The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S Mystery Magazine

32 EXTRA PAGES

MARCH 50¢

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

AGATHA CHRISTIE

VICTOR CANNING

GRAHAM GREENE

NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED

REX STOUT'S BRAND-NEW NERO WOLFE NOVELETTE

Eeny Meeny Murder Mo

21ST ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S
Mystery Magazine

***including* BLACK MASK MAGAZINE**

10 editions: U.S.A., Australian, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese

PUBLISHER: *B. G. Davis* EDITOR: *Ellery Queen*

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 39, No. 3, Whole No. 220, MARCH, 1962. Published monthly by Davis Publications, Inc. at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription $4.00 in U.S.A. and possessions and Canada; $5.00 in the Pan American Union; $5.00 in all other countries. Publication Office, 10 Ferry St., Concord, N. H. Editorial and General offices, 505 Park Ave., New York 22, N. Y. Change of address notices, undeliverable copies, orders for subscriptions, and other mail items are to be sent to 505 Park Ave., New York 22, N. Y. Second-Class postage paid at Concord, N. H.

JOEL DAVIS, *Assistant Publisher* PAUL W. FAIRMAN, *Managing Editor*
MELVIN FLAMM, *Business Manager* CONSTANCE DI RIENZO, *Executive Editorial Secretary*
FRANK TAGGART, *Art Director*

Second review of

ELLERY QUEEN'S 1962 ANTHOLOGY

Anthony Boucher, *New York Times,* **Nov. 12, 1961, wrote:**

. . . Diehards like me, who still think that Poe and Doyle had the right idea, should . . . welcome **ELLERY QUEEN'S 1962 ANTHOLOGY** (Davis, $1) with even more warmth than they customarily bestow upon a Queen collection; for here the primary emphasis is upon the simon-pure detective story, and sixteen of the twenty-three stories feature a detective at work—and in a dozen cases a familiar and respected series-detective.

These are stories that have appeared in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine (as originals or as reprints) over the past twenty years, but never before in a Queen anthology. As usual the quality is high and the quantity generous (almost 150,000 words); and even more emphatically than usual, the contents page is a roster of the great names in fictional detection: Gardner, Stout, Sayers, Christie, Queen, Carr, Rice, Rinehart, Woolrich, Lockridge—plus a smattering of Big Names from other fields: Bradbury, Molnar, Arthur Miller, Sinclair Lewis. . . . This annual is always a phenomenal bargain; and many, old-line readers will find this the most welcome volume yet.

ORDER FORM

ELLERY QUEEN'S 1962 ANTHOLOGY
505 Park Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.

Please send me.....copies of ELLERY QUEEN'S 1962 ANTHOLOGY as soon as possible. I am enclosing $1.00 for each copy. ($1.25 outside U.S.A.) E 362

☐ I am an EQMM Subscriber

Name .....
(Please print)

Address .....

City ..... Zone ..... State .....

Two new Inner Sanctum Mysteries

COUNTY KILL

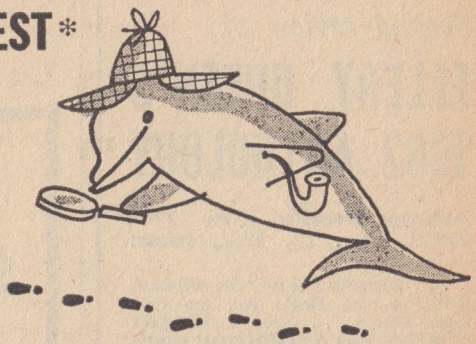
Stars **William Campbell Gault's** tough and likeable private eye, Brock Callahan. The case begins as a search for a missing man. It becomes a dangerous tangle of police corruption, narcotics dealings — and murder. Tense, fast, explosive. *February. $3.50*

THE ABDUCTOR

Title character of **Dolores Hitchens'** new mystery, is a man with an insane plan for vengeance — a plan that leads to a night of terror for a young woman and a little girl. Suspense is terrific. This is Dolores Hitchens at her very best. *March. $3.50*

Published by Simon and Schuster

BEST OF THE BEST*
the new, quality-paperback DOLPHIN MYSTERIES



*ANTHONY BOUCHER advises: "Don't miss a one of this splendid series . . . no reprint publisher has ever before brought out so stunning a list . . . These are mostly books which figured on my annual 'Best' checklists, and which remain in my mind as 'best' of more than a limited period." —*N.Y. Times*

DOLPHINS are distinctive, superior mysteries—many of them no longer in print in any other edition. Consequently DOLPHINS disappear from bookstores as soon as they are discovered. If your bookseller is out of these Dolphins, urge him to get more. Or write to us.

Julian Symons

THE PROGRESS OF A CRIME

Winner of the 1960 MWA award for the year's best mystery; brutal teen-age murder in a small British town. 95¢

Francis Steegmuller

BLUE HARPSICHORD

Murder, a beautiful harpsichordist, a professor (Columbia University) and three ex-chorus girls. 95¢

Elizabeth Fenwick

POOR HARRIET

First-rate American example of the thriller-crime detective story-cum character study. "Quite the brightest new thing that has happened to the mystery." —*N.Y. Herald Tribune Book Review* 95¢

Michael Innes

THE PAPER THUNDERBOLT

Mysterious adventure culminating in Oxford's Bodleian Library. "The most exciting novel I have read in years." —ORVILLE PRESCOTT 95¢

Peter Curtis (Norah Lofts)

THE DEVIL'S OWN

Strikingly offbeat suspense in an English village that seems to attract the supernatural. 95¢

Helen Eustis

THE HORIZONTAL MAN

A psychological mystery novel set in a New England women's college —a classic in its field. "A remarkable performance." —REX STOUT

*At all booksellers, or order from***

DOUBLEDAY & COMPANY, Inc. *Garden City, New York*

***Enclose payment, forget postage.*

a new Nero Wolfe novelette never before published

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **REX STOUT**

TITLE: ***Eeny Meeny Murder Mo***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Nero Wolfe

LOCALE: New York City

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *To quote Archie Goodwin, "It was a new kind of hole," and Nero Wolfe had never "looked into one just like it." It also concerned a divorce with a fabulous settlement—$30,000,000 . . .*

I WAS STANDING THERE IN THE OFFICE with my hands in my pockets, glaring down at the necktie on Nero Wolfe's desk, when the doorbell rang.

Since it would be a different story, and possibly no story at all, if the necktie hadn't been there, I had better explain about it. It was the one Wolfe had worn that morning —brown silk with little yellow curlicues, a Christmas gift from a former client. At lunch Fritz, coming to remove the leavings of the spareribs and bring the salad and cheese, had told Wolfe there was a drop of sauce on his tie and Wolfe had dabbed at it with his napkin; and later, when we had left the dining room to cross the hall to the office, he had removed the tie and put it on his desk.

Wolfe can't stand a spot on his clothes, even in private. But he hadn't thought it worth the effort to go up to his room for another tie, since no callers were expected, and when four o'clock came and he left for his afternoon session with the orchids in the plant rooms on the roof his shirt was still unbuttoned at the neck and the tie was still on his desk.

It annoyed me. It annoyed Fritz

too when, shortly after four, he came to say he was going shopping and would be gone two hours. His eye caught the tie and fastened on it. His brows went up.

"Schlampick," I said.

He nodded. "You know my respect and esteem for him. He has great spirit and character, and of course he is a great detective, but there is a limit to the duties of a chef and housekeeper. One must draw the line somewhere. Besides, there is my arthritis. You haven't got arthritis, Archie."

"Maybe not," I conceded, "but if you rate a limit so do I. My list of functions from confidential assistant detective down to errand boy is a mile long, but it does not include valeting. Arthritis is beside the point. Consider the dignity of man. He could have taken it on his way up to the plant rooms."

"You could put it in a drawer."

"That would be evading the issue."

"I suppose so." He nodded. "I agree. It is a delicate affair. I must be going." He went.

So, having finished the office chores at 5:20, including a couple of personal phone calls, I had left my desk and was standing to glare down at the necktie when the doorbell rang. That made the affair even more delicate. A necktie with a greasy spot should not be on the desk of a man of great spirit and character when a visitor enters. But by then I had got stubborn about it as a matter of principle, and anyway it might be merely someone with a parcel.

Going to the hall for a look, I saw through the one-way glass panel of the front door that it was a stranger, a middle-aged female with a pointed nose and a round chin, not a good design, in a sensible gray coat and a black turban. She had no parcel.

I opened the door and told her good afternoon. She said she wanted to see Nero Wolfe. I said Mr. Wolfe was engaged, and besides, he saw people only by appointment. She said she knew that, but this was urgent. She had to see him and would wait till he was free.

There were several factors: that we had nothing on the fire at the moment; that the year was only five days old and therefore the income tax bracket didn't enter into it; that I wanted something to do besides recording the vital statistics of orchids; that I was annoyed at him for leaving the tie on his desk; and that she didn't try to push but kept her distance, with her dark eyes, good eyes, straight at me.

"Okay," I told her, "I'll see what I can do," and stepped aside for her to enter. Taking her coat and hanging it on the rack and escorting her to the office, I gave her one of the yellow chairs near me instead of the red leather one at the end of Wolfe's desk.

She sat with her back straight and her feet together—nice little

feet in fairly sensible gray shoes. I told her that Wolfe wouldn't be available until six o'clock.

"It will be better," I said, "if I see him first and tell him about you. In fact, it will be essential. My name is Archie Goodwin. What is yours?"

"I know about you," she said. "Of course. If I didn't I wouldn't be here."

"Many thanks. Some people who know about me have a different reaction. And your name?"

She was eying me. "I'd rather not," she said, "until I know if Mr. Wolfe will take my case. It's private. It's very confidential."

I shook my head. "No go. You'll have to tell him what your case is before he decides if he'll take it, and I'll be sitting here listening. So? Also I'll have to tell him more about you than that your're thirty-five years old, weigh a hundred and twenty pounds, and wear no earrings, before he decides if he'll even see you."

She almost smiled. "I'm forty-two."

I grinned. "See? I need facts. Who you are and what you want."

Her mouth worked. "It's *very* confidential." Her mouth worked some more. "But there was no sense in coming unless I tell you."

"Right."

She laced her fingers. "All right. My name is Bertha Aaron. It is spelled with two A's. I am the private secretary of Mr. Lamont Otis, senior partner in the law firm of Otis, Edey, Heydecker and Jett. Their office is on Madison Avenue at Forty-first Street. I'm worried about something that happened recently and I want Mr. Wolfe to investigate it. I can pay him a reasonable fee, but it might develop that he will be paid by the firm."

"Were you sent here by someone in the firm?"

"No. Nobody sent me. Nobody knows I'm here."

"What happened?"

Her fingers laced tighter. "Maybe I shouldn't have come," she said. "I didn't realize . . . maybe I'd better not."

"Suit yourself, Miss Aaron. *Miss* Aaron?"

"Yes. I am not married." Her fingers flew apart to make fists and her lips tightened. "This is silly. I've got to. I owe it to Mr. Otis. I've been with him for twenty years and he has been wonderful to me. I couldn't go to him about this because he's seventy-five years old and he has a bad heart and it might kill him. He comes to the office every day, but it's a strain and he doesn't do much, only he knows more than all of the rest of them put together." Her fists opened. "What happened was that I saw a member of the firm with our opponent in a very important case, one of the biggest cases we've ever had, at a place where they wouldn't have met if they hadn't wanted to keep it secret."

"You mean with the opposing counsel?"

"No. The opposing client. With opposing counsel it might possibly have been all right."

"Which member of the firm?"

"I'm not going to say. I'm not going to tell Mr. Wolfe his name until he agrees to take the case. He doesn't have to know that in order to decide. If you wonder why I came, I've already said why I can't tell Mr. Otis about it, and I was afraid to go to any of the others because if one of them was a traitor another one might be in it with him, or even more than one. How could I be sure? There are only four members of the firm, but of course there are others associated—nineteen altogether. I wouldn't trust any of them, not on a thing like this." She made fists again. "You can understand that. You see what a hole I'm in."

"Sure. But you could be wrong. Of course that's unethical, a lawyer meeting with an enemy client, but there could be exceptions. It might have been accidental. When and where did you see them?"

"Last Monday, a week ago today. In the evening. They were together in a booth in a cheap restaurant—more of a lunchroom. The kind of place she would never go to, never. She would never go to that part of town. Neither would I, ordinarily, but I was on a personal errand and I went in there to use the phone. They didn't see me."

"Then one of the members of the firm is a woman?"

Her eyes widened. "Oh. I said 'she.' I meant the opposing client. We have a woman lawyer as one of the associates, just as employee really, but no woman firm member." She laced her fingers. "It couldn't possibly have been accidental. But of course it was conceivable, just barely conceivable, that he wasn't a traitor, that there was some explanation, and that made it even harder for me to decide what to do. But now I know. After worrying about it for a whole week I couldn't stand it any longer, and this afternoon I decided the only thing I *could* do was tell him and see what he said. If he had a good explanation, all right. But he didn't. The way he took it, the way it hit him, there isn't any question about it. He's a traitor."

"What did he say?"

"It wasn't so much what he said as how he looked. He said he had a satisfactory explanation, that he was acting in the interests of our client, but that he couldn't tell me more than that until the matter had developed further. Certainly within a week, he said, and possibly tomorrow. So I knew I had to do something, and I was afraid to go to Mr. Otis because his heart has been worse lately, and I wouldn't go to another firm member. I even thought of going to the opposing counsel, but of course that wouldn't do. Then I thought of Nero Wolfe,

and I put on my hat and coat and came. Now it's urgent. You can see it's urgent?"

I nodded. "It could be. Depending on the kind of case involved. Mr. Wolfe might agree to take the job before you name the alleged traitor, but he would have to know first what the case is about—your firm's case. There are some kinds he won't touch, even indirectly. What is it?"

"I don't want . . ." She let it hang. "Does he have to know that?"

"Certainly. Anyhow, you've told me the name of your firm and it's a big important case and the opposing client is a woman, and with that I could—but I don't have to. I read the papers. Is your client Morton Sorell?"

"Yes."

"And the opposing client is Rita Sorell, his wife?"

"Yes."

I glanced at my wrist watch and saw 5:39, left my chair, told her, "Cross your fingers and sit tight," and headed for the hall and the stairs.

Two new factors had entered and now dominated the situation: that if our first bank deposit of the new year came from the Sorell pile it would not be hay; and that one of the kinds of jobs Wolfe wouldn't touch, even indirectly, was divorce stuff. It would take some doing, and as I mounted the three flights to the roof of the old brownstone my brain was going faster than my feet.

In the vestibule of the plant rooms I paused, not for breath but to plan the approach, decided that was no good because it would depend on his mood, and entered. You might think it impossible to go down the aisles between the benches of those three rooms—cool and tropical—without noticing the flashes of color, but that day I did, and was in the potting room.

Wolfe was over at the side bench peering at a pseudo-bulb through a magnifying glass. Theodore Horstmann, the fourth member of the household, who was exactly half Wolfe's weight, 135 to 270, was opening a bag of osmundine.

I crossed over and told Wolfe's back: "Excuse me for interrupting, but I have a problem."

He took ten seconds to decide he had heard me, then removed the magnifying glass from his eye and demanded, "What time is it?"

"Nineteen minutes to six."

"It can wait nineteen minutes."

"I know, but there's a snag. If you came down and found her there in the office with no warning it would be hopeless."

"Find whom?"

"A woman named Bertha Aaron. She came uninvited. She's in a hole, and it's a new kind of hole. I came up to describe it to you so you can decide whether I go down and shoo her out or you come down and give it a look."

"You have interrupted me. You have violated our understanding."

"I know it, but I said excuse me, and since you're already interrupted I might as well tell you. She is the private secretary of Lamont Otis, senior partner . . ."

I told him, and at least he didn't go back to the pseudo-bulb. At one point there was even a gleam in his eye. He has made the claim, to me, that the one and only thing that impels him to work is his desire to live in what he calls acceptable circumstances in the old brownstone on West 35th Street, Manhattan, which he owns, with Fritz as chef and Theodore as orchid tender and me as goat (not his word), but the gleam in his eye was not at the prospect of a big fee because I hadn't yet mentioned the name Sorell. The gleam was when he saw that, as I had said, it was a new kind of hole. We had never looked into one just like it.

Then came the ticklish part. "By the way," I said, "there's one little detail you may not like, but it's only a side issue. In the case in question her firm's client is Morton Sorell. You know."

"Of course."

"And the opposing client is Mrs. Morton Sorell. You may remember that you made a comment about her a few weeks ago after you had read the morning paper. What the paper said was that she was suing him for thirty thousand a month for a separation allowance, but the talk around town is that he wants a divorce and her asking price is a flat thirty million bucks, and that's probably what Miss Aaron calls the case. However, that's only a detail. What Miss Aaron wants is merely—"

"No." He was scowling at me. "So that's why you pranced in here."

"I didn't prance. I walked."

"You knew quite well I would have nothing to do with it."

"I knew you wouldn't get divorce evidence, and neither would I. I knew you wouldn't work for a wife against a husband or vice versa, but what has that got to do with this? You wouldn't have to touch—"

"No! I will not. That marital squabble might be the central point of the matter. I will not! Send her away."

I had flubbed it. Or maybe I hadn't; maybe it had been hopeless no matter how I handled it; but then it had been a flub to try, so in any case I had flubbed it. I don't like to flub, and it wouldn't make it any worse to try to talk him out of it, or rather into it, so I did, for a good ten minutes, but it neither changed the situation nor improved the atmosphere.

He ended it by saying that he would go to his room to put on a necktie, and I would please ring him there on the house phone to tell him that she had gone.

Going down the three flights I

was tempted. I could ring him not to say that she was gone but that we were going; that I was taking a leave of absence to haul her out of the hole. It wasn't a new temptation; I had had it before; and I had to admit that on other occasions it had been more attractive. To begin with, if I made the offer she might decline it, and I had done enough flubbing for one day.

So as I crossed the hall to the office I was arranging my face so she would know the answer as soon as she looked at me. Then as I entered I rearranged it, or it rearranged itself, and I stopped and stood.

Two objects were there on the rug which had been elsewhere when I left: a big hunk of jade which Wolfe used for a paperweight, which had been on his desk, and Bertha Aaron, who had been in a chair.

She was on her side, with one leg straight and one bent at the knee. I went to her and squatted. Her lips were blue, her tongue was showing, and her eyes were open and popping; and around her neck, knotted at the side, was Wolfe's necktie.

If you get at a case of strangulation soon enough there may be a chance, and I got the scissors from my desk drawer. The tie was so tight that I had to poke hard to get my finger under. When I had the tie off I rolled her over on her back. Nuts, I thought, she's gone, but I picked pieces of fluff from the rug, put one across her nose and one on her mouth, and held my breath for twenty seconds.

She wasn't breathing.

I took her hand and pressed on a fingernail, and it stayed white when I removed the pressure. Her blood wasn't moving. Still there might be a chance if I got an expert quick enough, say in two minutes, and I went to my desk and dialed the number of Doc Vollmer, who lived down the street only a minute away. He was out.

I sat and stared at her a while, maybe a minute, just feeling, not thinking. I was too damn sore to think. I was sore at Wolfe, not at me, the idea being that it had been ten minutes past six when I found her, and if he had come down with me at six o'clock we might have been in time.

I swiveled to the house phone and buzzed his room, and when he answered I said, "Okay, come on down. She's gone," and hung up.

He always uses the elevator to and from the plant rooms, but his room is only one flight up. When I heard his door open and close I got up and stood six inches from her head and folded my arms, facing the door to the hall. There was the sound of his steps, and then him. He crossed the threshold, stopped, glared at Bertha Aaron, shifted to me, and bellowed, "You said she was gone!"

"Yes, sir. She is. She's dead."

"Nonsense!"

"No, sir." I sidestepped. "As you see."

He approached, still glaring, and aimed the glare down at her, for not more than three seconds. Then he circled around her and me, went to his oversized made-to-order chair behind his desk, sat, took in air clear down as far as it would go, and let it out again. "I presume," he said, not bellowing, "that she was alive when you left her to come up to me."

"Yes, sir. Sitting in that chair." I pointed. "She was alone. No one came with her. The door was locked, as always. As you know, Fritz is out shopping. When I found her she was on her side and I turned her over to test for breathing—after I cut the necktie off. I phoned Doc—"

"What necktie?"

I pointed again. "The one you left on your desk. It was around her throat. Probably she was knocked out first with that paperweight"—I pointed again—"but it was the necktie that stopped her breathing, as you can see by her face. I cut—"

"Do you dare to suggest that she was strangled with *my* necktie?"

"I don't suggest, I state. It was pulled tight with a slipknot and then passed around her neck again and tied with a granny." I stepped to where I had dropped it on the rug, picked it up, and put it on his desk. "As you see. I do dare to suggest that if it hadn't been here handy he would have had to use something else, maybe his handkerchief. Also that if we had come down a little sooner—"

"Shut up!"

"Yes, sir."

"This is insupportable."

"Yes, sir."

"I will not accept it."

"No, sir. I could burn the tie and we could tell Cramer that whatever he used he must have waited until he was sure she was dead and then removed it and took it—"

"Shut up. She told you that nobody knew she came here."

"Bah," I said. "Not a chance and you know it. We're stuck. I put off calling until you came down only to be polite. If I put it off any longer that will only make it worse because I'll have to tell them the exact time I found her." I looked at my wrist. "It's already been twenty-one minutes. Would you rather make the call yourself?"

No reply. He was staring down at the necktie, with his jaw set and his mouth so tight he had no lips. I gave him five seconds, and then went to the kitchen, to the phone on the table where I ate breakfast, and dialed a number.

Inspector Cramer of Homicide West finished the last page of the statement I had typed and signed, put it on top of the other pages on the table, tapped it with a finger, and spoke: "I still think you're lying, Goodwin."

It was a quarter past eleven. We were in the dining room. The gang of scientists had finished in the office and departed, and it was no longer out of bounds, but I had no special desire to move back in. For one thing, they had taken the rug, along with Wolfe's necktie and the paperweight and a few other items.

Of course they had also taken Bertha Aaron, so I wouldn't have to see her again, but even so I was perfectly willing to stay in the dining room. They had brought the typewriter there after the fingerprint detail had finished with it, so I could type the statement.

Now, after nearly five hours, they were gone, all except Sergeant Purley Stebbins, who was in the office using the phone, and Cramer. Fritz was in the kitchen, on his third bottle of wine, absolutely miserable. Added to the humiliation of a homicide in the house he kept there was the incredible fact that Wolfe had passed up a meal. He had refused to eat a bite. Around eight o'clock he had gone up to his room, and Fritz had gone up twice with a tray.

When I had gone up at ten thirty with a statement for him to sign, and told him they were taking the rug, he made a noise but had no words. With all that for background in addition to my personal reactions, it was no wonder that when Cramer told me he still thought I was lying I was outspoken.

"I've been trying for years," I said, "to think who it is you remind me of. I just remembered. It was a certain animal I saw once in a cage. It begins with B. Are you going to take me down or not?"

"No." His big round face is always redder at night, making his gray hair look whiter. "You can save the wisecracks. You wouldn't lie about anything that can be checked, but we can't check your account of what she told you. She's dead. Accepting your statement, and Wolfe's, that you have never had any dealings with her or anyone connected with that law firm, you might still save something for your private use—or change something. One thing especially. You ask me to believe that she told—"

"Excuse me. I don't care a single measly damn what you believe. Neither does Mr. Wolfe. You can't name anything we wouldn't rather have done than report what happened, but we had no choice, so we reported it and you have our statements. If you know what she said better than I do, that's fine with me."

"I was talking," he said.

"Yeah. I was interrupting."

"You say that she gave you all those details, how she saw a member of the firm in a cheap restaurant or lunchroom with an opposing client, the day she saw him, her telling him about it this afternoon, all the rest of it, including naming Mrs. Sorell, but she didn't name

the member of the firm. I don't believe it." He tapped the statement and his head came forward. "And I'm telling you this, Goodwin. If you use that name for your private purposes and profit, and that includes Wolfe, if you get yourselves hired to investigate this murder and you use information you have withheld from me to solve the case and collect a fee, I'll get you for it if it costs me an eye!"

I cocked my head. "Look," I said. "Apparently you don't realize. It's already been on the radio, and tomorrow it will be in the papers, that a woman who had come to consult Nero Wolfe was murdered in his office, strangled with his own necktie, while he was up playing with his orchids and chatting with Archie Goodwin. I can hear the horse laugh from here. Mr. Wolfe couldn't swallow any dinner; he wouldn't even try. We knew and felt all this the second we saw her there on the floor. If we had known which member of the firm it was, if she had told me his name, what would we have done? You ought to know, since you claim you know us. I would have gone after him. Mr. Wolfe would have left the office, shut the door, and gone to the kitchen, and would have been there drinking beer when Fritz came home. When he went to the office and discovered the body would have depended on when and what he heard from me. With any luck I would have got here with the murderer before you and the scientists arrived. That wouldn't have erased the fact that she had been strangled with his necktie, but it would have blurred it. I give you this just to show you that you don't know us as well as you think you do. As for your believing me, I couldn't care less."

His sharp gray eyes were narrowed at me. "So you would have gone and got him. So he killed her. Huh? How did he know she was here? How did he get in?"

I pronounced a word I'll leave out, and added, "Again? I have discussed that with Stebbins, and Rowcliff, and you. Now again?"

"What the hell," he said. He folded the statement and stuck it in his pocket, shoved his chair back, got up, growled at me, "If it costs me both eyes," and tramped out. From the hall he spoke to Stebbins in the office.

It will give you some idea of how low I was when I say that I didn't even go to the hall to see that they took only what belonged to them. You might think that after being in the house five hours Purley would have stepped to the door to say good night, but no. I heard the front door close with a bang, so it was Purley. Cramer never banged doors.

I slumped farther down in my chair. At twenty minutes to midnight I said aloud, "I could go for a walk," but apparently that didn't appeal to me. At 11:45 I arose,

picked up the carbons of my statement, went to the office, and put them in a drawer of my desk. Looking around, I saw that they had left it in fairly decent shape.

I went and brought the typewriter and put it where it belonged, tried the door of the safe, went to the hall to see that the front door was locked and put the chain bolt on, and proceeded to the kitchen. Fritz was in my breakfast chair, humped over with his forehead on the edge of the table.

"You're pie-eyed," I said.

His head came up. "No, Archie. I have tried, but no."

"Go to bed."

"No. He will be hungry."

"He may never be hungry again. Pleasant dreams."

I went to the hall, mounted one flight, turned left, tapped on the door, heard a sound that was half growl and half groan, opened the door, and entered. Wolfe, fully clothed, including a necktie, was in the big chair with a book.

"They've gone," I said. "Last ones out, Cramer and Stebbins. Fritz is standing watch in the kitchen expecting a call for food. You'd better buzz him. Is there any alternative to going to bed?"

"Can you sleep?" he demanded.

"Probably. I always have."

"I can't read." He put the book down. "Have you ever known me to show rancor?"

"I'd have to look in the dictionary. What is it exactly?"

"Vehement ill will. Intense malignity."

"No."

"I have it now, and it is in the way. I can't think clearly. I intend to expose that wretch before the police do. I want Saul and Orrie and Fred here at eight o'clock in the morning. I have no idea what their errands will be, but I shall know by morning. After you reach them sleep if you can."

"I don't have to sleep if there's something better to do."

"Not tonight. This confounded rancor is a pimple on the brain. My mental processes haven't been so muddled in many years. I wouldn't have thought—"

The doorbell was ringing. Now that the army of occupation was gone, that was to be expected, since Cramer had allowed no reporters or photographers to enter the house. I had considered disconnecting the bell for the night, and now, as I descended the stairs, I decided that I would. Fritz, at the door to the kitchen, looked relieved when he saw me. He had switched on the stoop light.

If it was a reporter he was a veteran, and he had brought a helper along, or maybe a girl friend just for company. I was in no hurry getting to the door, sizing them up through the one-way glass panel. He was a six-footer in a well-cut and well-fitted dark gray overcoat, a light gray woolen scarf, and a gray homburg, with a long bony

face with deep lines. She could have been his pretty little granddaughter, but her fur coat fastened clear up and her matching fur cloche covered everything but the little oval of her face. I removed the chain bolt and swung the door open and said, "Yes, sir?"

He said, "I am Lamont Otis. This is Mr. Nero Wolfe's house?"

"Right."

"I would like to see him. About my secretary, Miss Bertha Aaron. About information I have received from the police. This is Miss Ann Paige, my associate, a member of the bar. My coming at this hour is justified, I think, by the circumstances. I think Mr. Wolfe will agree."

"I do too," I agreed. "But if you don't mind—" I crossed the sill to the stoop and sang out, "Who are you over there? Gillian? Murphy? Come here a minute!"

A figure emerged from the shadows across the street. As he crossed the pavement I peered, and as he reached the curb on our side I spoke. "Oh, Wylie. Come on up."

He stood at the foot of the seven steps. "For what?" he demanded.

"May I ask," Lamont Otis asked, "what this is for?"

"You may. A police inspector named Cramer is in danger of losing an eye and that would be a shame. I'll appreciate it if you'll answer a simple question: were you asked to come here by either Mr. Wolfe or me?"

"Certainly not."

"Was your coming entirely your own idea?"

"Yes. But I don't—"

"Excuse me. —You heard him, Wylie? Include it in your report. It will save wear and tear on Cramer's nerves. Much obliged for—"

"Who is he?" the dick demanded.

I ignored it. Backing up, I invited them in, and when I shut the door I put the bolt on. Otis let me take his hat and coat, but Ann Paige kept hers. The house was cooling off for the night. In the office, sitting, she unfastened the coat but kept it over her shoulders.

I went to the thermostat on the wall and pushed it up to 70, and then went to my desk and buzzed Wolfe's room on the house phone. I should have gone up to get him, since he might balk at seeing company until he had dealt with the pimple on his brain, but I had had enough for one day of leaving visitors alone in the office, and one of these had a bum pump.

Wolfe's growl came, "Yes?"

"Mr. Lamont Otis is here. With an associate, Miss Ann Paige, also a member of the bar. He thinks you will agree that his coming at this hour is justified by the circumstances."

Silence. Nothing for some five seconds, then the click of his hanging up. You feel foolish holding a dead receiver to your ear, so I cradled it but didn't swivel to face the

company. It was even money whether he was coming or not, and I put my eyes on my wrist watch. If he didn't come in five minutes I would go up after him. I turned and told Otis, "You won't mind a short wait."

He nodded. "It was in this room?"

"Yes. She was there." I pointed to a spot a few inches in front of Ann Paige's feet. Otis was in the red leather chair near the end of Wolfe's desk. "There was a rug but they took it to the laboratory. Of course they—I'm sorry, Miss Paige. I shouldn't have pointed." She had pushed her chair back and shut her eyes.

She swallowed, and opened the eyes. They looked black in that light but could have been dark violet. "You're Archie Goodwin," she said.

"Right."

"You were—you found her."

"Right."

"Had she been . . . was there any . . ."

"She had been hit on the back of her head with a paperweight, a chunk of jade, and then strangled with a necktie that happened to be here on a desk. There was no sign of a struggle. The blow knocked her out, and probably she—

My voice had kept me from hearing Wolfe's steps on the stairs. He entered, stopped to tilt his head an eighth of an inch to Ann Paige, again to Otis, went to his chair behind his desk, sat, and aimed his eyes at Otis.

"You are Mr. Lamont Otis?"

"I am."

"I owe you an apology. A weak word; there should be a better one. A valued and trusted employee of yours has died by violence under my roof. She was valued and trusted?"

"Yes."

"I deeply regret it. If you came to reproach me, proceed."

"I didn't come to reproach you." The lines in Otis' face were furrows in the better light. "I came to find out what happened. The police and the District Attorney's office have told me how she was killed, but not why she was here. I think they know but are reserving it. I think I have a right to know. Bertha Aaron had been in my confidence for years, and I believe I was in hers, and I knew nothing of any trouble she might be in that would lead her to come to you. Why was she here?"

Wolfe, rubbing his nose with a fingertip, regarded him. "How old are you, Mr. Otis?"

Ann Paige made a noise. The veteran lawyer, who had probably objected to ten thousand questions as irrelevant, said merely, "I'm seventy-five. Why?"

"I do not intend to have another death in my office to apologize for, this time induced by me. Miss Aaron told Mr. Goodwin that the reason she did not go to you with her

problem was that she feared the effect on you. —Her words, Archie?"

I supplied them. "'He has a bad heart and it might kill him.'"

Otis snorted. "Bosh! My heart has given me a little trouble and I've had to slow down, but it would take more than a problem to kill me. I've been dealing with problems all my life, some pretty tough ones."

"She exaggerated it," Ann Paige said. "I mean Miss Aaron. I mean she was so devoted to Mr. Otis that she had an exaggerated idea about his heart condition."

"Why did you come here with him?" Wolfe demanded.

"Not because of his heart. Because I was at his apartment, working with him on a brief, when the news came about Bertha, and when he decided to see you he asked me to come with him. I do shorthand."

"You heard Mr. Goodwin quote Miss Aaron. If I tell Mr. Otis what she was afraid to tell him, what her problem was, will you take responsibility for the effect on him?"

Otis exploded. "Damn it, *I* take the responsibility! It's *my* heart!"

"I doubt," Ann Paige said, "if the effect of telling him would be as bad as the effect of *not* telling him. I take no responsibility, but you have me as witness that he insists."

"I not only insist," Otis said, "I assert my right to the information, since it must have concerned me."

"Very well," Wolfe said. "Miss Aaron arrived here at twenty minutes past five this afternoon—now yesterday afternoon—uninvited and unexpected. She spoke for some twenty minutes with Mr. Goodwin and he then went upstairs to confer with me. He was away half an hour. She was alone on this floor. You know what greeted him when he returned. He has given the police a statement which includes his conversation with her." His head turned. "Archie, give Mr. Otis a copy of the statement."

I got it from my desk drawer and handed it to him. I had a notion to stand by, in case Bertha Aaron had been right about the effect it would have on him, but from up there I couldn't see his face, so I returned to my chair; but after half a century of practising law his face knew how to behave. All that happened was that his jaw tightened a little, and once a muscle twitched at the side of his neck. He read it clear through twice, first fast and then taking his time. When he had finished he folded it neatly, fumbling a little, and was putting it in the breast pocket of his jacket.

"No," Wolfe said emphatically. "I disclose the information at my discretion, but that's a copy of a statement given the police. You can't have it."

Otis ignored it. He looked at his associate, and his neck muscle twitched again. "I shouldn't have brought you, Ann," he said. "You'll have to leave."

Her eyes met his. "Believe me, Mr. Otis, you can trust me. On anything. Believe me. If it's that bad you shouldn't be alone with it."

"I must be. I couldn't trust you on *this*. You'll have to leave."

I stood up. "You can wait in the front room, Miss Paige. The wall and door are soundproofed."

She didn't like it, but she came. I opened the door to the front room and turned the lights on, then went and locked the door to the hall and put the key in my pocket. Back in the office, as I was crossing to my desk Otis asked, "How good is the soundproofing?"

"Good for anything under a loud yell," I told him.

He focused on Wolfe. "I am not surprised," he said, "that Miss Aaron thought it would kill me. I am surprised that it hasn't. You say the police have this statement?"

"Yes. And this conversation is ended unless you return that copy. Mr. Goodwin has no corroboration. It is a dangerous document for him to sign except under constraint of police authority."

"But I need—"

"Archie. Get it."

I stood up. The heart was certainly getting tested. But as I took a step his hand went to his pocket, and when I reached him he had it out and handed it over.

"That's better," Wolfe said. "I have extended my apology and regret, and we have given you all the information we have. I add this: first, that nothing in that statement will be revealed to anyone by Mr. Goodwin or me without your consent; and second, that my self-esteem has been severely injured and it would give me great satisfaction to expose the murderer. Granted that that's a job for the police, for me it is my job. I would welcome your help, not as my client; I would accept no fee. I realize that at the moment you are under shock, that you are overwhelmed by what you have just learned; and when your mind clears you may be tempted to minimize the damage by dealing with your intramural treachery yourself and letting the culprit escape his doom. If you went about it with sufficient resourcefulness and ingenuity it is conceivable that the police could be cheated of their prey; but it is not conceivable that I could be."

"You are making a wholly unwarranted assumption," Otis said.

"I am not making an assumption. I am merely telling you my intention. The police hypothesis, and mine, is the obvious one: that a member of your firm killed Miss Aaron. Though the law does not insist that the testimony against him in court must include proof of his motive, inevitably it would. Will you assert that you won't try to prevent that? That you will not regard the reputation of your firm as your prime concern?"

Otis opened his mouth and closed it again.

Wolfe nodded. "I thought not. Then I advise you to help me. If you do, I'll have two objectives: to get the murderer and to see that your firm suffers as little as possible; if you don't, I'll have only one. As for the police, I doubt if they'll expect you to cooperate, since they are not nincompoops. They will realize that you have a deeper interest than the satisfaction of justice. Well, sir?"

Otis' palms were cupping his knees and his head was tilted forward so he could study the back of his left hand. His eyes shifted to his right hand, and when that too had been properly studied he lifted his head and spoke. "You used the word 'hypothesis,' and that's all it is, that a member of my firm killed Miss Aaron. How did he know she was here? She said that nobody knew."

"He could have followed her. Evidently she left your office soon after she talked with him. —Archie?"

"She probably walked," I said. "Between fifteen and twenty-five minutes, depending on her rate. At that time of day empty taxis are scarce, and crosstown they crawl. It would have been a cinch to tail her on foot."

"How did he get in?" Otis demanded. "Did he sneak in unseen when you admitted her?"

"No. You have read my statement. He saw her enter and knew this is Nero Wolfe's address. He went to a phone booth and rang this number and she answered. Here." I tapped my phone. "With me not here that would be automatic for a trained secretary. I had not pushed the button, so it didn't ring in the plant rooms. It would ring in the kitchen, but Fritz wasn't there. She answered it, and he said he wanted to see her at once and would give her a satisfactory explanation, and she told him to come here. When he came she was at the front door and let him in. All he was expecting to do was stall for time, but when he learned that she was alone on this floor and that she hadn't seen Mr. Wolfe he had another idea and acted on it. Two minutes would have been plenty for the whole operation, even less."

"All that is mere conjecture."

"Yeah. I wasn't present. But it fits. If you have one that fits better I do shorthand too."

"The police have covered everything here for fingerprints."

"Sure. But it was below freezing outdoors and I suppose the members of your firm wear gloves."

"You say that he learned she hadn't seen Wolfe, but she had talked with you."

"She didn't tell him that she had told me. It wouldn't take many words for him to learn that she was alone and hadn't seen Mr. Wolfe. Either that, or she did tell him but he went ahead anyhow. The former is more probable. I like it better."

He studied me a while, then he closed his eyes and his head tilted again. When his eyes opened he put them at Wolfe. "Mr. Wolfe. I reserve comment on your suggestion that I would be moved by personal considerations to balk justice. You ask me to help you. How?"

"By giving me information. By answering questions. Your mind is trained in inquiry; you know what I will ask."

"I'll know better when I hear you. Go ahead and we'll see."

Wolfe looked at the wall clock. "It's nearly an hour past midnight, and this will be prolonged. It will be a tiresome wait for Miss Paige."

"Of course," Otis agreed. He looked at me. "Will you ask her to step in?"

I got up and crossed to the door to the front room. Entering, words were at the tip of my tongue, but that was as far as they got.

She wasn't there.

(*continued on page 64*)

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ERLE STANLEY GARDNER**

TITLE: ***Only By Running***

TYPE: Action Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *An unusual story for the creator of Perry Mason—espionage and counterespionage, first on a transcontinental train, then in the wilds of Wyoming . . .*

ONLY ONCE BEFORE HAD THE woman in the club car ever known panic—not merely fear but the real panic which paralyzes the senses.

That had been in the mountains when she had tried to take a short cut to camp. When she realized she was lost there was a sudden overpowering desire to run. What was left of her sanity warned her, but panic made her feel that only by flight could she escape the menace of the unknown. The silent mountains, the somber woods, had suddenly become enemies, leering in hostility. Only by running did she feel she could escape—by running—the very worst thing she could have done.

Now, surrounded by the luxury of a crack transcontinental train, she again experienced that same panic. Once more there was that overpowering desire to run.

Someone had searched her compartment while she had been at dinner. She knew it was a man. He had tried to leave things just as he had found them, but there were little things that a woman would have noticed that the man didn't even see. Her plaid coat, which had been hung in the little steel closet so that the back was to the door, had been turned so the buttons were toward the door. A little thing, but a significant thing which had been the first to catch her attention, leaving her, for the moment, cold and numb.

Now, seated in the club car, she

strove to maintain an attitude of outward calm by critically inspecting her hands. Actually, she was taking stock of the men who were in the car.

Her problem was complicated by the fact that she was a compactly formed young woman, with smooth lines, clear eyes, a complete quota of curves, and under ordinary circumstances, a smile always quivering at the corners of her mouth. It was, therefore, only natural that every male animal in the club car sat up and took notice.

The fat man across the aisle who held a magazine in his pudgy hands was not reading. He sat like a Buddha, motionless, his half-closed, lazy-lidded eyes fixed on some imaginary horizon far beyond the confines of the car; yet she felt those eyes were taking a surreptitious interest in everything she did. There was something sinister about him, from the big diamond on the middle finger of his right hand to the rather ornate twenty-five-dollar cravat which begged for attention above the bulging expanse of his vest.

Then there was the man in the chair on her right. He hadn't spoken to her but she knew that he was going to, waiting only for an opportunity to make his remark sound like the casual comment of a fellow passenger. He was in his late twenties, bronzed by exposure, steely-blue of eye. His mouth held the firmness of a man who has learned to command first himself and then others.

The train lurched. The man's hand reached for the glass on the little stand between them. He glanced apprehensively at her skirt.

"Sorry," he said.

"It didn't spill," she replied.

"I'll lower the danger point," he said, raising the glass to his lips. "Going all the way through? I'm getting off at six o'clock in a cold Wyoming morning."

For a moment her panic-numbed brain failed to appreciate the full significance of his remark, then she experienced a sudden surge of relief. Here, then, was one man whom she could trust. She knew that the man who had searched her baggage hadn't found what he wanted because she had it with her, neatly folded, fastened to the bottom of her left foot by strong adhesive tape.

Therefore the enemy would stay on the train as long as she was on it, waiting, watching, growing more and more desperate, until at last, perhaps in the dead of night, he would . . . She knew only too well that he would stop at nothing. One murder had already been committed.

But now she had found one person whom she could trust, a man who had no interest in the thing she was hiding, a man who might well be a possible protector.

He seemed mildly surprised at her sudden friendliness.

"I didn't know this train stopped anywhere at that ungodly hour," she ventured, smiling.

"A flag stop," he explained.

Across the aisle the fat man had not moved a muscle, yet she felt absolutely certain that those glittering eyes were concentrating on her and that he was listening as well as watching.

"You live in Wyoming?" she asked.

"I did as a boy. Now I'm going back. I lived and worked on my uncle's cattle ranch. He died and left it to me. At first I thought I'd sell it. It would bring a small fortune. But now I'm tired of the big cities, I'm going back to live on the ranch."

"Won't it be frightfully lonely?"

"At times."

She wanted to cling to him now, dreading the time when she would have to go back to her compartment.

She felt the trainmen must have a master key which could open even a bolted door—in the event of sickness, or if a passenger rang for help. There *must* be a master key which would manipulate even a bolted door. And if trainmen had such a key, the man who had searched her compartment could have one.

Frank Hardwick, before he died, had warned her. "Remember," he had said, "they're everywhere. They're watching you when you don't know you're being watched. When you think you're running away and into safety, you'll simply be rushing into a carefully laid trap."

She hoped there was no trace of the inner tension as she smiled at the man on her right. "Do tell me about the cattle business," she said brightly . . .

All night she had crouched in her compartment, watching the door, waiting for that first flicker of telltale motion which would show the doorknob was being turned. Then she would scream, pound on the walls of the compartment, make commotion, spread an alarm.

Nothing had happened.

Probably that was the way "they" had planned it. They'd let her spend one sleepless night, then when fatigue had numbed her senses . . .

The train abruptly slowed. She glanced at her wrist watch, saw that it was 5:55, and knew the train was stopping for the man who had inherited the cattle ranch. Howard Kane was the name he had given her after she had encouraged him to tell her all about himself. Howard Kane, twenty-eight, unmarried, presumably wealthy, his mind scarred by battle experiences, seeking the healing quality of the big, silent places.

There was a quiet competency about him; one felt he could handle any situation—and now he was getting off the train.

Suddenly a thought gripped her —"They" would hardly be expecting her to take the initiative. "They" always kept the initiative—that was why they always seemed so damnably efficient, so utterly invincible.

They chose the time, the place, and the manner—give them that advantage and . . .

There wasn't time to reason the thing out. She jerked open the door of the little closet, whipped out her plaid coat, turned the fur collar up around her neck, and as the train eased to a creaking stop, she opened the door of her compartment and thrust out a cautious head.

The corridor was deserted.

She could hear the vestibule door being opened at the far end of the Pullman.

She ran to the opposite end of the car, fumbled for a moment with the fastenings of the vestibule door on the side next to the double track, then got it open and raised the platform.

Cold morning air, tanged with high elevation, rushed in to meet her, dispelling the train atmosphere, stealing the warmth from her garments.

The train started to move. She scrambled down the stairs, jumped for the graveled roadbed by the side of the track.

The train gathered speed. Dark, silent cars whizzed past her with continuing acceleration until the noise of the wheels became a mere hum. The steel rails readjusted themselves to the cold morning air, giving cracking sounds of protest. Overhead, stars blazed in steady brilliance. To the east was the first trace of daylight.

She looked for a town. There was none.

She could make out the faint outlines of a loading corral and cattle chute. Somewhere behind her was a road. An automobile was standing on this road, the motor running. Headlights sent twin cones of illumination knifing the darkness, etching into brilliance the stunted sagebrush shivering under the impact of a cold north wind.

Two men were talking. A door slammed. She started running frantically.

"Wait!" she called. "Wait for me!"

Back on the train the fat man, fully dressed and shaved, contemplated the open vestibule door, then padded back to the recently vacated compartment and walked in.

He didn't even bother to search the baggage that had been left behind. Instead, he sat down in the chair, held a telegraph blank against a magazine, and wrote out his message:

THE BUNGLING SEARCH TRICK DID THE JOB. SHE LEFT THE TRAIN. IT ONLY REMAINS TO CLOSE THE TRAP. I WILL GET OFF AT THE FIRST PLACE WHERE I CAN RENT A PLANE AND CONTACT THE SHERIFF.

Ten minutes later the fat man found the porter. "I find the elevation bothering me," he said. "I'm going to have to leave the train. Get the conductor."

"You won't get no lower by gettin' off," the porter said.

"No, but I'll get bracing fresh air and a doctor who'll give me a heart stimulant. I've been this way before. Get the conductor."

This time the porter saw the twenty-dollar bill in the fat man's fingers.

Seated between the two men in the warm interior of the car, she sought to concoct a convicing story.

Howard Kane said, by way of introduction, "This is Buck Doxey. I'm afraid I didn't catch your name last night."

"Nell Lindsay," she said quickly.

Buck Doxey, granite-faced, kept one hand on the steering wheel while he doffed a five-gallon hat. "Pleased to meet yuh, ma'am."

She sensed his cold hostility, his tight-lipped disapproval.

Howard Kane gently prodded for an explanation.

"It was a simple case of cause and effect," she said, laughing nervously. "It was so stuffy in the car I didn't sleep at all. So," she went on quickly, "I decided that I'd get out for a breath of fresh air. When the train slowed and I looked at my wrist watch I knew it was your stop and . . . Well, I expected the train would be there for at least a few minutes. I couldn't find a porter to get the door open, so I did it myself, and jumped down to the ground. That was where I made my mistake."

"Go on," Kane said.

"At a station you step down to a platform that's level with the tracks. But here I jumped onto a slanting shoulder of gravel, and sprawled flat. When I got up, the step of the car was so far above me . . . well, you have to wear skirts to understand what I mean."

Kane nodded gravely. Buck turned his head and gave Kane a questioning glance.

She said, "I guess I could have made it if I'd had sense enough to pull my skirt all the way up to the hips, but I couldn't make it on that first try and there wasn't time for a second one. The train started to move. Good heavens, they must have just *thrown* you off!"

"I'm traveling light," Kane said.

"Well," she told him, "that's the story. Now what do I do?"

"Why, you accept our hospitality, of course."

"I couldn't . . . couldn't wait here for the next train?"

"Nothing stops here except to discharge passengers," he said.

"But there's a . . . station there. Isn't there someone on duty?"

"Only when cattle are being shipped," Buck Doxey explained. "This is a loading point."

"Oh."

She settled back against the seat

and was conscious of a reassuring masculine friendship on her right side, a cold detachment on her left side.

"I suppose it's horribly ravenous of me, but do we get to the ranch for breakfast?"

"I'm afraid not," Kane said. "It's slow going. Only sixty feet of the road is paved."

"Sixty feet?"

"That's right. We cross the main transcontinental highway about five miles north of here."

"What *do* we do about breakfast?"

"Well," Kane said, "in the trunk of the car there's a coffee pot and a canteen of water. I'm quite certain Buck brought along a few eggs and some ham . . ."

"You mean you stop right out here in the open and cook?"

"When yuh stop here, you're in the open, ma'am," Buck said and somehow made it seem his words were in answer to some unjustified criticism.

She gave him her best smile. "Would it be impertinent to ask when?"

"In this next coulee . . . right here . . ."

The road slanted down to a dry wash that ran east and west. The perpendicular north bank broke the force of the north wind. Buck attested to the lack of traffic on the road by stopping the car squarely in the ruts.

They watched the sun rise over the plateau country as they ate breakfast. She hoped that Buck Doxey's cold disapproval wouldn't communicate itself to Kane.

When Buck produced a battered dishpan she said, "As the only woman present I claim the right to do the dishes."

"Women," Buck said, "are . . ." and abruptly checked himself.

She laughingly pushed him aside and rolled up her sleeves. "Where's the soap?"

As she was finishing the last dish she heard the motor of the low-flying plane.

All three looked up.

The plane, which had been following the badly rutted road, banked into a sharp turn.

"Sure givin' us the once-over," Buck said, his eyes steady on Kane's face. "One of 'em has binoculars and he's as watchful as a cattle buyer at a loading chute. Don't yuh think it's about time we find out what we've got into, Boss?"

"I suppose it is," Kane said. Before her startled mind could counter his action, Buck Doxey picked up the purse which she had left lying in the car.

She flew toward him.

Doxey's bronzed, steel fingers wrapped around her wet wrist. "Take it easy, ma'am," he said.

He pushed her back, found her driving license. "The real name," he drawled, "seems to be Jane Marlow."

"Anything else?" Kane asked.

"Gobs of money, lipstick, keys and . . . Gosh, what a bankroll."

She went for him blindly.

Doxey said, "Now, ma'am, I'm goin' to have to spank yuh if yuh keep on like this."

The plane circled, its occupants obviously interested in the scene on the ground below.

"Now—here's something else," Doxey said, taking out a folded newspaper clipping.

She suddenly went limp. There was no use in further pretense.

Doxey read aloud, " 'Following the report of an autopsy surgeon, police, who had never been entirely satisfied that the unexplained death of Frank Hardwick was actually a suicide, are searching for his attractive secretary, Jane Marlow. The young woman reportedly had dinner with Hardwick in a downtown restaurant the night of his death.

" 'Hardwick, after leaving Miss Marlow, according to her story, went directly to the apartment of Eva Ingram, a strikingly beautiful model who has however convinced police that she was dining out. Within a matter of minutes after entering the Ingram apartment, Hardwick either jumped or fell from the eighth story window.

" 'With the finding of a witness who says Frank Hardwick was accompanied at least as far as the apartment door by a young woman whose description answers that of Jane Marlow, and evidence indicating several thousand dollars was removed from a concealed floor safe in Hardwick's office, police are anxious once more to question Miss Marlow.'

"And here's a picture of this young lady," Buck went on, "with some more stuff under it. 'Jane Marlow, secretary of scientist who jumped from apartment window to his death, is now sought by police after witness claims to have seen her arguing angrily with Frank Hardwick when latter was ringing bell at front door of apartment house from which Hardwick fell or jumped to sidewalk.' "

Overhead, the plane suddenly ceased its circling and took off in a straight line to the north.

As the car proceeded northward, Buck put on speed, deftly avoiding the bad places in the road.

Jane Marlow tried one more last desperate attempt when they crossed the paved road. "Please," she said, "let me out here. I'll catch a ride back to Los Angeles and report to the police."

Kane's eyes asked a silent question of the driver.

"Nope," Buck said decisively. "That plane was the sheriff's scout plane. He'll expect us to hold you. I don't crave to have no more trouble over women."

"All right," Jane said, "I'll tell you the whole story. Then I'll leave it to your patriotism. I was secre-

tary to Frank Hardwick. He was working on something that had to do with cosmic rays."

"I know," Doxey interrupted sarcastically. "And he dictated his secret formula to you."

"Don't be silly," she said, "but he *did* know that he was in danger. He told me that if anything happened to him to take something, which he gave me, to a certain individual."

"Just keep on talking," Buck said. "Tell us about the money."

"Mr. Hardwick had a concealed floor safe in the office. He left reserve cash there for emergencies. He gave me the combination, told me that if anything happened to him I was to go to that safe, take the money, and deliver it and a certain paper to a certain scientist in Boston."

Buck's smile of skepticism was certain to influence Kane even more than words.

"Frank Hardwick never jumped out of any window," she went on. "They were waiting for him, and they threw him out."

"Or," Buck said, "a certain young lady became jealous, followed him, got him near an open window, and then gave a sudden, unexpected shove. It *has* been done, you know."

"And people *have* told the truth," she blazed. "*I* don't enjoy what I'm doing. I consider it a duty to my country—and I'll probably be murdered, just as Frank Hardwick was."

"Now listen," Kane said. "Nice little girls don't jump off trains before daylight and tell the kind of story you're telling. You got off that train because you were running away from someone."

She turned to Kane. "I was hoping that *you* would understand."

"He understands," Buck said, and laughed.

After that she was silent.

Overhead, from time to time, the plane came circling back. Once it was gone for nearly forty-five minutes and she dared to hope they had thrown it off the track; but later she realized it had only gone to refuel and then it was back above them once more.

It was nearly nine when Buck turned off the rutted road and headed toward a group of unpainted, squat cabins which seemed to be bracing themselves against the cold wind while waiting for the winter snow. Back of the buildings were timbered mountains.

The pilot of the plane had evidently spotted the ranch long ago. Hardly had Buck turned off the road than the plane came circling in for a landing.

Jane Marlow had to lean against the cold wind as she walked from the car to the porch of the cabin. Howard Kane held the door open for her and she found herself inside a cold room which fairly reeked of masculine tenancy, with a littered desk, guns and elk horns.

Within a matter of seconds she heard the pound of steps on the porch. The door was flung open and the fat man and a companion stood on the threshold.

"Well, Jane," the fat man said, "you gave us quite a chase, didn't you?" He turned to the others. "Reckon I'd better introduce myself, boys." He reached in his pocket, took out a wallet, and tossed it carelessly on the desk.

"I'm John Findlay of the F.B.I.," he said.

"That's a lie," she said. "Can't you understand? This man is an enemy. Those credentials are forged."

"Well, ma'am," the other newcomer said, stepping forward, "there ain't nothing wrong with my credentials. I'm the sheriff here, and I'm taking you into custody."

He took her purse, saying, "You just might have a gun in here."

He opened the purse. Findlay leaned over to look and said, "It's all there."

"Come on, Miss Marlow," the sheriff said, "You're going back in that plane."

"That plane of yours hold three people?" Findlay asked.

The sheriff looked appraisingly at the fat man. "Not us three."

"I can fly the crate," Findlay said. "I'll take the prisoner in, lock her up, then fly back for you . . ."

"No, no!" Jane Marlow screamed. "Don't you see, can't you realize, this man isn't an officer. I'd never get there. He. . . ."

"Shut up," the sheriff said.

"Sheriff, please! You're being victimized. Call up the F.B.I. and you'll find out that . . ."

"I've already called up the Los Angeles office of the F.B.I.," the sheriff said.

Kane's brows leveled. "Was that because you were suspicious, Sheriff?"

"Findlay himself suggested it."

Jane was incredulous. "You mean they told you that . . . ?"

"They vouched for him in every way," the sheriff said. "They told me he'd been sent after Jane Marlow, and to give him every assistance. Now I've got to lock you up and . . ."

"She's my responsibility, Sheriff," Findlay said.

The sheriff frowned, then said. "Okay, I'll fly back and send a deputy out with a car."

"Very well," Findlay agreed. "I'll see that she stays put."

Jane Marlow said desperately, "I presume that when Mr. Findlay told you to call the F.B.I. office in Los Angeles, he gave you the number so you wouldn't have to waste time getting it from information."

"Why not?" the sheriff said, smiling good-humoredly. "He'd be a hell of an F.B.I. man if he didn't know his own telephone number."

The fat man fished a cigar from his pocket. Biting off the end and scraping a match into flame, he winked at the sheriff.

Howard Kane said to Findlay, "Mind if I ask a question?"

"Hell, no. Go right ahead."

"I'd like to know something of the facts in this case. If you've been working on the case of course you'd know . . ."

"Sure thing," Findlay agreed, getting his cigar burning evenly. "She worked for Hardwick, who was having an affair with a model. We followed him to the model's apartment. They had a quarrel. Hardwick's supposed to have jumped out of the window. She went to his office and took five thousand dollars out of the safe. The money's in her purse."

"So she was jealous?"

"Jealous and greedy. Don't forget she got five grand out of the safe."

"I was following instructions in everything," Jane said.

Findlay grinned.

"What's more," she blazed, "Frank Hardwick wasn't having any affair with that model. He was lured to her apartment. It was a trap and he walked right in."

Findlay said, "Yeah. The key we found in his vest pocket fitted the apartment door. He must have found it on the street and was returning it to the owner as an act of gallantry."

Howard Kane glanced speculatively at the young woman. "She doesn't look like a criminal."

"Oh, thank you!" she said sarcastically.

Findlay's glance was patronizing. "How many criminals have you seen, buddy?"

Doxey rolled a cigarette. His eyes narrowed against the smoke as he squatted down cowboy fashion on the backs of his high-heeled riding boots. "Ain't no question but what she's the one who jimmied the safe, is there?"

"The money's in her purse," Findlay said.

"Any accomplices?" Buck asked.

"No. It was a combination of jealousy and greed." Findlay glanced inquiringly at the sheriff.

"I'll fly in and send that car out," the sheriff said.

"Mind if I fly in with yuh and ride back with the deputy, Sheriff?" Buck asked eagerly. "I'd like to see this country from the air once. There's a paved road other side of that big mountain where the ranger has his station. I'd like to look down on it. Some day they'll connect us up. Now it's an hour's ride by horse . . ."

"Sure," the sheriff agreed. "Glad to have you."

"Just give me time enough to throw a saddle on a horse," Doxey said. "Kane might want to ride out and look the ranch over. Yuh won't mind, Sheriff?"

"Make it snappy," the sheriff said.

Buck Doxey went to the barn and after a few minutes returned leading a dilapidated-looking range pony saddled and bridled. He cas-

ually dropped the reins in front of the ranch "office," and called inside, "Ready any time you are, Sheriff."

They started for the airplane. Buck stopped at the car to get a map from the glove compartment, then hurried to join the sheriff. The propeller of the plane gave a half turn, stopped, gave another half turn, the motor sputtered, then roared into action. A moment later the plane became the focal point of a trailing dust cloud, then raised and swept over the squat buildings in a climbing turn and headed south.

Jane Marlow and Kane watched it through the window until it became but a speck.

Howard Kane said, "Now, Mr. Findlay, I'd like to ask you a few questions."

"Sure, go right ahead."

"You impressed the sheriff very cleverly," Kane said, "but I'd like you to explain . . ."

"Now that it's too late," Jane Marlow said indignantly.

Kane motioned her to silence. "Don't you see, Miss Marlow, I had to get rid of the sheriff. He represents the law, right or wrong. But if this man is an imposter, I can protect you against him."

Findlay's hand moved with such rapidity that the big diamond made a streak of glittering light.

"Okay, wise guy," he said. "Try protecting her against this."

Kane rushed the gun.

Sheer surprise slowed Findlay's reaction time. Kane's fist flashed out in a swift arc, just before the gun roared.

The fat man moved with amazing speed. He rolled with the punch, spun completely around on his heel, and jumped back, the automatic held to his body.

"Get 'em up," he said.

The cold animosity of his tone showed that this time there would be no hesitancy.

Slowly Kane's hands came up.

"Turn around," Findlay said. "Move over by that window. Press your face against the wall. Give me your right hand, Kane . . . Now the left hand."

A smooth leather thong, which had been deftly slipknotted, was jerked tight, then knotted into a quick half hitch.

The girl, taking advantage of Findlay's preoccupation, flung herself on him.

The bulk of Findlay's big shoulders absorbed the onslaught without making him even shift the position of his feet. He jerked the leather thong into a last knot, turned, and struck the girl in the pit of the stomach.

She wobbled about for a moment on rubbery legs, then fell to the floor.

"Now, young lady," Findlay said, "you've caused me a hell of a lot of trouble. I'll just take the thing you're carrying in your left shoe. I spotted it from the way you were limping."

He jerked off the shoe, looked inside, seemed puzzled, then suddenly grabbed the girl's stockinged foot.

She kicked and tried to scream, but the wind had been knocked out of her.

Findlay reached casual hands up to the top of her stocking, jerked it loose without bothering to unfasten the garters, pulled the adhesive tape from the bottom of the girl's foot, ran out to the car, and jumped in.

"Well, what do you know!" he exclaimed. "The damn yokel took the keys with him . . . Come on, horse, I guess there's a trail we can find."

Moving swiftly, the fat man ran over to where the horse was standing on three legs, drowsing in the sunlight.

Findlay gathered up the reins, thrust one foot in the stirrup, grabbed the saddle, front and rear, and swung himself awkwardly into position.

Jane heard a shrill animal squeal of rage. The sleepy-looking horse, transformed into a bundle of dynamite, heaved himself into the air, ears laid back along his neck.

The fat man, grabbing the horn of the saddle, held on desperately.

"Well," Kane asked, "are you going to untie me?"

She ran to him and tugged at the knot.

The second his hands were free, Kane went into action.

Findlay, half out of the saddle, clung drunkenly to the pitching horse, then went into the air, turned half over and came down with a jar that shook the earth.

Kane emerged from the cabin holding a rifle.

"All right, Findlay, it's my turn now," Kane said. "Don't make a move for that gun."

The shaken Findlay seemed to have trouble orienting himself. He turned dazedly toward the sound of the voice and clawed for his gun.

Kane, aiming the rifle carefully, shot Findlay's gun out of his hand.

"Now, ma'am," Kane said, "if you want to get that paper out of his pocket . . ."

Shortly before noon Jane Marlow decided to invade the sacred precincts of Buck Doxey's thoroughly masculine kitchen to prepare lunch. Howard Kane showed his respect for Findlay's resourcefulness by keeping him covered despite the man's bound wrists.

"Buck is going to hate me for this," she said. "Not that he doesn't hate me enough already—and I don't know why."

"Buck's soured on women," Kane explained. "I tried to tip you off. He was engaged to a girl in Cheyenne. No one knows exactly what happened, but they split up. I think she's as miserable as he is, but neither one will make the first move. But for heaven's sake don't try to rearrange his kitchen according to ideas of feminine efficiency.

Just open a can of something and make coffee."

Findlay said, "I don't suppose there's any use trying to make a deal with you two."

Kane scornfully sighted along the gun by way of answer.

Jane, opening drawers in the kitchen, trying to locate the utensils, inadvertently stumbled on Buck Doxey's private heartache—a drawer containing letters, and the photograph of a girl. The photograph had been torn into several pieces and then laboriously pasted together. The front of the picture was inscribed, "To Buck with all my heart, Pearl."

Jane felt a surge of guilt at having opened the drawer, but feminine curiosity caused her to hesitate long enough before closing it to notice Pearl's return address in the upper left-hand corner of one of the envelopes addressed to Buck Doxey . . .

It was as they were finishing lunch that they heard the roar of the plane.

They went to the door to watch it turn into the teeth of the cold north wind, settle to a landing, then taxi up to the low buildings.

The sheriff and Buck Doxey started running toward the cabins and it was solace to Jane Marlow's pride to see the look of almost comic relief on the face of the sheriff as he saw Kane with the rifle and Findlay with bound wrists.

Jane heard the last part of Doxey's hurried explanation to Kane.

"Wouldn't trust a woman that far but her story held together and his didn't. I thought you'd understand what I was doing. I flew in with the sheriff just so I could call the F.B.I. in Los Angeles. Findlay is a badly wanted enemy spy. How did *you* make out?"

Kane grinned. "I decided to give Findlay a private third-degree. He answered my questions with a gun. If it hadn't been for that horse . . ."

Buck's face broke into a grin. "He fell for that one?"

"Fell for it, and off it," Kane said.

"If he hadn't been a fool tenderfoot he'd have noticed that I led the horse out from the corral instead of riding him over. Old Fox is a rodeo horse, one of the best bucking broncs in Wyoming. Perfectly gentle until he feels it's time to do his stuff, and then he gives everything he has until he hears the ten-second whistle. I sort of figured Findlay might try something before I could sell the sheriff a bill of goods and get back."

It had been sheer impulse which caused Jane Marlow to leave the train early in the morning. It was also sheer impulse which caused her to sign Pearl's name to a telegram as she went through Cheyenne.

The telegram was addressed to Buck Doxey, care of the Forest

Ranger Station and read: BUCK I AM SO PROUD OF YOU. PEARL.

Having started the message on its way, Jane looked up Pearl and casually told her of the torn picture which had been so laboriously pasted together.

Half an hour later Jane was once more speeding East aboard the sleek streamliner, wondering if her efforts on behalf of Cupid had earned her the undying enmity of two people, or had perhaps been successful.

When she reached Omaha two telegrams were delivered. One was from Howard Kane and read simply:

YOU WERE SO RIGHT. IT GETS TERRIBLY LONELY AT TIMES. HOLD A DINNER DATE OPEN FOR TONIGHT. YOU NEED A BODYGUARD ON YOUR MISSION AND I AM FLYING TO CHICAGO TO MEET YOU AT TRAIN AND DISCUSS THE WYOMING CLIMATE AS A PERMANENT PLACE OF RESIDENCE. LOVE. HOWARD.

The second telegram was the big surprise. It read:

I GUESS I HAD IT COMING. PEARL AND I BOTH SEND LOVE. I GUESS I JUST NEVER REALIZED WOMEN ARE LIKE THAT. YOURS HUMBLY. BUCK DOXEY.

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **AGATHA CHRISTIE**

TITLE: ***Foxglove in the Sage***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Miss Marple

LOCALE: England

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *A modern Arabian Nights tale, with Mrs. Bantry as Scheherazade, with England as the locale, and with the one and only Miss Marple as the* dea ex machina . . .

NOW THEN, MRS. B.," SAID SIR Henry Clithering encouragingly.

Mrs. Bantry, his hostess, looked at him in cold reproof.

"I've told you before that I will *not* be called Mrs. B. It's not dignified."

"Scheherazade, then."

"And even less am I Sche—what's her name! I never can tell a story properly—ask Arthur if you don't believe me."

"You're quite good at the facts, Dolly," said Colonel Bantry, "but poor at the embroidery."

"That's just it," said Mrs. Bantry. She flapped the bulb catalogue she was holding on the table in front of her. "I've been listening to you all and I don't know how you do it. 'He said, she said, you wondered, they thought, everyone implied'—well, I just couldn't, and besides I don't know anything to tell a story about."

"We can't believe that, Mrs. Bantry," said Dr. Lloyd. He shook his gray head in mocking disbelief.

Miss Marple said in her gentle voice, "Surely, dear—"

Mrs. Bantry continued obstinately to shake her head.

"You don't know how banal my life is. What with the servants and the difficulties of getting scullery

maids, and just going to town for clothes, and dentists, and then the garden—"

"Ah!" said Dr. Lloyd. "The garden. We all know where your heart lies, Mrs. Bantry."

"It must be nice to have a garden," said Jane Helier, the beautiful young actress. "That is, if you don't have to dig, or to get your hands messed up. I'm ever so fond of flowers."

"The garden," said Sir Henry. "Can't we take that as a starting point? Come, Mrs. B. The poisoned bulb, the deadly daffodils, the herb of death!"

"Now it's odd your saying that," said Mrs. Bantry. "You've just reminded me. Arthur, do you remember that business at Clodderham Court? You know. Old Sir Ambrose Bercy. Do you remember what a courtly charming old man we thought him?"

"Why, of course. Yes, that *was* a strange business. Go ahead, Dolly."

"You'd better tell it, dear."

"Nonsense. Go ahead. Must paddle your own canoe, you know."

Mrs. Bantry drew a deep breath. She clasped her hands and her face registered complete mental anguish. She spoke rapidly and fluently.

"Well, there's really not much to tell. The Herb of Death—that's what put it into my head, though in my own mind I call it *sage and onions.*"

"Sage and onions?" asked Dr. Lloyd.

Mrs. Bantry nodded. "That was how it happened, you see," she explained. "We were staying, Arthur and I, with Sir Ambrose Bercy at Clodderham Court, and one day, by mistake—though very stupidly, I've always thought—a lot of foxglove leaves were picked with the sage. The ducks for dinner that night were stuffed with it and everyone was very ill, and one poor girl—Sir Ambrose's ward—died of it."

"Dear, dear," said Miss Marple, "how very tragic."

"Wasn't it?"

"Well," said Sir Henry, "what next?"

"There isn't any next," said Mrs. Bantry, "that's all."

Everyone gasped. Though warned beforehand, they had not expected quite such brevity as this.

"But, my dear lady," remonstrated Sir Henry, "it can't be all. What you have related is a tragic occurrence, but not in any sense of the word a problem for us to solve."

"Well, of course there's *some* more," said Mrs. Bantry. "But if I were to tell you it, you'd know the answer."

She looked defiantly round the assembly and said plaintively, "I told you I couldn't dress things up and make it sound properly like a story."

"Ah ha!" said Sir Henry. He sat up in his chair and adjusted an eyeglass. "Really, you know, Scheherazade, this is most refreshing.

Our ingenuity is challenged. I'm not so sure you haven't done it on purpose—to stimulate our curiosity. A few brisk rounds of 'Twenty-Questions' is indicated, I think. Miss Marple, will you begin?"

"I'd like to know something about the cook," said Miss Marple. "She must have been a very stupid woman, or else very inexperienced."

"She was just very stupid," said Mrs. Bantry. "She cried a great deal afterwards and said the leaves had been picked and brought into her as sage, and how was she to know?"

"Not one who thought for herself," said Miss Marple.

"Probably an elderly woman and, I daresay, a very good cook?"

"Oh, excellent," said Mrs. Bantry.

"Your turn, Miss Helier," said Sir Henry.

"You mean to ask a question?" There was a pause while Jane pondered. Finally she said helplessly, "Really, I don't know what to ask."

Her beautiful eyes looked appealingly at Sir Henry.

"Why not the *dramatis personae,* Miss Helier?" he suggested smiling.

Jane still looked puzzled.

"Characters in order of their appearance," said Sir Henry gently.

"Oh, yes," said Jane. "That's a very good idea."

Mrs. Bantry began briskly to tick people off on her fingers.

"Sir Ambrose—Sylvia Keene, the girl who died—a friend of hers who was staying there, Maud Wye, one of those dark ugly girls who manage to make an effect somehow—I never know how they do it. Then there was a Mr. Curle who had come down to discuss books with Sir Ambrose—you know, rare books—queer old things in Latin, all musty parchment. There was Jerry Lorimer—he was a kind of next door neighbor. His place, Fairlies, joined Sir Ambrose's estate. And there was Mrs. Carpenter, one of those middle-aged pussies who always seem to manage to dig themselves in comfortably somewhere. She was by way of being *dame de compagnie* to Sylvia, I suppose."

"If it is my turn," said Sir Henry, "I want a good deal. I want short verbal portraits, please, of all the foregoing. Sir Ambrose now—start with him. What was he like?"

"Oh, he was a very distinguished-looking old man—and not so very old really—not more than sixty, I suppose. But he was very delicate—he had a weak heart, could never go upstairs—had had to have a lift put in, and so that made him seem older than he was. Very charming manners—courtly—that's the word that describes him best. You never saw him ruffled or upset. He had beautiful white hair and a particularly charming voice."

"Good," said Sir Henry. "I can see Sir Ambrose. Now the girl Sylvia—what did you say her last name was?"

"Keene. She was pretty—really *very* pretty. Fair-haired, you know, and a lovely skin. Not, perhaps, very clever. In fact, rather stupid."

"Oh, come, Dolly," protested her husband.

"Arthur, of course, wouldn't think so," said Mrs. Bantry drily. "But she *was* stupid—she really never said anything worth listening to."

"One of the most graceful creatures I ever saw," said Colonel Bantry warmly. "See her playing tennis—charming, simply charming. And she was full of fun—most amusing little thing. And such a pretty way with her. I bet the young fellows all thought so."

"That's just where you're wrong," said Mrs. Bantry. "Youth, as such, has no charms for young men nowadays. It's only old duffers like you, Arthur, who sit maundering on about young girls."

"Being young's no good," said Jane. "You've got to have S.A."

"What," said Miss Marple, "is S.A.?"

"Sex appeal," said Jane.

"Ah, yes," said Miss Marple. "What in my day they used to call 'having the come-hither in your eye.'"

"Not a bad description," said Sir Henry. "*The dame de compagnie,* you described, I think, as a pussy, Mrs. Bantry?"

"I didn't mean a *cat,* you know," said Mrs. Bantry. "It's quite different. Just a big soft white purry person. Always very sweet. That's what Adelaide Carpenter was like."

"How old a woman?"

"Oh, I should say fortyish. She'd been there some time—ever since Sylvia was eleven. I believe. A very tactful person. One of those widows left in unfortunate circumstances, with plenty of aristocratic relations, but no ready cash. I didn't like her myself—but then I never do like people with very long white hands. And I don't like pussies."

"Mr. Curle?"

"Oh, one of those elderly stooping men. There are so many of them about, you'd hardly know one from the other. He showed enthusiasm when talking about his musty books, but not at any other time. I don't think Sir Ambrose knew him very well."

"And Jerry next door?"

"A charming boy. He was engaged to Sylvia. That's what made it so sad."

"Now I wonder—" began Miss Marple, and then stopped.

"What?"

"Nothing, dear."

Sir Henry looked at Miss Marple curiously. Then he said thoughtfully, "So this young couple were engaged. Had they been engaged long?"

"About a year. Sir Ambrose had opposed the engagement because, he said, Sylvia was too young. But after a year's engagement he had

given in and the marriage was to have taken place quite soon."

"Had the young lad any property?"

"Next to nothing—a bare hundred or two a year."

"No rat in that hole, Clithering," said Colonel Bantry, and laughed.

"It's the doctor's turn to ask a question," said Sir Henry.

"My curiosity is mainly professional," said Dr. Lloyd. "I should like to know what medical evidence was given at the inquest—that is, if our hostess knows."

"I know roughly," said Mrs. Bantry. "It was poisoning by digitalin—is that right?"

Dr. Lloyd nodded. "The active principle of the foxglove—digitalis—acts on the heart. Indeed, it is a very valuable drug in some forms of heart trouble. A very curious case altogether. I would never have believed that eating a preparation of foxglove leaves could possibly result fatally. These ideas of eating poisonous leaves and berries are very much exaggerated. Very few people realize that the vital principle, or alkaloid, has to be extracted with much care and preparation."

"Mrs. MacArthur sent some special bulbs round to Mrs. Toomie the other day," said Miss Marple. "And Mrs. Toomie's cook mistook them for onions, and all the Toomies were very ill indeed."

"But they didn't die of it," said Dr. Lloyd.

"No," admitted Miss Marple.

"A girl I knew died of ptomaine poisoning," said Jane Helier.

"We must get on with investigating the crime," said Sir Henry.

"Crime?" said Jane, startled. "I thought it was an accident."

"If it were an accident," said Sir Henry gently, "I do not think Mrs. Bantry would have told us this story. No, as I read it, this was an accident only in appearance—behind it is something more sinister. I remember a case—various guests in a house party were chatting after dinner. The walls were adorned with all kinds of old-fashioned weapons. Entirely as a joke one of the party seized an ancient pistol and pointed it at another man, pretending to fire it. The pistol was loaded and went off, killing the man. We had to ascertain, in that case, first, who had secretly prepared and loaded that pistol, and secondly who had so led and directed the conversation that that final bit of horseplay resulted—for the man who had fired the pistol was entirely innocent!

"It seems to me we have much the same problem here. Those digitalin leaves were deliberately mixed with the sage, knowing what the result would be. Since we exonerate the cook—we do exonerate the cook, don't we?—the question arises: Who picked the leaves and delivered them to the kitchen?"

"That's easily answered," said Mrs. Bantry. "At least the last part of it is. It was Sylvia herself who

took the leaves to the kitchen. It was part of her daily job to gather things like salad or herbs, bunches of young carrots—all the sort of things that gardeners never pick right. They hate giving you anything young and tender—they wait for them to be fine specimens. Sylvia and Mrs. Carpenter used to see to a lot of these things themselves. And there was foxglove actually growing with the sage in one corner, so the mistake was quite natural."

"But did Sylvia actually pick them herself?"

"That, nobody ever knew. It was assumed so."

"Assumptions," said Sir Henry, "are dangerous things."

"But I do know that Mrs. Carpenter didn't pick them," said Mrs. Bantry. "Because, as it happened, she was walking with me on the terrace that morning. We went out there after breakfast. It was unusually nice and warm for early spring. Sylvia went alone into the garden, but later I saw her walking arm in arm with Maud Wye."

"So they were great friends, were they?" asked Miss Marple.

"Yes," said Mrs. Bantry.

"Had she been staying there long?" asked Miss Marple.

"About a fortnight," said Mrs. Bantry.

There was a note of trouble in her voice.

"You didn't like Miss Wye?" suggested Sir Henry.

"I did. That's just it, I did."

The trouble in her voice had grown to distress.

"You're keeping something back, Mrs. Bantry," said Sir Henry accusingly.

"I wondered just now," said Miss Marple, "but I didn't like to go on."

"When did you wonder?"

"When you said that the young people were engaged. You said that was what made it so sad. But, if you know what I mean, your voice didn't sound right when you said it—not convincing, you know."

"What a dreadful person you are," said Mrs. Bantry. "You always seem to *know*. Yes, I was thinking of something. But I don't really know whether I ought to say it or not."

"You must say it," said Sir Henry. "Whatever your scruples, it mustn't be kept back."

"Well, it was just this," said Mrs. Bantry. "One evening—in fact, the very evening before the tragedy—I happened to go out on the terrace before dinner. The window in the drawing room was open. And as it chanced I saw Jerry Lorimer and Maud Wye. He was—well—kissing her. Of course I didn't know whether it was just a sort of chance affair, or whether—well, I mean, one can't *tell*. I knew Sir Ambrose never had really liked Jerry Lorimer—so perhaps he knew he was that kind of young man. But one thing I *am* sure of: that girl, Maud

Wye, was *really* fond of him. You'd only to see her looking at him when she was off guard. And I think, too, they were really better suited than he and Sylvia were."

"I am going to ask a question quickly, before Miss Marple can," said Sir Henry. "I want to know whether, after the tragedy, Jerry Lorimer married Maud Wye?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Bantry. "He did. Six months afterwards."

"Oh, Scheherazade, Scheherazade," said Sir Henry. "To think of the way you told us this story at first! Bare bones indeed—and to think of the amount of flesh we're finding on them now."

"Don't speak so ghoulishly," said Mrs. Bantry. "And don't use the word flesh. Vegetarians always do. They say, 'I never eat flesh' in a way that puts you right off your nice little beefsteak. Mr. Curle was a vegetarian. He used to eat some peculiar stuff that looked like bran for breakfast. Those elderly stooping men with beards are often faddish. They have patent kinds of underwear, too."

"What on earth, Dolly," said her husband, "do you know about Mr. Curle's underwear?"

"Nothing," said Mrs. Bantry with dignity. "I was making a guess."

"I'll amend my former statement," said Sir Henry. "I'll say instead that the *dramatis personae* in your problem are very interesting. I'm beginning to see them all—eh, Miss Marple?"

"Human nature is always interesting, Sir Henry. And it's curious to see how certain types always tend to act in exactly the same way."

"Two women and a man," said Sir Henry. "The old eternal human triangle. Is that the base of our problem here? I rather fancy it is."

Dr. Lloyd cleared his throat. "I've been thinking," he said rather diffidently. "Did you say, Mrs. Bantry, that you yourself were ill?"

"Was I! And so was Arthur! So was everyone!"

"That's just it—everyone," said the doctor. "You see what I mean? In Sir Henry's story which he told us just now, one man shot another—he didn't have to shoot the whole roomful."

"I don't understand," said Jane. "Who shot who?"

"I'm saying that whoever planned this thing went about it very curiously, either with a blind belief in chance, or else with an absolutely reckless disregard for human life. I can hardly believe there is a man capable of deliberately poisoning *eight* people with the object of removing only *one* of them."

"I see your point," said Sir Henry, thoughtfully.

"And mightn't he have poisoned himself too?" asked Jane.

"Was anyone absent from dinner that night?" asked Miss Marple.

Mrs. Bantry shook her head.

"Everyone was there."

"Except Mr. Lorimer, I suppose,

my dear. He wasn't staying in the house, was he?"

"No, but he was dining there that evening," said Mrs. Bantry.

"Oh!" said Miss Marple in a changed voice. "That makes all the difference in the world." She frowned vexedly to herself. "I've been very stupid," she murmured. "Very stupid indeed."

"I confess your point worries me, Lloyd," said Sir Henry.

"How insure that the girl, and the girl only, should get a fatal dose?"

"You can't," said the doctor. "That brings me to the point: *supposing the girl was not the intended victim after all?"*

"What?"

"In all cases of food poisoning the result is very uncertain. Several people share a dish. What happens? One or two are slightly ill, two more, say, are seriously indisposed, one dies. That's the way of it—there's no certainty anywhere. But there are cases where another factor might enter in. Digitalin is a drug that acts directly on the heart—as I've told you it's prescribed in certain cases. *Now, there was one person in that house who suffered from a heart complaint.* Suppose he was the intended victim? What would not be fatal to the rest *would* be fatal to him—or so the murderer might reasonably suppose. That the thing turned out differently is only proof of what I was saying just now—the uncertainty and unreliability of the effect of drugs on different human beings."

"Sir Ambrose," said Sir Henry, "you think *he* was the person aimed at? Yes, yes—and the girl's death was a mistake."

"Who got his money after he was dead?" asked Jane.

"A very sound question, Miss Helier. One of the first we always ask in my late profession," said Sir Henry.

"Sir Ambrose had a son," said Mrs. Bantry slowly. "He had quarreled with him many years previously. The boy was wild, I believe. Still, it was not in Sir Ambrose's power to disinherit him—Clodderham Court was entailed. Martin Bercy succeeded to the title and estate. There was, however, a good deal of other property that Sir Ambrose could leave as he chose, and that he left to his ward Sylvia. I know this because Sir Ambrose died less than a year after the events I am telling you of, and he had not troubled to make a new will after Sylvia's death. I think the money went to the Crown—or perhaps it was to his son as next of kin—I don't really remember."

"So it was only to the interest of a son who wasn't there and of the girl who died herself," said Sir Henry thoughtfully. "That doesn't seem very promising."

"Didn't the other woman get anything?" asked Jane. "The one Mrs. Bantry calls the pussy woman."

"She wasn't mentioned in the will," said Mrs. Bantry.

"Miss Marple, you're not listening," said Sir Henry. "You're somewhere far away."

"I was thinking of old Mr. Badger, the chemist," said Miss Marple. "He had a very young housekeeper—young enough to be not only his daughter, but his grand-daughter. Not a word to anyone, and his family, a lot of nephews and nieces, full of expectations. And when he died, would you believe it, he'd been secretly married to her for two years? Of course, Mr. Badger was a chemist, and a very rude, common old man as well, and Sir Ambrose Bercy was a very courtly gentleman, so Mrs. Bantry says; but for all that, human nature is much the same everywhere."

There was a pause. Sir Henry looked very hard at Miss Marple who looked back at him with gently quizzical blue eyes. Jane Helier broke the silence.

"Was this Mrs. Carpenter good-looking?" she asked.

"Yes, in a very quiet way. Nothing startling."

"She had a very sympathetic voice," said Colonel Bantry.

"Purring—that's what I call it," said Mrs. Bantry.

"You'll be called a cat yourself one of these days, Dolly."

"I like being a cat in my home circle," said Mrs. Bantry. "I don't much like women anyway, and you know it. I like men and flowers."

"Excellent taste," said Sir Henry. "Especially in putting men first."

"That was tact," said Mrs. Bantry. "Well, now, what about my little problem? I've been quite fair, I think. Arthur, don't you think I've been fair?"

"Yes, my dear."

"First boy," said Mrs. Bantry, pointing a finger at Sir Henry."

"I'm going to be long-winded. Because, you see, I haven't really got any feeling of certainty about the matter. First, Sir Ambrose: well, he wouldn't take such an original method of committing suicide—and on the other hand he certainly had nothing to gain by the death of his ward. Exit Sir Ambrose. Mr. Curle: no motive for death of girl. If Sir Ambrose was intended victim, he might possibly have purloined a rare manuscript or two that no one else would miss. Very thin, and most unlikely. So I think Mr. Curle is cleared. Miss Wye: motive for death of Sir Ambrose—none. Motive for death of Sylvia—pretty strong. She wanted Sylvia's young man, and wanted him rather badly—from Mrs. Bantry's account. She was with Sylvia that morning in the garden, so had opportunity to pick leaves. No, we can't dismiss Miss Wye so easily. Young Lorimer: he's got a motive in either case. If he gets rid of his sweetheart, he can marry the other girl. Still it seems a bit drastic to

kill her—what's a broken engagement these days? If Sir Ambrose dies, he will marry a rich girl instead of a poor one. That might be important or not—depends on his financial position. If I find that his estate was heavily mortgaged and that Mrs. Bantry has deliberately withheld that fact from us, I shall claim a foul. Now Mrs. Carpenter: you know, I have suspicions of Mrs. Carpenter. Those white hands, for one thing, and her excellent alibi at the time the herbs were picked—I always distrust alibis. And I've got another reason for suspecting her which I shall keep to myself. Still, on the whole, if I've got to plump, I shall plump for Miss Maud Wye, because there's more evidence against her than anyone else."

"Next boy," said Mrs. Bantry, and pointed at Dr. Lloyd.

"I think you're wrong, Clithering, in sticking to the theory that the girl's death was meant. I am convinced that the murderer intended to do away with Sir Ambrose. I don't think that young Lorimer had the necessary knowledge. I am inclined to believe that Mrs. Carpenter was the guilty party. She had been a long time with the family, knew all about the state of Sir Ambrose's health, and could easily arrange for this girl Sylvia to pick the right leaves. Motive, I confess, I don't see; but I hazard the guess that Sir Ambrose had at one time made a will in which she was mentioned. That's the best I can do."

Mrs. Bantry's pointing finger went on to Jane Helier.

"I don't know what to say," said Jane, "except this: why shouldn't the girl herself have done it? She took the leaves into the kitchen after all. And you say Sir Ambrose had been against her marriage. If he died, she'd get the money and be able to marry at once. She'd know just as much about Sir Ambrose's health as Mrs. Carpenter."

Mrs. Bantry's finger came slowly round to Miss Marple.

"Sir Henry has put it all very clearly—very clearly indeed," said Miss Marple. "And Dr. Lloyd was so right in what he said. Between them they seem to have made things so very clear. Only I don't think Dr. Lloyd quite realized one aspect of what he said. You see, not being Sir Ambrose's medical adviser, he couldn't know just what kind of heart trouble Sir Ambrose had, could he?"

"I don't quite see what you mean, Miss Marple," said Dr. Lloyd.

"You're assuming—aren't you? —that Sir Ambrose had the kind of heart that digitalin would affect adversely? But there's nothing to prove that's so. It might be just the other way about."

"The other way about?"

"Yes, you did say that it was often prescribed for heart trouble?"

"Even then, Miss Marple, I don't see what that leads to."

"Well, it would mean that he would have digitalin in his possession quite naturally—without having to account for it. What I am trying to say—I always express myself so badly—is this: supposing you wanted to poison anyone with a fatal dose of digitalin. Wouldn't the simplest and the easiest way be to arrange for *everyone* to be poisoned—actually by digitalin leaves? It wouldn't be fatal in anyone else's case, of course, but no one would be surprised at one victim because, as Dr. Lloyd said, these things are so uncertain. No one would be likely to ask whether the girl had actually had a fatal infusion of digitalis. He might have put it in a cocktail, or in her coffee or even made her drink it simply as a tonic."

"You mean Sir Ambrose poisoned his ward, the charming girl whom he loved?"

"That's just it," said Miss Marple. "Like Mr. Badger and his young housekeeper. Don't tell me it's absurd for a man of sixty to fall in love with a girl of twenty. It happens every day—and I daresay with an old autocrat like Sir Ambrose it might take him queerly. These things become a madness sometimes. He couldn't bear the thought of her getting married—did his best to oppose it—and failed. His jealousy became so great that he preferred killing her to letting her go to young Lorimer. He must have thought of it some time beforehand, because that foxglove seed would have to be sown among the sage. He'd pick it himself when the time came, and send her into the kitchen with it. It's horrible to think of, but I suppose we must take as merciful a view of it as we can. Gentlemen of that age are sometimes very peculiar indeed where young girls are concerned. Our last organist—but there, I mustn't talk scandal."

"Mrs. Bantry," said Sir Henry. "Is this so?"

Mrs. Bantry nodded. "Yes. I'd no idea of it—never dreamed of the thing being anything but an accident. Then, after Sir Ambrose's death, I got a letter. He had left directions to send it to me. He told me the truth in it. I don't know why—but he and I always got on very well together."

In the momentary silence, she seemed to feel an unspoken criticism and went on hastily. "You think I'm betraying a confidence—but that isn't so. I've changed all the names. He wasn't really called Sir Ambrose Bercy. Didn't you see how Arthur stared stupidly when I said that name to him? He didn't understand at first. I've changed everything. It's like they say in magazines and in the beginnings of books: 'All the characters in this story are purely fictitious.' You'll never know who they really are."

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **JAMES HOLDING**

TITLE: ***Do-It-Yourself Escape Kit***

TYPE: Prison Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *When the Professor reached the door marked "Open," he already had the taste—the sweet taste—of freedom on his tongue.*

I'VE HEARD OF A LOT OF FUNNY ways to pick up pin money on the side to supplement your regular income. But Turley's scheme was about as queer as any of them.

It certainly showed imagination, I have to hand him that. And a nice feeling for the step-by-step planning that any good salesman knows is necessary to clinch the final sale.

Turley must have been hustling his outside income for several years before they caught up with him, which isn't bad when you consider that the only people Turley had to work on were real pros themselves. I don't think he ever would have been found out if one of his "customers" hadn't carelessly allowed himself to be recaptured after getting clean away, and in a fit of pique, testified against old Turley.

My experience with Turley began when I was occupying a cell in the middle of the right-hand row at the Country Workhouse. It wasn't a maximum security prison, but you couldn't just walk out of there, either. They had guards and bars and walls and all the usual gimmicks for enforced confinement. And naturally I was dying to get out of the place. I had made a modest score, cached the loot, and I had a blonde waiting for me, I hoped, in a certain small town across the state line. So I didn't feel at all disposed to serve out my three-year sentence—not if I could help it.

Turley must have seen and recognized all the signs in me.

One evening we had marched back from the dining hall, and as Turley locked my cell door after

me he said brightly, pitching his voice so that only I could hear it, "Like to break out of here, Professor?"

He used my nickname casually, like a friend, which was a switch for Turley, who was usually the surliest guard in the cell block.

"What do you mean?" I said, my heart accelerating a little. I turned to face him through my bars while he pretended to be fumbling with the key.

"I'll sell you an escape kit," he said. "For fifty bucks."

That floored me. I'd been in a few sneezers in my time, but never before had a prison guard approached me with such a proposition.

"Fifty bucks?" I repeated, more in shock than anything else.

"You got it," Turley said, "in the back of your cigarette pack."

Now how had he found that out? He must have seen me transferring my hold-out money from an empty pack to a fresh one.

"Think it over," he muttered, and then walked away.

I thought it over, all right. Who wouldn't? And the next time we had a chance to exchange a few words in private, I nodded to Turley and said, "Okay, I'll buy," and slipped a picture of U.S. Grant into his hand.

The "escape kit" he supplied me with a few days later was really quite a package.

It consisted of three items: first, two thin rubber pads with some kind of adhesive on one side, that I was obviously supposed to stick onto the bottoms of my heavy work shoes to muffle their sound on the cement floors of the prison.

Second, a roughly drawn floor-plan of the Workhouse ground floor, with arrows indicating a route from my cell past the guard-room doorway at the head of my cell block and into the corridor that led past the dining hall; then through a big washroom beyond the dining hall and out a door at its back into a short, windowless corridor that led into the prison's greenhouse where some of the convicts raised flowers to sell to local gardeners. The arrows continued through the greenhouse, out through a door marked *Open,* at its farther end, which was in the prison's high outer wall; and finally through the prison vegetable garden beside the highway—from which point Turley evidently intended that I should be on my own. A legend at the bottom of the sketch said with a touch of alliterative sentiment which I would never have thought Turley capable of—*Follow the arrow to freedom. Eat this.*

The third item in the "escape kit" went, of course, directly to the heart of the matter. It was a duplicate key to the lock on my cell door.

I studied these articles surreptitiously and at length. Then I hid the shoe-sole covers and the key un-

der my inch-thick mattress, and dutifully shredded the map and swallowed it.

When Turley locked me up that night I said, "When?"

He said, "On Thursday night—my day off. Go between Reilly's rounds. When he's in the guard room at the head of the block, sneak past his door—and you've got it made."

"A clear route from there on?"

"Like a morgue at night. Nobody around."

"Okay," I said.

"Good luck, Professor." His lips were as motionless when he spoke as a good ventriloquist's.

"Thanks, Turley."

I could hardly wait for Thursday night. I knew Turley avoided suspicion by timing my escape for his night off. But it was tough to wait, with that key in my hand and the map engraved in my mind.

On Thursday night it went like a charm. I waited till Reilly had made his one-o'clock round, pretending to be sacked out cold on my bunk. When he passed along the cell block opposite, I got up and watched him through my bars. I had the key ready and the rubber shoe-mufflers stuck in place.

When Reilly went out of my sight into his guard room, I waited three minutes more, then silently reached through my bars and unlocked my cell door. I came out and eased the door shut behind me without any telltale noise. I crept up the cell block and kneeled on the corridor floor to peek around the door frame of Reilly's guard room. He was pouring himself a cup of coffee from a pot on the hot plate. His back was toward me. I stood up and stepped past his open door like a ballet dancer doing Sleeping Beauty on her toes.

When I got into the deserted corridor leading past the dining room, I began to allow myself to feel hopeful. When I was through the washroom without halt or hitch, I felt I could, in justice, be even more hopeful. And when I had negotiated the short corridor, slipped into the greenhouse, and approached the door at its far end —the door that would take me through the outer wall of the Workhouse, my last barrier—I already had the taste of freedom on my tongue.

I grasped the handle of the door that had been marked *Open* on Turley's map. I drew a deep breath of what I confidently felt would be the last tainted prison air I'd breathe for some time—perhaps forever. Exultantly, I tried to turn the door handle.

I wrenched at it like a madman for several minutes before the realization swept over me that the door was locked, not merely stuck or stubborn. Then, cursing under my breath, I turned to examine the greenhouse.

There was no way out—no way except by the door at one end or

the other. For the glass bell of the conservatory roof was reinforced, on the outside, by a tight weave of slender steel rods—not thick enough to prevent sunlight from coming in, but plenty thick enough to keep convicts from breaking out. I could see this instantly in the glow of one of the floodlights on the wall outside, which cast some of its reflected light into the greenhouse.

So there I was. I hadn't given up all hope, but it was depressing, to say the least, being so close to a successful escape and then having the taste turn sour in my mouth. I had sense enough to bury the key to my cell door and the shoe-sole covers under a big pile of sheep manure beside the potting bench. But when the sirens went off, I was still battering at the door marked *Open,* and getting nowhere . . .

The Warden was furious. He had them bring me into his office. Red-eyed from insufficient sleep and dressed in a sloppy bathrobe over his pajamas, he sat behind his desk and glared, with his nose wrinkled up as if he were smelling something pretty bad.

"How did you get out of your cell, Professor?" he demanded roughly. He used my nickname, too, but not in the friendly way Turley had.

"Walked out, Warden," I said. "Just walked out. The door was wide open."

He swore. "A likely story."

"Honest," I said. "Reilly must have forgotten to give his key the full turn when he locked me in. Because there it was, wide open. You can't blame me for accepting an invitation like that, can you?"

"I'll have something to say to Reilly," the Warden growled. "The lunatic! And you, Professor—maybe this will teach you it can't be done. You can't break out of this Workhouse!"

"I've heard rumors that a few have made it," I said, shrugging. I couldn't resist that little feeler about Turley's past successes, if any.

"Very few," the Warden said. "Very damn few."

After the week in solitary that they gave me as punishment, I was taken back to my original cell.

The first chance I had, I told Turley off—in the voice I reserve for the hardest of hard cases, "You owe me fifty bucks, Turley."

He fumbled with my lock again and gave me a thin grin. "Nuts," he said. "You had your chance, didn't you?"

"Some chance, you crook!" I didn't raise my voice, but I made it snap. I'd taken skin off with that tone in my time. But Turley was completely unmoved by it.

He grinned at me, full-size this time. "What stopped you, Professor? The greenhouse door?"

"What else? As you know perfectly well."

"Yeah, I knew it was locked."

He shook his head disapprovingly at me. "Cool off, Professor."

"You knew it! And you took my fifty bucks anyway! What was the idea, you blasted fool? I could have ratted on you when they caught me."

He glanced up and down the cell block. Nobody was paying any attention to us. He risked a few more words. "Not you, Professor. You trust me, I trust you. That was just a dry run, see, just to give you a taste of freedom. To show you that I can deliver. And to make you want to break out even more than you did before."

"What do you mean, Turley? I don't understand you."

He gestured toward the cigarette pack in my shirt pocket. "For the other three hundred bucks you got in there," he said, "I can sell you another key—a key to the greenhouse door. And now you know it's worth it."

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **NORMAN DANIELS**

TITLE: ***The Retirement of Muldoon***

TYPE: Cop Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Patrolman Muldoon was a symbol of the old days when cops were tough and ruled their beats as if they meant it . . . A gr-r-and story with a true Irish lilt!*

FROM HER HAVEN IN THE POLICE Chief's office, Eileen Muldoon looked out onto the large area before the main desk where the theater squad was lined up and ready to go.

She said, "Oh, my Sainted Aunt, not now! Not now!"

At her side, even Jeff Anderson, whose task was to oppose her, felt a pang of sympathy, though it was tempered with humor and an I-told-you-so attitude.

The six old men standing in a line before the desk were assigned to the various movie houses in town. It was easy work—the uniform was sufficient in most cases to quell trouble; but the six old men had been policemen all their lives and if this last assignment was the prelude to retirement, it was none the less police work and they were proud enough to show it. Their uniforms were pressed and clean. Their shoes shone, their badges were brighter than those of the men on more active duty because these were bright with the honor of having been worn so many years.

Of the six old men the smallest was Patrolman Terence Muldoon. He'd never have made the height limits of modern days, though there were some who said he'd been shrinking slightly these last few years—a statement not made in the hearing of Patrolman Muldoon, however. He stood there at attention, his shoes just as polished, the crease in his pants just as sharp, his blue jacket as carefully brushed, and on his head perched a derby hat. It was a bit green with age, it had

been renewed with a series of the black hatbands over the years, and it was still serviceable, though not as part of the uniform.

"Of all the times he'd have to forget," Eileen Muldoon said bitterly.

The desk lieutenant was reading a complaint. As a rule, this squad wasn't troubled with such items as stolen cars or lost dogs. Mislaid or wandering kids now, that was something else. Lots of them wandered into the movie houses. But tonight there was a special order of the day.

"As all you men know," the Lieutenant said, "we've had a cat burglar prowling the West Side for six months and he's pulled so many jobs we've got a special file of them. Now it's possible he's some young punk who likes the movies—the detective bureau has the idea he's not the type to sit home and look at television. So if you notice some young punk spending too much money, let me know. If we don't get that thieving scoundrel pretty soon, the criticism of our citizenry will be bulkier than our files on the burglar. All but Muldoon, right face, forward march. Muldoon, the Chairman of the Police Board wants to see you in the Chief's office."

Eileen hated to give him the satisfaction of laying a hand on the fabric of his sleeve, but she did, and Jeff Anderson looked down at her and thought, as he had so many times in the last few moments, that those who fashion the Irish are specialists in bright blue eyes. Besides the eyes, she had a cute little nose and a mouth with red, red lips and small ears and everything else to make her a neat package of sheer delight.

"Please," she said, "give him another chance. Anyone could forget . . ."

"Now see here, Miss Muldoon," Anderson said firmly, and it was all wrong to be firm with a girl like this. "Now see here, there are many factors involved in this case. Your grandfather has been one of the finest police officers we've ever had, but he's grown old. He's far past the retirement age."

"There are no records."

"I know. I suspect your grandfather came across them years ago and destroyed them. At any rate, I don't need a calendar, or records, to tell me how old he is. Look at him!"

"He's a fine upstanding man, and don't you say otherwise."

"Granted—but, Miss Muldoon, if there's trouble, what can he do? He'll get hurt. I'm thinking of him."

"You're thinking you're the new Commissioner, and new Commissioners always have to sweep away some deadwood or they don't act like new Commissioners. That's how I think you're thinking."

Patrolman Muldoon stepped into the office as erect as a staff sergeant reviewing a final parade in his honor. The derby still rode his head proudly and defiantly.

"And what are you doing here, Eileen?" he asked. "Begging your pardon, sir." He touched his forehead in a salute, missed the hat visor the first time, and rolled his eyes ceilingward as if to see what rested on his head.

"Gramps," Eileen said tenderly, "I told you they would be checking closely. And that derby. Nobody's worn a derby hat in years."

"Well, now," Muldoon said with remarkable facility, "I happen to like a derby hat. There's substance and character to it."

"Not when worn with a uniform," Jeff said mildly.

"Oh—that." Muldoon tapped the crown of the hat. "You ever wear an iron hat, Mr. Commissioner?"

"No," Jeff conceded.

There was a slight exhalation of Muldoon's breath. "You see, sir, an iron hat sometimes fits too snug and there's mortal danger in taking it off. To the hat, I mean. I had some difficulty this evening, so I left it on until the warmth of the building loosened the sweat band . . ." he reached up and deftly snatched off the hat, ". . . so then a man can remove it with ease, as you saw. Now I'll fetch my uniform cap and be on my way. The theater manager brings the cash into the box office about this time and it's safer to have a policeman . . ."

"I'm sorry," Jeff said. He actually was. This rather magnificent man was a symbol of the old days when cops were tough and independent and ruled their beats as if they meant it. They were a proud, honest, brave breed and such symbols are not removed easily nor without a pang of regret.

"If it's my age," Muldoon said hopefully, "I'm but sixty-six."

"If you're only sixty-six," Jeff said, "You must have been nine when you joined the force. It won't work, Muldoon."

"Well now, I have a good record . . ."

"Your last arrest was made at the end of World War II when everybody turned out for the welcome home parade and a drunk fell down so the entire parade had to be halted and you were the nearest police officer . . ."

"It's the quality of a man's arrests, not the quantity." Muldoon tried the old bromide, but he knew it wouldn't do.

"You get your uniform hat," Jeff said, "and report to the theater. That's all for now, Officer Muldoon."

The old man nodded bleakly and shuffled out. There wasn't much spring in his steps for there was no longer any need of it.

"At least," Eileen said in a chill voice, "You didn't fire him on the spot as I thought you might."

"If you'd only see this has to be my may . . ."

"I'm seeing it the way any pair of grateful and kindly eyes can see it. Retirement will kill him."

"What if he gets in trouble? What

if he's hurt on duty?"

"That's how he'd want it."

"If some nitwit hadn't forgotten to write a compulsory retirement age for cops in the city charter . . ."

"And who's to say when a man has to be set aside on a high shelf? Some day, Mr. Commissioner—I don't think I know what your profession is—"

"Lawyer."

"Some day I hope a judge will look down from the bench and say you're an old man, Attorney Anderson. Your client is undoubtedly innocent, but you're a dried-up old fossil and even if you won the case for your client, an old man can't do that so we find him guilty and suggest you go out to pasture."

"Now see here . . ."

"Good *night,* Mr. Anderson."

"Miss Muldoon, I have a right to be heard. I suggest we go somewhere for a cup of coffee."

"I'd prefer having my coffee with that cat burglar the force is looking for," she said.

Jeff felt he was making a little time with her. The reply gratified him, encouraged him to pursue the subject, and before long she was beside him in the little sports car which crowded them together and proved that foreign automotive designers know their business.

"I'm only allowing you to drive me home in this—this midget," she said, "because I want you to see Muldoon's own bailiwick."

"I'm delighted," Jeff said.

"But you'll still retire my grandfather."

"I'll retire Muldoon," he conceded.

The section of town was one of narrow streets, yelling kids, noisy trash cans being set out in front of the small stores. It was a section of tenement houses, all of them clean, though old-fashioned.

"In front of Kilpatrick's." She pointed at the two-story wooden building with the store front.

"Saloon!" Jeff stared at the lettered windows. "Saloon! I thought the word was obsolete."

"You think many things are obsolete," Eileen said tartly. "We'll drop in on Tim Kilpatrick."

"Of course. I'd be glad to buy you a drink."

"And what makes you think you can buy a drink in there?"

He had no idea, but he followed happily because that was what he wanted to do more than anything else. He held the door open for her. Inside was a short hallway ending in a pair of swinging doors.

"Batwings," Jeff said admiringly. "The only ones I've ever seen were in the movies and on TV."

"They're against the law, Mr. Commissioner. They're supposed to be demoralizing to the young, so Kilpatrick keeps them inside. But let me tell you, from what I hear, the young ones are buying more booze than ever and in the days when these doors were legal they'd never have got past them. Not that

I'm against drinking, mind you. If you like it, that's your privilege, and I might have a glass of beer at that."

They walked into the large room which was dominated by a long mahogany bar as clean as an operating table. Behind it stood a man with tufts of gray hair clinging sturdily to an otherwise shiny pate, ringing it like a fence. There was just the faint odor of beer, the kind of smell that whets the appetite like salted peanuts.

"Mr. Kilpatrick," Eileen said, "meet Mr. Anderson."

"Anderson, eh?" Kilpatrick said it like the name was mildly cursed.

"He's the new Chairman of the Police Commission."

"Is he indeed?"

"Will you serve him, Tim?"

Jeff turned a puzzled glance on Eileen. "Will he serve me? It's a public place, isn't it?"

"It's a private club," Kilpatrick said.

"I'll have beer."

"Will you, now? That remains to be seen. Anderson, eh?"

"Beer," Jeff said.

"Should he be served, Eileen?" Kilpatrick asked. "Any special friend . . ."

"He's about to kick Gramps off the force. Tim. He's no friend of mine."

Kilpatrick found a perfectly dry, perfectly clean cloth and polished a perfectly dry, perfectly clean bar with it.

"Anderson, is it?" he said.

Jeff frowned. "Let me see . . . my grandfather was Swedish. My mother's grandfather was English and . . . oh, let me think . . . her father was half Scotch and . . . half Irish. By heaven, his name was O'Brien."

The glasses dripped the ice-cold beer, making lovely little pools on the bar.

"That," Kilpatrick said, "makes the difference."

Eileen picked up her glass and walked toward one of the tables at the back of the room. Jeff followed her and Kilpatrick went back to his dreaming of another era when they made beer as it should be made.

"This table," Eileen said, "is his."

"Whose?" Jeff looked around the otherwise empty place.

"My grandfather's. The Muldoon!"

The beer was stone-cold and very, very good. Jeff wiped the foam off his lips. "Look, Miss Muldoon, I don't want to retire your grandfather. It's not personal. In fact, I wish he could go on being a cop for fifty more long years, but the Board . . ."

"I understand," she said, giving in slightly. "You just don't know what it will do to him. Other men might accept it and glory in loafing, but Gramps won't. He'll die."

Jeff reached for his beer and found it mysteriously gone, it had been that good. "I'd like another—and I'd better pay for these."

"Have all you like, Mr. Ander-

on, but you can't pay for them. Tim Kilpatrick runs the place because he wants to. He doesn't have to. You know the Graham Building downtown—the biggest office building in town? He owns it, along with much more property."

"I see. Well, I'll have to indulge his hospitality because this is the best beer—"

"It should be. He also owns the brewery where it's made. Special for Tim."

"You've known him a long time, haven't you?"

"Me and Gramps live upstairs." She looked at the ceiling. "My mother was born there. Tim owns this building too."

"Yes, I thought he might."

Jeff was at the bar, complimenting the quality of the beer, when the woman came in. She was middle-aged, worried. She went straight to the table. Jeff walked back, carrying the two glasses of beer.

The woman was saying, "I saw you go in here, Eileen, and I thought your grandfather was here too. It's him again—somebody teased him into a drink. Just one and he's off. He'll listen only to Muldoon. I've got him sleeping it off at home now. I'd appreciate it if you'd tell the Muldoon."

"He'll be there as soon as he's off duty," Eileen said. "Don't worry, Muldoon will take care of it."

"What's that all about?" Jeff asked, after the batwings slapped shut on the woman.

"Her husband's an alcoholic. He stays away from it for months at a time and then he slips, and Muldoon sobers him up and talks him into staying that way."

Jeff looked at her inquiringly. "One of the Muldoon's little services, I suppose?"

The blue eyes flashed. "You may suppose and you're right. This was his beat when he was young enough to walk it. He watched the whole section grow. There hasn't been a baptism, or a wedding, or a funeral here he hasn't attended. Nor a street fight he wasn't mixed up in, trying to stop it. Nor a family squabble he didn't silence, nor a wayward young man who wouldn't listen and got sent away and then he listened to the Muldoon. There wasn't a tough egg in this section of mighty tough eggs who hasn't felt the sting of the Muldoon's nightstick in his day."

"Really?" Jeff asked. "I had no idea."

"Now that he's old and ready for the rubbish heap—according to the likes of you—he sits here each day and his friends come to him and he tells them what they must or must not do. They listen because he knows all the answers, or he can send them to those who do. They respect him for his age, and his wisdom, and they don't worry that he might get hurt in a fight. Hurt in a fight! He's been laid out more times than he is old in years. This was a tough section once."

"And you live upstairs?"

"Yes. Me and himself."

"Would you have a cup of coffee up there for a starved man?"

There was a touch of joy in her eyes, but shrewdness too. "What about Muldoon, Mr. Commissioner? Before you get any coffee out of me, what of him?"

"Eileen," he said, "my hands are tied. Look, every Police Board for the past ten years has been trying to retire your grandfather. I wondered why they hadn't, but I can see now. I'll bet tomorrow there's going to be more pressure turned on me than I've ever experienced before. There will be the influence of Kilpatrick, and yes, that woman who was just in here, and everyone else Muldoon helped through the years."

"You'll be surprised how much," she said. "But you'll stand up under it. I got that idea when I first met you. You're a man with a strong back, Jeff Anderson, and you won't be influenced out of a decision you have to make."

"Whether I like the decision or not," he added.

"Then Gramps is sunk and there's nothing can be done, so what's the sense in my giving you a cup of coffee, Mr. Anderson? I thank you for the ride home, and now I'll be on my way if you don't mind and there's no need to follow me because it'll do you no good."

She drank half the fresh glass of beer and hurried out of the saloon. After a moment Kilpatrick came over with two more glasses, enormous ones, dripping with foam. He sat down.

"It'll be a mistake," he said, and he didn't have to be more explicit.

"I didn't understand what Muldoon was doing outside of uniform."

"He's never outside it. This is no sissy section of town. It's one of these rough neighborhoods where the newspapers and the big shots like to say all crime is cradled. Lots of it is—sure, it is—but there are other things cradled here too. Men—and women—who grow important and useful. Of them all, Muldoon shines out."

"I suppose he needs the badge to help him."

"Without it how could he browbeat those who would stand up to him otherwise? The authority of the badge and Muldoon's sincerity, they do the trick. Sometimes even that won't work and a boy goes wrong, or a man winds up in prison, but more often than not Muldoon settles 'em down. Him and the badge."

"You understand, Kilpatrick, it's not all my doing. A new Police Board under a new administration tries to be efficient and one of the best ways is to eliminate deadwood. Hold on now, I'm not saying Muldoon is deadwood—not from what I've seen and heard tonight. But try and convince the other four members of the Board."

"Don't I know it. I've been trying to convince them, but this time it

won't work. They're dead set, they won't listen, and I guess I'm too old to fight hard—just as Muldoon is too old for their tastes. Then too, there always comes a time when nothing works."

"I think," Jeff said, "I'll see if the coffee is ready yet."

"You do that. If you're not down in one minute flat, it's ready."

"Wait for me," Jeff said. "You're a very unusual man, and you might have some unusual ideas. But first things first."

"Especially when they're mighty pretty," Kilpatrick said. "Go along with you. I'll wait."

Eileen admitted him to an old-fashioned, spotless apartment, and he smelled the coffee the moment he stepped inside. She'd been crying and while the swift application of make-up had helped, it didn't hide the redness. Neither mentioned the fact that she'd told him downstairs that he wasn't wanted.

"Tim has been telling me a few more things," Jeff said.

"So can everyone in the neighborhood. How much sugar?"

"None, thanks. You know the Board meets tomorrow night and the first thing to be taken up is the retirement of your grandfather."

"I know. Jeff, isn't there *something* we can do? He's lasted through four Police Boards so far. Is this to be the end of it?"

"I don't know. If I could prevent it, I would. I don't see how . . ."

A radio came on softly. A police radio, and the dispatcher's voice was sending cars up to the West End. The cat burglar again. Jeff didn't think the presence of a police radio in this tenement was out of the ordinary. Eileen scarcely heeded it, but Jeff had an idea that if Muldoon were here and there was a dispatch about any address in the immediate neighborhood, Muldoon would arrive before the radio cars.

"No matter what happens," he said. "I want to see you again, Eileen."

"Why?" she asked. "Why would you want to see me?"

He held up the half-empty cup. "A girl who makes coffee like this . . . and you ask me why."

"We'll see. I'm in no mood for talk now, Jeff Anderson. What will I say to Muldoon when he comes home tonight?"

"I don't know. Perhaps nothing—for the moment. Just don't hold it against me if I'm unable to help."

"I think you'd save his badge if you could. I didn't think so at first, but I do now. I think you're a soft man when it comes to things like this, Jeff Anderson. Please go now."

"I'll call you tomorrow," he said. "Tim's waiting downstairs with more beer. Good night, Eileen, and if nothing else comes of it, at least I can share your troubles."

Kilpatrick, with the beer in the process of being drawn as Jeff walked in, had no ideas, no plans. Jeff leaned against the bar, got his foot comfortably settled on the brass

rail, and after a mouthful of beer he began to talk . . .

At eight the following evening, Eileen came uncertainly into the Police Station to find Jeff waiting for her. There seemed to be an air of despondency around the place. Upstairs, in the police courtroom, things were ready for the Board meetings. Eileen went to the end of the long main-office desk and stood beside Jeff.

Arnold Farwell entered first, He was a bank cashier and, as Eileen whispered to Jeff, he didn't know beans about running a police department even if he was one of the new Commissioners. Then Mrs. Blunt entered. A large, squarely built woman. She was one of the former members of the Board and she knew more about police business—in her estimation—than the Chief. The third member was an austere, retired manufacturer who was confident he served his community, and his conscience, by being on the Board and he had accepted the nomination purely as a favor to the city. Otto Van Gruntweld was the fourth member, brand-new, impressed with his importance, eager to learn what the inside of a police station looked like from the viewpoint of an outsider.

They greeted Jeff, noticed Eileen because she was someone even Mrs. Blunt would notice, and then they walked briskly upstairs.

"What's to be done now?" Eileen asked hopelessly.

"I'm going to talk to them," Jeff said. "No Dutch uncle ever talked as much or as hard as I will."

"It's no use. Their faces show their minds are made up. Muldoon will be the first order of business. It won't take two minutes and Muldoon is finished."

"Wait here," Jeff said. "If necessary, I'll drag the lot of them down to Kilpatrick's and stuff 'em with beer."

He ran up the stairs and let the leather-covered doors swing shut behind him. He took his place at the head of the court clerk's table, which was used by the Police Board. He talked and he argued. He threatened before he pleaded, but he finally was down to his last resort—begging them to reconsider.

"The facts are clear," Mrs. Blunt said. "Old men do not make capable police officers. Nothing you can say will convince me of it. All this about Officer Muldoon doing so much work on his own, it's very commendable, but it does not remove any of his many years nor make him young enough to take part in—well, whatever a police officer takes part in."

"Pinching crooks," Van Gruntweld said heavily. "A man this old can't pinch hard enough to hold a butterfly, let alone some dangerous crook."

"It's for the good of the other old men on the force," Farwell said.

The ex-manufacturer kept nodding his head.

"The other old men?" Jeff asked. "Are you considering more than Muldoon?"

"Several," Mrs. Blunt said tersely. "I think I should have been told of this."

"You would have been, Mr. Anderson," she replied. "We met in informal session last night. You were supposed to be here. We understand you went off with Patrolman Muldoon's granddaughter."

"Very attractive girl," Farwell added significantly.

Jeff stood up and talked more. He talked and talked, and they listened, but they kept shaking their heads and he was growing hoarse and looking at his wrist watch like a man who has a date.

Downstairs there were loud voices. The Commissioners didn't pay much attention until they heard a scuffle and angrier voices. Then curiosity got the better of them.

Jeff was the first down the steps and he went straight to Eileen. The other members of the Board remained on the staircase for protection and peered over the banister.

"Now just simmer down," Muldoon was telling the hulking youth chained to his wrist. "It won't do you no good to put up more of a fight. If you do, I'll take a club to you"—he peered around the main office—"if there's a nightstick left from the old days."

The desk lieutenant was losing his patience. "Muldoon, what the devil is this?"

"Ah—yes, I did forget to charge him, didn't I?" Muldoon said. "This is the cat burglar. I caught him in the theayter with the loot sticking out of his pockets. You can see for yourself how they bulge. And I had a talk with him and he admitted he's the one."

"You brought him in alone?" a reporter asked in awe. Muldoon was barely half the size of the man chained to him.

"I said we had a little talk," Muldoon reiterated. "He was a reasonable man after our conversation and I'm sure he sees the error of his ways, but he robbed forty-one homes and he tells me his room is so full of stuff he has trouble moving about. It's at the Parkmore Arms, down in my section of town, and a flea trap it is too."

The desk lieutenant was calling the detectives from their offices down the hall. The reporters were hurrying for telephones. Muldoon was having trouble finding his handcuff key and it turned out he didn't have one, but fortunately all handcuffs can be unlocked with the same type of key.

Muldoon had to remain at Headquarters to file his report and have his picture taken against the background of all the loot they found in the cat burglar's room. It was rather late by that time, so Eileen was happy to accept a ride home in Jeff Anderson's small car. They went the long way.

She glanced up at the windows

above Kilpatrick's. "He's already home, Jeff, and he'll want to tell me about it and have a cup of coffee. But Kilpatrick will be glad to pass the time of day with you and I'll be down soon."

"That's fine," he said. "I'd like to talk to Kilpatrick alone. About you. I want to know if you'll make me a good and trusting wife."

He was ten feet tall when she grew starry-eyed. He entered Kilpatrick's and found two cold ones already drawn. He adjusted himself to the regulation bar position and drank deeply.

"Wonderful," he said. His eyes scrutinized Kilpatrick's bland face. "You heard what happened?"

"Of course. Muldoon stopped in for a quick one."

"He'll keep his badge as long as he likes."

"And a fit man he is to wear it." Kilpatrick leaned across the bar and pulled his shaggy brows together. "You recall telling me if we could help Muldoon make a good arrest it might be in his favor?"

"I recall."

"We didn't have to do it. Muldoon knew all about that young spalpeen. He told me so last night. He'd been noticing how he'd been spending too much money, and he'd show up with such luxuries as fancy cigarette lighters, which aren't used much in this neighborhood. Muldoon was ready to make the pinch as soon as he had the evidence."

"That I believe, knowing he has sources of information the Detective Bureau would be proud of. What gets me, Tim, is why this cat burglar walked into the theater where Muldoon was on duty—and with his pockets so stuffed with loot that Muldoon couldn't miss it."

Kilpatrick gently dissolved a fine mustache of beer suds on his upper lip by drawing a finger across it.

"They do say, now, that every crook is stupid."

"True enough. And the way Muldoon worked that young giant over. I wouldn't have wanted to tackle him myself."

"Muldoon's a tough old rooster," Kilpatrick said.

"He must be. What happened that your right hand knuckles are taped, Tim?"

Kilpatrick regarded the adhesive. "Keg of beer fell on it. Happens all the time."

"To many of Muldoon's friends as well, I presume?"

Kilpatrick drew Jeff's half-finished glass toward his side of the bar. "If you're calling me a liar, you'll not be drinking with me, Mr. Anderson."

"I'm not calling anybody a liar," Jeff said. "And put a head on it and draw another. I hear Eileen clattering down the stairs."

When she entered, the beer was ready. "He's that proud, it'll take some doing to hold him down," she said happily.

"He has a right to be," Jeff said.

Kilpatrick raised his foaming glass. "Well, here's to Muldoon. I expect we three'll be drinking to him regularly from here on."

They all drank. Eileen looked steadily at the man beside her. "Jeff does like your beer, Tim."

Kilpatrick observed that he hadn't taken his eyes off her since she came in. "Yes," he said. "I can see that."

"I'd be a better Chairman of the Police Commission if I studied Muldoon's ways," Jeff said. "That would require my frequent presence here."

"Muldoon would be proud to show you the way," Eileen said warmly.

The Irish blue eyes robbed Jeff of any desire to speak at that moment.

Kilpatrick put a head on all three beers and leaned comfortably on his side of the bar. "He'll have much to learn," he said. "From both Muldoons."

EENY MEENY MURDER MO

by REX STOUT

(*continued from page 21*)

Cold air was streaming in through a wide-open window. As I went to it and stuck my head out I was prepared to see her lying there with one of my neckties around her throat, though I hadn't left one in that room. It was a relief to see that the areaway, eight feet down, was unoccupied.

A roar came from the office: "Archie! What the devil are you up to?"

I shut the window, glanced around to see if there were any signs of violence or if she had left a note, saw neither, and rejoined the conference.

"She's gone," I said. "Leaving no message. When I—"

"Why did you open a window?"

"I didn't. I closed it. When I took her in there I locked the door to the hall so she couldn't wander around and hear things she wasn't supposed to—so when she got tired waiting, the window was the only way out."

"She climbed out a window?" Otis demanded.

"Yes, sir. It's a mere conjecture, but it fits. The window was wide-open, and she's not in the room, and she's not outside. I looked."

"I can't believe it. Miss Paige is a level-headed and reliable—" He bit it off. "No. No! I no longer know who is reliable." He rested his elbow on the chair arm and propped his head with his hand. "May I have a glass of water?"

Wolfe suggested brandy, but he said he wanted water, and I went to the kitchen and brought some. He got a little metal box from a pocket, took out two pills, and washed them down.

"Will they help?" Wolfe asked. "The pills?"

"Yes. The *pills* are reliable." He handed me the glass.

"Then we may proceed?"

"Yes."

"Have you any notion why Miss Paige was impelled to leave by a window?"

"No. It's extraordinary. Damn it, Wolfe, I have no notions of anything! Can't you see I'm lost?"

"I can. Shall we put it off?

"No!"

"Very well. My assumption that Miss Aaron was killed by a member of your firm—let us call him X—rests on a prior assumption, that when she spoke with Mr. Goodwin she was candid and her facts were accurate. Would you challenge that assumption?"

Otis looked at me. "Tell me

something. I know what she said from your statement, and it sounded like her, but how was she—her voice and manner? Did she seem in any way . . . well, out of control? Unbalanced?"

"No, sir," I told him. "She sat with her back straight and her feet together, and she met my eyes all the time."

He nodded. "She would. She always did." To Wolfe: "At this time, here privately with you, I don't challenge your assumption."

"Do you challenge the other one, that X killed her?"

"I neither challenge it nor accept it."

"Pfui. You're not an ostrich, Mr. Otis. Next: if Miss Aaron's facts were accurate, it must be supposed that X was in a position to give Mrs. Sorell information that would help her substantially in her action against her husband, your client. That is true?"

"Of course." Otis was going to add something, decided not to, and then changed his mind again. "Again here privately with you, it's not merely her action at law. It's blackmail. Perhaps not technically, but that's what it amounts to. Her demands are exorbitant and preposterous. It's extortion."

"And a member of your firm could give her weapons. Which one or ones?"

Otis shook his head. "I won't answer that."

Wolfe's brows went up. "Sir? If you pretend to help at all that's the very least you can do. If you're rejecting my proposal, say so and I'll get on without you. By noon tomorrow—today—the police will have that elementary question answered. It may take me longer."

"It certainly may," Otis said. "You haven't mentioned a third assumption you're making. You are assuming that Goodwin was candid and accurate in reporting what Miss Aaron said."

"Bah." Wolfe was disgusted. "You are gibbering. If you hope to impeach Mr. Goodwin you are indeed forlorn. You might as well go. If you regain your faculties later and wish to communicate with me I'll be here." He pushed his chair back.

"No." Otis extended a hand. "Good God, man, I'm trapped! It's not my faculties! I have my faculties."

"Then use them. Which member of your firm was in a position to betray its interests to Mrs. Sorell?"

"They all were. Our client is vulnerable in certain respects, and the situation is extremely difficult, and we have frequently conferred together on it. I mean, of course, my three partners. It could have only been one of them, partly because none of our associates was in our confidence on this matter, but mainly because Miss Aaron told Goodwin it was a member of the firm. She wouldn't have used that phrase, 'member of the firm,' loose-

ly. For her it had a specific and restricted application. She could only have meant Frank Edey, Miles Heydecker, or Gregory Jett. And that's incredible!"

"Incredible literally or rhetorically? Do you disbelieve Miss Aaron —or, in desperation, Mr. Goodwin? Here with me privately?"

"No."

Wolfe turned a palm up. "Then let's get at it. Is it equally incredible for all three of those men, or are there preferences?"

During the next hour Otis balked at least a dozen times, and on some details—for instance, the respects in which Morton Sorell was vulnerable—he clammed up absolutely, but I had enough to fill nine pages of my notebook.

Frank Edey, 55, married, with two sons and a daughter, wife living, got 27% of the firm's net income. (Otis' share was 40%.) He was a brilliant idea man but seldom went to court. He had drafted the marriage agreement which had been signed by Morton Sorell and Rita Ramsey when they got yoked four years ago. Personal financial condition, sound. Relations with wife and children, so-so. Interest in other women, definitely yes, but fairly discreet. Interest in Mrs. Sorell casual so far as Otis knew.

Miles Heydecker, 47, married, wife living but no children, got 22%. His father, now dead, had been one of the original members of the firm. His specialty was trial work and he handled the firm's most important cases in court. He had appeared for Mrs. Sorell at her husband's request two years ago when she had been sued by a man who had formerly been her agent. He was tight with money and had a nice personal pile of it. Relations with his wife, uncertain; on the surface, okay. Too interested in his work and his hobbies, chess and behind-the-scenes politics, too bother with women, including Mrs. Sorell.

Gregory Jett, 36, single, had been made a firm member and allotted 11% of the income because of his spectacular success in two big corporation cases. One of the corporations was controlled by Morton Sorell, and for the past year or so Jett had been a fairly frequent guest at the Sorell home on Fifth Avenue but had not been noticeably attentive to his hostess. His personal financial condition was one of the details Otis balked on, but he allowed it to be inferred that Jett was careless about the balance between income and outgo and was in the red in his account with the firm.

Shortly after Jett had been made a member of the firm, about two years ago, he had dropped a fat chunk—Otis thought about $40,000 —backing a Broadway show that flopped. A friend of his, female, had been in the cast. Whether he had had other expenses connected with a female friend or friends Otis either didn't know or wasn't tell-

ing. He did say that he had gathered, mostly from remarks Bertha Aaron had made, that in recent months Jett had shown more attention to Ann Paige than their professional association required.

But when Wolfe suggested the possibility that Ann Paige had left through a window because she suspected, or even knew, what was in the wind, and had decided to take a hand, Otis wouldn't buy it. He was having all he could do to swallow the news that one of his partners was a snake, and the idea that another of his associates might have been in on it was too much. He would tackle Ann Paige himself; she would no doubt have an acceptable explanation for her sudden and unconventional departure.

On Mrs. Morton Sorell he didn't balk at all. Part of his information was known to everyone who read newspapers and magazines: that as Rita Ramsey she had dazzled Broadway with her performance in *Reach for the Moon* when she was barely out of her teens, that she had followed that with even greater triumphs in two other plays, that she had spurned Hollywood, that she had also spurned Morton Sorell for two years and then abandoned her career to marry him.

But Otis added other information about Mr. and Mrs. Sorell that had merely been hinted at in gossip columns: that in a year their union had gone sour; that it became apparent Rita had married Sorell only to get her lovely paws on a bale of dough; and that she was by no means going to settle for the terms of the marriage agreement. She wanted much more—more than half—and she had carefully begun to collect evidence of certain activities of Sorell's, but he had got wise and consulted his attorneys, Otis, Edey, Heydecker and Jett, and they had stymied her—or thought they had. Otis had been sure they had, until he had read the copy of my statement. Now he was sure of nothing.

But he was still alive. When he got up to go, at two hours past midnight, he had bounced back some. He wasn't nearly as jittery as he had been when he asked for a glass of water to take the pills. He hadn't accepted Wolfe's offer in so many words, but he had agreed to take no steps until he had heard further from Wolfe, provided he heard within thirty-two hours, by ten o'clock Wednesday morning.

The only action Otis would take during that period would be to instruct Ann Paige to tell no one that he had read my statement and to learn why she had skedaddled. He didn't think the police would tell him the contents of my statement, but if they did he would say that he would credit it only if it had corroboration. Of course he wanted to know what Wolfe was going to do, but Wolfe said he didn't know and probably wouldn't decide until after breakfast.

When I returned to the office after holding Otis' coat for him and letting him out, Fritz was there.

"No," Wolfe was saying grimly. "You know quite well I almost never eat at night."

"But you had no dinner. An omelet, or at least—"

"No! Confound it, let me starve! Go to bed!"

Fritz looked at me, I shook my head, and he went. I sat down and spoke: "Do I get Saul and Fred and Orrie?"

"No." He took in air through his nose and let it out through his mouth. "If I don't know how I am going to proceed how the deuce can I have errands for them?"

"Rhetorical," I said.

"It is not rhetorical. It's logical. There are the obvious routine errands, but that would be witless. Find the cheap restaurant or lunchroom where they met? How many are there?"

"Oh, a thousand. More."

He grunted. "Or question the entire personnel of that law office to learn which of those three men spoke at length with Miss Aaron yesterday afternoon? Or, assuming that he followed her here, left the office on her heels? Or which one cannot account for himself from five o'clock to ten minutes past six? Or find the nearby phone booth from which he dialed this number? Or investigate their relations with Mrs. Sorell? Those are all sensible and proper lines of inquiry, and by mid-morning Mr. Cramer and the District Attorney will have a score of men pursuing them."

"Two score. This is a special."

"So for me to put three men on them, four including you, would be frivolous. A possible procedure would be to have Mr. Otis get them here—Edey, Heydecker, and Jett. He could merely tell them that he has engaged me to investigate the murder that was committed in my own house."

"If they're available. They'll be spending most of the day at the D.A.'s office. By request."

He shut his eyes and tightened his lips. I picked up the copy of my statement which Otis had surrendered, got the second carbon from my drawer, went and opened the safe, and put them on a shelf. I had closed the safe door and was twirling the knob when Wolfe spoke.

"Archie."

"Yes, sir."

"Will they tackle Mrs. Sorell?"

"I doubt it. Not right away. What for? Since Cramer warned us that if we blab what Bertha Aaron told me we may be hooked for libel, which was kind of him, evidently he's going to save it, and going to Mrs. Sorell would spill it."

He nodded. "She is young and comely."

"Yeah. I've never seen her offstage. You have seen pictures of her."

"You have a talent for dealing with personable young women."

"Sure. They melt like chocolate bars in the sun. But you're exaggerating it a little if you think I can go to that specimen and ask her which member of the firm she met in a cheap restaurant or lunchroom and she'll wrap her arms around me and murmur his name in my ear. It might take me an hour or more."

"You can bring her here."

"Maybe. Possibly. To see the orchids?"

"I don't know." He pushed his chair back and raised his bulk. "I am not myself. Come to my room at eight o'clock." He headed for the hall.

At 10:17 that Tuesday morning I left the house, walked north fourteen short blocks and east six long ones, and entered the lobby of the Churchill. I walked instead of flagging a taxi for two reasons: because I had had less than five hours' sleep and needed a lot of oxygen, especially from the neck up, and because eleven o'clock was probably the earliest Mrs. Morton Sorell, born Rita Ramsey, would be accessible. It had taken only a phone call to Lon Cohen at the *Gazette* to learn that she had taken an apartment at the Churchill Towers two months ago, when she had left her husband's roof.

In my pocket was a plain white envelope, sealed, on which I had written by hand:

Mrs. Morton Sorell

Personal and Confidential

and inside it was a card, also handwritten:

We were seen that evening in the lunchroom as we sat in the booth. It would be dangerous for me to phone you or for you to phone me. You can trust the bearer of this card.

No signature. It was twelve minutes to eleven when I handed the envelope to the chargé d'affaires at the lobby desk and asked him to send it up, and it still lacked three minutes of eleven when he motioned me to the elevator.

Those nine minutes had been tough. If it hadn't worked, if word had come down to bounce me, or no word at all, I had no other card ready to play. So as the elevator shot up I was on the rise in more ways than one, and when I stepped out at the thirtieth floor and saw that she herself was standing there in the doorway my face wanted to grin at her but I controlled it.

She had the card in her hand. "You sent this?" she asked.

"I brought it."

She looked me over, down to my toes and back up. "Haven't I seen you before? What's your name?"

"Goodwin. Archie Goodwin. You may have seen my picture in the morning paper."

"Oh." She nodded. "Of course." She lifted the card. "What's this about? It's crazy! Where did you get it?"

"I wrote it." I advanced a step

and got a stronger whiff of the perfume of her morning bath—or it could have come from the folds of her yellow robe, which was very informal. "I might as well confess, Mrs. Sorell. It was a trick. I have been at your feet for years. The only pictures in my heart are of you. One smile from you, just for me, would be rapture. I have never tried to meet you because I knew it would be hopeless, but now that you have left your husband I might be able to do something, render some little service, that would earn me a smile. I had to see you and tell you that, and that card was just a trick to get to you. I made it up. I tried to write something that would make you curious enough to see me. Please forgive me!"

She smiled the famous smile, just for me. "You overwhelm me, Mr. Goodwin, you really do. You said that *so* nicely. Have you any particular service in mind?"

I had to hand it to her. She knew darned well I was a double-breasted liar. She knew I hadn't made it up. She knew I was a licensed private detective and had come on business. But she hadn't batted an eye—or rather, she had. Her long dark lashes, which were homegrown and made a fine contrast with her hair, the color of corn silk just before it starts to turn, had lowered for a second to veil the pleasure I was giving her. She was as good offstage as she was on, and I had to hand it to her.

"If I might come in?" I suggested. "Now that you've smiled at me?"

"Of course." She backed up and I entered. She waited while I removed my hat and coat and put them on a chair, then led me through the foyer to a large living room with windows on the east and south, and across to a divan.

"Not many people ever have a chance like this," she said, sitting. "An offer of a service from a famous detective. What shall it be?"

"Well." I sat. "I can sew on buttons."

"So can I." She smiled. Seeing that smile, you would never have dreamed that she was a champion bloodsucker. I was about ready to doubt it myself. It was pleasant to be on the receiving end of it.

"I could walk along behind you," I offered, "and carry your rubbers in case it snows."

"I don't walk much. It might be better to carry a gun. You mentioned my husband. I honestly believe he is capable of hiring someone to kill me. You're handsome—*very* handsome. Are you brave?"

"It depends. I probably would be if you were looking on. By the way, now that I'm here, and this is a day I'll never forget, I might as well ask you something. Since you saw my picture in the paper, I suppoose you read about what happened in Nero Wolfe's office yesterday. That woman murdered. Bertha Aaron. Yes?"

"I read part of it." She made a face. "I don't like to read about murders."

"Did you read who she was? Private secretary of Lamont Otis, senior partner of Otis, Edey, Heydecker and Jett, a law firm?"

She shook her head. "I didn't notice."

"I thought you might because they are your husband's attorneys. You know that, of course."

"Oh." Her eyes had widened. "Of course. I didn't notice."

"I guess you didn't read that part. You would have noticed those names, since you know all four of them. What I wanted to ask, did you know Bertha Aaron?"

"No."

"I thought you might, since she was Otis' secretary and they have been your husband's attorneys for years and they handled a case for you once. You never met her?"

"No." She wasn't smiling. "You seem to know a good deal about that firm and my husband. You said that *so* nicely, about being at my feet and my pictures in your heart. So they sent you, or Nero Wolfe did, and he is working for my husband. So?"

"No. He isn't."

"He's working for that law firm, and that's the same thing."

"No. He's working for nobody but himself. He—"

"You're lying."

"I only allow myself so many lies a day and I'm careful not to waste them. Mr. Wolfe is upset because that woman was killed in his office, and he intends to get even. He is working for no one, and he won't be until this is settled. He thought you might have known Bertha Aaron and could tell me something about her that would help."

"I can't."

"That's too bad. I'm still at your feet."

"I like you there. You're *very* handsome." She smiled. "I just had an idea. Would Nero Wolfe work for me?"

"He might. He doesn't like some kinds of jobs. If he did he'd soak you. If he has any pictures in his heart at all, which I doubt, they are not of beautiful women—or even homely ones. What would you want him to do?"

"I would rather tell him."

"For that," I said, "you would have to make an appointment at his office. He never leaves his house on business." I got a card from my case and handed it to her. "There's the address and phone number. Or if you'd like to go now I'd be glad to take you, and he might stretch a point and see you. He'll be free until one o'clock."

"I wonder." She smiled.

"You wonder what?"

"Nothing. I was talking to myself." She shook her head. "I won't go now. Perhaps . . . I'll think it over." She stood up. "I'm sorry I can't help but I had never met that —what was her name?"

"Bertha Aaron." I was on my feet.

"I had never heard of her." She glanced at the card, the one I had handed her. "I may ring you later today. I'll think it over."

She went with me to the foyer, and as I reached for the doorknob she offered a hand and I took it. There was nothing flabby about her clasp.

When you leave an elevator at the lobby floor of the Churchill Towers you have three choices. To the right is the main entrance. To the left and then right is a side entrance, and to the left and left again is another. I left by the main entrance, stopped a moment on the sidewalk to put my coat on and pull at my ear, and then turned downtown, in no hurry.

At the corner I was joined by a little guy with a big nose who looked, at first sight, as if he might make forty bucks a week waxing floors. Actually Saul Panzer was the best operative in the metropolitan area and his rate was ten dollars an hour.

"Any sign of a dick?" I asked him.

"None I know, and I think none I don't know. You saw her?"

"Yeah. I doubt if they're on her. I stung her and she may be moving. The boys are covering?"

"Yes. Fred at the north entrance and Orrie at the south. I hope she takes the front."

"So do I. See you in court."

He wheeled and was gone, and I stepped to the curb and flagged a taxi. It was 11:40 when it rolled to the curb in front of the old brownstone on 35th Street.

Mounting the seven steps to the stoop, using my key to get in, and putting my hat and coat on the rack in the hall, I went to the office. Wolfe would of course be settled in his chair behind his desk with his current book, since his morning session in the plant rooms ended at eleven o'clock. But he wasn't. His chair was empty, but the red leather one was occupied, by a stranger. I kept going for a look at his front, and said good morning. He said good morning.

He was a poet above the neck, with deep-set dreamy eyes, a wide sulky mouth, and a pointed modeled chin, but he would have had to sell a lot of poems to pay for that suit and shirt and tie, not to mention the Parvis of London shoes. Having given him enough of a glance for that, and not caring to ask him where Wolfe was, I returned to the hall and turned left, toward the kitchen; and there, in the alcove at the end of the hall, was Wolfe, standing at the hole.

The hole was through the wall at eye level. On the office side it was covered by a picture of a waterfall. On this side, in the alcove, it was covered by nothing, and you could not only hear through it but also see through it.

I didn't stop. Pushing the two-

way door to the kitchen, I held it for Wolfe to enter and then let it swing back.

"You forgot to leave a necktie on your desk," I told him.

He grunted. "We'll discuss that some day, the necktie. That is Gregory Jett. He has spent the morning at the District Attorney's office. I excused myself because I wanted to hear from you before talking with him, and I thought I might as well observe him."

"Good idea. He might have muttered to himself, 'By golly, the rug is gone.' Did he?"

"No. Did you see that woman?"

"Yes, sir. She's a gem. There is now no question about Bertha Aaron's basic fact, that a member of the firm was with Mrs. Sorell in a lunchroom."

"She admitted it?"

"No, sir, but she confirmed it. We talked for twenty minutes, and she never mentioned the card after the first half a minute, when she merely said it was crazy and asked me where I got it. She told me I was handsome twice, she smiled at me six times, she said she had never heard of Bertha Aaron, and she asked if you would work for her. She may phone for an appointment. Do you want it verbatim now?"

"Later will do. The men are there?"

"Yes. I spoke with Saul when I left. That's wasted. She's not a fool, anything but. Of course it was a blow to her to learn that her meeting in the lunchroom is known, but she won't panic. Also, of course, she doesn't know how we got onto it. She may not have suspected that there was any connection between that meeting and the murder of Bertha Aaron. It's even possible she doesn't suspect it now, though that's doubtful. If and when she does, she will also suspect that the man she was with in the lunchroom killed Bertha Aaron, and that will be hard to live with, but even then she won't panic. She is a very tough article and she is still after thirty million bucks. Looking at her as she smiled at me and told me I was handsome, which may have been her honest opinion in spite of my flat nose, you would never have guessed that I had just sent her a card announcing that her pet secret had been spilled. She's a gem. If I had thirty million I'd be glad to buy her a lunch. What's biting Gregory Jett?"

"I don't know. We shall see." He pushed the door open and passed through and I followed.

As Wolfe detoured around the red leather chair Jett spoke: "I said my business was urgent. You're rather cheeky, aren't you?"

"Moderately so." Wolfe got his mass adjusted in his seat and swiveled to face him. "If there is pressure, sir, it is on you, not on me. Am I concerned?"

"You are involved." The deep-set dreamy eyes came to me. "Is your name Archie Goodwin?"

I said yes.

"Last night you gave a statement to the police about your conversation with Bertha Aaron, and you gave a copy of it to Lamont Otis, the senior member of my firm."

"Did I?" I was polite. "I only work here. I only do what Mr. Wolfe tells me to. Ask him."

"I'm not asking, I'm telling." He returned to Wolfe. "I want to know what is in that statement. Mr. Otis is an old man and his heart is weak. He was under shock when he came here, from the tragic news of the death of his secretary, who was murdered here in your office, in circumstances which as far as I know them were certainly no credit to you or Goodwin. It must have been obvious that Mr. Otis was under shock, and it was certainly obvious that he is an old man. To show him that statement was irresponsible and reprehensible. I want to know what is in it."

Wolfe had leaned back and lowered his chin. "Well. When cheek meets cheek. You are manifestly indomitable and I must buckle my breastplate. I choose to deny that there is any such statement. Then?"

"Poppycock. I know there is."

"Your evidence?" Wolfe wiggled a finger. "Mr. Jett. This is fatuous. Someone has told you the statement exists or you would be an idiot to come and bark at me. Who told you, and when?"

"Someone who . . . in whom I have the utmost confidence."

"Mr. Otis himself?"

"No."

"Her name?"

Jett set his teeth on his lower lip. After chewing on it a little he shifted to the upper lip. He had nice white teeth.

"You must be under shock too," Wolfe said, "to suppose you could come with that demand without disclosing the source of your information. Is her name Ann Paige?"

"I will tell you that only in confidence."

"Then I don't want it. I will take it as private information entrusted to my discretion, but not in confidence. I am still denying that such a statement exists."

"Damn you!" Jett hit the arm of his chair. "She was here with him! She saw Goodwin hand it to him! She saw him read it!"

Wolfe nodded. "That's better. When did Miss Paige tell you about it? This morning?"

"No. Last night. She phoned me."

"At what hour?"

"Around midnight. A little after."

"Had she left here with Mr. Otis?"

"You know damn well she hadn't. She had climbed out a window."

"And phoned you at once." Wolfe straightened up. "If you are to trust my discretion you must give it ground. I may then tell you what the statement contains, or I may

not. I reject the reason you have given, or implied, for your concern —solicitude for Mr. Otis. Your explanation must account not only for your concern but also for Miss Paige's flight through a window. You—"

"It wasn't a flight! Goodwin had locked the door!"

"He would have opened it on request. You said your business is urgent. How and to whom? You are trying my patience. With your trained legal mind, you know it is futile to feed me inanities."

Jett looked at me. I set my jaw and firmed my lips to show him that I didn't care for inanities either. He went back to Wolfe.

"Very well," he said. "I'll trust your discretion, since there is no alternative. When Otis told Miss Paige she had to leave, she suspected that Miss Aaron had told Goodwin something about me. She thought—"

"Why about you? There had been no hint of it."

"Because he said to her, 'I couldn't trust you on *this*.' She thought he knew that she couldn't be trusted in a matter that concerned me. That is true—I hope it is true. Miss Paige and I are engaged to marry. It has not been announced, but our mutual interest is probably no secret to our associates, since we have made no effort to conceal it. Added to that was the fact that she knew that Miss Aaron might have had knowledge, or at least suspicion, of a certain—uh—episode in which I had been involved. An episode of which Mr. Otis would have violently disapproved. You said my explanation must account both for my concern and for Miss Paige's leaving through a window. It does."

"What was the episode?"

Jett shook his head. "I wouldn't tell you that even in confidence."

"What was its nature?"

"It was a personal matter."

"Did it bear on the interests of your firm or your partners?"

"No. It was strictly personal."

"Did it touch your professional reputation or integrity?"

"It did not."

"Was a woman involved?"

"Yes."

"Her name?"

Jett shook his head. "I'm not a cad, Mr. Wolfe."

"Was it Mrs. Morton Sorell?"

Jett's mouth opened, and for three breaths his jaw muscles weren't functioning. Then he said, "So that was it. Miss Paige was right. I want—I demand to see that statement."

"Not yet, sir. Later, perhaps—or not. Do you maintain that the episode involving Mrs. Sorell had no relation to your firm's interests or your professional integrity?"

"I do. It was purely personal, and it was brief."

"When did it occur?"

"About a year ago."

"When did you last see her?"

"About a month ago, at a party. I didn't speak with her."

"When were you last with her tête-à-tête?"

"I haven't been since—not for nearly a year."

"But you are still seriously perturbed at the chance that Mr. Otis has learned of the episode?"

"Certainly. Mr. Sorell is our client, and his wife is our opponent in a very important matter. Mr. Otis might suspect that the episode is—was not merely an episode. He has not told me of the statement you showed him, and I can't approach him about it because he has ordered Miss Paige not to mention it to anyone, and she didn't tell him she had already told me. I want to see it. I have a right to see it!"

"Don't start barking again." Wolfe rested his elbows on the chair arms and put his fingertips together. "I'll tell you this: there is nothing in the statement, either explicit or allusive, about the episode you have described. That should relieve your mind. Beyond that—"

The doorbell rang.

I was wrong about them. As soon as I got a look at them through the one-way panel I guessed who they were, but I had the labels mixed.

My guess was that the big broad-shouldered one in a dark blue chesterfield tailored to give him a waist, and a homburg to match, was Edey, 55, and the compact little guy in a brown ulster with a belt was Heydecker, 47; but when I opened the door and the chesterfield said they wanted to see Nero Wolfe, and I asked for names, he said, "This gentleman is Frank Edey and I am Miles Heydecker. We are—"

"I know who you are. Step in."

Since age has priority I helped Edey off with his ulster, putting it on a hanger, and let Heydecker manage his chesterfield, then took them to the front room and invited them to sit. If I opened the connecting door to the office Jett's voice could be heard and there was no point in his trusting Wolfe's discretion if he couldn't trust mine; so I went around through the hall, crossed to my desk, wrote *Edey and Heydecker* on my memo pad, tore the sheet off, and handed it to Wolfe. He glanced at it and looked at Jett.

"We're at an impasse. You refuse to answer further questions unless I tell you the contents of the statement, and I won't do that. Mr. Edey and Mr. Heydecker are here. Will you stay or go?"

"Edey?" Jett stood up. "Heydecker? Here?"

"Yes, sir. Uninvited and unexpected. You may leave unseen if you wish."

Evidently he didn't wish anything except to see the statement. He didn't want to go and he didn't want to stay. When it became apparent that he wasn't going to de-

cide, Wolfe decided for him by giving me a nod, and I went and opened the connecting door and told the newcomers to come in. Then I stepped aside and looked on, at their surprise at seeing Jett, their manners as they introduced themselves to Wolfe, the way they handled their eyes.

I had never completely squelched the idea that when you are in a room with three men and you know that one of them committed a murder, especially when he committed it in that room only eighteen hours ago, it will show if you watch close enough. I knew from experience that the idea wasn't worth a damn, that if you did see something that seemed to point, you were probably wrong, but I still had it and still have it. I was so busy with it that I didn't go to my desk and sit until Jett was back in the red leather chair and the newcomers were on two of the yellow ones, facing Wolfe, and Heydecker, the big broad-shouldered one, was speaking.

His eyes were at Jett. "We came," he said, "for information, and I suppose you did too, Greg. Unless you got more at the D.A.'s office than we did."

"I got damn little," Jett said. "I didn't even see Howie, my old schoolmate. They didn't answer questions, they asked them. A lot of them I didn't answer and they shouldn't have been asked—about our affairs and our clients. Naturally I answered the relevant ones, the routine stuff about my relations with Bertha Aaron and my whereabouts and movements yesterday afternoon. Not only mine, but others'. Particularly if anyone had spoken at length with Bertha, and if anyone had left the office with her or soon after her. Obviously they think she was killed by someone connected with the firm, but they don't say why—at least, not to me."

"Nor to me," Edey said. He was the compact undersized one and his thin tenor fitted him fine.

"Nor to me," Heydecker said. "What has Wolfe told you?"

"Not much. I haven't been here long." Jett looked at Wolfe.

Wolfe obliged. He cleared his throat. "I presume that you gentlemen have come with the same purpose as Mr. Jett. He asks for any information that will give light, with emphasis on the reason for Miss Aaron's coming to see me. He assumes—"

"That's it," Heydecker cut in. "What was she here for?"

"If you please. He assumes from the circumstances that she was killed to prevent a revelation she meant to make, and that is plausible. But surely the police and the District Attorney haven't withheld *all* the details from you. Haven't they told you that she didn't see me?"

"No," Edey said. "They haven't told me."

"Nor me," Heydecker said.

"Then I tell you. She came without an appointment. Mr. Goodwin admitted her. She asked to see me on a confidential matter. I was engaged elsewhere, upstairs, and Mr. Goodwin came to tell me she was here. We had a matter under consideration and discussed it at some length, and when we came down her dead body was here." He pointed at Heydecker's feet. "There. So she couldn't tell me what she came for, since I never saw her alive."

"Then I don't get it," Edey declared. The brilliant idea man was using his brain. "If she didn't tell you, you couldn't tell the police or the District Attorney. But if they don't know what she came to see you about, why do they think she was killed by someone in our office? It's conceivable that they got that information from someone else—but so soon? They started in on me at seven o'clock this morning. And I conclude from their questions that they don't merely think it, they think they know it."

"They do, unquestionably," Heydecker agreed. "Mr. Goodwin. You admitted her. She was alone?" That was the brilliant trial lawyer.

"Yes." Since we weren't before the bench I omitted the "sir."

"You saw no one else around? On the sidewalk?"

"No. Of course it was dark. It was twenty minutes past five. On January fifth the sun sets at 4:46." By gum, he wasn't going to trap me.

"You conducted her to this room?"

"Yes."

"Leaving the outer door open perhaps?"

"No."

"Are you certain of that?"

"Yes. If I have one habit that's totally automatic, it's closing that door and making sure it's locked."

"Automatic habits are dangerous things, Mr. Goodwin. Sometimes they fail you. When you brought her to this room did you sit?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Where I am now."

"Where did she sit?"

"About where you are. About three feet closer to me."

"What did she say?"

"That she wanted to see Nero Wolfe about something urgent. No, she said that at the door. She said her case was private and very confidential."

"She used the word 'case'?"

"Yes."

"What else did she say?"

"That her name was Bertha Aaron and she was the private secretary of Mr. Lamont Otis, senior partner in the law firm of Otis, Edey, Heydecker and Jett."

"What else did she say?"

Naturally I had known that the time would come to lie, and decide this was it. "Nothing," I said.

"Absolutely nothing?"

"Right."

"You are Nero Wolfe's confiden-

tial assistant. He was engaged elsewhere. Do you expect me to believe that you did not insist on knowing the nature of her case before you went to him?"

The phone rang. "Not if you'd rather not," I said, and swiveled, lifted the receiver. "Nero Wolfe's residence, Archie Goodwin speaking."

I recognized the voice: "This is Rita Sorell, Mr. Goodwin. I have decided—"

"Hold it please. Just a second." I pressed a palm over the transmitter and told Wolfe, "That woman you sent a card to. The one who told me I was handsome." He reached for his receiver and put it to his ear and I returned to mine. "Okay. You have decided—?"

"I have decided that it will be best to tell you what you came this morning to find out. I have decided that you were too clever for me, not mentioning at all what you had written on the card, when that was what you came for. Your saying that you made it up, that you tried to write something that would make me curious—you didn't expect me to believe that. You were too clever for me. So I might as well confess, since you already know it. I did sit with a man in a booth in a lunchroom one evening last week—what evening was it?"

"Monday."

"That's right. And you want to know who the man was?"

"It would help."

"I want to help. You are *very* handsome. His name is Gregory Jett."

"Many thanks. If you want to help—"

She had hung up.

(*continued on page 148*)

Owing to unexpected production difficulties, we cannot bring you the Victor Canning story about the Department of Patterns ("The Three Musketeers") which we promised last month. But we can give you another new story by Victor Canning, and we will do our best to include the second tale of the Department of Patterns in next month's issue. In the meantime, enjoy this glimpse behind the scenes of England's film business—the "inside story" of how Tania Lamont (that wasn't her real name, of course) got her "break" in pictures.

STAR STUFF

by VICTOR CANNING

I suppose my real trouble is that I've never been able to resist a good cash proposition. Sometimes they turn up trumps. But more often not. Not that I mind. Life is full of ups and downs. When you're up you enjoy it and when you're down —well, you have the next up to look forward to.

You know Tania Lamont? Who doesn't Tania Lamont in *Abruptly, With Love*. Tania Lamont in *Sleeping Wives*. Tania Lamont *in this* and *in that*, and right out there now, across the square, a great neon-lighted cut-out of her in a green sheath dress stretching halfway down the façade of the Paragon and a lot of pigmy faces staring up at her out of the rain. Star worship.

Well, I made her. I gave Tania Lamont her first break. Five years ago. But she was not called Tania Lamont when I first saw her. No, sir. But then a lot of things change when you get into the film business and the first—if you're a girl going places—is usually your name.

At the time I was assistant producer to Otto Heldmaster. It sounds good, doesn't it? The great Heldmaster. But it didn't amount to much. There were three assistant producers and all we did was to sit around waiting to be sent on errands, walk his black poodle, do this, do that—rarely anything of real importance.

Well, one evening he took me to the Savoy for dinner. Not because he liked me particularly, but because he wanted someone to talk to, and I happened to be around. I just sat opposite him and he went on and on about the new picture he had coming up. I didn't say much—Otto liked someone to talk at. It put him off if he were answered.

The great Heldmaster was about fifty, a big fleshy-faced man with a short mat of crisp black hair that

looked like astrakhan, and small blue, rather watery eyes that never seemed to blink. He talked about this new film and how some people wanted him to do it in color and he was damned if he would. People didn't care whether a film was in black and white, color, or anything so long as it was a good film, and he made good films. Always had. Always would.

And he was damned too if he would take any of the stars they kept pushing at him. The right girl was around somewhere and he would find her and make her. I knew he would, too. He always found what he wanted and it wasn't any good trying to help him.

And then, slap in the middle of his filet mignon, he got up and said goodbye to me, getting my name wrong, and explaining that he must positively be in bed before ten as this was a bad period under his horoscope and he needed the utmost rest for the next three days. He meant it, too. He was a great one for horoscopes and the crystal ball, for never walking under a ladder, for touching wood—he used to carry a little piece of black mahogany in his breast pocket.

So I sat there alone with my thoughts and the prospect of paying the bill and arguing the next day with the accounts people about it because Otto would look blank and not even remember if he had been with me. Anyway, I finished my steak and passed on to coffee and with it the waiter brought a note asking me to join another table for liqueurs. He pointed out the table across the room. It had only one occupant, a dark-haired woman in a white dress with a sparkle about her neck and hands that looked expensive even at that distance.

I went over. When opportunity knocks, you always want to answer. She was in her early twenties, and even without the diamonds she could knock your eye out.

She said, "I saw Mr. Heldmaster leave you. I hope you didn't resent my note?"

"I'm here," I said. "Anyway, I've a feeling you're more interested in Mr. Heldmaster than in me. But I warn you, though I'm perfectly willing to get you an interview with him, it won't work. I've tried it before, for money and for love. He just likes to find his stars for himself."

"I'm aware of that, Mr.—?"

"Speedwell, Jimmy."

The waiter hovered, and after she had said Cointreau, I said Grand Marnier, and then I went on, to her, "I'm sorry—I can't help."

"I'm sure you can." She smiled at me and it was a good smile. She had everything, including money, and I couldn't think why she wanted more. But some women are like that.

"How?" I asked.

"I want to be a film star. It sounds terrible said like that, doesn't it? But I do. And I'll be frank. I don't want

to do years of dreary repertory work and so on for it. I want to go in at the top.

"Who wouldn't?"

But she gave me that smile again and there was a lot of calculation behind it. "It can be done. You know Mr. Heldmaster. From what I hear he always goes on hunches. Now, you find a way for him to discover me and I'll pay you two thousand pounds the day he signs me to a contract. A hundred now, as a guarantee of good faith—and the understanding between us that our little arrangement remains a dead secret forever."

"With all due respect," I said, "I think you're crazy. I don't have any way of doing it."

She stood up. "You look to me like the kind of young man who can find a way. My name is Nicholson—Miss—and my telephone number is in this envelope—with the hundred pounds." She dropped an envelope before me.

"You came here with this envelope all prepared?"

"I've got a good intelligence service. Mr. Heldmaster frequently dines here with one of his assistant producers."

She left, trailing a clutch of mink from one hand, and without looking back.

I slept on it for three nights. £2000. I was fed up with being an assistant producer. With £2000 I could take off for the South of France for six months and do the thing I really like doing—which is not having to work. And then—when I thought that there was no possible way—Otto handed it to me on a platter.

He pushed his head round the office door and called to me one afternoon, "Harry!"

"Jimmy, Mr. Heldmaster."

"Oh, yes, Jimmy. Ring Mrs. Zaremba and tell her I'd like to change my weekly appointment from Wednesday to Thursday the same time."

"Yes, sir."

But I didn't ring her. I went round to her flat in Chelsea. Mrs. Zaremba, I was sure, wouldn't look offended at the prospect of £200. That kind of money doesn't float out of crystal balls when you tickle them.

I put it to her straight. She was a granite-chinned woman with a pair of eyes like black marbles and a gipsy scarf over her head—the kind, I was sure, who didn't want any finessing about money.

I talked and she listened and occasionally she nodded, and there on the table between us was her crystal ball with a velvet cloth over it.

When I'd finished she said, "You are in love with this girl, aren't you?"

"I am." She would have to do better with her crystal ball than that to get my personal trade. "Will you do it? Please." I even got a catch in my voice for her.

She nodded. "I will. Two hundred and fifty pounds. Fifty now. Two hundred more if it comes off."

Well, it was fifty more than I'd barbained for, but I agreed and went straight out and telephoned Miss Nicholson. There was no need to beat about the bush.

I said, "You know Mr. Heldmaster has a suite on the third floor of the Royal Curzon Hotel?"

"Yes."

"Well, by hook or by crook, and by this coming Thursday, I want you to take a suite on the floor below. Any suite on the second floor will do. But they all have different-colored entrance doors—blue, yellow, green, red, and so on. When you've got a suite just let me know the color of the door. Can you do that?"

"If I have to buy the hotel."

"Good. Now, the next step. On Thursday you stay in that suite all afternoon—until midnight if necessary. Don't have a maid or anyone else in. Whoever knocks on the door, you answer it in person. Sometime after four Mr. Heldmaster will knock. Just pretend you don't know him. React how you like. But he won't take anything from you except your signature on a contract. He'll discover you. Okay?"

"You're sure this is going to work?"

"It can't fail. It's a crystal-ball certainty."

It would be, too. Otto could be as keen as a hawk, but the fortune-telling stuff put blinkers on him. He'd held up production on his last film for two weeks because some star or planet was in the wrong house or quarter or something.

Well, I bit my nails until Otto went off for his appointment on Thursday. I'd got the message from Miss Nicholson that her door was a green one and had passed the information to Mrs. Zaremba.

I sat there imagining the interview. It wasn't hard—I'd done the script for it. I could hear her voice as she hung over the crystal ball and Otto lapped it all up . . . "Yes, something comes, the shadows draw back. I see you, Mr. Heldmaster, walking, walking through the streets, walking up to a hotel entrance and all about you there is a green aura—of thought, of worry, and I feel that you are waiting for guidance.

"Oh, how strong your vibrations are, glowing so green . . . You go through the lobby like a man in a dream, a green haze about you. You walk to the marble stairway—it's a lovely stairway with carved fish, big fish, at the bottom. You walk up to the second floor and you turn right and the doors of the suites stretch out before you.

"I can't see the numbers on them—but they are all different colors. But like a man in a dream, compelled by your own destiny, you go straight to the green door and you knock . . .

"Oh, dear, it begins to fade . . .

No, no, I see the door open and a young, dark-haired, beautiful woman stands there—a stranger to you—and on your face I see a sudden blaze of revelation. This girl is the answer—the answer to your problem. Oh, it's going fast. The crystal ball is getting clouded . . ."

The marble stairway in Otto's hotel, the Royal Curzon, had two carved dolphins at the foot. It couldn't miss.

And that is how Otto found the girl for his next film. At five o'clock I got a call from an excited Otto to bring a cameraman over to his suite. We went over there. Otto's man let us in. In the lounge was Otto, and a dark-haired girl stood by the fireplace with her back to us.

Otto said, "This, gentlemen, is the young lady who is going to star in my next film. Under the influence of the stars, guided and inspired by my own aura as though in a soft green haze, I have been led to her."

The girl turned. She was dark-haired and lovely. But it wasn't Miss Nicholson.

Otto introduced her to us. "Miss Janet Bolton," he said. "But we'll change that. Just think, I found her in this hotel!—on the floor below where she worked as a secretary to an old lady who has a suite there."

Well, there it was. Less than a year later Janet Bolton was Tania Lamont.

As soon as I could get away I rang Miss Nicholson. It was a brief interview. No one had knocked on her door.

I said, "What the hell happened then? He was still mumbling about his green aura when I left him. He *must* have knocked on your door."

"Nobody knocked, I tell you! That fool Mrs. Zaremba must have got it wrong."

"No, I've already checked with her. Green, she said. Green. And Otto's babbling green, too."

I could hear her breathing angrily over the telephone, then she snapped, "That damned fool Otto Heldmaster must be color blind."

Although she didn't know it—and I didn't find out until an intimate friend of Otto's let it slip out one night when he'd had too many brandies—Miss Nicholson was dead-right. Otto had been color blind all his life. That's why he'd never make color films.

Green and red looked just the same to him. He'd simply knocked on the wrong door—a red one I checked later, and got the right girl—for there was no doubt about the girl. Tania Lamont had star stuff in her all the time—just take a look across the square in front of the Paragon.

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **MELVILLE DAVISSON POST**

TITLE: ***The Three Threads of Justice***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Uncle Abner

LOCALE: Old Virginia

TIME: Jeffersonian days

COMMENTS: *All who saw it agreed: the knife thrower at the County Fair killed the deaf mute by accident. But Uncle Abner knew the difference between an Act of God and an act of justice . . .*

IT WAS THE LAST DAY OF THE COUNty Fair, and I stood beside my Uncle Abner, on the edge of the crowd, watching the performance of a mountebank.

On a raised platform, before a little house on wheels, stood a girl dressed like a gypsy, with her arms extended, while an old man out in the crowd, standing on a chair, was throwing great knives that hemmed her in with a steel hedge.

The girl was very young, scarcely more than a child, and the man was old, but he was hale and powerful. He wore wooden shoes, travel-worn purple velvet trousers, a red sash, and a white blouse of a shirt open at the throat.

I was watching the man, whose marvelous skill fascinated me. He seemed to be looking always at the crowd of faces that passed between him and the wagon, and yet the great knife fell to a hair on the target, grazing the body of the girl.

But while the old man with his sheaf of knives held my attention, it was the girl that Uncle Abner looked at. He stood studying her face with a strange rapt attention. Sometimes he lifted his head and

looked vacantly over the crowd with the eyelids narrowed, like one searching for a memory that eluded him; then he came back to the face in its cluster of dark ringlets, framed in knives that stood quivering in the poplar board.

It was thus that my father found us when he came up.

"Have you noticed Blackford about?" he said. "I want to see him."

"No," replied Abner, "but he should be here, I think. He is at every frolic."

"I sent him the money for his cattle last night," my father went on, "and I wish to know if he got it."

Abner turned upon him at that.

"You will always take a chance with that scoundrel, Rufus," he said, "and some day you will be robbed. His lands are covered with a deed of trust."

"Well," replied my father, with his hearty laugh, "I shall not be robbed this time. I have Blackford's request over his signature for the money, with the statement that the letter is to be evidence of its payment."

And he took an envelope out of his pocket and handed it to Abner.

My uncle read the letter to the end, and then his great fingers tightened on the sheet, and he read it carefully again, and yet again, with his eyes narrowed and his jaw protruding. Finally he looked my father in the face.

"Blackford did not write this letter!" he said.

"Not write it!" my father cried. "Why, man I know the deaf mute's writing like a book. I know every line and slant of his letters, and his signature."

My father was annoyed.

"Nonsense!" he said. "I can call a hundred men on these fairgrounds who will swear that Blackford made every stroke of the pen in that letter, even against his denial, and though he bring Moses and the prophets to support him."

Abner looked my father steadily in the face.

"That is true, Rufus," he said. "The thing is perfect. There is no letter or line or stroke or twist of the pen that varies from Blackford's hand, and every grazer in the hills, to a man, will swear upon the Bible that he wrote it. Blackford himself cannot tell this writing from his own, nor can any other living man; and yet the deaf mute did not write it."

"Well," said my father, "yonder is Blackford now. We will ask him."

But they never did.

I saw the tall deaf mute swagger up and enter the crowd before the mountebank's wagon. And then a thing happened. The chair upon which the old man stood broke under him. He fell and the great knife in his hand swerved downward and went through the deaf mute's body, as though it were a cheese.

The man was dead when we picked him up; the knife blade stood out between his shoulders, and the heft was jammed against his bloody coat.

We carried him into the Agricultural Hall among the prize apples and the pumpkins, summoned Squire Randolph from the cattle pens, and brought the mountebank before him.

Randolph came in his big blustering manner and sat down as though he were the judge of all the world. He heard the evidence, and upon the word of every witness the tragedy was an accident clean through. But it was an accident that made one shudder. It came swift and deadly and unforeseen, like a vengeance of God in the Book of Kings. One passing among his fellows, in no apprehension, had been smitten out of life. There was terror in the mystery of selection that had thus claimed Blackford in this crowd for death. It brought our voices to a whisper to feel how unprotected a man was in this life, and how little we could see.

And yet the thing had the aspect of design and moved with our stern Scriptural beliefs. In the pulpit this deaf mute had been an example and a warning. His life was profligate and loose. He was a cattle shipper who knew the abominations indexed by the Psalmist. He was an Ishmaelite in more ways than his affliction. He had no wife or child, nor any next of kin. He had been predestined to an evil end by every good housewife in the hills. He would go swiftly and by violence into hell, the preachers said; and swiftly and by violence he had gone on this autumn morning when the world was like an Eden.

He lay there among the sheaves of corn and the fruits and cereals of the earth, so fully come to the end predestined that those who had cried the prophecy the loudest were the most amazed. With all their vaporings, they could not believe that God would be so expeditious, and they spoke in whispers and crowded about on tiptoe, as though the Angel of the Lord stood at the entrance of this little festal hall, as before the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

Randolph could do nothing but find the thing an accident, and let the old man go. But he thundered from behind his table on the dangers of such a trade as this. And all the time the mountebank stood stupidly before him like a man dazed, and the little girl wept and clung to the big peasant's hand.

Randolph pointed to the girl and told the old man that he would kill her some day, and with the gestures and authority of omnipotence forbade his trade. The old mountebank promised to cast his knives into the river and get at something else. Randolph spoke upon the law of accidents sententiously for some

thirty minutes, quoted Lord Blackstone and Mr. Chitty, called the thing an act of God, within a certain definition of the law, and rose.

My Uncle Abner had been standing near the door, looking on with a grave, undecipherable face. He had gone through the crowd to the chair when the old man fell, had drawn the knife out of Blackford's body, but he had not helped to carry him in, and he had remained by the door, his big shoulders towering above the audience.

Randolph stopped beside him as he went out, took a pinch of snuff, and trumpeted in his big, many-colored handkerchief.

"Ah, Abner," he said, "do you concur in my decision?"

"You called the thing an act of God," replied Abner, "and I concur in that."

"And so it is," said Randolph, with judicial pomp. "The writers on the law, in their disquisitions upon torts, include within that term those inscrutable injuries that no human intelligence can foresee —for instance, floods, earthquakes, and tornadoes."

"Now, that is very stupid in the writers on the law," replied Abner. "I should call such injuries acts of the devil. It would not occur to me to believe that God would use the agency of the elements in order to injure the innocent."

"Well," said Randolph, "the writers upon the law have not been theologians, although Mr. Greenleaf was devout, and Chitty with a proper reverence, and my lords Coke and Blackstone and Sir Matthew Hale in respectable submission to the established church. They have grouped and catalogued injuries with delicate and nice distinctions with respect to their being actionable at law, and they found certain injuries to be acts of God; but I do not read that they found any injury to be an act of the devil. The law does not recognize the sovereignty and dominion of the devil."

"Then," replied Abner, "with great fitness is the law represented blindfold. I have not entered any jurisdiction where his writs have failed to run."

There was a smile about the door that would have broken into laughter but for the dead man inside.

Randolph blustered, consulted his snuffbox, and turned the conversation into a neighboring channel.

"Do you think, Abner," he said, "that this old showman will give up his dangerous practice as he promised me?"

"Yes," replied Abner, "he will give it up, but not because he promised you."

And he walked away to my father, took him by the arm.

"Rufus," he said, "I have learned something. Your receipt is valid."

"Of course it is valid," replied my father. "It is in Blackford's hand."

"Well," said Abner, "he cannot come back to deny it, and I will not be a witness for him."

"What do you mean, Abner?" my father said. "You say that Blackford did not write this letter, and now you say that it is valid."

"I mean," replied Abner, "that when the one entitled to a debt receives it, that is enough."

Then he walked away into the crowd, his head lifted and his fingers locked behind his massive back.

The County Fair closed that evening in much gossip and many idle comments on Blackford's end. The chimney-corner lawyers, riding out with the homing crowd, vapored upon Mr. Jefferson's Statute of Descents, and how Blackford's property would escheat to the state since there was no next to kin, and were met with the information that his lands and his cattle would precisely pay his debts, with an eagle or two beyond for a coffin. And, after the manner of lawyers, were not silenced, but laid down what the law would be if only the facts were agreeable to their premise. And the prophets, sitting in their wagons, assembled their witnesses and established the dates at which they had been prophetically delivered.

Evening descended, and the fairgrounds were mostly deserted. Those who lived at no great distance had moved their live stock with the crowd and had given up their pens and stalls. But my father, who always brought a drove of prize cattle to these fairs, gave orders that we should remain until the morning. The distance home was too great and the roads were filled. My father's cattle were no less sacred than the bulls of Egypt, and not to be crowded by a wagon wheel or ridden into by a shouting drunkard.

The night fell. There was no moon, but the earth was not in darkness. The sky was clear and sown with stars like a seeded field. I did not go to bed in the cattle stall filled with clover hay under a hand-woven blanket, as I was intended to do. A youngster at a certain age is a sort of jackal and loves nothing in this world so much as to prowl over the ground where a crowd of people has encamped. Besides, I wished to know what had become of the old mountebank, and it was a thing I soon discovered.

His wagon stood on the edge of the ground among the trees near the river, with the door closed. His horse, tethered to a wheel, was nosing an armful of hay. The light of the stars filtered through the treetops, filled the wheels with shadows, and threw one side of the wagon into the blackness of the pit. I went down to the fringe of trees.

There I sat squatted on the earth until I heard a footstep and saw my Uncle Abner coming toward the wagon. He walked as I had seen

him walking in the crowd, his hands behind him and his face lifted as though he considered something that perplexed him.

He came to the steps, knocked with his clenched hand on the door, and when a voice replied, entered.

Curiosity overcame me. I scurried up to the dark side of the wagon. There a piece of fortune awaited me: a gilded panel had cracked from some jolt upon the road, and by perching myself upon the wheel I could see inside.

The old man had been seated behind a table made by letting down a board hinged to the wall. His knives were lying on the floor beside him, bound together with a twine string. There were some packets of old letters on the table and a candle. The little girl lay asleep in a sort of bunk at the end of the wagon.

The old man stood up when my uncle entered, and his face, that had been dull and stupid before the justice of the peace, was now keen and bright.

"Monsieur does me an honor," he said. The words were an interrogation with no welcome in them.

"No honor," replied my uncle, standing with his hat on, "but possibly a service."

"That would be strange," the mountebank said dryly, "for I have received no service from any man here."

"You have a short memory," replied Abner. "The justice of the peace rendered you a great service on this day. Do you put no value on your life?"

"My life has not been in danger, monsieur," he said.

"I think it has," replied Abner.

"Then monsieur questions the decision?"

"No," said Abner. "I think it was the very wisest decision that Randolph ever made."

"Then why does monsieur say that my life was in danger?"

"Well," replied my uncle, "are not the lives of all men in danger? Is there any day or hour of a day in which they are secure, or any tract or parcel of this earth where danger is not? And can a man say when he awakes at daylight in his bed that on this day I shall go into danger, or I shall not? In the light it is, and in the darkness it is, and where one looks to find it, and where he does not. Did Blackford believe himself in danger today when he passed before you?"

"Ah, monsieur," replied the man, "that was a terrible accident!"

My uncle picked up a stool, placed it by the table, and sat down. He took off his hat and set it on his knees, then he spoke, looking at the floor.

"Do you believe in God?"

I saw the old man rub his forehead with his hand and the ball of his first finger make a cross.

"Yes, monsieur," he said, "I do."

"Then," replied Abner, "you can hardly believe that things happen

out of chance and not design."

"We call it chance, monsieur," said the man, "when we do not understand it."

"Sometimes we use a better term," replied Abner. "Now, today Randolph did not understand this death of Blackford, and yet he called it an act of God."

"Who knows," said the man. "Are not the ways of God past finding out?"

"Not always," replied my uncle.

He gathered his chin into his hand and sat for some time motionless, then he continued, "I have found out something about this one."

The old mountebank moved to his stool beyond the table and sat down.

"And what is that, monsieur?" he said.

"That you are in danger of your life—for one thing."

"In what danger?"

"Do you come from the south of Europe," replied Abner, "and forget that when a man is killed there are others to threaten his assassin?"

"But this Blackford has no kin to carry a blood feud," said the mountebank.

"And so," cried Abner, "you knew that before you killed him. And yet, in spite of that precaution, there stood a man in the crowd before the justice of the peace who held your life in his hand. He had but to speak."

"And why did he not speak—this man?" said the mountebank, looking at Abner across the table.

"I will tell you that," replied Abner. "He feared that the justice of the law might contravene the justice of God. It is fabric woven from many threads—this justice of God. I saw three of these threads today stretching into the great loom, and I feared to touch them lest I disturb the weaver at his work. I saw men see a murder and not know it. I saw a child see its father and not know it, and I saw a letter in the handwriting of a man who did not write it."

The face of the old mountebank did not whiten, but instead it grew stern and resolute, and the muscles came out in it so that it seemed a thing of cords under the tanned skin.

"The proofs," he said.

"They are all here," replied Abner.

He stooped, lifted the sheaf of knives, broke the string, and spread the knives upon the table. He selected the one from which Blackford's blood had been wiped off.

"Randolph examined this knife," he continued, "but not the others. He assumed that they are all alike. Well, they are not. The others are dull, but this one has the edge of a razor."

And he plucked a piece of paper from the table and sheared it in two. Then he put the knife down on the board and looked toward the far end of the wagon.

"And the child's face," he said. "I was not certain of that until I saw Blackford's ironed out under the hand of death, and then I knew. And the letter—"

But the old man was on his feet, straining over the table, his features twitching like a taut rope.

"Hush! Hush!" he said.

There came a little gust of wind that whispered in the dry grass and blew the dead leaves against the wagon and about my face. They fluttered like a presence, these dead leaves, and packed and clawed at the gilded panel like the nails of some feeble hand. I began to be assailed with fear as I sat there alone in the darkness looking in upon this tragedy.

My Uncle Abner sat down, and the old man remained with the palms of his hands pressed against the table. Finally he spoke.

"Monsieur," he said, "shall a man lead another into hell and escape the pit himself? Yes, she is his daughter, and her mother was mine, and I have killed him. He could not speak, but with those letters he persuaded her."

The man paused and turned over the packet of yellow envelopes tied up with faded ribbon.

"And she believed what a woman will always believe. What would you have done, monsieur? Go to the law—your English law that gives the woman a pittance and puts her out of the courthouse door for the ribald to laugh at! *Diable!* Monsieur, that is not the law. I know the law, as my father and my father's father, and your father and your father's father knew it. I would have killed him then, when she died, but for this child. I would have followed him into these hills, day after day, like his shadow behind him, until I got a knife into him and ripped him up like a butchered pig. But I could not go to the hangman and leave this child, and so I waited."

He sat down.

"We can wait, monsieur. That is one thing we have in my country—patience. And when I was ready I killed him."

The old man paused and put out his hand, palm upward, on the table. It was a wonderful hand.

"You have eyes, monsieur, but the others are as blind men. Did they think that hand could have failed me? Cunning men have made machinery so accurate that you marvel at them; but there was never a machine with the accuracy of the human hand when it is trained as we train it. Monsieur, I could scratch a line on the door behind you with a needle, and with my eyes closed set a knife point into every twist and turn of it. Why, monsieur, there was a straw clinging to Blackford's coat—a straw that had fallen on him as he passed some horse stall. I marked it as he came up through the crowd, and I split it with the knife . . . And now, monsieur?"

My uncle stopped him. "Not yet," he said. "I am concerned about the living and not the dead. If I had thought of the dead only, I should have spoken this day; but I have thought also of the living. What have you done for the child?"

There came a great tenderness into the old man's face.

"I have brought her up in love," he said, "and in honor, and I have got her inheritance for her."

He stopped and indicated the pack of letters.

"I was about to burn these when you came in, monsieur, for they have served their purpose. I thought I might need to know Blackford's hand and I set out to learn it. Not in a day, monsieur, nor a week, like your common forger, but in a year, and years—with a hand that obeys me. I went over and over every letter of every word until I could write the man's hand—not an imitation of it, monsieur, not that, but the very hand itself, the very hand that Blackford writes with his own fingers. And it was well, for I was able to get the child all that Blackford had, beyond his debts, by a letter that no man could know that Blackford did not write."

"I knew that he did not write it," said Abner.

The old man smiled.

"You jest, monsieur," he said. "Blackford himself could not tell the writing from his own. I could not, nor can any living man."

"That is true," replied Abner. "The letter is in Blackford's hand, as he would have written it with his own fingers. It is no imitation, as you say—it is the very writing of the man; and yet he did not write it, and when I saw it I knew that he did not."

The old man's face was incredulous.

"How could you know that, monsieur?" he said.

My uncle took the letter which my father had received out of his pocket and spread it out on the table.

"I will tell you," he said, "how I knew that Blackford did not write this letter, although it is in his very hand. When my brother Rufus showed me this letter, and I read it, I noticed that there were words misspelled in it. Well, that of itself was nothing for the deaf mute did not always spell correctly. It was the manner in which the words were misspelled. Under the old system, when a deaf mute was taught to write he was taught by the eye; consequently, he writes words as he remembers them to look, and not as he remembers them to sound.

"His mistakes, then, are mistakes of the eye and not of the ear. And in this he differs from every man who can hear; for the man who can hear, when he is uncertain about the spelling of a word, spells it as it sounds phonetically, using not a letter that sounds like it—using 's' for 'c' and 'o' for 'u'—a thing no

deaf mute would ever do in this world, because he does not know what letters sound like.

"Consequently, when I saw the words in this letter misspelled *by sound*—when I saw that the person who had written this letter remembered his word as a sound, and by the arrangement of the letters in it was endeavoring to indicate that sound—I knew he could hear."

The old man did not reply, but he rose and stood before my uncle. He stood straight and fearless, his long white hair thrown back, his bronzed throat exposed, his face lifted, and his eyes calm and level, like some ancient druid among his scared oak trees.

And I crowded my face against the cracked panel, straining to hear what he would say.

"Monsieur," he said, "I have done an act of justice, not as men do it, but as the providence of God does it. With care and with patience I have accomplished every act—so that to the eyes of men it bore the relation and aspect of God's providence. And all who saw were content—all but you. You have pried and ferreted behind these things, and now you must bear the obligations of your knowledge."

He spread out his hands toward the sleeping girl.

"Shall this child grow up to honor in ignorance, or in knowledge go down to hell? Shall she know what her mother was, and what her father was, and what I am, and be fouled by the knowledge of it, and shall she be stripped of her inheritance and left not only outlawed, but paupered? And shall I go to the hangman, and she to the street? These are things for you to decide, since you would search out what was hidden and reveal what was covered! I leave it in your hands."

"And I," replied Abner, rising, "leave it in God's."

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **JOHN EUGENE HASTY**

TITLE: ***How Culture Came to Milford***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: Milford, U.S.A.

TIME: Nearly a generation ago

COMMENTS: *Willie and Al Hosmer, of Hosmer's Diner, made their debut in EQMM nine years ago. But time has not withered their charm—as this hilarious tale proves . . .*

ON THE WALLS OF WHAT THEY call the Green Room, in the town of Milford's Philharmonic Hall, hang a number of glossy photographs. With one exception they are all pictures of artists, great and near-great, who over the years have given concerts there.

The exception is a dusty-looking print of two elderly gentlemen, one seated, the other standing. The former is tall and spare, with a drooping mustache, the latter round and solid-looking. Both give the impression of being uncomfortably dressed up. Across the bottom of the photo, written in a faded flowing script, are the words, *William and Albert Hosmer.*

Since the photograph has occupied the same position for almost thirty years, there may be those who wonder who William and Albert Hosmer were, and about their relation to Milford's cultural background. There may be those who never have seen—indeed, never heard of—Hosmer's Diner, which once stood on Acacia Avenue. So, as a matter of filling in a possible gap in local history, I am herewith recording certain relevant events, some of which were reported to me, and others which I myself observed.

To the gleaming glass and tile façades which line Acacia Avenue, the diner presented a melancholy contrast. A shabby frame structure, of peeling white paint and murky windows, it was patronized mainly by truck drivers on their way to or

from Bennington. Our local colmnist, Ward Wilson, used to refer to it as Heartburn House; and the inane doings and obtuse remarks of its proprietors, Willie and Al Hosmer, provided Ward with a rich source of daily material.

For example: one day a gentleman entered the diner and introduced himself as Mr. Gumbler. His purpose was simply to elicit a piece of information. Mr. Gumbler, it seemed, had shipped a trunk and five suitcases to the Palace Hotel in Bennington, but only four of the suitcases had arrived. He wanted to know if any of the truck drivers, who dropped in at the diner regularly, had an undelivered suitcase on his truck.

To Willie and Al, Mr. Gumbler had to explain his problem over and over. Finally, and with unconcealed irritation, he summed it up once more. "Look! There's a truck driver with an undelivered suitcase. It's a large brown suitcase, containing clothing. I'm not worried about the clothing, but in one of the shirts is a valuable set of cuff links, embossed with hieroglyphics. They're a kind of good luck charm. A relief from an Egyptian tomb."

Willie Hosmer studied this for a while. Then he said, "Most anything 'd be a relief from an Egyptian tomb."

Ward Wilson itemed the comment—it was typically Hosmerian.

However, I suspect that my report should properly begin, not with the brothers Hosmer, but with Mrs. Grover Pinkley who, at the time, held undisputed leadership in what the Milford *Sentinel's* society editor called the "Smart Set." How our Smart Set got that way has never been disclosed; but the reason for Mrs. Pinkley's leadership stood out clearly.

A tall, bony woman, with square shoulders and a military stride, Carolynn Pinkley was the immovable obstacle and the irresistible force, all in one package. Not snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor gloom of night, stayed Mrs. Pinkley. They just plumb wouldn't have dared.

Consequently any Pinkley Plan for a Cultural Center in Milford commanded the attention of both press and populace. The Plan, first outlined in the *Sentinel,* and later expounded in great detail in Mrs. Pinkley's speech before the Women's Wednesday Club, provided for a series of concerts to take place at the High School. Expenses of the concerts would be defrayed by annual donations from local merchants and businessmen. The ticket sales, then, would represent a clear profit, and the accumulation of these profits would, in time, be sufficient to erect a Cultural Center. Meanwhile, the businessmen and merchants would presumably get their donations back in the form of patronage by an appreciative public. Thus, declared Mr. Pinkley, the Plan would cost nothing.

If Mrs. Pinkley's explanation

seemed to disregard certain economic principles, it was only because she didn't want her thinking cluttered up with hard facts. Her speech drew vigorous applause, and then she launched the most exciting announcement of all. The brilliant young pianist, Jose Moreno, was now in Bennington, and Mrs. Pinkley had already been in contact with his manager, Mr. Bowman. She had arranged with Mr. Bowman for Jose Moreno to play the opening concert that would bring Culture to Milford.

The ladies of the Wednesday Club scurried hither and yon to collect donations, and they succeeded splendidly. They raised $2200. Now it happened that Mr. Bowman had quoted Moreno's fee as $2500—but a difference of $300 presented no problem to the Pinkley persistence.

Mr. Bowman, a personable man, and quite sympathetic toward the larger cultural idea, would probably have reduced the fee, or, for that matter, Mrs. Pinkley could easily have made up the difference herself. But scanning the list of firms on which the good ladies had called, Mrs. Pinkley noted one that had refused to contribute, that had flouted the Pinkley appeal for funds. The knowledge rang like a trumpet call to battle. On the instant Carolynn Pinkley knew where to raise the final $300.

It was mid-morning when she marched into the Hosmer Diner, and except for a disreputable-looking individual eating a bowl of soup, the place was empty of customers. Mrs. Pinkley ignored the soup-eater and proceeded to state her case to William and Al. She concluded with, "So, you see, every business concern in Milford has contributed, every one but you. Now we've put you down for a donation of three hundred dollars and I'm here to collect it."

Al scratched his head. He said, "What about Oliver's Restaurant down the street? How much did you put them down for?"

"More than you! Four hundred dollars! However, the restaurant is broke and going out of business."

"Well, come around when we're broke and goin' outta business," Al said, "and you can put us down for four hundred, too."

"Oliver's has nothing to do with the size of your donation," Mrs. Pinkley said starchily.

"Yes, but 'sakes, three hunderd dollars," Willie said. "Why, me and Al ain't got that kinda money."

"You have plenty of money in the bank. I checked."

"Whata yuh figger to do with the money after you collect it?"

"I've already explained. I've told you the series will present some very fine artists. Do you know who's going to play here first? Jose Moreno!"

Al slapped languidly at a fly. "Who'd juh say?"

"Jose Moreno! He'll play first."

"Well, who'll pitch?"

"Pitch?" Mrs. Pinkley's voice went suddenly loud. "Nobody's going to pitch!"

"Blame funny series, with nobody pitchin'," Al remarked.

Mrs. Pinkley took a deep breath, held it for a moment behind tightly compressed lips, then let it out. She said crushingly, "Jose Moreno does not play baseball—he plays piano."

Willie stared at her. "Yuh mean you're gonna pay three hunderd dollars jest for a piano player?"

"A great deal more than that. You can't buy virtuosity for pennies, and Jose Moreno comes high."

"Yeah? Well, then let him git high on somebody else's money," Al said. "We ain't puttin' out."

"No, sirree," Willie agreed. "We don't go for that kinda jazz."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Mrs. Pinkley said. "Jazz is an irregular movement from bar to bar."

"That," Willie said positively, "is exactly what I'm talkin' about."

Mrs. Pinkley's face was becoming flushed, and her voice husky, but she managed to keep control of her temper. Slowly and precisely she said, "I'll try once more to make it clear to you. Jose Moreno is a great artist. He plays the piano."

"Plays it in bars?" Al inquired.

"At concerts! Concerts all over the world! Paris! Rome! London! Vienna! He's been a staggering success."

"Well, if he starts staggerin' around here," Al said, "he'll be invited to the pokey."

"Yes, siree! We got a jail to take care of drunks," Willie said. "So you can jest forget about the three hunderd dollars. You oughta be ashamed even to be askin' for it."

Mrs. Pinkley's usually well-modulated voice became a shriek. "Now you listen to me—!" But what she intended to say remained unsaid. Suddenly all the anger went out of her face, and a hard, cunning expression appeared around her eyes. She drew herself up and strode to the door. But there she paused and swung around. "You're going to regret this—regret it very much."

Three days later the ladies of the Wednesday Club again busied themselves, this time seeking signatures to a petition. The petition, prepared by Harold MacChesney, who was Mrs. Pinkley's nephew and just out of law school, called on the city council for the following actions: (1) condemnation of Hosmer's Diner as a menace to progress; (2) its seizure by the city under the right of eminent domain; (3) its demolition to make way for a Cultural Center.

The move triggered an explosion of controversy which rocked the town. For now it seemed that not everyone shared Mrs. Pinkley's opinion of the diner. Many regarded it as interesting and quaint, or as a sort of hallowed landmark.

Argument crackled and flared. But in the clash and clamor of pros

and cons, two voices remained silent—the voices of Willie and Al Hosmer, apparently too dumb to realize what was going on. At the council meeting they dozed in their chairs as Harold MacChesney read the petition to Mayor Felder, to the city fathers, and to a record crowd of spectators.

When Harold had finished, Mayor Felder peered at him benignly. "You've done a nice job there, Harold, but I'm afraid you haven't quite thought this thing clear through. Now according to your petition, the city is to seize and tear down the building. But this couldn't be done without also seizing the land. And there appears to be no valid reason to support such an action."

Harold MacChesney smiled a small, superior smile. He said, "I beg to differ with you, Mr. Mayor. In the case of a tort, or any private or civil wrong, the location upon which the wrong occurs is not a matter for consideration. In this respect, I should like to cite the celebrated case, in English common law, of Jonathan Long versus the Duke of Yarborough."

Mayor Felder looked a little vague, and the spectators hunched forward in their chairs. Harold went on: "The Duke was taking a gallop over his estate when a duck, belonging to one Jonathan Long, flew out of the bushes and was kicked and killed by the Duke's horse. Now, although the duck was on the Duke's land, the duck was killed notwithstanding, so—"

At this point Al Hosmer opened his eyes. He said, "What was that agin, Harold?"

Willie regarded his brother severely. "Why doncha listen? The duck was killed not with standing. It was killed layin' down."

"The duck was not lying down," Harold said emphatically.

Willie looked surprised. "Well, that's the first time I ever heard of a dead duck standin' up."

There was an arpeggio of laughter and Harold's face reddened. He said, "The point involved is that the Duke killed the duck."

Al's eyes widened. "What? Agin?"

"No, no! I'm starting all over. Now the Duke is riding along. Something stirs in the bushes, and out flies—"

"A dead duck," Willie said.

"Not at all! The duck isn't dead yet."

"Sakes," Willie said, "that's the toughest duck I ever seen."

Harold's tone tensed. "The duck, although belonging to another man, was on the Duke's land, but it wasn't dead until the horse kicked him."

"Kicked who?" Al asked. "Kicked the man?"

"No," Willie answered. "Kicked the Duke."

"No!" Harold shouted. "Kicked the duck!"

Willie shook his head sadly. "I'm

gittin to feel kinda sorry for that poor duck."

Again there was laughter, and Harold MacChesney turned to face Mayor Felder. "Mr. Mayor, if I may make this clear. The Duke killed the duck—so the man who owned the duck endeavored to collect."

"Collect what?" Willie asked.

"Collect money for the duck."

"Well, what good would money do a dead duck?"

Harold's voice rose stridently over the guffaws. "I mean, the man endeavored to collect—the man owning the duck. He filed an action, complaining against the Duke, and he took him into court."

"Who did?" Al said. "The Duke?"

"No!" Willie corrected. "The duck!"

"The man!" Harold bellowed. But he had lost his continuity, so he tried to pick it up. "I mean, the duck—the duck is *DEAD!*"

"That's too bad," Al replied. "I hope from nothing serious."

Harold tried desperately to press on. "As I say, the man complained."

"What did *he* have to complain of," Willie interrupted. "Look at that poor duck."

Once more Harold appealed to Mayor Felder. "*Mr.* Mayor, may I have order and quiet? I can't even hear what I'm saying."

"You ain't missin' much," Al commented.

The mayor rapped for order. He said wearily, "I see no necessity to prolong this. We've heard the petition and now we'll take a vote."

Four of the six councilmen promptly voted "Aye." It happened that quickly. The diner was doomed.

Now according to one version, Mrs. Pinkley, on the following day, came to the diner for the sheer purpose of gloating. That there existed reasons for her doing so, I agree. For now her Plan had reached a triumphant conclusion. The last $300 had been raised, the full amount had been handed to Moreno's manager, Mr. Bowman, and the contract had been signed. However, subsequent events seemed to indicate that the true motive for her visit was to show Mr. Bowman the site of the proposed Center.

When she and Bowman entered the diner, Willie was standing at the counter, in conversation with a man, and Al was perched high on a ladder, covering the wall with a particularly poisonous-looking shade of green paint.

It was Willie who decided that introductions were in order. He said, "This is Mr. Gumbler, from Bennington. We jest found his suitcase for him. It's got all his good clothes in it, and a pair of lucky cuff buttons."

Al, from his elevation on the ladder, added an interesting comment. "If the cuff buttons are so blame lucky, how come the feller that first wore 'em was in a tomb?"

Mr. Gumbler let a smile come through. "Well, actually, the cuff links aren't mine. They belong to Mr. Moreno."

Across Bowman's face flicked a curious expression. He took Mrs. Pinkley's arm. "Shall we go?"

For an instant Mrs. Pinkley hesitated—and on that instant pivoted the whole affair.

Gumbler said, "In the seven years that I've managed Jose, he's never played a concert without them. I'd better phone him, and tell him they've been located."

As Gumbler lifted the phone, Bowman's hand left its position on Mrs. Pinkley's arm, and with a smooth motion went inside his coat. The hand emerged, holding a black, snub-nosed revolver. He said in a suddenly sharp voice, "Nobody's going to phone nobody. And if you folks know what's good for you, you'll stay right here—and keep quiet!"

As they stood gaping, Bowman backed swiftly toward the door.

And then it happened.

Al let his paint bucket fall. It was full of paint, and heavy; it descended right side up, and encountered Bowman's uncovered head with a solid klunk. The gun flipped out of Bowman's fingers. His body went slack, and flopped onto the floor. Minutes later, when the police arrived, Bowman was still unconscious, lying in what would have looked like a pool of blood, except it was green.

Well, that's about all there is to the story. As it all came out later, Bowman was wanted in various places for robbery and bunko. He happened to be in Milford, noticed the *Sentinel's* piece about the concert series, and represented himself to Mrs. Pinkley as Moreno's manager. Since Jose Moreno really was in the area, preparing for a concert in Bennington, Mrs. Pinkley's gullibility was not without some justification. However, contributors to the fund for a Cultural Center took a different view. They felt that Mrs. Pinkley had played carelessly and high-handedly with their hard-earned money.

The concert series started on schedule after all, though not under Carolynn Pinkley's aegis. Because of the unusual circumstances, and Moreno's delight over the return of his cuff links, he agreed to play at a considerably reduced fee. So, in a sense, it was Willie and Al Hosmer who really launched the movement which eventually culminated in the building of our Philharmonic Hall.

Of course, the condemnation proceedings were dropped—it developed they were illegal anyway—and Willie and Al went right on running Hosmer's Diner, and doing everything all wrong. How any two men cold make so many mistakes in any given day was a mystery—until Ward Wilson, our local Winchell, suggested an answer. He said they get up early.

50 NOW ONLY $5.95 BEST SELLING MYSTERIES

If Mystery Is Your Oyster, Feast On 50 Best Sellers!

OFFER GOOD UNTIL JUNE 1, 1962

- ☐ 2088 **The ABC Murders**, Agatha Christie
- ☐ C•392 **The Big Bankroll**, Leo Katcher
- ☐ 6006 **The Big Blackout**, Don Tracy
- ☐ M•3089 **The Brave, Bad Girls** Thomas B. Dewey
- ☐ 1231 **The Broken Angel**, Floyd Mahannah
- ☐ 1252 **Cairo Intrigue**, William Manchester
- ☐ M•3055 **The Con Man**, Ed McBain
- ☐ 2270 **The Devil to Pay**, Ellery Queen
- ☐ M•3084 **Diamonds Are Forever**, Ian Fleming
- ☐ 1248 **Dishonor Among Thieves** Spencer Dean
- ☐ 1214 **Dragnet: The Case of the Crime King**, Richard Deming
- ☐ C•397 **Easy to Kill**, Agatha Christie
- ☐ M•3076 **Ellery Queen's Awards: Tenth Series**, Ellery Queen
- ☐ 1230 **End of the Line** Bert and Dolores Hitchens
- ☐ M•3051 **F.O.B. Murder** Bert and Dolores Hitchens
- ☐ 1223 **The Gracious Lily Affair** F. van Wyck Mason
- ☐ 1250 **The Killer Is Mine**, Talmage Powell
- ☐ M•3108 **Killer's Choice**, Ed McBain
- ☐ M•3113 **Killer's Payoff**, Ed McBain
- ☐ 1240 **The Lady Came to Kill**, M. E. Chaber
- ☐ 2246 **The Lady in the Morgue** Jonathan Latimer
- ☐ M•4200 **The Maltese Falcon** Dashiell Hammett
- ☐ 6000 **Mark Kilby and the Secret Syndicate**, Robert Caine Frazer
- ☐ 1261 **Mark Kilby Solves a Murder** Robert Caine Frazer
- ☐ 1152 **The Men From the Boys**, Ed Lacy
- ☐ 1277 **The Merchant of Murder** Spencer Dean
- ☐ 2680 **The Moving Target** John Ross Macdonald
- ☐ 956 **Mrs. McGinty's Dead** Agatha Christie
- ☐ 1206 **The Murder of the Missing Link**, Vercors
- ☐ 1220 **Murder on Delivery**, Spencer Dean
- ☐ 1255 **Murder Takes a Wife** James A. Howard
- ☐ 1256 **Never Kill a Cop**, Lee Costigan
- ☐ 1193 **Night Extra**, William P. McGivern
- ☐ C•316 **Odds Against Tomorrow** William P. McGivern
- ☐ M•3100 **One-Way Ticket** Bert and Dolores Hitchens
- ☐ 2846 **Pick-Up on Noon Street** Raymond Chandler
- ☐ M•3062 **The Pusher**, Ed McBain
- ☐ 1118 **Queen's Bureau of Investigation** Ellery Queen
- ☐ 1262 **Reason for Murder**, Jack Usher
- ☐ M•3103 **The Saint Around the World** Leslie Charteris
- ☐ 6004 **Señor Saint**, Leslie Charteris
- ☐ 1274 **So Dead the Rose**, M. E. Chaber
- ☐ 1201 **The Sulu Sea Murders** F. van Wyck Mason
- ☐ 1233 **Thanks to the Saint** Leslie Charteris
- ☐ 2823 **Trouble Is My Business** Raymond Chandler
- ☐ M•3079 **Unhappy Hooligan**, Stuart Palmer
- ☐ M•3122 **The Velvet Ape**, David C. Holmes
- ☐ 1171 **When Strangers Meet** Robert Bloomfield
- ☐ M•3096 **Widow's Pique**, Blair Treynor
- ☐ M•4145 **The Widow's Tale**, John Coates

MYSTERY POCKET CLUB MARCH 1962
c/o E.Q.M.M.
505 Park Avenue
New York 22, N.Y. (262)

I enclose_____($5.95 for each set of 50 books) which will be sent to me prepaid. (Please send check or money order.) I understand that if I am not completely satisfied I may return my books within 14 days for a complete refund.

NAME_____

STREET_____

CITY_____ZONE_____

STATE_____

Another Reader Service Appearing in "The World's Leading Mystery Magazine"

ELLERY QUEEN'S *Mystery Magazine*

Jan.-Feb. 1962 Releases

DIRECTORY OF MYSTERY & SUSPENSE PAPERBACKS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	RETAIL PRICE	ON SALE DATE	ORIGINAL or REPRINT
Aarons, Edward S.	ASSIGNMENT—MADELEINE	Gold Medal	35¢	January 30	Reissue
Bingham, John	MURDER PLAN SIX	Dell	40¢	February 27	R
Brannon, W. T.	THE CROOKED COPS	Regency Books	50¢	February 27	O
Brennan, Bill	THE FASTER WE LIVE	Monarch Books	35¢	February 6	O
Brown, Carter	MURDER WEARS A MANTILLA	New American Library	35¢	February 20	O
Christie, Agatha	MR. PARKER PYNE, DETECTIVE	Dell	40¢	February 20	R
Christie, Agatha	MURDER AT HAZELMOOR	Dell	40¢	February 20	R
Christie, Agatha	CARDS ON THE TABLE	Dell	40¢	February 20	R
Costigan, Lee	THE NEW BREED	Gold Medal	35¢	January 30	O
Curley, Thomas	THE CROOKED ROAD (orig. title: Its A Wise Child)	Avon	50¢	February 14	R
Ehrlich, Jack	CRY, BABY	Dell	35¢	February 13	O
Flynn, J. M.	THE SCREAMING CARGO	Ace	40¢	February 10	O
Howard, James A.	THE BULLET-PROOF MARTYR	Ace	40¢	February 10	R
MacNeil, Neil	MEXICAN SLAY RIDE	Gold Medal	35¢	January 30	O
Marlowe, Dan J.	THE NAME OF THE GAME IS DEATH	Gold Medal	35¢	January 30	O
Slesar, Henry	A CRIME FOR MOTHERS AND OTHERS	Avon	40¢	February 14	O
Telfair, Richard	TARGET FOR TONIGHT	Dell	40¢	February 22	O
Tey, Josephine	BRAT FARRAR	Berkley	50¢	February 1	Reissue

The titles appearing above are available at your newsstands or wherever paperbacks are sold. Do not order them through this magazine.

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **GERTRUDE SCHWEITZER**

TITLE: ***Never Let Him Down***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *A moving story about one of the most important problems of our time—and we do not mean juvenile delinquency.*

BUD STOOD UNDER THE SHOWER for a long time, letting the needles of water spray hard against his spine. He wished he had a shower at home, instead of just an old tub in the cramped little bathroom—a half-pint tub, meant for a girl, or maybe for an undersized guy like Pop, not for a guy over six foot.

"Hey, Bud, you gonna stay in there all day?"

He yelled, "Hold your horses!" but he turned off the water right away and stepped out of the wooden stall, shaking the drops from his black crew-cut hair, and went loping across the wet concrete floor to his locker.

Don was already dressed, sitting on a bench with a cigarette in his mouth. But Don didn't have to worry about breaking rules. Any other guy, if he was caught smoking here, would be kicked off the basketball squad, but not Don. His father was such a big shot in town, nobody would dare do anything to Don.

Bud got quickly into his T-shirt and dungarees, put on his jacket, and stuck his bare feet into his beat-up loafers. "Okay," he said. "Let's go."

Don flipped his cigarette to the floor and they went up the stairs together, the blond, well-knit boy and the big, rangy, dark one, both overgrown, both swaggering a little in the still-new awareness of their masculinity.

On the outside steps of the

school they met the coach. "You two better wake up," he snapped, looking at them with cold blue eyes. "Anybody on my squad who quits trying can count himself out."

Don muttered something inaudible, but when they reached the street he said to Bud, "Wait'll I tell my dad about that guy. Just wait. We'll have a new coach around here so *fast*—"

Bud did not answer. There wouldn't be any use telling *his* father, that was for sure. Pop wouldn't even know what he was talking about. He wouldn't know a basketball from a football, hardly.

"Not that I give a damn," Don said. "I'm sick of it anyhow. Practice, practice, practice, every day, sweating ourselves up in the gym, never having any fun, and what do we get? A chance to play a quarter, maybe, if some guy busts an arm, or if we're so far ahead we can't lose."

"Yeah," Bud said. "I feel like that too."

It was funny how you got sick of things. Last year, when he was a freshman, he had thought he'd do pretty near anything to get on the basketball squad—he had thought it was just about the most important thing there was—and now he was on it, and so what? There wasn't much kick in it any more. There wasn't much kick in a lot of stuff he'd thought was pretty good when he was a little kid.

They stood on the street corner and lighted cigarettes. Three girls came past them from school, talking very loud, pretending not to notice them. Don and Bud waited until they were halfway down the block and then gave a shrill wolf whistle in unison, and the girls giggled and walked faster, but that was all there was to it.

Bud looked after them, feeling a vague and momentary hot tingling along his skin. Some day soon he was going to get a girl alone—a pretty girl, like Betty Warwick, or that Mary Lou on the cheering squad—and kiss her good.

"Where you want to go?" he asked Don, puffing restlessly on the cigarette, feeling the sting of the smoke, harsh and unpleasant in his throat. "What'll we do now?"

"I don't know," Don said. "Nothing I feel like doing."

"Me neither."

They walked along a bit, shuffling their feet in their loose-fitting shoes. After a minute Don said, "Listen, you come over after dinner, hear? My dad and her are going out with another couple in their car—I heard her fixing it on the phone last night. We'll take our car and go places."

Bud looked at Don with admiration. In the few months since he had been admitted to the other boy's friendship, he had found out new things about him almost every day.

Don lived in a big private house

with a lot of grounds around it. He had his own room, full of all kinds of stuff like you saw in store windows. The one he always called "her," his father's third wife, was as pretty as a model, and his father was the head of his own company. He was swell to Don, too, always buying him what he wanted and letting him have fun. That was the kind of father to have.

"You know how to drive?" Bud asked Don.

"Me? I been sneaking the car out since I was thirteen."

"Yeah?" The word was a whisper of awe. "You bet I'll be over."

He left Don and shuffled slowly home.

He could smell the spaghetti cooking on the fourth floor and as he started to trudge up the stairs of the walk-up where he lived. Pop was standing over the stove, stirring with a long wooden spoon—a small, swarthy man with thinning black hair and bright black eyes.

Bud wondered what Don would have thought if he could have seen him there, puttering around the stove, in the old brown sweater he wore because he was almost always cold. Of course he had to do the cooking. Bud's mother was dead, and they sure didn't have any money to hire a cook.

Still, Don probably would have thought it was funny. A father, cooking.

"Hallo, Bud," Pop said, turning around and grinning so the space showed where he'd lost a tooth. "How did he do, the basketball practice?"

As many years as Pop had been here, you'd have thought he could talk better. And what did he care about the practice, anyhow? What did he know about basketball?

"Okay," Bud muttered.

He slouched against the table and threw his leather jacket at the kitchen chair. It missed and slid to the floor, and Bud let it lie.

Pop stopped grinning. "Pick up coat," he said.

Bud did not move. Pop's eyes hardened, and he took a step toward the boy. "Pick up coat," he repeated, with little spaces between the words.

Bud looked at him, and then bent over, mumbling to himself, and grabbed up the jacket and threw it across the chair.

He was mad at himself for picking it up. He didn't know why he did—why he didn't just leave it on the floor if he felt like it. Pop couldn't make him pick it up. Pop couldn't make him do anything. Bud was much bigger and stronger, and he knew a lot more too. Pop hadn't even been born in this country. He hadn't even gone past fifth grade.

"You play in game Friday night," the old man said, bending over his pot again. "I think maybe I come watch."

Bud's chin jerked up. "Aw, you wouldn't like it, Pop. Basketball's a

very tough game to follow if you don't understand it. Anyhow, I don't think I'll be playing. The coach has it in for me."

"Why should coach have it in, if you play good and behave nice?" Pop said. He frowned up at the boy. "What you do, Bud?"

Bud came away from the table, his face flaring red under the dark skin. "I didn't do anything!" he shouted. "You make me sick! You always think it's me. You always take the other guy's side. You'd think just once in a while you'd stick by your own son!"

He slammed out of the kichen before his father could answer and strode into the dark little bedroom they shared and flung himself on his bed. He lay there with his arms under his head and stared up at the ceiling. Don's father always stood by Don, all right. He wasn't always blaming his own son for everything that went wrong.

"Bud—"

The boy did not turn his head, but he knew his father was standing in the doorway.

"Yeah?"

"Who do you think you talk to so fresh?" his father asked in his soft voice that had no real softness in it at all. "Who you think you are? Big, sure—go to high school, sure—but just a kid, anyhow. *My* kid, see? And my kid gotta talk nice to me and do like I say, or I teach him better. Nobody else to teach him, no mama, only me."

He walked over to the bed where Bud was lying and slapped the boy once, hard, across the face. Bud gave a little yelp and sat up. I'll sock you back. I'm bigger than you. The next time, you wait, I'll sock you back. But he did not say these words aloud. He never said them aloud.

"I talk fresh to my papa in old country," Pop said, "he beat me with a strap. Our family raise no bums." He walked to the door. "Come eat supper now."

Bud slid off the bed and shuffled into the kitchen, and Pop piled his plate with spaghetti and poured over it the rich, red sauce.

But Bud was not hungry. He did not feel like eating spaghetti. He was sick of it. He did not want to go over to Don's smelling of garlic.

"Come on, you eat," his father said. "Big boy, basketball player, got to have lotsa food."

Bud took up his fork and twirled the spaghetti around it. He had not looked at his father since he had come into the kitchen, but he could feel Pop's eyes on him.

"It tastes good, Pop," he said.

"Sure. Been cooking since four o'clock. Gotta cook real slow for long time."

When they finished, Pop washed the dishes and Bud dried them. "You got homework tonight? G'ometry?" Pop asked him.

He was always stewing about geometry, ever since Bud had almost flunked it last term. He didn't

know the difference between a triangle and a rectangle, but he was always after Bud about it.

"I'm going over to Don's tonight."

Pop nodded. "Sure. But first you do g'ometry."

Bud threw the dish towel down. "You don't need to tell me when to do my homework. I know what I've got to do. I know a lot better than you do."

He choked and ran out of the kitchen, out of the apartment, flinging back words in a cracking voice. "Leave me alone! Leave me alone, that's all!"

He ran, thinking Pop might come after him. He ran almost all the way to Don's before he was sure he was safe. Then he went on slowly, recovering his breath.

As he reached the gravel driveway of Don's house, his spirits began to lift. Something would be doing now. Don wasn't satisfied with just after-school sports and movies and kidding girls and all that tame stuff Bud had thought was so great last year, before he and Don had started palling around together. Don was always thinking up something new.

Bud rang the bell, and after a minute Don came and opened the door. His blue eyes shone with excitement.

"Everybody's out," he said. "Come on!"

He led the way to the garage. He opened the rear door of the car, felt around on the floor for a moment, and then straightened up, triumphantly dangling a key in front of Bud's eyes. "The extra ignition key. We're all set."

Bud stared at the long, gleaming car in the lighted garage. "It looks brand-new," he said.

"It is. Just came yesterday."

"You know how to drive it?"

Don shrugged. "You drive one, you can drive 'em all. Say, what's the matter, you turning chicken?"

"Hell, no! Only—"

"Well okay, then, come on." He slid into the driver's seat and Bud got in next to him. "The guys who live around here are all a bunch of sissies," Don said. "I figured you'd be different."

Bud slammed the car door with sudden, unexplained anger. "What are we waiting for? If you can really drive this thing, like you say, let's see you drive it."

"Okay!" Don turned the key and instantly the motor began to throb with quiet power. Don looked startled. He peered at the dashboard. "It's not exactly like the old one. I've got to figure it out."

As he finished speaking they heard the sound of footsteps, and the next instant a gnarled, square little man appeared in the garage and ran toward the car.

"Hell," Don whispered. "I forgot about the gardener."

"What'sa go on here?" the little man screamed. "Who you, taka car?" He squinted in the window.

"Mister Don? That you, Mister Don? You no drive car."

"Get back, Tony!" Don shouted. He stepped on the gas and the car shot out of the garage.

They had got almost to the end of the long, narrow driveway when there was a sickening, scraping jolt. Don stepped on the brake so hard that Bud almost went through the windshield.

"That damn' tree!" Don said. "Dad's been telling that dumb wop to cut it—Oh." He glanced sidelong at Bud. "Sorry."

What for? Bud thought, the strange anger beating at his chest again. He was an American, born right here in this town. Even if he did have to eat spaghetti sometimes, so maybe he smelled of garlic. Even if his old man—

"Let's get out of here," Don said. He slid from behind the wheel and Bud followed. "We'll take the bikes."

As they passed the car, they saw that all along the right side of its sleek burnished body was a ragged dent.

"Gosh, Don, what will your dad say?"

Don shrugged. "Oh, he'll get over it. He's so souped up about *her* he don't care what happens. Come on." He grabbed Bud's arm, his voice harsh. "Let's see what's doing around this town."

Bud marveled at the other boy's coolness. He himself was still shaken and frightened, he would just as soon have called it a night.

But Don was already in the shed, wheeling out a bicycle with chromium horns and headlights. Bud took the bike, and Don wheeled out another one, even shinier, and then stood a minute, holding the handle bars.

"Listen," he said, his voice low. "You game for anything?"

His voice was tense, pitched a little too high. It made Bud uncomfortable. He had not heard Don sound like that before.

"Sure," Bud answered quickly, loudly. "What do you think I am?"

He wasn't chicken. He was no sissy, to be scared by a dented fender or anything else. He was better than any of the other guys Don knew; even if they did live around here and their fathers didn't have to work in factories or do the cooking.

"Let's go!" Bud said.

Don got on his bike and pedaled off into the darkness, with Bud following close beind. They pumped up a steep hill and then coasted down the other side, fast.

The wind bit through Bud's jacket, but he scarcely noticed. He felt as if he were sailing, or flying, and the cold wind and the swishing wheels and the kaleidoscope of houses and trees blurred together into a single sensation of joy.

When he saw Don stop ahead of him, at the bottom of the hill, he drew alongside him. He stood shiv-

ering, feeling the wind now, staring down the dark, empty road. As far as he could see there was only one house, a big one off to their right on a rise of ground.

"That's the Mitchells' house," Don said, following Bud's glance. "They're in Florida. Want to go in and look around?"

"What for?"

"I don't know. Just for kicks."

Don spoke casually, but the tenseness was in his voice again. Bud didn't get it. He didn't see what kicks there would be in looking around somebody's empty house.

"We couldn't get in," he said. "They wouldn't go away without locking it up."

Don smiled. "We'll get in. Unless, of course, you want to chicken out on me."

Bud's hands tightened on the handle bars of the bike. "Cut saying that, willya? I haven't chickened yet, have I?"

"Okay, okay," Don grinned and clapped Bud on the shoulder. "I just wanted to make sure. Some guys woulda quit when I smacked up the car."

Bud stopped shivering. He laughed. "Tough guys, huh?"

They hid their bicycles in the bushes and ran along the lawn at the side of the house, crouching low in the darkness. Bud felt a high excitement begin to rise in him.

This was how it would be, rushing an enemy position on a black night, moving without a sound. He clutched an imaginary Tommy gun in his sweating hands and tried to make his big feet light and quiet on the grass. Hell, he wasn't afraid of anything either!

Don's voice, close to his ear, startled him. "There's nobody around here, not in five miles," Don whispered, "but we've got to watch out for the prowl car."

They had reached the house by now. Don found a rock on the ground and picked it up. Carefully, he broke a pane of a cellar window, reached in and unlatched the window and slid it open. In another moment they were both inside the house.

"See, there's nothing to it," Don whispered. "You've just got to know how."

"You act like you've done this before."

Don shook his head. "No, but I've planned it. I could rob this place as easy as anything, and who would suspect me, with all my dad's money and everything? It would be the perfect crime."

Bud leaned against the concrete wall of the cellar and wiped his palms on his dungarees. "Is that what you came for?" he asked. "To rob the house?"

Don laughed. "Hell, no! What for? What would I need with any of the Mitchells' junk? I'm just saying how I *could* do it if I wanted to. Come on."

Bud followed Don up the cellar

steps, his eyes accustomed to the darkness now, assisted by a pale light from the moon outside. When they reached the liiving room, it struck him at first that the furniture was peculiarly shapeless, but then he saw that everything was covered with sheets.

Dimly he remembered this from some long-ago time, this careful covering of valued pieces against dust and dirt. His mother must have done it, he thought—his mother, whose face in his memory was a blur, softly surrounded by smooth black hair. She must have covered their furniture once—the chair with the spring that protruded from the bottom—the faded sofa, stained and frayed—they must have been new once, and cherished.

Don whipped a sheet from one of the chairs and wrapped himself in it, muffling his laughter in the folds, and Bud pulled a sheet from the sofa. They chased each other around the shadowy room, the slim, agile, fair-haired ghost and the dark, lumbering one, dodging tables, sliding on the bare floor.

All at once Don stopped short, and Bud, coming up behind him, tried to skid to a halt, lost his balance, and went crashing into a slender-legged end table.

"Gosh!" Bud whispered, looking down at it. "Do you think I busted it?"

"Who cares?" Don unwound himself from his sheet and picked up the little table. He held it poised over his foot and kicked it across the room. There was a splintering sound as it hit the wall. "Who cares?" he repeated, laughing.

He took a penknife out of his pocket and ran to the sofa on the other side of the room, his breath coming fast and loud enough for Bud to hear. With oe long, deliberate motion he slashed through the fabric, pulled out some handfuls of down, and scattered them around the room. He did the same thing to one of the chairs.

"Get some water!" he called to Bud. "Hurry up!"

Bud had been standing in the middle of the room watching, still clutching the sheet around himself. Now he let it drop to the floor and took a step toward Don.

"Why are you sore at them?" he whispered. "What did they do to you?"

Don looked around. "Who?"

"The people own this house."

"The Mitchells? I don't even know 'em."

"Then why—?"

"What's the matter? What're you worried about?" Don walked up to Bud and thrust his face forward, his breath still coming fast. "Scared they'll catch us?"

"I'm not scared. I just can't figure why you want to bust up the place, that's all."

Don's voice shook. "For kicks, you dope," he said. "For kicks." He shoved Bud aside. "Aw, I'll get the water myself. I shoulda known bet-

ter than to bring a guy like you along."

Bud could feel himself beginning to tremble. He wasn't "a guy like you." He was just the same as Don, just as good. He could keep up with Don any time, do anything he did. He'd show him.

He lunged after Don and pulled him away from the door. "I'll get the water," he said.

He ran into the kitchen, stumbling in the dark, and filled the biggest pot he could find. It was so heavy that he staggered a little as he ran back with it. He carried it over to the gutted sofa and emptied the water all over the cushions.

They couldn't even fix it now, he thought. It was worse now than the old, faded, stained sofa that his mother had once covered so carefully with a sheet to protect it from dust.

He went back again and again with the pot, and poured water over everything. His hands shook and he gasped as though he had been running in a race.

He would do more than Don—he would do worse. He'd fix this place good, and if they arrested him he'd just smile—he'd smile when they took his picture for the paper—and then Don would see if he was chicken.

Suddenly he heard Don's voice, clear and startling in his ear, perfectly calm.

"We better get out now, Bud. The prowl car might come."

Bud stood holding the empty pot for a moment. The dark seemed almost light to his accustomed eyes. He could see the gashed and sodden furniture, the pools of water on the floor. He breathed heavily. They would come home, the people who lived here, and see it like this. The woman would cry . . .

For a minute he thought he was going to cry himself. He swallowed. What was the matter with him? "Who's afraid of the prowl car?" he muttered, but Don grabbed his arm and rushed him out.

They were halfway down the lawn when they saw the lights of a car swing up the driveway and stop. They flattened themselves on the grass and watched a policeman get out with a flashlight.

"Stay still!" Don whispered. "He's just looking around. When he gets to the other side, we'll run for it."

They reached the bicycles all right, but they were scarcely on them when they heard the wheels of the prowl car crunching on the driveway behind them, coming fast.

Don swerved out of the road and into a grove of trees. He leaped off his bike and signaled Bud to do the same, and the two of them ran through the grove.

By the time they heard the car screech to a stop, they were through the trees and running across a dark field on the other side . . .

Bud could see the light in the fourth-floor window as he walked down the block toward home. Pop always waited up for him, as if he was a little kid. It made him mad. Only tonight he did not feel mad. He felt heavy and sick, the way he had felt before he got scarlet fever. His throat hurt, too.

Pop was sitting on the sofa, playing solitaire. He had the cards lined up across one of the cushions, hiding the worst worn spot. The sofa didn't look so bad with that spot hidden. It wasn't cut up, anyway.

"I'm home," Bud said.

Pop looked up. "I see you home," he said, and went back to his game.

Bud stood rubbing his hands along the sides of his dungarees. "Ill stay home tomorrow night and study my geometry. I'll stay home every night this week."

Before his father could answer, the superintendent knocked on the door to say that Bud was wanted on the telephone in the hall downstairs. Bud ran down, taking the steps three at a time. Maybe it was the cops. Maybe—

It was Don. "I gotta make this quick," he said. "There's a guy on his way to your place, an investigator or something. They found the bikes with my license, so this guy came here, asking about tonight. I said I was home all night and that the bikes must have been stolen, because they've been missing since yesterday, so when he asks you—"

"How does he know about me?"

"He found out we're pals—those guys find out everything—so he's checking up. But we got nothing to worry about. My dad backed me up on the bikes and being home all night, and they wouldn't dare not believe my dad, so all you've got to do is say you were home too."

Bud hung up and went slowly upstairs. Pop was putting the cards away. He did not ask who had telephoned.

"There's a man on his way here," Bud said. "He's going to ask if I was out tonight. You say no, Pop, hear? You say I was home all night."

His father turned around. "What you do, Bud? You do something bad?"

Bud began to tremble. "Just say I was home, that's all!" he shouted. "Just stick by me, the way Don's father did, and say I was home!"

He rushed out and went into the bedroom and stood there in the dark—just stood there, his legs heavy and his throat aching, until the doorbell rang. He waited until his father called him, and then he went back, trying to look casual, trying to look like a boy who had been home all night.

The investigator was a stocky man with a red, pleasant face. "Hello, son," he said. "You're Don Willard's pal, aren't you?"

"Yeah."

"Have you seen him tonight?"

Bud shook his head. "I been home

all night. I had a lot of schoolwork."

"What happen, please?" his father asked. "What you think my boy do?"

The investigator turned to Pop. "Two boys broke into the Mitchells' house over on Soundview Drive and wrecked the place. A policeman saw them get away on bicycles, but he lost them. They abandoned the bikes and ran into the woods. The bikes were traced to Don Willard."

"I was home all night," Bud said. "I don't know anything about it."

"Is that true?" the investigator asked his father. "Has he been here all night?"

Bud stared at his father. The little man looked back at him, looked for a long instant, and then turned away.

"He was out," Bud's father said. "He been home only little while."

"Did he tell you where he was going?"

Bud's father shook his head. "This you gotta ask Bud. This not my job to say."

The investigator touched Bud's arm. "Well, son?"

Bud sprang away as though he and been burned. Deep sobs tore up through his chest and he could not stop them.

"All right," he cried. "All right—okay—I did it—and now you can put me in jail—I don't care."

No one spoke. In a little while the sobbing stopped.

"Why?" Pop asked quietly then. "Why you do this, Bud?"

Bud wished Pop would get tough. He wished he would sock him.

"I don't know," he said. "I don't know."

"What about Don?" the investigator asked. "He was with you, wasn't he?"

Bud shook his head. "Nobody was with me. I did it alone."

"What about the two bikes?"

"I don't know anything about any two bikes. I borrowed Don's bike a couple days ago and I used that tonight."

The investigator shrugged. "We're pretty sure Don was with him," he said to Pop, "but we can't prove it. His father swears the kid was home all night, and that his bikes were both stolen a few days ago. The old guy was scared silly that there might be a smear on the family name. But now maybe if Bud told you he was going to see Don tonight, and you'd tell me—"

"I got nothing to do with Don," Pop said. "His father take care him. I take care my boy." He looked up at the investigator. "Listen, mister, what you do with Bud? He no bad boy. A little fresh, maybe, a little mix' up. Crazy age—you know? But he never in trouble before."

The investigator smiled a little. "We know that, sir. And if the damage is paid for, I think there's a chance no charges will be pressed." He looked around the

room, and his smile faded. "There's a good bit of damage, of course. It's going to be pretty expensive."

Sir, Bud thought. The investigator had talked contemptuously of Don's father as "the old guy," but he called Pop "sir."

"My boy pay," Pop said.

When they were alone, Bud leaned against the door, not looking at his father.

"I can't pay for it, Pop," he said. "All that stuff. You don't know. Where would I get the money?"

"You pay," Pop said in the soft, not-soft voice. "They let you off like this, you pay. You work after school every day. No more basketball. No more nothing until all paid up." He paused, and then went on in a gentler way. "I help. I work overtime and pay too. Is part my fault, maybe. Different pop, better pop, maybe keep son from doing this bad things. So I pay too."

Pop worked hard all day. He was an old man and he worked hard, and now he was going to work overtime too. Don's father wasn't going to work overtime. While Pop was at the factory at night to help pay for what Don and Bud had done, Don's father would go out somewhere with his pretty young wife, and laugh, and not care.

The superintendent knocked on the door again to call Bud to the telephone. The boy went slowly down the stairs, his loafers slapping loosely against each step.

"Hello," he said into the telephone. "Hello, Don."

"Well, what happened? How'd it go?"

"All right."

"Say, you don't sound good," Don said. "What's the score? That dumb old man of yours didn't let you down, did he?"

Bud cupped his hand hard around the mouthpiece. "Let me down?" he said. "My pop? No, he didn't let me down." He paused a minute, and then said, "I got to go now. I got work to do."

He hung up and went back upstairs, taking the steps two at a time.

BEST MYSTERIES OF 1961

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

1961 was a Year of Trends in the literature of crime. Indeed, in a score of years of professional trend-spotting in the field, I don't know when I've seen so much evidence of the fact that crime-writing is ever in a healthy state of ferment and renewal. There are, thank God, always new possibilities to explore and new (and old) writers to explore them.

Trend A: A marked increase in the number of suspense novels set in specific periods of the past. This often delightful change of pace was long found only in the novels of Carr and van Gulik, who remain its most eminent practitioners in

THE WITCH OF THE LOW-TIDE [1907], *by John Dickson Carr* (Harper, $3.50)
THE RED PAVILION [*ca.* 670], *by Robert van Gulik* (Lounz, $2.50)

Trend B: A comparable increase in the number of novels based on true murders, usually treated (*A* again) in their own periods, as in

THE SMARTEST GRAVE [1903], *by R. J. White* (Harper, $3.95)
THE GIFT OF ROME [66 B. C.], *by John & Esther Wagner*
(Atlantic-Little, Brown, $4)

but sometimes modernized:

COURT OF CROWS, *by Robert A. Knowlton* (Harper, $4)

Trend C: An unusual number of distinguished treatments of murder in real life, including two all-time five-star volumes devoted to great individual cases:

LIZZIE BORDEN: THE UNTOLD STORY, *by Edward D. Radin*
(Simon & Schuster, $4.50)
TEN RILLINGTON PLACE [R. J. H. Christie], *by Ludovic Kennedy*
(Simon & Schuster, $4.95)

and two excellent studies of murder and its punishment:

HANGED IN ERROR, *by Leslie Hale* (Penguin S196, 85¢)
HANGED BY THE NECK, *by Arthur Koestler & C. H. Rolph*
(Penguin S197, 85¢)

Trend D: The appearance of the first comprehensive reference books for the fancier of true crime, of which the most ambitious (an ENCYCLOPEDIA no less) was poorly executed but two deserve a place on the shortest shelf of criminous non-fiction:

A COMPANION TO MURDER [English, 1900–1950], *by E. Spencer Shew*
(Knopf, $4.50)

THE ANNALS OF MURDER [American, 1600-1900], *by Thomas M. McDade*
(University of Oklahoma, $15)

Trend E: The emphasis, continuing on from the 1950's, on the novel of detailed police procedure, with stress on the cop-as-human-being. Americans have forcefully shown us what police work is like in, respectively, a small Connecticut town and San Francisco:

THAT NIGHT IT RAINED, *by Hillary Waugh* (Crime Club, $2.95)
NIGHT OF THE KILL, *by Breni James* (Simon & Schuster, $3.50)

and England's prolific (9 novels here in 1961) John Creasey, under his most distinguished pseudonym, contributed what is for my money the Book of the Year in the crime-suspense field:

GIDEON'S FIRE, *by J. J. Marric* (Harper, $3.50)

Trend F: An astonishing number of good first novels by American authors, at least 13 of whom equalled or excelled the average Edgar-winner. Of the writers already mentioned, Knowlton, James and the Wagners are debutants, as are:

FELONY TANK, *by Malcolm Braly* (Gold Medal s1075, 35¢)
THE CIPHER, *by Alex Gordon* (Simon & Schuster, $3.50)
OLD HOUSE OF FEAR, *by Russell Kirk* (Fleet, $3.95)
SOME OF YOUR BLOOD, *by Theodore Sturgeon* (Ballantine 458K, 35¢)

and you might also keep an eye on Suzanne Blanc, Olivia Dwight, Emma Lathen, Theodore Mathieson, Allen Richards and Robert Switzer. It is less surprising that there were a number of outstanding firsts from England, including White above and

COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENSE, *by Jeffrey Ashford* (Harper, $3.50)
THE MOONBEAMS, *by R. Vernon Beste* (Harper, $3.95)
NIGHT OF WENCESLAS, *by Lionel Davidson* (Harper, $3.50)
MESSAGE FROM SIRIUS, *by Cecil Jenkins* (Dodd, Mead, $3.50)
THE WRONG SIDE OF THE SKY, *by Gavin Lyall* (Scribner's, $3.95)

Trend G: Editors tended to mingle mystery with horror, fantasy, science fiction . . . the generally macabre and guignol, as in two brilliantly varied anthologies:

ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS STORIES FOR LATE AT NIGHT
(Random, $4.95)
TALES OF LOVE AND HORROR, *edited by Don Congdon*
(Ballantine, 522K, 35¢)

and two one-author collections of short stories:

BLOOD RUNS COLD, *by Robert Bloch* (Simon & Schuster, $3.50)
NIGHTMARES AND GEEZENSTACKS, *by Fredric Brown* (Bantam J2296, 40¢)

This trend even affected (and not for the worse)

ELLERY QUEEN'S 16TH MYSTERY ANNUAL (Random, $3.95)

though the pure detective story was admirably presented in

ELLERY QUEEN'S 1962 ANTHOLOGY (Davis, $1)

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 228th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . Here is the letter which accompanied Fred Sherwood's story: "Dear Mr. Queen: Perhaps you will recall publishing a story several years ago, entitled 'A True Blue Friend,' written by my daughter Millicent, who was then in eighth grade. [The story appeared in the September 1957 issue of EQMM] The eternal mother in me comes to the fore again as I send you another story, this one by her brother, Fred, who is now in eighth grade. I think it is quite good and as it seems suited to your magazine, I am sending it along to see what you think. I realize I'm prejudiced, but he also was presented with a Certificate of Merit for it in school, so perhaps I'm justified. Sincerely yours, Jean S. Sherwood (Mrs. F. E.)"

How could we resist? How could we refrain from commenting to the mother that writing certainly seems to run in the Sherwood family and that we hope there are other children, who will become contributors to EQMM when they, in their turn, reach eighth grade.

In reply, Mrs. Sherwood advised us that there is one more child, now in fifth grade. Well, we know what to expect in three years!

By the way, when young Fred was told that his story would appear in EQMM, as his older sister's had, he said, "Boy, this has been a good day for me. I hit a grand-slam home run in gym, and now this!"

WHERE?

by FRED SHERWOOD

THE GORDON CLUB IS ONE OF THE swankiest private men's clubs in the city. Its wood paneling, velvety carpets, and mahogany tables made the old man look as if he belonged in a shack by the railroad tracks. In spite of his neatly pressed suit, smartly polished shoes, and monogrammed tie, the old man's drooping mustache, pallid color, dull eyes, and wrinkled features made him look like a dog on its last legs.

As the old man (who was merely called "the Colonel"), John Thomas the 2nd, P. J. Archer the 3rd, his brother Philip, and I were playing poker, the conversation turned to the occult and communicating with the dead.

"My second wife believed that it could be done," remarked P. J. "She spent so much money on a phony spiritualist that I had to dismiss one of the maids for lack of immediate funds."

At the mention of the word "spiritualist" the old man looked up and said, "None of you believes in communication with the dead, do you?"

"Oh, yes," laughed John, "and flying kangaroos, too."

The Colonel was not amused. He merely looked at John a minute, then asked, "Do any of you live in a house where your forefathers once lived?"

"Yes, I do," answered the usually silent Philip, before his brother, P. J., the blabbermouth of the clan, could reply.

Something mysterious about the Colonel prompted me to find out what he was up to. When a meeting was arranged at the Archers' home the next night I agreed to be there.

I was the last one to arrive and after I was seated I heard the Colonel say, "Hello up there, what might your name be?" He was looking directly at a doorway which to all appearances was empty. Then he said, "So you're Archibald Archer, eh?"

"Archibald was my grandfather," said P. J. in an awed whisper.

So the evening went on. The Colonel talked with and completely described two grandfathers, the Archer brothers' father, two uncles, and a cousin, all of whom had long since died.

At eleven o'clock the Colonel went home, leaving the rest of us sitting alone in the large room. "What do you make of it, P. J.?" inquired John.

Before P. J. could answer I directed another question at him. "Do you suppose he could have known the relatives he talked to?"

"Not personally. One of my grandfathers was killed during the Civil War and the cousin he spoke of was an invalid who never left this house after the age of six."

Then John, with a weasel-like grin on his face, spoke again. "We'll give him another chance. He can come to my house and we'll see if he can name some of my family. I think by telling the Colonel to direct questions to my ancestors we can trip him up and reveal his little hoax."

The next week found me driving out to John's estate, going rather fast because, as usual, I was late. The road seemed safe enough—no ice was in sight. Suddenly, as I rounded a curve, I hit a bump and skidded over a patch of ice. The car lurched violently off the road and turned over, landing on its side.

Relieved at finding myself uninjured, I managed to open the door facing upward and crawled out. The road was in lonely country, and as far as I knew the nearest house was John's. It was only a walk of a half mile and from there

I could phone a service station.

It was a raw, bitter day and as I walked, the wind cut right through me. The shock of the crash had jolted my nerves so badly, however, that the cold had little effect on me.

When I reached John's house I knocked on the door and a butler opened it, confronting me with a stare as blank as a new sheet of paper. I was in a hurry, so I paid little heed as I strode past him into the house.

Upon approaching the room where my friends were gathered, I heard Philip say impatiently, "Tony's half an hour late. What could have happened to detain him?"

"Here I am," I said.

Nobody looked up but the Colonel, who said, "Here he is now!"

The others seemed surprised, and looking right at me they all said just one word:

"Where?"

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **T. E. BROOKS**

TITLE: ***This Man Is Dangerous***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Here are some of the ingredients of this short-short: car accident, sudden death, unexpected freedom, flight, manhunt, terror, amnesia—all in about 2500 words!*

THE THROB OF RAIN AWAKENED him. He could feel it drumming on his body, slapping at his face. Experimentally he pressed his hand into the earth under him. Wet sand grated between his fingers. A split of lightning revealed an overturned police squad car nearby, its top cushioned in the sand.

He started to raise himself. The effort of getting up sent pain crashing through his head. He leaned back, moisture from beneath his eyelids melting into the rain on his face.

Then he realized that something had bound his wrists together and cautiously he tried to separate them. Apprehension, sticky with fear, crept over him. Twisting one hand back, he slid his fingers over the opposite wrist, finding the thin band of steel. His fingers touched the separating links. He was handcuffed.

Slowly, carefully, he rose to his knees. The noise of thunder suffused him with pain. He wavered, clutching the air with his lungs. Beyond him, the eerie configuration of the squad car loomed out of the darkness.

He pushed himself upright and staggered toward the car. On the driver's side he made out two forms beneath the wreck—the uniformed officer who had been in the back seat and the plainclothes driver twisted around the steering wheel.

There was no sound except the

rain hammering the desert. He knelt in the broken glass and listened. Within the car was eternal silence. Crouching at the window, he groped for the dead officer's belt, his fingers closing over the key ring. He unsnapped it and drew his hands back.

When he rose, the handcuffs and ring of keys lay gleaming dully on the shattered glass by the car.

He stumbled forward in the darkness. A hundred yards from the car he came upon a dark swath in the desert—the long body of a man sprawled face down in the sand. The man's dark brown suit squashed wetly under his hands as he rolled the body over. The face was a soggy mass of sand and blood. He straightened, confusion smearing the pain in his head, and plodded on.

Painfully, clumsily, time and distance passed. It stopped raining. The soft, clean glow of night infiltrated blackness. A scatter of lights, widely separated and far off, came into view. He chose one and labored slowly toward it . . .

Inside the ranch house the girl stood before the bathroom mirror brushing her hair. Tomorrow she would wash it in the rain water. That would make it soft and silky. She frowned. It wasn't right for a girl to be alone in a house so far from neighbors. She hoped her father would get back soon.

She walked into the bedroom and opened a window. The rain had stopped. A few stars twinkled uncertainly in the sky. She started to undress, her glance catching the little table radio. She walked over to it, tuned in an all-night disc jockey, and hummed a little of the song as she slipped into her pajamas.

The ten o'clock news came on. Her fingers, working a button through a buttonhole, stopped.

"I repeat," said the newscaster, "a killer is at large. Confessed slayer, Carl Johnson, has escaped. The police car in which he was being driven has been found overturned in the desert ten miles from Palm Valley.

"Dead are: Sheriff's Deputy Al Kern, driver of the car; Police Sergeant John Miller; and Prosecuting Attorney Richard Wyler.

"The bodies of Kern and Miller were found crushed beneath the car. Wyler, sustaining head injuries and lacerations of the face and neck, apparently bled to death in an attempt to reach aid. His body was found a hundred yards from the scene of the wreck.

"Police theorize that Johnson probed the body of Sergeant Miller for handcuff keys. Miller's key ring and a pair of handcuffs were found on the ground by the car. Tonight's heavy rainfall has wiped out all traces of Johnson's escape. A posse is being formed now for an all-out manhunt."

There was a pause. The newscaster's voice picked up again.

"A brief description of Johnson has just come in over the wire: Age, thirty-four; height, six feet two inches; weight, a hundred and eighty pounds. He is dressed in prison garb of gray denim pants and shirt. He is a killer. He is dangerous. To repeat: *This man is dangerous . . .*"

She walked over and switched off the sound. Then she switched it on again, turning it low.

In the living room she slid the bolt on the front door. At the kitchen door she drew the long wooden latch over the doorsill. She wished, this time urgently, that her father were home.

She heated some milk in a pan. The music of a dance band drifted in softly from the bedroom. She drank the milk slowly and rinsed the cup. Then she started back for the bedroom.

In the hall, by the bathroom door, she stopped. Fear pushed at the roots of her hair. She had left a light on in the bedroom. The doorway was dark now. The white curtains at the bedroom window billowed out with a light breeze.

Slowly, reluctantly, telling herself it was a burned-out bulb, she moved toward the room. At the door she reached in, feeling the wall for the electric switch. Light flooded the room. It was empty.

Trembling with relief, she walked to the window and closed and locked it. She turned off the overhead light and snapped on a small bed lamp. A muted rock-and-roll beat out of the radio. Sitting on the edge of the bed, she bent down and took off her slippers, swung her feet into bed, and leaned back.

Then a scream froze in her throat.

He stood tall in the doorway of the bedroom, a rain-and-blood washed apparition in gray denim and shirt.

The scream tore from her throat, ripping at the pain in the man's head. He lunged across the room. She felt her head in his hand, his other hand brutal across her mouth.

"Don't scream," he said hoarsely. "Don't *scream!*"

Terror paralyzed her. His face was close to hers. A trickle of blood coursed a slow path down his jaw. She stared at the blood. *It's going to drop on me,* she thought, *it's going to drop on me.*

The pain in his head quieted. She was so pretty, so white—like a wax doll before they add the human coloring. For a moment his confusion waned, and his hand slipped from her mouth, closing against the side of her face.

She flung herself from him, panic in her eyes.

"Don't scream," he said quickly, remembering the pain. The stunned look was back in his eyes.

She edged slowly off the bed. The radio blurted out a commercial. She stood up on the other side

of the bed, desperate to run, to hide, somehow to get away from him. If she could get to the window . . . then she remembered she had closed and locked it. A shiver darted down her spine, starting a shaking in her body.

"You're shaking," he said in surprise. "Are you afraid?"

"Wh . . . what do you want?"

"I don't know," he said slowly, and frowned.

"How did you get in?"

He looked at the window. "It was open," he said. "I'm sure it was open. I came in through it. The light hurt my head, so I turned it off. I went down the hall." He looked back at her. "Did you close the window?"

"Yes," she said.

"Why?"

"I didn't know you were here. I —I closed it because I was afraid."

"What were you afraid of?"

"You."

A small light flicked in his eyes. "Do you know me?"

"No."

"But you know who I am."

A new spasm of fear gripped her.

"Who am I?" he pressed.

"You . . . you don't know?"

"No."

Hope spread cautiously over her fear. "Where did you come from?"

"The desert," he answered. "There was an accident. They're all dead."

"What were you doing there?"

"I don't know. I woke up . . . handcuffed. I—I just don't know."

She fought a sudden wedge of compassion. He didn't know he was a killer . . .

"Let me get a doctor," she said quietly. "You're sick."

"I can't let you get a doctor," he said roughly. "I'm a criminal of some kind. Don't you understand? I was handcuffed!"

She stood a few feet from him. She wasn't afraid of him now. A strange excitement touched her.

He watched her, the confusion lifting from his eyes. She was all he knew. She was here and real and soft beneath the flannel pajamas. The rest was desert and pain and dead men. And the vast expanse of nothing that was memory. He pulled her to him.

The frame of his body strained against his wet shirt. She knew the rust-colored streaks in the fabric were blood, but his mind was helpless now, locked from its own evil. He was neither good nor bad, only a human being in need.

A man's voice broke urgently from the little radio.

"A killer is still at large . . ."

She stiffened, charged with fear. He mustn't hear! She tore savagely from him, lunging toward the radio. He whirled, grabbing her arm.

"No!" she cried. "Don't listen!"

His hand clamped again over her mouth. When he had heard, he released her and walked to the radio. She saw the back of his head and gasped. He wore a skull cap of

sand and blood. He shut off the radio and turned back to her, his face gray.

"I'm a killer," he said, looking down at his denim-sheathed legs. "You've known all along?"

A sob caught in her throat. "Your head . . ."

He towered over her. "Who did I kill?"

She stared at him. He still didn't remember. It had been in the newspapers. It was a senseless killing. She mustn't tell him.

"Answer me," he said. "Who did I kill?"

She tried not to whimper. "I—I don't know," she said.

"I've got to know. Don't you understand? I've got to *remember!*" He paused. "What are you afraid of?"

She raised her gaze helplessly.

A brief understanding crossed his face. She was so pretty, her pale face so soft, even in fear. Confusion sifted down on him again. He could almost hear the dull throb in his head. She wouldn't help him. She was too afraid, and he didn't want to hurt her.

He turned and crossed the room, walking back and forth. She watched him pace, her eyes dilating slightly each time she saw the back of his head.

Suddenly he was at her side, his hands gripping her shoulders.

"Tell me," he pleaded. "Tell me what you know—I've *got* to remember!"

She turned her head away. He started to shake her, jerking the small body back and forth. She began to cry, her face crumpling like a baby's, the silent tears streaming from beneath closed eyes.

He stopped as suddenly as he had started.

"Get dressed," he ordered harshly. "And stop crying."

She made her way across the room. Clumsily, behind the closet door, she fumbled into her clothes. She emerged, her face flushed, her eyes still spilling tears.

"Does that wreck in the yard run?" he said.

She nodded.

He shoved her roughly out of the bedroom and down the hall. At the living-room door he yanked the bolt out of its slot and pushed her onto the porch, half pulling, half carrying her across the yard. At the old car he opened the door and thrust her into the front seat.

He started up the motor and backed out to the road.

"Which way is the nearest town?"

She pointed.

"Damn it, will you stop crying!"

He drove in silence across the desert. At the main highway he asked again which way to turn. She motioned, and he swung the car up on the pavement. She wondered fleetingly where he was taking her.

After a long time they approached the lights of a little town.

"Where's the sheriff's office?" he asked.

She looked at him in surprise, a protest filling her mouth.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Turn myself in," he replied harshly.

There was a silence.

"I've got no choice," he said at last, as if to himself. He spat a laugh. "I hope I know a good lawyer."

The car hit a hole in the road and jounced crazily. His fingers tightened around the wheel as the pain shot through his head. After an eternity they pulled up in front of the sheriff's office.

"I don't see," he muttered thickly, "how they can try me if I can't defend myself. And I can't defend myself if I can't remember. And I damn well can't remember."

He pushed open the door of the car and lurched out, staggering across the street. The girl tore from the car, racing across the street. She grabbed his arm and steered him through the door.

A man sat behind the desk, caressing a coffee cup. He stared at the telephone by his elbow. A reporter lolled comfortably in a chair.

"Well, Joe," the newspaperman said, "that about covers it. It started out to be a big night, too."

The deputy looked disgusted. "It's still a big night," he grunted. "I gotta round up—" He broke off, looking up as the man and the girl weaved into the room.

They stood for a moment just inside the door, the man reaching one hand to the wall to steady himself. He looked down at the girl. Her face was a white little island in the revolving room. It was a hard face to relinquish. *I'm a killer, not a lover,* he told himself grotesquely, and moved slowly and carefully toward the desk.

"I came to turn myself in."

"What the hell for?" said the deputy.

"You're looking for a killer, aren't you?"

"No more we ain't, Mac."

The reporter was across the room. "God Almighty, the back of his head . . ." He peered at the tall man's face. "Hey, this guy's the Prosecuting Attorney!"

The tall man slumped. The reporter caught him, staggering under the dead weight.

"It's okay, Wyler," the reporter said, lowering him to the floor. "Johnson put his handcuffs on you and changed clothes with you before he struck out for home base and bled to death in the desert. The call just came through. They've identified the guy in your clothes as the killer."

The white little island of her face still held steady in the whirling room. It was the last thing he saw before he closed his eyes—and the first thing he saw when he opened them.

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **GRAHAM GREENE**

TITLE: ***Across the Bridge***

TYPE: Detective Story

LOCALE: A border town in Mexico

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *A distinguished story by the author of* OUR MAN IN HAVANA *and* A BURNT-OUT CASE—*about a man worth a million who kicked his dog and swindled the poor . . .*

THEY SAY HE'S WORTH A MILlion," Lucia said. He sat there in the little hot damp Mexican square, a dog at his feet, with an air of immense and forlorn patience. The dog attracted your attention at once; for it was very nearly an English setter, only something had gone wrong with the tail and the feathering.

Palms wilted over his head, it was all shade and stuffiness round the bandstand, radios talked loudly in Spanish from the little wooden sheds where they changed your pesos into dollars at a loss. I could tell he didn't understand a word from the way he read his newspaper—as I did myself, picking out the words which were like English ones.

"He's been here a month," Lucia said. "They turned him out of Guatemala and Honduras."

You couldn't keep any secrets for five hours in this border town. Lucia had only been twenty-four hours in the place, but she knew all about Mr. Joseph Calloway. The only reason I didn't know about him (and I'd been in the place two weeks) was because I couldn't talk the language any more than Mr. Calloway could.

There wasn't another soul in the place who didn't know the story—the whole story of the Halling Investment Trust and the proceedings for extradition. Any man doing dusty business in any of the wooden booths in the town is better

fitted by long observation to tell Mr. Calloway's tale than I am, except that I was in—literally—at the finish. They all watched the drama proceed with immense interest, sympathy, and respect. For, after all, he had a million.

Every once in a while through the long steamy day, a boy came and cleaned Mr. Calloway's shoes: he hadn't the right words to resist them—they pretended not to know his English. He must have had his shoes cleaned the day Lucia and I watched him at least half a dozen times.

At midday he took a stroll across the square to the Antonio Bar and had a bottle of beer, the setter sticking to heel as if they were out for a country walk in England (he had, you may remember, one of the biggest estates in Norfolk). After his bottle of beer he would walk down between the money-changers' huts to the Rio Grande and look across the bridge into the United States: people came and went constantly in cars. Then back to the square till lunch-time.

He was staying in the best hotel, but you don't get good hotels in this border town: nobody stays in them more than a night. The good hotels were on the other side of the bridge: you could see their electric signs twenty stories high from the little square at night, like lighthouses marking the United States.

You may ask what I'd been doing in so drab a spot for a fortnight. There was no interest in the place for anyone; it was just damp and dust and poverty, a kind of shabby replica of the town across the river: both had squares in the same spots; both had the same number of cinemas. One was cleaner than the other, that was all, and more expensive, much more expensive.

I'd stayed across there a couple of nights waiting for a man a tourist bureau said was driving down from Detroit to Yucatan and would sell a place in his car for some fantastically small figure—twenty dollars, I think it was. I don't know if he existed or was invented by the optimistic half-caste in the agency; anyway, he never turned up and so I waited, not much caring, on the cheap side of the river.

It didn't much matter; I was living. One day I meant to give up the man from Detroit and go home or go south, but it was easier not to decide anything in a hurry. Lucia was just waiting for a car going the other way, but she didn't have to wait so long. We waited together and watched Mr. Calloway waiting —for God knows what.

I don't know how to treat this story—it was a tragedy for Mr. Calloway, it was poetic retribution, I suppose, in the eyes of the shareholders he'd ruined with his bogus transactions, and to Lucia and me, at this stage, it was pure comedy—except when he kicked the dog.

I'm not a sentimentalist about dogs, I prefer people to be cruel to

animals rather than to human beings, but I couldn't help being revolted at the way he'd kick that animal—with a hint of cold-blooded venom, not in anger but as if he were getting even for some trick it had played him a long while ago. That generally happened when he returned from the bridge: it was the only sign of anything resembling emotion he showed. Otherwise, he looked a small, set, gentle creature with silver hair and a silver mustache, and gold-rimmed glasses, and one gold tooth like a flaw in character.

Lucia hadn't been accurate when she said he'd been turned out of Guatemala and Honduras; he'd left voluntarily when the extradition proceedings seemed likely to go through, and moved north. Mexico is still not a very centralized state, and it is possible to get round governors as you can't get round cabinet ministers or judges. And so he waited there on the border for the next move.

That earlier part of the story is, I suppose, dramatic, but I didn't watch it and I can't invent what I haven't seen—the long waiting in anterooms, the bribes taken and refused, the growing fear of arrest, and then the flight—in gold-rimmed glasses—covering his tracks as well as he could, but this wasn't finance and he was an amateur at escape.

And so he'd washed up here, under my eyes and Lucia's eyes, sitting all day under the bandstand, nothing to read but a Mexican paper, nothing to do but look across the river at the United States, quite unaware, I suppose, that everyone knew everything about him, once a day kicking his dog. Perhaps in its semi-setter way it reminded him too much of the Norfolk estate—though that too, I suppose, was the reason he kept it.

And the next act again was pure comedy. I hesitate to think what this man worth a million was costing his country as they edged him out from this land and that. Perhaps somebody was getting tired of the business, and careless; anyway, they sent across two detectives, with an old photograph. He'd grown his silvery mustache since that had been taken, and he'd aged a lot, and they couldn't catch sight of him.

They hadn't been across the bridge two hours when everybody knew that there were two foreign detectives in town looking for Mr. Calloway—everybody knew, that is to say, except Mr. Calloway, who couldn't talk Spanish. There were plenty of people who could have told him in English, but they didn't. It wasn't cruelty, it was a sort of awe and respect: like a bull, he was on show, sitting there mournfully in the plaza with his dog, a magnificent spectacle for which we all had ringside seats.

I ran into one of the policemen in the Bar Antonio. He was dis-

gusted; he had had some idea that when he crossed the bridge, life was going to be different, so much more color and sun, and—I suspect—love, and all he found were wide mud streets where the nocturnal rain lay in pools, and mangy dogs, smells and cockroaches in his bedroom, and the nearest to love, the open door of the Academia Comercial, where pretty mestizo girls sat all the morning learning to typewrite. Tip-tap-tip-tap-tip—perhaps they had a dream, too—jobs on the other side of the bridge, where life was going to be so much more luxurious, refined, and amusing.

We got into conversation; he seemed surprised that I knew who they both were and what they wanted. He said, "We've got information this man Calloway's in town."

"He's knocking around somewhere," I said.

"Could you point him out?"

"Oh, I don't know him by sight," I said.

He drank his beer and thought a while. "I'll go out and sit in the plaza. He's sure to pass sometime."

I finished my beer and went quickly off and found Lucia. I said, "Hurry, we're going to see an arrest."

We didn't care a thing about Mr. Calloway, he was just an elderly man who kicked his dog and swindled the poor, and who deserved anything he got. So we made for the plaza; we knew Calloway would be there, but it had never occurred to either of us that the detectives wouldn't recognize him.

There was quite a surge of people round the place; all the fruit-sellers and bootblacks in town seemed to have arrived together; we had to force our way through, and there in the little green stuffy center of the place, sitting on adjoining seats, were the two plainclothesmen and Mr. Calloway.

I've never known the place so silent; everybody was on tiptoe, and the plainclothesmen were staring at the crowd looking for Mr. Calloway, and Mr. Calloway sat on his usual seat staring out over the money-changing booths at the United States.

"It can't go on. It just can't," Lucia said.

But it did. It got more fantastic still. Somebody ought to write a play about it. We sat as close as we dared. We were afraid all the time we were going to laugh. The semi-setter scratched for fleas and Mr. Calloway watched the U.S.A. The two detectives watched the crowd, and the crowd watched the show with solemn satisfaction.

Then one of the detectives got up and went over to Mr. Calloway. That's the end, I thought. But it wasn't, it was the beginning. For some reason they had eliminated him from their list of suspects. I shall never know why.

The man said, "You speak English?"

"I *am* English," Mr. Calloway said.

Even that didn't tear it, and the strangest thing of all was the way Mr. Calloway came alive. I don't think anybody had spoken to him like that for weeks. The Mexicans were too respectful—he was a man with a million—and it had never occurred to Lucia and me to treat him casually like a human being; even in our eyes he had been magnified by the colossal theft and the world-wide pursuit.

He said, "This is rather a dreadful place, don't you think?"

"It is," the policeman said.

"I can't think what brings anybody across the bridge."

"Duty," the policeman said gloomily. "I suppose you are passing through."

"Yes," Mr. Calloway said.

"I'd have expected over here there'd have been—you know what I mean—life. You read things about Mexico."

"Oh, life," Mr. Calloway said. He spoke firmly and precisely, as if to a committee of shareholders. "That begins on the other side."

"You don't appreciate your own country until you leave it."

"That's very true," Mr. Calloway said. "Very true."

At first it was difficult not to laugh, and then after a while there didn't seem to be much to laugh at; an old man imagining all the fine things going on beyond the international bridge. I think he thought of the town opposite as a combination of London and Norfolk—theaters and cocktail bars, a little shooting and a walk round the field at evening with the dog—that miserable imitation of a setter—poking the ditches.

He'd never been across, he couldn't know that it was just the same thing over again—even the same layout; only the streets were paved and the hotels had ten more stories, and life was more expensive, and everything was a little bit cleaner. There wasn't anything Mr. Calloway would have called living—no galleries, no bookshops, just *Film Fun* and the local paper, and *Click* and *Focus* and the tabloids.

"Well," said Mr. Calloway, "I think I'll take a stroll before lunch. You need an appetite to swallow the food here. I generally go down and look at the bridge about now. Care to come too?"

The detective shook his head. "No," he said, "I'm on duty. I'm looking for a fellow."

And that, of course, gave *him* away. As far as Mr. Calloway could understand, there was only one "fellow" in the world anyone was looking for—his brain had eliminated friends who were seeking their friends, husbands who might be waiting for their wives, all objectives of any search but just the one. The power of elimination was what had made him a financier—he could forget the people behind the shares.

That was the last we saw of him for a while. We didn't see him going into the Botica Paris to get his aspirin, or walking back from the bridge with his dog. He simply disappeared, and when he disappeared, people began to talk, and the detectives heard the talk.

They looked silly enough, and they got busy after the very man they'd been sitting next to in the garden. Then they too disappeared. They, as well as Mr. Calloway, had gone to the state capital to see the Governor and the Chief of Police, and it must have been an amusing sight there too, as they bumped into Mr. Calloway and sat with him in the waiting rooms. I suspect Mr. Calloway was generally shown in first, for everyone knew he was worth a million. Only in Europe is it possible for a man to be a criminal as well as a rich man.

Anyway, after about a week the whole pack of them returned by the same train. Mr. Calloway traveled Pullman, and the two policemen traveled in the day coach. It was evident that they hadn't got their extradition order.

Lucia had left by that time. The car came and went across the bridge. I stood in Mexico and watched her get out at the United States Customs. She wasn't anything in particular but she looked beautiful at a distance as she gave me a wave out of the United States and got back into the car.

And suddenly I felt sympathy for Mr. Calloway, as if there were something over there which you couldn't find here, and turning round I saw him back on his old beat, with the dog at his heels.

I said "Good afternoon," as if it had been all along our habit to greet each other. He looked tired and ill and dusty, and I felt sorry for him—to think of the kind of victory he'd been winning, with so much expenditure of cash and care—the prize this dirty and dreary town, the booths of the money-changers, the awful little beauty parlors with their wicker chairs and sofas looking like the reception rooms of brothels, that hot and stuffy garden by the bandstand.

He replied gloomily, "Good morning," and the dog started to sniff at some ordure and he turned and kicked it with fury, with depression, with despair.

And at that moment a taxi with the two policemen in it passed us on its way to the bridge. They must have seen that kick; perhaps they were cleverer than I had given them credit for, perhaps they were just sentimental about animals, and thought they'd do a good deed, and the rest happened by accident. But the fact remains—those two pillars of the law set about the stealing of Mr. Calloway's dog.

He watched them go by. Then he said, "Why don't you go across?"

"It's cheaper here," I said.

"I mean just for an evening. Have a meal at that place we can see at

night in the sky. Go to the theater."

"There isn't a chance."

He said angrily, sucking his gold tooth, "Well, anyway, get away from here."

He stared down the hill and up the other side. He couldn't see that that street climbing up from the bridge contained only the same money-changers' booths as this one.

I said, "Why don't *you* go?"

He said evasively, "Oh—business."

I said, "It's only a question of money. You don't *have* to pass by the bridge."

"I don't talk Spanish."

"There isn't a soul here," I said, "who doesn't talk English."

He looked at me with surprise. "Is that so?" he said. "Is that so?"

It's as I have said; he'd never tried to talk to anyone, and they respected him too much to talk to him—he was worth a million. I don't know whether I'm glad or sorry that I told him that. If I hadn't, he might be there now, sitting by the bandstand having his shoes cleaned—alive and suffering.

Three days later his dog disappeared. I found him looking for it, calling it softly and shamefacedly between the palms of the garden. He looked embarrassed. He said in a low angry voice, "I *hate* that dog. The beastly mongrel," and called "Rover, Rover" in a voice which didn't carry five yards. He said, "I bred setters once. I'd have shot a dog like that."

It reminded him, I *was* right, of Norfolk, and he lived in the memory, and he hated it for its imperfection. He was a man without a family and without friends, and his only enemy was that dog. You couldn't call the law an enemy; you have to be intimate with an enemy.

Late that afternoon someone told him they'd seen the dog walking across the bridge. It wasn't true, of course, but we didn't know that then—they'd paid a Mexican five pesos to smuggle it across. So all that afternoon and the next Mr. Calloway sat in the garden having his shoes cleaned over and over again, and thinking how a dog could just walk across like that, and a human being, an immortal soul, was bound here in the awful routine of the little walk and the unspeakable meals and the aspirin at the *botica*.

That dog was seeing things he couldn't see—that hateful dog. It made him mad—I think literally mad. You must remember the man had been going on for months. He had a million and he was living on two pounds a week, with nothing to spend his money on.

He sat there and brooded on the hideous injustice of it. I think he'd have crossed over one day in any case, but the dog was the last straw.

Next day when he wasn't to be seen I guessed he'd gone across, and I went too. The American town is as small as the Mexican. I knew I couldn't miss him if he

was there, and I was still curious. A little sorry for him, but not much.

I caught sight of him first in the only drug store, having a Coca-Cola, and then once outside a cinema looking at the posters; he had dressed with extreme neatness, as if for a party, but there was no party.

On my third time round, I came on the detectives—they were having Coca-Colas in the drug store, and they must have missed Mr. Calloway by inches. I went in and sat down at the bar.

"Hello," I said, "you still about?" I suddenly felt anxious for Mr. Calloway. I didn't want them to meet.

One of them said, "Where's Calloway?"

"Oh," I said, "he's hanging on."

"But not his dog," he said, and laughed. The other looked a little shocked, he didn't like anyone to *talk* cynically about a dog. Then they got up—they had a car outside.

"Have another?" I said.

"No, thanks. We've got to keep moving."

The man bent close and confided to me, "Calloway's on this side."

"No!" I said.

"And his dog."

"He's looking for it," the other said.

"I'm damned if he is," I said, and again one of them looked a little shocked, as if I'd insulted the dog.

I don't think Mr. Calloway was looking for his dog, but his dog certainly found him. There was a sudden hilarious yapping from the car and out plunged the semi-setter and gamboled furiously down the street.

One of the detectives—the sentimental one—was into the car before we got to the door and was off after the dog. Near the bottom of the long road to the bridge was Mr. Calloway—I do believe he'd come down to look at the Mexican side when he found there was nothing but the drug store, the cinemas and the paper shops on the American.

He saw the dog coming and yelled at it to go home—"Home, home, home," as if they were in Norfolk—it took no notice at all, pelting toward him. Then he saw the police car coming and ran.

After that, everything happened too quickly, but I think the order of events was this—the dog started across the road right in front of the car, and Mr. Calloway yelled, at the dog or the car, I don't know which. Anyway, the detective swerved—he said later, weakly, at the inquiry, that he couldn't run over a dog, and down went Mr. Calloway, in a mess of broken glass and gold rims and silver hair, and blood.

The dog was on to him before any of us could reach him, licking and whimpering and licking. I saw Mr. Calloway put up his hand, and down it went across the dog's neck and the whimper rose to a stupid bark of triumph, but Mr. Calloway was dead—shock and a weak heart.

"Poor old geezer," the detective

said, "I bet he really loved that dog," and it's true that the attitude in which he lay looked more like a caress than a blow. I thought it was meant to be a blow, but the detective may have been right. It all seemed to me a little too touching to be true as the old crook lay there with his arm over the dog's neck, dead with his million between the money-changers' huts, but it's as well to be humble in the face of human nature.

He had come across the river for something, and it may, after all, have been the dog he was looking for. It sat there, baying its stupid and mongrel triumph across his body, like a piece of sentimental statuary. The nearest he could get to the fields, the ditches, the horizon of his home.

It was comic and it was pitiable; but it wasn't less comic because the man was dead. Death doesn't change comedy to tragedy, and if that last gesture was one of affection, I suppose it was only one more indication of a human being's capacity for self-deception, our baseless optimism that is so much more appalling than our despair.

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ROBERT EDMOND ALTER**

TITLE: ***Manhunt on Dead Yank Creek***

TYPE: Human Interest Crime-Detection

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *A beautifully written regional tale that gets to the golden secret, to the very heart of the Dead Yank swamp . . . listen to the sounds, picture the sights, feel the heartbeat—in a distinguished story.*

A FISH EAGLE COASTED DOWN FROM the turquoise, cleared a green belt of maiden cane, and made a tentative pass at something it saw in the water, then veered off sharply, leaving an expanding dimple on the dark surface. It winged high over Jube Wiggs and banked for the cypress barrier.

The old man squinted, raising his grizzled head to the sun, and followed the bird's flight. He knew he hadn't scared the eagle, because the swamp creatures had long ago accepted him in their brotherhood; some, like 'gators, with suspicion; some, like cottonmouths, with cold hate; and others, like jorees, with absent-minded friendliness; but most of them with plain indifference. "It's because I don't use no gun," as Jube often explained it, "less a panther comes at me."

No, he hadn't scared the eagle, but the strangers had—the two dozen men with rifles and shotguns, and the bloodhounds, and the police boat with its hoot-toot whistle. "Enough to spook anything or anybody," Jube allowed.

The men were after Chad Page; Jube knew that. He let the oars trail absently in the water, let the boat drift while he thought of the boy who was hiding or running somewhere in the vast boggy wilderness.

Chad was a professional 'gator-hunter. A dead 'gator didn't have much value, so those fellows went

after them alive, with shovels and ropes; and when the ropes failed it was Chad's job to get in the water and wrestle the 'gator ashore, barehand.

"And he was good at it too," the old man murmured. "He shore God was." A strong youth with arms on him like slick-peeled tree limbs . . . too strong. Two years before there had been a dance down at Crab's Corners, and Willy Fergus, drunk and mean, had gone after Chad with a knife. The Law said Chad shouldn't have hit Willy the way he did, between the eyes. The Law said Chad knew his fist could kill a bull, and Willy Fergus had been a far cry from a bull.

And now Chad had escaped from the state prison farm and had fled back to the 'gator-ground.

Jube stroked two-three times with the port oar to miss a tussock, and settled into thought again. He remembered Chad as a boy. Nice little fellow; always fooling around the edge of the swamp like he was looking for something, like the swamp was a golden secret and he just had to get to the heart of it.

"Wonder how far he'll git at now?" Jube asked the floating bonnets.

A shout startled the old man. "Hi, Jube! Over here!"

Five men were drifting in a skiff in the broad slough before the mouth of Dead Yank Creek. They were armed, and Jube recognized the widest of them to be Sheriff Parks. Jube brought his boat alongside and two of the men captured his gunwale to hold him fast.

Sheriff Parks was polishing his moon face with a bandanna.

"Afternoon, Jube. You seen airy of Chad Page hereabouts?"

Jube nodded to the others, though he didn't know any of them. They looked like they'd missed a night of sleep and the skeeters had been at them some.

"No, I ain't. Just seen your fellas about, is all." He glanced toward the mouth of the creek significantly. "You aiming to go up Dead Yank, Jim?" he asked.

Sheriff Parks seemed to think that question a poser. He squinted his eyes first at the breach in the cypress and cane, then at his men.

"I don't guess we will just yet, Jube," he said finally. "Chad cain't reach the creek less he has him a skiff, and so far ain't no boats bin reported stole."

"Well," one of his men muttered darkly, "I ain't fixing to go up that creek and lost *myself*. Fellas say they's cottonmouths bigger'n a man's neck in there. Say a man kin go stark mad in two hours does he git hisself caught in the pin-downs. And say your right foot kin be tromping ground like rock while your left is sinking in quicksand."

Sheriff Parks gave the dissenter a hard look. "Hank, see kin you give that jaw a rest, will you? I didn't say we was going at her, did I?" He looked at Jube again. "No,

I say Chad's still fooling around the scrub oak. It's them state boys want us to go charging clear through the swamp. But then them tie-wearing fellas don't know what you and me do about this here old slough, eh, Jube?"

The old man nodded and pushed off from the side of the sheriff's boat. He had no desire to extend the conversation because he knew they would leave him shortly, and then he'd be more lonely than ever.

He rowed around a bend of palmettos, then, alone and out of sight, drifted again. Bonnets whispered alongside the skiff, and a black-hooded joree went hop-skipping across the mud of the nearest bank, chirping away in its foolish fashion. Jube sagged his head and seemed to listen.

His boy, Billy had been killed in some far-off place called Tar-wa (Jube never could get the correct sound of it), and Milly Mae, his wife, had followed two years later —broken heart, it seemed. And that had been a long time ago. He was a lonely old man, tired, and sometimes it seemed pointless to go on. Once he'd trapped 'coon and otter for profit; now he did it disinterestedly, merely to sustain life.

Life . . . He looked overboard at the dark water and closed his eyes. He'd thought about *that* also, too many times maybe. Folks said it was wrong, said there was a Law against it—and that seemed funny when you stopped to think of it.

Well, he wasn't going to think of it, not now. Sheriff Parks had enough on his hands without Jube giving him more to worry after. He began stroking the water evenly, cutting the prow of the boat through the stillness. But a thought came to him and he paused, looking up at the cypress wall.

"Chad," he whispered, as though his voice and thought had the power of omnipresence, "you shore making a mistake. Man ain't born kin live in this swamp alone." He paused, then pushed the thought one step further. "Ain't born, I reckon, kin live *nowhere* alone."

Jube's home was a one-room house on a raft. He kept it moored in a secluded five-acre pool, a quiet walled-in hide-hole. Two acres of the pool were carpeted with water lettuce suggesting a clipped lawn; and above, beards of Spanish moss draped the cypresses, giving the impression of hoary giants waiting for eternity's end in mute apathy.

Once he had loved this place; once it had pulsated with laughter, guitar song, and love. Now it was like a damp tomb, and he felt already dead.

He secured the skiff to the stern of the houseboat and hauled himself wearily to the back porch, his open workshop. This is where he did the skinning. The pelts he hung on the rear wall of the shanty —'coon pelts on square racks and mink on narrow frames. Little Billy

used to stand right there to watch and learn the trade, a long time ago.

Jube shook his head and went on down the port walk to the door.

It was shadowy, still, and with a trace of mustiness inside his house. "Some day now," he murmured, "got to stir me up the interest to dust her a speck." But he knew he wouldn't. There didn't seem to be any reason for it.

He found a match, scraped it on the underside of the table, and held the flame to the lampwick. A warm yellow glow expanded, pushing the corners and angles of the room into soft brown shadows. And then Jube froze, statue-stiff, like a hound that's just poked its sensitive nose into a belt of scent. He was so attuned to swamp-sound that any foreign noise, even the merest suggestion of noise, was instantly captured by his ears. And now it was the sound of a stranger's breathing.

Jube turned and looked at Chad Page.

The boy was against the doorwall. He was black-wet from muddy shoes to beltline, and the prison shirt had been half clawed from his body, which showed that he'd had a time for himself out in the hurrah and titi and hoop bushes. He held a barlow knife in his right hand, out from the waist. The blade was slick-new and the lamplight ran along the edge like a thin line of pale blood.

"Wiggs," the boy said, and then he put conviction in his words by allowing pauses between them, "you come at me, and shore as mud's soft, *I'll cut you.* Ain't no reward on me—so no sense in gitting yourself pig-struck fer nothing."

Jube wasn't consciously afraid of death, but it had to be in his own way, in his own time. He didn't hanker to catch it from a knife.

"You think I'd *sell you,* boy?" he asked, and he put a hint of the hurt he felt into the question. "Wasn't it me learned you to find turtle eggs when you was but eight? Wasn't it me learned you how to bring down a curlew with a lightwood?"

Chad nodded, studying the old man with reflective eyes. "That's so. But there's I-don't-know-how-many men out there right now trying to cut acrost on me and run me down like a fox. You'll allow I got some cause to be leery?"

"Not from me you ain't." Jube spoke stiffly.

Chad lowered the knife and skirted his troubled eyes over the room. "I got in here just afore you come," he explained. "I was fixing to raid your cooler when I heered you oar-ing. I need rations, and need me a change of clothes. Hound dogs is after these I got."

"All right. See if that rolled-up something in the corner won't go for a shirt. I reckon you like gravy on your grits?"

It was a checkered flannel and a

tight fit, for the boy had a chest like the bull 'gators he'd once fought. But he grinned and said, "Feels good. It damn shore does!"

They sat across from each other, Chad shoveling food voraciously, not speaking until he was through. Jube picked at his grits. For a long time now he'd had little interest in eating.

"How old will you be now, Chad?"

"Twen'y-one come spring, reckon."

"And you aiming on spending the rest of your life alone in here?"

Chad looked at him. "Ain't aiming on spending it on no farm harrowing out 'bacca furrows."

"But they only give you one-to-five, less good behavior. Even at worst you'd only went for three more years."

"That's easy come for you to say, and *you* on the outside!"

Jube gave that some thought, decided there might be something in it.

"Didn't they treat you kind in there, Chad? Was the rations bad?"

"N-no, they treated me right, and the rations was prime."

"Well, then I don't see . . ."

Chad pushed up to his feet, his sudden show of agitation cutting Jube short. The boy took two-three aimless steps about the room, and finally flapped his hands at his sides in a gesture of helplessness.

"I could've done it," he said, "if it hadn't bin fer being alone." He came back to the table and looked at Jube. "I ain't got me no folks, Jube. My girl, she run off with a Yankee drummer last year—you heered about that? Well, I don't know kin I explain it to you so you'll see that a man locked up with a couple hundred other fellas is still alone. But that's how it was, Jube. It shore God was.

"Didn't have nobody could write me. Didn't have nobody would come see me on visit day. But what was worst was I didn't have me nobody to *come back to*. Didn't have nobody was waiting fer me. You follow along there? Seems like I was doing my time fer nothing, fer no purpose. And I got to thinking on her, and thinking, and come at last to figure that do I got to be alone, be better I'm really alone, and be where I belong—here on 'gator-ground. And I just pure-out run fer it."

Old Jube stared at his plate and thought about aloneness.

"Chad, you sorry about killing Willy Fergus?"

Chad straightened up, tilting his head and eyes to the cobwebby rafters. He took time before answering.

"Yes," he said finally, "I am. Sorry I done hit him so hard. But he was coming at me with that knife of his, and I got mad, and well—I was purely scared too, I ain't 'shamed to admit it, and I give Willy everything I could find in me right between the eyes." He

looked down at Jube again. "But I ain't a killer, Jube. You know I ain't that. I ain't mean."

Somewhere a night-running hound loosed a sad trombone bay.

Chad reached for his knife, listening. "They just ain't goan give up, be they? Listen here, old man, I need your help. Need me some of your rations and your skiff. Cain't git where I'm going withoutn it."

Jube watched the boy. "Where would that be, Chad?"

"Be dog if I see where that's any of your nevermind."

"Maybe not. But I reckon it ain't no great secret neither. You fixing fer Dead Yank."

There was a pause of stillness between them. And as it grew Jube felt uncomfortable in it and became defensive. "Well, doggit, if I had me to run and hide and wanted me to a place where maybe nobody would think to look, nor yet have the gumption *to* look, I'd properly give some thought to Dead Yank Creek."

Chad put the point of the knife on the table, pressing a quarter-inch dent in the soft wood. "Jube," he said quietly, "if I thought you might git 'em on me . . ."

"You'd what?" the old man cried angrily. "You just now done told me you ain't no killer. You done swore you ain't mean. So what would you be about to do to me? No call fer you to git bossified. I ain't aiming to tell 'em nothing. But I tell you something, Chaddy. You keep on thisaway, a-giving them cause to shag you with dogs and guns, and you shore God goan end up mean. You goan end up being a real killer, now I tell you!"

"Jube, you always bin good to me, and I respect you fer heaps. But if you done went to rooting around in your brainbox that I'm goan stand here and let you talk me back into that prison, you damn shore better fetch you another think! I plain ain't going."

The old man said nothing more. He sat pensively with his corncob pipe and watched Chad fill a gunny sack with rations. The boy found Jube's old .303 carbine and a box of cartridges, and said, "I'll fetch this along. I ain't fixing to git myself panther-et some night."

He returned to the table with sack, carbine, and shells.

"Wish they was a way I could square-up at you fer all this. Tell you what: that Dead Yank is pure un-played when it comes to hunting 'coon and otter. Bet a purty they be a gracious fortune in hides waiting up there right now. When I git to where I'm a-going I'll do you some trapping. Then maybe sometime we kin arrange to meet up and I'll give you them hides. How does that set?"

Jube nodded. "All right, Chad. That's pleasurable to me."

Chad held out his hand. "Jube, I'd admire to shake goodbye."

But Jube ignored the hand and stood up. "Don't reckon as how

we're ready to say goodbye just yet," he said.

"How's that?"

"I'm going with you. How you expect me to git my skiff back if you take her up there alone? I row you far's you want, then bring myself back. That way won't nobody see I'm missing my skiff and come to think you went and stole her to git up Dead Yank. You see?"

Chad saw, but he didn't seem to like the arrangement. "You'd go up Dead Yank with me?" he asked. "You know what all they say about that creek. You ain't afeered?"

"No, I ain't. Air you?"

The boy shrugged. "All right then, I reckon that's best."

"Reckon it be."

The night was moonbright and a-twitter with little cries, flurries, and flutterings. Above and beyond, the palmettos stood like a shaggy row of ebony silhouettes; and along the sandbanks, and in the maiden cane and pin-downs, little night-hunting and hunted creatures went scurrying and splashing; and once something large slid from a hummock and went *spang* in the water.

"'Gator," Chad muttered needlessly. He was sitting forward in the skiff with the carbine across his lap. Jube was standing aft, stobbing. They moved quietly, leaving only a small purling of water behind. A flock of night-feeding ducks paddled off indignantly at the boat's approach, and a moment later a chimp-faced owl squatting overhead in a tupelo tree asked them the inevitable question—hoo? hoo?

Chad watched the moony sky apprehensively, saying, "Reckon it ain't goan dew up at all." And fifteen minutes later he had cause for alarm. A skiff approached them, coming downstream on the far side of a tussock rise. They had a fire bucket going in the bow, and one of them stirred the embers with a lightwood torch and held the wad of frying pitch aloft, making an island of saffron light that fell on their heads and turned their erect gunbarrels into slim rods of gold.

"Hi! Where at y-all going?"

Jube felt a rope of sick fear twist a half hitch in his stomach. He didn't want them to try and take Chad—not when the boy was sitting there as dangerous as a stepped-on rattler with the carbine.

"Sheriff wanted us to go for a last turn about Backin Bay," Jube called with sudden inspiration. "You fellas going down fer the night?"

They were, and Jube claimed he'd be along presently. And then the skiffs were far apart and the little ball of light winked out. Chad chuckled and looked over his shoulder. "Bet foxhounds couldn't catch you fer trickiness, Jube."

The old man stobbed without a

word. No one had to tell him he had a trick or two up his sleeve.

The creek had a bad name, and it had a legend. Away back in history a hunted Yankee spy stole a skiff and fled up the twisted little waterway. The four Rebs that followed him lost their skiff, their guns, boots, and half their clothes. It took them a week to claw their way back to civilization, and they returned with haunted eyes and tall tales.

They told of man-eating cottonmouths, of skeeters bigger than pencils, of pin-down bushes that writhed like snakes, groping blindly through the mud for human prey, of morasses that would swallow boats, panthers as large as cattle, and of a bull 'gator that was the grandfather of all gators, with a mouth like a cave-opening and teeth like barlow knives. They never did find the Yank—"Gator-et" they said.

Bonnets rustled alongside, a frog burped barrump, and a distant wildcat yowled a dismal note. Jube grunted, easing the pole in his hand. The creek didn't seem so bad to him—it was like any other part of the swamp. The trouble with men, he decided, was too much imagination—that, and their roots that reached deep into the mud and stirred up superstition. A slough was a slough, and all of them were dangerous.

Chad lifted the damp sack from the fire bucket and set a torch ablaze. He studied the near sandbanks in the spreading circle of light. "Let's put in here, Jube," he called. "Ain't nobody goan come at us tonight."

Jube put the prow of the skiff ashore, and Chad slogged up the rise of land to a strip of clearing that fronted a thicket-wall of titi and tupelo. He squatted and felt the earth with his hand, looking for 'gator-ground. There was only one thing worse than cutting a 'gator off from water: that was cutting a bear off from the bush.

"No 'gators here," he called. "Let's camp."

They made a fire of lightwood, boiled some coffee, and settled back on their bedrolls with their pipes. Overhead the moon was gold-dollar bright and just as round.

"Jube, you reckon city folk never see a moon like that?"

"Reckon they don't, poor fellas."

Chad stretched and gave a long grunt of satisfaction. "Jube, this ain't so bad, eh? Wouldn't you call it pleasant-like?"

Jube nodded. "Nothing wrong with this here at all—fer *two* folks. But t'would be hell on ungreased wheels fer a man alone."

Chad made a face. "Let's not start that again. Let's just enjoy this some while we got her. I don't want to think of being alone."

"But you got to start thinking on her sometime, boy. It's coming fer you like a madman with an axe. Man weren't meant to live alone,

Chaddy. I know. I bin trying her fer fifteen year. *Everybody* got to need him *somebody*. God just shore enough made us thataway."

"Well, I ain't got me nobody!" the boy cried angrily. "That's bin my whole trouble. And ain't no sense in fussing about what you ain't got and cain't git. Now hush on it, will you?"

Jube looked at the boy. He started to say something, but didn't. His eyes went wide, then darted sideways to the carbine that lay nearby in the saw-grass. He reached for it slowly, picked it up, and eased a shell into the chamber. "Don't move, Chad," he said softly.

Chad stiffened. His eyelids narrowed to two fire-bright slits.

"Jube—Jube, you wouldn't . . . not *you*, Jube."

The old man brought the gun up, drawing a bead. "Don't breathe. They's a cottonmouth coiled on a stump right back your neck."

"Jube," the boy whispered, "you shore God better be telling the truth, 'cause it 'pears to me *you drawing aim on my head.*"

"Close your eyes, boy—here comes."

The shot echoed, rolled, caroming off the water. Chad lunged sideways, leaped to his feet, and spun about. In the dark grass a five-foot cottonmouth coiled, uncoiled, squirmed into a knot and thrashed, its crimson head shattered.

Chad came for Jube, clutching at his shoulders. "Jube," he cried. "I'm sorry. I'm before-God sorry. I pure-out thought you . . ."

"I know what you thought," the old man said gruffly."

Chad looked back at the trembling grass. He seemed embarrassed.

"I guess you the only true friend I ever had me," he murmured.

"Yes," Jube said, "a friend is a handy thing."

In the morning, as the young bull 'gators stood in the shallows and thundered defiance at the new day, Jube and Chad shoved off from the sandbank.

It was slow moving in the sluggish-flowing water, as they paddled and stobbed the skiff up the little black creek, with the tussocks and morasses under the bow and the jungle growth hanging so low it sometimes brushed its moss in their eyes.

Young 'gators watched them from the water with wary suspicion, sinking before the bow and rising again in the wake to hiss wetly after them. A poor-joe bird scolded them for no apparent reason, and two big round-butted bears working a bee tree paused to wrinkle their snouts, trying to determine the man-scent.

Maiden cane stood erect in the sandbanks like green troops awaiting inspection, and tall cypress fluttered as though waving, while the slim cabbage-palms nodded in unison. And the silence bulged like a mute monster staring stupidly at them from the damp wilderness.

Then there was a spreading bogland of petrified logs, soggy stumps, dead leaves, and stagnant water. And once there was a vast meadow of water lettuce, the green rosettes so thick on the surface the water was completely obscured. They had to wade then, waist-high, Chad pulling on the bow, Jube pushing the stern. Twice the old man felt something bump his legs, wrap around, and wiggle on. He didn't mind. He knew the moccasins wouldn't strike underwater.

In the early noon they paddled into a great shadow-still pool. A cool draft of air came from somewhere and passed across their sweat-damp heads, and flowed on to the thickets to stir the color splotches, the ivy trumpets, pink hurrahs, and white Cherokee roses. It was a lonely place, and lost.

"Jube," Chad whispered, "it's church-like, ain't it now? More'n that—like . . . what they call them big shebangs? Cathedrals?"

"Maybe so. But I ain't never seen me one."

Something long, glistening dark and scutted, broke the surface in a floating bed of golden-heart. Jube caught his breath and pointed. "Chaddy—looky there. Just you look at the size of that 'gator!"

It was a monster, and it skimmed across the water toward them with a lack of caution that was frightening. They saw its treading paws sag limp as the flat head raised slightly and it opened its great jaws. The two men stared down the dark tunnel of throat.

"Lord o' the jay-birds!" Chad breathed. "He'll go fer a grandpappy."

Jube felt uneasy. He didn't know why—he was used to 'gators, even big ones. But there was something about this bull that struck him as prophetic. "You don't think he could be . . ."

Chad picked that up instantly. "Gowan!" he sneered. " 'Gators don't live that long. I've seen 'em his big afore—never fought one, though. And don't know as I aim to. Let's paddle."

They left the pool, following a waterway that was muck-bordered and thick with stunted bays, paintbushes, and titi. But when Jube looked back he saw the great 'gator tailing in their wake. He said nothing about it to Chad.

Ain't goan git me superstitious on it, he said. *Got me other problems 'sides 'gators.*

Chad ceased paddling, straightened up to stare ahead at the wilderness. "Jube," he called. "Know what I'm fixing at? Goan work me clear up to the head of Dead Yank. Goan see me just what's there." Then he laughed boyishly and looked back at the old man.

"Cain't tell, Jube. Just might find that lost fountain of youth men bin a-looking fer."

"Might find the backend of the earth too."

"Ain't no telling. But I just got

it to do. You with me?"

Jube nodded soberly. "Reckon. Ain't got me nowhere particular to go at."

The boy grinned. "Be dog—we'll do her then!"

Abruptly the long sad bay of a hound reached them, hanging them in glassy suspension for a trembly moment. Then Chad cried, "That's too God-close fer comfort. They on me again, Jube!"

The old man nodded, staring. "Must have found our fire this morning," he said. "Chad, don't try to run 'em. Sheriff Parks will be coming with four-five men stroking to a skiff. He'll haul you—"

"Shush up! Hear? *They ain't taking me back.* I done fixed my mind on that point." Chad looked around desperately at the grim landscape. A myriad of maiden cane, roots, pin-downs, cypress knees, and log litter spread confusedly on either hand. He reached for the carbine. "I'll give 'em a walk they won't forgit," he said grimly.

Jube was nonplussed. He hadn't expected the Sheriff to catch them so soon—not before he'd really been given a chance to show Chad the mistake he was making. "Don't, Chad!" he shouted. "You'll kill yourself shore in them pin-downs."

Chad ignored him. He stepped from the bow onto a morass and sank to his knees. "Don't just sit there!" he shouted wildly. "Git going! Staying there is just giving them a jumping off place on me!"

He turned and started slogging toward the high ground. The hooped roots of the pin-downs tripped him over twice before he could cover fifteen feet.

Jube closed his eyes, feeling sick and helpless. Then he turned and looked at the water. The great 'gator was coasting in cautiously now, its bump-eyes wide and curious. A hound bayed, and another. Jube closed his eyes again.

He would never be certain just what happened next. One moment he was sitting limp in the stern of the skiff, the next he was toppling overboard.

He had time to shout just once—*"CHAD!"*—and then he was under and lost in the deep water.

In his mind—no, in his stomach, which sucked in with screaming fear—he felt the 'gator rush at him. Then something slammed along his twisting legs and he was caught in a thrash of whipped water. It was the teeth he felt the most, felt them clear through his quivering body, even though they hadn't yet touched him.

God, he said, *I shore tried to do it right.*

He came up on the portside of the skiff, gasping, dizzy, bleareyed. Far down the waterway a shout hollowed the air. Jube pawed at his eyes and saw one of the Sheriff's skiffs coming fast. But a hurricane of noise was breaking right behind him.

He looked and saw the bull 'ga-

tor rolling white-chest up through cane, roots, and shallows. The bull hissed, churning water, and flipped again. Chad swung into view, clinging leechlike to the sparkling corrugated back.

"Git out!" he screamed at Jube. "Git! *I cain't hold him!*"

Jube started wading, tripping, toward Chad and the 'gator. "Yes you kin, Chad!" he shouted. "You the best damn 'gator-fighter in the swamp! *You kin take him, boy!*"

The 'gator swiveled its body in a giant pivot, and the armored tail cut Jube's legs right out from under him. He went down, under . . . but he sloshed up and forward again, and lunged onto Chad's back. Together they grappled for the 'gator's vulnerable spot—the jaws. Their faces came together, wild-eyed, and Chad was swearing.

"You the most fool-stubborn old man I ever see! Why didn't you clear out when I told you? We cain't never walk this granpappy ashore! Now we got to hang to him like death till help come!"

Jube said nothing. He gritted his teeth and held on. He knew what he was doing.

Sheriff Parks, three-four of his men, Chad and Jube stood in a circle on a peaty morass and looked at the trussed and helpless 'gator.

"That's real 'gator-bawling," the sheriff crowed. "And not a mark on him! He'll go fer a pretty price, Chad. I'll see to it."

Chad grunted. "Jube kin hold the money fer me. Half it's hisn."

The old man looked at the Sheriff. "Jim. Chad here was on his way to give hisself up when I went and fell overboard. I'd be dead and 'gator-et this minute, Chad hadn't went to save me."

Parks rubbed at his mouth. "You went and fell overboard, eh, Jube? Careless of you, I'd say." Then he chuckled good-naturedly. "Shore, I knowed Chad was fixing to give hisself up all the while. I was just tagging along waiting fer him to git around to it, that's all."

Jube touched Chad's arm, turning him; the others, seeing the gesture, pulled back a bit.

"Chad, I'll be coming at you every visit day. That's a pure promise. And tell you what—I'll have Miss Molly, the schoolmarm, write me up a letter a week fer you. And —" he shrugged, smiled "—and when you done with your time, why, I'll still be here, boy. I'll be waiting right here where I always bin. And, Chad, you and me will go clear-gone to the head of Dead Yank. Just fer the hell on it. Just fer to see what's there."

The boy smiled, putting his hand on the old man's shoulder.

"Jube, how'd you knowed I'd come at you when you went and dunked your-fool-self overboard?"

The old man nodded a straight-face. "I knowed, Chad. I knowed you would. A friend is a handy thing."

EENY MEENY MURDER MO

by REX STOUT

(*continued from page 79*)

I cradled the receiver and rotated my chair. Wolfe pushed his phone back and said, "She is a confounded nuisance."

"Yes, sir."

"I suppose we'll have to humor her."

"Yes, sir. Or shoot her."

"Not a welcome option." He arose. "Gentlemen, I must ask you to excuse us. Come, Archie."

He headed for the hall and I got up and followed. Turning left, he pushed the door to the kitchen. Fritz was there at the big table, chopping an onion. The door swung shut.

Wolfe turned to face me. "Very well. You know her. You have seen her and talked with her. What about it?"

"I'd have to toss a coin. Several coins. You have seen Jett and talked with him. It could be that she merely wanted to find out if we already knew who it was, and if so she might have named the right one and she might not. Or it might have been a real squeal; she decided that Jett killed Bertha Aaron, and either she loves justice no matter what it costs her, or she was afraid Jett might break and her spot would be too hot for comfort. I prefer the latter. Or it wasn't Jett, it was Edey or Heydecker, and she is trying to ball it up—and she may be sore at Jett on account of the episode. If it backfires, if we already know it was Edey or Heydecker, what the hell. Telling me on the phone isn't swearing to it on the stand. She can deny she called me. Or she might—"

"That's enough for now. Have you a choice?"

"No, sir. I told you she's a gem."

He grunted. He reached for a piece of onion, put it in his mouth, and chewed. When it was down he asked Fritz, "Ebenezer?" and Fritz told him no, Elite. He turned to me: "In any case, she has ripped it open. Even if she is merely trying to muddle it we can't afford to assume that she hasn't communicated with him—or soon will."

"She couldn't unless he phoned her. They've been at the D.A.'s office all morning."

He nodded. "Then we'll tell him first. You'll have to recant."

"Right. Do we save anything?"

"I think not. The gist first and we'll see."

He made for the door. In the hall we heard a voice from the office, Edey's thin tenor, but it stopped as we appeared.

When Wolfe was settled in his chair he said, "Gentlemen, Mr. Goodwin and I have decided that you deserve candor. That was Mrs. Morton Sorell on the phone. What

she said persuaded us—"

"Did you say *Sorell?"* Heydecker demanded. He was gawking and so was Edey. Evidently Jett never gawked.

"I did. —Archie?"

I focused on Heydecker. "If she had called twenty seconds earlier," I told him, "I wouldn't have had to waste a lie. I did insist on knowing the nature of Bertha Aaron's case before I went to Mr. Wolfe, and she told me. She said she had accidentally seen a member of the firm in secret conference with Mrs. Morton Sorell, the firm's opponent in an important case. She said that after worrying about it for a week she had told him about it that afternoon, yesterday, and asked for an explanation, and he didn't have one, so she concluded he was a traitor. She said she was afraid to tell Mr. Otis because he had a weak heart and it might kill him, and she wouldn't tell another firm member because he might be a traitor too. So she had come to Nero Wolfe."

I had been wrong about Jett. Now he was gawking too. He found his tongue first: "This is incredible. I don't believe it!"

"Nor I," Heydecker said.

"Nor I," Edey said, his tenor a squeak.

"Do you expect us to believe," Heydecker demanded, "that Bertha Aaron would come to an outsider with a story that would gravely damage the firm if it became known?"

Wolfe cut in. "No more cross-examination, Mr. Heydecker. I indulged you before, but not now. If questions are to be asked I'll do the asking. As for Mr. Goodwin's bona fides, he has given a signed statement to the police, and he is not an ass. Also—"

"The police?" Edey squeaked.

"It's absolutely incredible," Jett declared.

Wolfe ignored them. "Also I allowed Mr. Otis to read a copy of the statement when he came here last night. He agreed not to divulge its contents before ten o'clock tomorrow morning, to give me till then to plan a course—a course based on the natural assumption that Miss Aaron was killed by the man she had accused of treachery—an assumption I share with the police. Evidently the police have preferred to reserve the statement, and so have I, but not now—since Mrs. Sorell has named the member of your firm she was seen with. On the phone just now. One of you."

"This isn't real," Edey squeaked. "This is a nightmare."

Heydecker sputtered, "Do you dare to suggest—"

"No, Mr. Heydecker." Wolfe flattened a palm on his desk. "I will not submit to questioning; I will choose the facts I'm willing to share. I suggest nothing; I am reporting. I neglected to say that Miss Aaron did not name the member of the firm she had seen with Mrs. Sorell. Now Mrs. Sorell has named

him, but I am not satisfied of her veracity. Mr. Goodwin saw her this morning and found her devious. I'm not going to tell you whom she named, and that will make the pressure on one of you almost unendurable."

The pressure wasn't exactly endurable for any of them. They were exchanging glances, and they weren't glances of sympathy and partnership. In a spot like that the idea I mentioned might be expected to work, but it didn't. Two of them were really suspicious of their partners and one was only pretending to be, but it would have taken a better man than me to pick him; better even than Wolfe, whose eyes, narrowed to slits, were taking them in.

He was going on: "The obvious assumption is that one of you followed Miss Aaron when she left your offices yesterday after she had challenged you, and when you saw her enter my house your alarm became acute. One of you sought a telephone and rang this number. In Mr. Goodwin's absence she answered the phone, and consented to admit you. If you can—"

"But it was pure chance that she was alone," Edey objected. The idea man.

"Pfui. If I'm not answering questions, Mr. Edey, neither am I debating trifles. With your trained minds that is no knot for you. Speaking again to one of you: if you could be identified by inquiry into your whereabouts and movements yesterday afternoon the police would have the job already done and you would be in custody. All that they have been told by you and by the entire personnel of your office is being checked by men well qualified for the task. But since they have reserved the information supplied by Mr. Goodwin, I doubt if they have asked you about Monday evening of last week. Eight days ago. Have they?"

"Why should they?" It was Jett.

"Because that was when one of you was seen by Miss Aaron in conference with Mrs. Sorell. I'm going to ask you now—but first I should tell you of an understanding I had with Mr. Otis last night. In exchange for information he furnished I agreed that in exposing the murderer I would minimize, as far as possible, the damage to the reputation of his firm. I will observe that agreement—so manifestly, for two of you, the sooner this is over the better. —Mr. Jett. How did you spend Monday evening, December 29th, from six o'clock to midnight?"

Jett's eyes were still deep-set, but they were no longer dreamy. They had been glued on Wolfe ever since I had recanted, and he hadn't moved a muscle. He said, "If this is straight, if all you've said is true, including the phone call from Mrs. Sorell, the damage to the firm is done and you can do nothing to minimize it. No one can."

"I can try. And I intend to."

"How?"

"By meeting contingencies as they arise."

Heydecker put in, "You say Mr. Otis knows all this? He was here last night?"

"Yes. I am not a parrot and you are not deaf.—Well, Mr. Jett? Monday evening of last week?"

"I was at a theater with a friend."

"The friend's name?"

"Miss Ann Paige."

"What theater?"

"The Drew. The play was *Practice Makes Perfect*. Miss Paige and I left the office together shortly before six and had dinner at Ruserman's. We were together continuously until after midnight."

"Thank you. Mr. Edey?"

"That was the Monday before New Year's," Edey said. "I got home before six o'clock and ate dinner there and was there all evening."

"Alone?"

"No. My son and his wife and two children spent the holiday week with us. They went to the opera with my wife and daughter, and I stayed home with the children."

"How old are the children?"

"Two and four."

"Where is your home?"

"An apartment. Park Avenue and 69th Street."

"Did you go out at all?"

"No."

"Thank you. Mr. Heydecker?"

"I was at the Manhattan Chess Club watching the tournament. Bobby Fischer won his adjourned game with Weinstein in fifty-eight moves. Larry Evans drew with Kalme, and Reshevsky drew with Mednis."

"Where is the Manhattan Chess Club?"

"West 65th Street."

"Did play start at six o'clock?"

"Certainly not. I was in court all day and had things to do at the office. My secretary and I had sandwiches at my desk."

"What time did you leave the office?"

"Around eight o'clock. My secretary would know."

"What time did you arrive at the chess club?"

"Fifteen or twenty minutes after I left the office." Heydecker suddenly moved and was on his feet. "This is ridiculous," he declared. "You may be on the square, Wolfe, I don't know. If you are God help us." He turned. "I'm going to see Otis. You coming, Frank?"

He was. The brilliant idea man, judging from his expression, had none at all. He pulled his feet back, moved his head slowly from side to side to tell hope goodbye, and arose. They didn't ask the 11% partner to join them, and apparently he wasn't going to, but as I was reaching for Edey's ulster on the hall rack here came Jett, and when I opened the door he was the first one out.

I stood on the stoop, getting a breath of air, and watched them heading for Ninth Avenue three abreast, a solid front of mutual trust and understanding, in a pig's eye.

In the office Wolfe was leaning back with his eyes closed. As I reached my desk the phone rang. It was Saul Panzer, to report that there had been no sign of Mrs. Sorell. I told him to hold the wire and relayed it to Wolfe, and asked if he wanted to put them on the alibis we had just collected. "Pfui," he said, and I told Saul to carry on.

I swiveled. "I was afraid," I said, "that you might be desperate enough to try it, checking their alibis. It's very interesting, the different ways there are of cracking a case. It depends on who you are. If you're just a top-flight detective, me for instance, all you can do is detect. You'd rather go after an alibi than eat. When you ask a man where he was at eleven minutes past eight you put it in your notebook and them wear out a pair of shoes looking for somebody who says he was somewhere else. But if you're a genius you don't give a damn about alibis. You ask him where he was only to keep the conversation going while you wait for something to click. You don't even listen—"

"Nonsense," he growled. "They have no alibis."

I nodded. "You didn't listen."

"I did listen. Their alibis are worthless. One with his fiancée, one watching a chess tournament, one at home with young children in bed asleep. Bah. I asked on the chance that one of them, possibly two, might be eliminated, but no. There are still three."

"Then genius is all that's left. Unless you have an idea for another card I could take to Mrs. Sorell. I wouldn't mind. I like the way she says *very*."

"No doubt. Could you do anything with her?"

"I could try. She might possibly make another decision—for instance, to sign a statement. Or if she has decided to hire you I could bring her, and you could have a go at her yourself. She has marvelous eyelashes."

He grunted. "It may come to that. We'll see after lunch. It may be that after they have talked with Mr. Otis—yes, Fritz??"

"Lunch is ready, sir."

I never got to check an alibi, but it was a close shave. Who made it close was Inspector Cramer.

Since Wolfe refuses to work either his brain or his tongue on business at table, and a murder case is business even when he has no client and no fee is in prospect, no progress was made during lunch, but when we returned to the office he buckled down and tried to think of something for me to do.

The trouble was, the problem

was too damn simple. We knew that one of three men had committed murder, and how and when. Okay, which one? Eeny meeny murder mo.

Even the why was plain enough: Mrs. Sorell had hooked him with an offer, either of a big slice of the thirty million she was after or of more personal favors.

Any approach you could think of was already cluttered with cops, except Mrs. Sorell, and even if I got to her again I had nothing to use for a pry. What it called for was a good stiff dose of genius, and apparently Wolfe's was taking the day off. Sitting there in the office after lunch I may have got a little too personal with him or he wouldn't have bellowed at me to go ahead and check their alibis.

"Glad to," I said, and went to the hall for my hat and coat, and saw visitors on the stoop, not strangers. I opened the door just as Cramer pushed the bell button, and inquired, "Have you an appointment?"

"I have in my pocket," he said, "a warrant for your arrest as a material witness. Also one for Wolfe. I warned you."

There were two ways of looking at it. One was that he didn't mean to shoot unless he had to. If he had really wanted to haul us in he would have sent a couple of dicks after us instead of coming himself with Sergeant Purley Stebbins. The other was that here was a good opportunity to teach Wolfe a lesson. A couple of the right kind of impolite remarks would have made Cramer sore enough to go ahead and serve the warrants, and spending several hours in custody, and possibly all night, would probably cure Wolfe of leaving neckties on his desk.

But I would have had to go along, which wouldn't have been fair, so I wheeled and marched to the office, relying on Purley to shut the door, and told Wolfe, "Cramer and Stebbins with warrants. An inspector to take you and a sergeant to take me, which is an honor."

He glared at me and then transferred it to them as they entered.

Cramer said, "I warned you last night," draped his coat on the arm of the red leather chair, and sat.

Wolfe snorted. "Tommyrot."

Cramer took papers from his pocket. "I'll serve these only if I have to. If I do I know what will happen: you'll refuse to talk and so will Goodwin, and you'll be out on bail as soon as Parker can swing it. But it will be on your record and that won't close it. Held as a material witness is one thing, and charged with interfering with the operation of justice is another. In the interest of justice we were withholding the contents of the statements you and Goodwin gave us, and you knew it, and you revealed them. To men suspected of murder. Frank Edey has admitted it. He phoned an Assistant D. A."

The brilliant idea man again.

"He's a jackass," Wolfe declared.

"Yeah. Since you told them in confidence."

"I did not. I asked for no pledges and got none. But I made it plain that if I put my finger on the murderer before you do I'll protect that law firm from injury as far as possible. If Mr. Edey is innocent it was to his interest not to have me interrupted by you. If he's guilty, all the worse."

"Who's your client? Otis?"

"I have no client. I am going to avenge an affront to my dignity and self-esteem. Your threat to charge me with interference with the operation of justice is puerile. I am not meddling in a matter that does not concern me. I cannot escape the ignominy of having my necktie presented in a courtroom as an exhibit of the prosecution; I may even have to suffer the indignity of being called to the stand to identify it; but I want the satisfaction of exposing the culprit who used it. In telling Mr. Otis and his partners what Miss Aaron said to Mr. Goodwin, in revealing the nature of the menace to their firm, I served my legitimate personal interest and I violated no law."

"You knew damn well we were withholding it!"

Wolfe's shoulders went up an eighth of an inch. "I am not bound to respect your tactics, either by statute or by custom. You and I are not lawyers; ask the District Attorney if a charge would hold." He upturned a palm. "Mr. Cramer. This is pointless. You have a warrant for my arrest as a material witness?"

"Yes. And one for Goodwin."

"But you don't serve them, for the reason you have given, so they are only cudgels for you to brandish. To what end? What do you want?"

A low growl escaped Sergeant Purley Stebbins, who had stayed on his feet behind Cramer's chair. There is one thing that would give Purley more pleasure than to take Wolfe or me in, and that would be to take both of us. Wolfe handcuffed to him and me cuffed to Wolfe would be perfect. The growl was for disappointment and I gave him a sympathetic grin as he went to a chair and sat.

"I want the truth," Cramer said.

"Pfui," Wolfe said.

Cramer nodded. "Phooey is right. If I take Goodwin's statement as it stands, if he put nothing in and left nothing out, one of those three men—Edey, Heydecker, Jett—one of them killed Bertha Aaron. I don't have to go into that. You agree?"

"Yes."

"But if a jury takes Goodwin's statement as it stands it would be impossible to get one of those men convicted. She got here at 5:20, and he was with her in this room until 5:39, when he went up to you in the plant rooms. It was 6:10 when

he returned and found the body. All right, now for them. If one of them had a talk with her yesterday afternoon, or if one of them left the office when she did, or just before or just after, we can't pin it down. We haven't so far and I doubt if we will. They have private offices; their secretaries are in other rooms. Naturally we're still checking on movements and phone calls and other details, but it comes down to this. —That list, Purley."

Stebbins got a paper from his pocket, handed it over, and Cramer studied it briefly. "They had a conference scheduled for 5:30 on some corporation case, no connection with Sorell. In Frank Edey's office. Edey was there when Jett came in a minute or two before 5:30. They were there together when Heydecker came at 5:45. Heydecker said he had gone out on an erraand which took longer than he expected. The three of them stayed there, discussing the case, until 6:35. So even if you erase Edey and Jett and take Heydecker, what have you got? Goodwin says he left her here, alive, at 5:39. They say Heydecker joined the conference at 5:45. That gives him six minutes after tailing her here to phone this number, come and be admitted by her, kill her, and get back to that office more than a mile away. Phooey. And one of them couldn't have come and killed her after the conference. On that I don't have to take what Goodwin says; he phoned in and reported it at 6:31, and the conference lasted to 6:35. How do you like it?"

Wolfe was scowling at him. "Not at all. What was Heydecker's errand?"

"He went to three theaters to buy tickets. You might think a man with his income would get them through a ticket broker, but he's close. We've checked that. They don't remember him at the theaters."

"Did neither Edey not Jett have the office at all between 4:30 and 5:30?"

"Not known. They say they didn't, and no one says they did, but it's open. What difference does it make, since even Heydecker is out?"

"Not much. And of course the assumption that one of them hired a thug to kill her isn't tenable."

"Certainly not. Here in your office with your necktie? Nuts. You can take your pick of three assumptions. One." Cramer stuck a finger up. "They're lying. That conference didn't start at 5:30 and/or Heydecker didn't join them at 5:45. Two." Another finger. "When Bertha Aaron said 'member of the firm' she merely meant one of the lawyers associated with the firm. There are nineteen of them. If Goodwin's statement is accurate I doubt it. Three." Another finger. "Goodwin's statement is a phony. She didn't say 'member of the firm.' God knows what she did say.

It may be *all* phony. I admit that can never be proved, since she's dead, and no matter what the facts turn out to be when we get them he can still claim that's what she said. Take your pick."

Wolfe grunted. "I reject the last. Granting that Mr. Goodwin is capable of so monstrous a hoax, I would have to be a party to it, since he reported to me on his conversation with Miss Aaron before she died—or while she died. I also reject the second. As you know, I talked with Mr. Otis last night. He was positive that she would not have used that phrase, 'member of the firm,' in any but its literal sense."

"Look, Wolfe." Cramer uncrossed his legs and put his feet flat. "You admit you want the glory of getting him before we do."

"Not the glory. The satisfaction."

"Okay. I understand that. I can imagine how you felt when you saw her lying there with your own necktie around her throat. I know how fast your mind works when it has to. It would take you two seconds to realize that Goodwin's report of what she had told him could never be checked. You wanted the satisfaction of getting him. It would take you maybe five minutes to think it over and tell Goodwin how to fake his report so we would spend a couple of days chasing around getting nowhere. With your damn ego that would seem to you perfectly all right. You wouldn't be obstructing justice; you would be bringing a murderer *to* justice. Remembering the stunts I have seen you pull, do you deny you would be capable of that?"

"No. Given sufficient impulse, no. But I didn't. Let me settle this. I am convinced that when Mr. Goodwin came to the plant rooms and told me what Miss Aaron had said to him he reported fully and accurately, and the statement he signed corresponds in every respect with what he told me. So if you came, armed with warrants, to challenge it, you're wasting your time and mine. —Archie, get Mr. Parker."

Since the number of Nathaniel Parker, Wolfe's lawyer, was one of those I knew best and I didn't have to consult the book, I swiveled and dialed. When I had him Wolfe got on his phone.

"Mr. Parker? Good afternoon. Mr. Cramer is here waving warrants at Mr. Goodwin and me . . . No. Material witnesses. He may or may not serve them. Please have your secretary ring my number every ten minutes. If Fritz tells you that we have gone with Mr. Cramer you will know what to do . . . Yes, of course. Thank you."

As he hung up, Cramer left his chair, spoke to Stebbins, got his coat from the chair arm, and tramped out, with Purley at his heels. I stepped to the hall to see that both of them were outside when the door shut.

When I returned, Wolfe was leaning back with his eyes closed, his fists on his chair arms, and his mouth working. When he does that with his lips, pushing them out and pulling them in, out and in, he is not to be interrupted, so I crossed to my desk and sat. That can last anywhere from two minutes to half an hour.

That time it wasn't much more than two minutes. He opened his eyes, straightened up, and growled, "Did he omit the fourth assumption deliberately? Has it occurred to him?"

"I doubt it. He was concentrating on us. But it soon will."

"It has occurred to you?"

"Sure. From that timetable it's obvious. When it does occur to him he'll probably mess it up. It's not the kind he's good at."

He nodded. "We must forestall him. Can you get her here?"

"I can try. I supposed that was what you were working at. I can make a stab at it on the phone, and if that doesn't work we can invent another card trick. When do you want her? Now?"

"No. I must have time to contrive a plan. What time is it?" He would have had to twist his neck to look up at the wall clock.

"Ten after three."

"Say six o'clock. We must also have all the others."

I dialed and asked for Mrs. Morton Sorell, and after a wait heard a voice I had heard before.

"Mrs. Sorell's apartment. Who is it, please?"

"This is Archie Goodwin, Mrs. Sorell. I'm calling from Nero Wolfe's office. A police inspector was here for a talk with Mr. Wolfe and just left. Before that three men you know were here—Edey and Heydecker and Jett. There have been some very interesting developments, and Mr. Wolfe would like to discuss them with you before he makes up his mind about something. You were asking this morning if he would work for you, and that's one possibility. Would six o'clock suit you?"

Silence. Then her voice: "What are the developments?"

"Mr. Wolfe would rather tell you himself. I'm sure you'll find them interesting."

"Why can't he come here?"

"Because as I told you, he never leaves his house on business."

"You do. You come. Come now."

"I would love to, but some other time. Mr. Wolfe wants to discuss it with you himself."

Silence. Then: "Will the policeman be there?"

"Certainly not."

Silence, then: "You say at six?"

"That's right."

"Very well. I'll come."

I hung up, turned, and told Wolfe, "All set. She wants me to come there but that will have to wait. You have less than three hours to cook up a charade, and for two of them you'll be up with the

orchids. Anything for me?"

"Get Mr. Otis," he muttered.

I felt then, and I still feel, that it was a waste of money to have Saul and Fred and Orrie there; and since we had no client it was Wolfe's money. When Saul phoned in at five o'clock I could just as well have told him to call it a day. I do not claim that I can handle five people all having a fit at once, even if one of them is seventy-five years old and another one is a woman; but there was no reason to suppose that more than one of them would really explode, and I could certainly handle him. But when Saul phoned I followed instructions, and there went sixty bucks.

They weren't visible when, at eight minutes after six, the bell rang and I went and opened the door to admit Rita Sorell, nor when I escorted her to the office, introduced her to Wolfe, and draped her fur coat, probably milky mink, over the back of the red leather chair. No one was visible but Wolfe. The fact that she gave Wolfe a smile and fluttered her long dark lashes at him didn't mean that she was a snob; I had got mine in the hall.

"I'm not in the habit," she told him, "of going to see men when they send for me. This is a new experience. Maybe that's why I came; I like new experiences. Mr. Goodwin said you wanted to discuss something?"

Wolfe nodded. "I do. Something private and personal. And since the discussion will be more productive if it is frank and unreserved, we should be alone. —If you please, Archie? No notes will be needed."

I objected. "Mrs. Sorell might want to ask me—"

"No. Leave us, please."

I went. Shutting the door as I entered the hall, I turned right, went and opened the door to the front room, entered, shut that door too, and glanced around.

All was in order. Lamont Otis was in the big chair by a window, the one Ann Paige had left by, and she was on one side of him and Edey on the other. Jett's chair was tilted back against the wall to the right. On the couch facing me was Heydecker, in between Fred Durkin and Orrie Cather. Saul Panzer stood in the center of the room. Their faces all came to me and Edey started to speak.

I cut him off. "If you talk," I said, "you won't hear, and even if you don't want to hear, others do. You can talk later. As Mr. Wolfe told you, a speaker behind the couch is wired to a mike in his office, and he is there talking with someone. Since you'll recognize her voice. I don't need to name her."

Saul, who had moved to the rear of the couch, flipped the switch and Wolfe's voice sounded: ". . . and she described her problem to Mr. Goodwin before he came up to me. She said that on Monday

evening of last week she saw a member of the firm in a booth in a lunchroom in secret conference with you; that she had concluded he was betraying the interests of one of the firm's clients to you, the client being your husband; that for reasons she thought cogent she would not tell another member or members of the firm; that she had finally, yesterday afternoon, told the one she was accusing and asked for an explanation, and got none; that she refused to name him until she had spoken with me; and that she had come to engage my services. Mr. Goodwin has of course reported this to the police."

MRS. SORELL: "She didn't name him?"

WOLFE: "No. As I said, Mrs. Sorell, this discussion should be frank and unreserved. I am not going to pretend that you have named him and are committed. You told Mr. Goodwin on the phone today that you were with a man in a booth in a lunchroom last Monday evening, and you said his name is Gregory Jett; but you could have been merely scattering dust."

Jett had caused a slight commotion by jerking forward in his tilted chair, but not enough to drown the voice, and a touch on his arm by me had stopped him.

MRS. SORELL: "What if I don't deny it and name Gregory?"

WOLFE: "I wouldn't advise you to. If in addition to scattering dust you were gratifying an animus you'll have to try again. It wasn't Mr. Jett. It was Mr. Heydecker."

Heydecker couldn't have caused any commotion even if he had wanted to, with Fred at one side of him and Orrie at the other. The only commotion came from Lamont Otis, who moved and made a choking noise.

MRS. SORELL: "That's interesting. Mr. Goodwin said I would find it interesting, and I do. So I sat in a booth with a man and didn't know who he was? Really, Mr. Wolfe!"

WOLFE: "No, madam. I assure you it won't do. I'll expound it. I assumed that one of three men—Edey, Heydecker, or Jett—had killed Bertha Aaron. In view of what she told Mr. Goodwin it was more than an assumption, it was a conclusion. But three hours ago I had to abandon it, when I learned that those three were in conference together in Mr. Edey's office at 5:45. It was 5:39 when Mr. Goodwin left Miss Aaron to come up to me. That they were lying, that they were in a joint conspiracy, was most unlikely, especially since others on the premises could probably impeach them. But though none of them could have killed her, one of them could have provoked her doom, wittingly or not. Of the three, only Mr. Heydecker was known to have left the offices around the same time as Miss Aaron—he had said on a personal errand, but his movements could not be checked. My new assumption,

not yet a conclusion, was that he had followed her to this address and seen her enter my house, had sought a phone and called you to warn you that your joint intrigue might soon be exposed, and then, in desperation, had scurried back to his office, arriving fifteen minutes late for the conference."

It was Edey's turn to make a commotion and he obliged. He left his chair, moved to the couch, and stood staring down at Heydecker.

WOLFE: "Now, however, that assumption is a conclusion, and I don't expect to abandon it. Mr. Heydecker does not believe, and neither do I, that on receiving his phone call you came here determined to murder. Indeed, you couldn't have, since you could have no expectation of finding her alone. Mr. Heydecker believes that you merely intended to salvage what you could—at best to prevent the disclosure, at worst to learn where you stood. You called this number and she answered and agreed to admit you and hear you. Mr. Heydecker believes that when you entered and found that she was alone and that she had not yet seen me, it was on sudden impulse that you seized the paperweight and struck her. He believes that when you saw her sink to the floor, unconscious, and then noticed the necktie on this desk, the impulse carried you on. He believes that you—"

MRS. SORELL: "How do you know what he believes?"

That would have been my cue if I were needed. I had been instructed to use my judgment. If Heydecker's reaction made it doubtful I was to get to the office with a signal before Wolfe had gone too far to hedge. It was no strain at all on my judgment. Heydecker was hunched forward, face covered by his hands.

WOLFE: "A good question. I am not in his skull. I should have said, he *says* he believes. You might have known, madam, that he couldn't possibly stand the pressure. Disclosure of his treachery to his firm will end his professional career, but concealment of guilty knowledge of a murder might have ended his life."

MRS. SORELL: "If he says he believes I killed that woman he's lying. He killed her. He's a rat and a liar. He phoned me twice yesterday, first to tell me that we had been seen in the lunchroom, to warn me, and again about an hour later to say that he had dealt with it, that our plan was safe. So he killed her. When Mr. Goodwin told me there had been developments I knew what it was—I knew he would lose his nerve, I knew he would lie. He's a rat. That's why I came. I admit I concealed guilty knowledge of a murder, and I know that was wrong, but it's not too late. Is it too late?"

WOLFE: "No. A purge can both clean your conscience and save your skin. What time did he phone you the second time?"

MRS. SORELL: "I don't know exactly. It was between five and six. Around half-past five."

WOLFE: "What was the plan he had made safe?"

MRS. SORELL: "Of course he has lied about that too. It was his plan. He came to me about a month ago and said he could give me information about my husband that I could use to make . . . that I could use to get my rights. He wanted—"

Heydecker jerked his head up and yapped, "That's a lie! I didn't go to her, she came to me!" That added to my knowledge of human nature. He hadn't uttered a peep when she accused him of murder.

MRS. SORELL: . . . he wanted me to agree to pay him a million dollars for it, but I couldn't because I didn't know how much I would get, and I finally said I would pay him one-tenth of what I got. That was that evening at the lunchroom."

WOLFE: "Has he given you the information?"

MRS. SORELL: "No. He wanted too much in advance. Of course that was the difficulty. We couldn't put it in writing and sign it."

WOLFE: "No, indeed. A signed document is of little value when neither party would dare to produce it. I presume you realize, Mrs. Sorell, that your purge will have to include your appearance on the stand at a murder trial. Are you prepared to testify under oath?"

MRS. SORELL: "I suppose I'll have to. I knew I would have to when I decided to come to see you."

WOLFE (in a new tone, the snap of a whip): "Then you're a dunce, madam."

Again that would have been my cue if I were needed. The whole point of the set-up—having the four members of the firm in the front room listening in—was to get Heydecker committed before witnesses. If his nerve had held it would have been risky for Wolfe to crack the whip. But Heydecker was done for.

MRS. SORELL: "Oh, no, Mr. Wolfe. I'm not a dunce."

WOLFE: "But you are. One detail alone would pin the murder on you. After you rang this number yesterday afternoon, and Miss Aaron answered, and you spoke with her, you got here as quickly as possible. Since you were not *then* contemplating murder, there was no reason for you to use caution. I don't know if you have a car and chauffeur, but even if you have, to send for it would have meant delay, and minutes were precious. There is no crosstown subway. Buses, one downtown and one crosstown, would have been far too slow. So unquestionably you took a cab. In spite of the traffic that would have been much faster than walking. The doorman at the Churchill probably summoned one for you, but even if he didn't it will be a simple matter to find it. I need only telephone Mr. Cramer, the police inspector who was here this after-

noon, and suggest that he locate the cab driver who picked you up at or near the Churchill yesterday afternoon and drove you to this address. In fact, that is what I intend to do, and that will be enough to sink you, madam."

Ann Paige stood up. She was in a fix. She wanted to go to Gregory Jett, where her eyes already were, but she didn't want to leave Lamont Otis, who was slumped in his chair. Luckily Jett saw her difficulty, went to her, and put an arm around her. It scored a point for romance that he could have a thought for personal matters at the very moment his firm was getting a clout on the jaw.

WOLFE: "I shall also suggest that he send a man here to take you in hand until the cab driver is found. If you ask why I don't proceed to do this, why I first announce it to you, I confess a weakness. I am savoring a satisfaction. I am getting even with you. Twenty-five hours ago, in this room, you subjected me to the severest humiliation I have suffered for many years. I will not say it gives me pleasure, but I confess it—"

There was a combination of sounds from the speaker behind the couch: a kind of cry or squeal, presumably from Mrs. Sorell, a sort of scrape or flutter, and what might have been a grunt from Wolfe.

I dived for the connecting door and went with it as I swung it open, and kept going; but two paces short of Wolfe's desk I halted to take in a sight I had never seen before and never expect to see again —Nero Wolfe with his arms tight around a beautiful young woman in his lap, pinning her arms, hugging her close. I stood paralyzed.

"Archie!" he roared. "Confound it, get her!"

I obeyed.

I would like to be able to report that Wolfe got somewhere with his effort to minimize the damage to the firm, but I have to be candid and accurate. He tried, but there wasn't much he could do, since Heydecker was the chief witness for the prosecution at the trial and was cross-examined for six hours. Of course that finished him professionally.

Wolfe had better luck with another effort: the D.A. finally conceded that I was competent to identify Exhibit C, a brown silk necktie with little yellow curlicues, and Wolfe wasn't called. Evidently the jury agreed with the D.A., since it only took them only three hours to bring in a verdict of guilty.

At that, the firm is still doing business at the old stand, and Lamont Otis still comes to the office five days a week. I hear that since Gregory Jett's marriage to Ann Paige he has quit being careless about the balance between income and outgo. I don't know if his 11% cut has been boosted. That's a confidential matter.

(Continued from other side)

For Only $1.00 You Get $24.50 Worth of Mysteries *At Once!*

IF YOU "eat up" good mysteries, here's a real FEAST for you! Now you can get SEVEN of Erle Stanley Gardner's top-flight Perry Mason baffiers – six full-length, hard-cover books PLUS another handsome library volume containing the 7th, and latest, Perry Mason adventure and TWO MORE top-notch mystery hits! These NINE exciting mystery stories are worth $24.50 in publishers' editions—but they're YOURS for only $1.00 on this sensational introductory offer!

We make this liberal offer to introduce you to the many advantages of membership in the Detective Book Club.

The Best NEW Mysteries — for LESS than 80¢ each!

Out of the 300 or more new detective books that come out every year, the Club selects the very "cream of the crop" – by outstanding authors like Erle Stanley Gardner, Agatha Christie, A. A. Fair, Mignon G. Eberhart, and John Creasey. All THESE and many other famous authors have had their books selected by the Club. Many are members themselves!

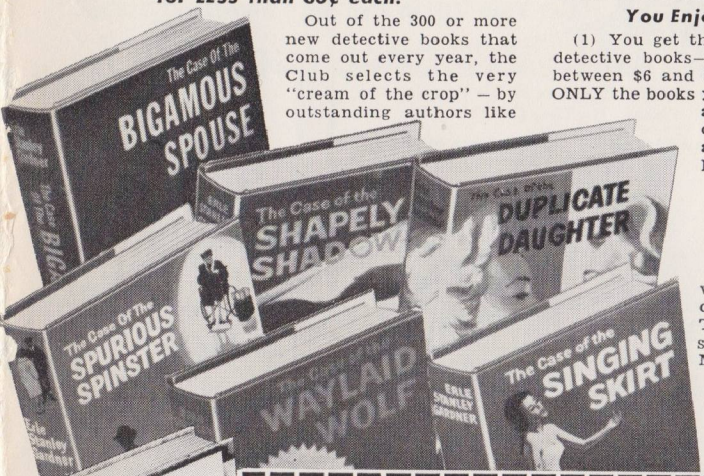
Club selections are ALL newly published books. As a member, you get THREE of them complete in one handsomely bound triple-volume (an $8.85 to $9.40 value in publishers' editions) for ONLY $2.29.

Take ONLY The Books You Want

You do NOT have to take a volume every month. You receive a free copy of the Club's "Preview" which will fully describe all coming selections and you may reject any volume before or after receiving it. NO money in advance; NO membership fees. You may cancel membership any time.

You Enjoy These Five Advantages

(1) You get the cream of the finest BRAND-NEW detective books—by the best authors. (2) You save between $6 and $7 off the usual cost. (3) You take ONLY the books you want. (4) The volumes are fresh and clean — delivered right to your door. (5) They are so well printed and bound that they grow into a library you'll be proud to own.



SEND NO MONEY

Mail Coupon for ALL SEVEN Volumes

Simply mail coupon promptly and we will send you at once the SEVEN complete Perry Mason stories—PLUS TWO MORE exciting mysteries described on other side. But don't delay. Mail the valuable coupon NOW to:

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
Roslyn, L.I., New York

MAIL THIS POSTCARD NOW FOR YOUR NINE MYSTERIES

•

NO POSTAGE NEEDED

SEND NO MONEY – JUST MAIL COUPON

79-237

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
Roslyn, L.I., New York

YY

Please enroll me as a member and send me the SIX full-size, hard-bound editions of Perry Mason thrillers, PLUS the brand-new 3-in-One-volume Club selection containing my SEVENTH "Perry Mason" and 2 other great mystery stories. I may keep all SEVEN books for only $1.00 (plus a few cents mailing charge) on this sensational introductory offer. If not completely satisfied after one week's examination. I may return all the books and owe nothing.

I am not obligated to take any specific number of books, and I am to receive advance "Previews" of all future selections. Also, I may reject any volume before or after I receive it, and I may cancel my membership whenever I wish. I need send no money now, but for each future Club triple-volume I keep I will send you the low price of $2.29 (plus a few cents mailing charge) as complete payment within a week. *(Books shipped in U.S.A. only.)*

Mr.
Mrs. } .....
Miss

(PLEASE PRINT PLAINLY)

Address.....

City.....Zone.....State.....

Attention
MYSTERY FANS!

NOW FOR ONLY $1.00 GET THESE 7 Perry Mason MYSTERIES by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

TO NEW MEMBERS

World's No. 1 Mystery Writer

Get SIX in These Full-Size Individual Books!
Get Your 7th in This Big "3-in-One" Volume!

Follow PERRY MASON As He Tackles These Thrilling Cases

1 The Case of the BIGAMOUS SPOUSE
Stunning Gwynn Elston begs Perry to help her. Then SHE's arrested for *First Degree MURDER!*

2 The Case of the SPURIOUS SPINSTER
Two spinsters disappear. Perry's GOT to find one of them — before the *other* one gets killed!

3 The Case of the SHAPELY SHADOW
The judge wants a mistrial. But Perry DOESN'T — even though it would SAVE his client!

4 The Case of the DUPLICATE DAUGHTER
Perry's star witness *refuses to talk.* But the *D.A.'s* star witness will HAVE to! It's Perry!

5 The Case of the WAYLAID WOLF
Arlene Ferris insists she didn't kill "Wolf" Lamont. But the evidence says she's going to prison — or *die!*

6 The Case of the SINGING SKIRT
A gambling hostess gets Perry into real hot water — accused as *an accessory to MURDER!*

ALL FULL-SIZE FULL-LENGTH HARD-COVER BOOKS

Perry's Latest!

The Case of the RELUCTANT MODEL
by Erle Stanley Gardner
Is the rich playboy's masterpiece a fraud? The ONE person who *knows* gets shot full of holes — and Perry has to save a gorgeous model from death!

Plus

TWO MORE Top-Flight Mystery Thrillers!

CERTAIN SLEEP
by Helen Reilly
Did death come *accidentally* to the beautiful heiress? Everything says "Yes"—except for *one little detail!*

THE EYE OF THE NEEDLE
by Thomas Walsh
Father McDonald is SURE his brother didn't kill his wife. But only a real JOLT can solve *this* case!

SEE OTHER SIDE

Postage Will be Paid by Addressee

No Postage Stamp Necessary If Mailed in the United States

BUSINESS REPLY MAIL

FIRST CLASS PERMIT No. 47 — ROSLYN, N. Y.

The Detective Book Club
Roslyn, L. I.
New York