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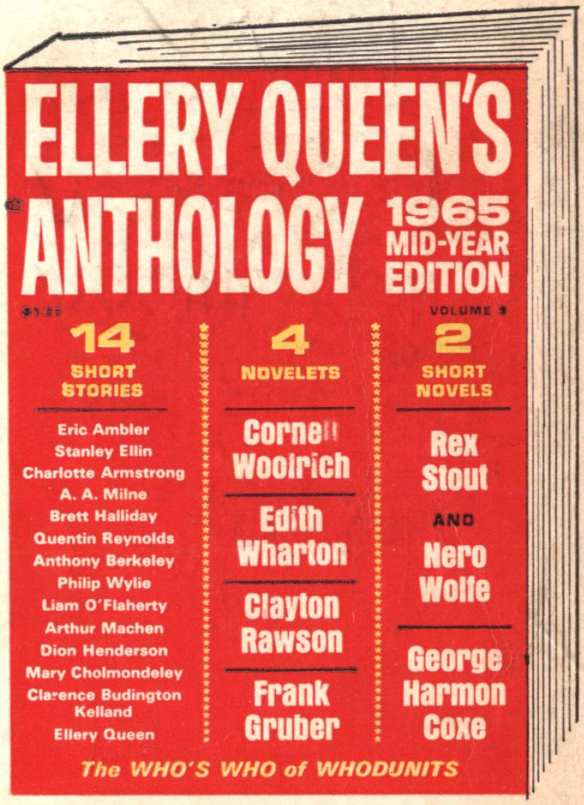

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THE ETERNAL CHASE

by ANTHONY GILBERT

I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO. I DON'T know, and there's no one to ask. They say. lightning never strikes twice in the same place, but how can you be sure? How can you be *sure?*

When I heard that The Dingle House had been rented by a widow with a little girl I was glad, because I thought now I should have someone to play with. Ours is an old household, just Grandmother and Aunt Agatha, with Uncle Ned coming down from Friday to Monday. And even he's pretty old—about 30. I share a governess with my three sisters, but they're all older and they think I'm silly.

So I waited eagerly for Grandmother to call on Mrs. Craddock. Until she did, of course, I couldn't even ask the little girl to tea. And I expected so much of the meeting.

But that, of course, was before I met Harriet.

In fact, Grandmother never did call at The Dingle House and my first meetings with Harriet were accidental. One afternoon Maryanne —she had been my nurse and had stayed on after I was nine and didn't really need a nurse any more—sent me to the mail box with a letter she'd forgotten to give to the postman. Coming back, I saw two strangers approaching. In Hilton Abbas you know everyone whether your grandmother calls on them or not, so these had to be the mysterious Mrs. Craddock and her daughter.

It was Harriet I looked at first—and had a shock. She was shorter than I, and as elegant as her mother; they both wore clothes you wouldn't see at The Dower House even on one of Grandmother's "At Home" days; and she was striking enough to hold anyone's attention. Her skin had the soft gold of an apricot, and

she had huge brown eyes and long raying lashes.

But at the very first glance I knew she would never be my playmate. Because, though she was two months younger, she wasn't a child. She was like a small adult; even her movements were smooth and controlled. I knew she would never bump into things or break them as I am always doing. Still, as we drew close I smiled at her—to show that if Grandmother hadn't called it had nothing to do with me.

And she looked straight through me. I actually felt as though I were a ghost. In mortification, I looked at Mrs. Craddock—and got my second shock. I had heard Uncle Ned talk about the Jersey Lily, how people jumped on park benches and crowded the windows just to see her go by. The Immortal Beauty, he called her.

Well, Margaret Craddock was the same. When she caught my eye she smiled, and I just stood and gaped. It was as if someone had switched on the sun.

She didn't speak—she knew the rules of good society as well as I—and the next minute I had gone past, but not so far that I didn't hear Harriet say, "There was no need to take any notice. We don't know her."

And Mrs. Craddock's voice, as lovely as the rest of her, floated back. "I wish we did, Harriet. For your sake, I wish we did."

"I met Mrs. Craddock and her daughter," I told Maryanne when I got back. "Why won't Grandmother call on them?"

"Because!" said Maryanne, as she always did when she didn't know the answer. But later I heard her say to Jessie, the parlormaid, "But who was Mr. C? That's what I'd like to know."

I leaned over the banisters. "He's dead," I called. I supposed he'd been a very wicked man, and it was a case of touching pitch and being defiled. Only no one could really think of Mrs. Craddock as pitch.

Still Grandmother didn't pay the call, and about a month went by before I saw the Craddocks again. Maryanne had taken me to buy a pair of gloves at Robinson's—Mr. Robinson had the only draper's shop in Hilton Abbas. He used to stand in the doorway wearing a morning coat and welcoming important customers; his two daughters, Lucy and Elsie, served in the shop.

We had bought my gloves and Maryanne was whispering with Lucy at the far end of the shop when Mrs. Craddock and Harriet came in. Mrs. Craddock asked for a muff for her little girl. We all wore muffs, mostly of white rabbit fur with little black "tails," strung round our necks with a silk cord.

Elsie said they were out of white muffs, but she showed Mrs. Craddock a very pretty brown one. More serviceable than the white, Elsie said.

Harriet immediately flew into a tantrum. "I won't have a brown one," she screamed. "A horrid dirty color." And she flounced across the shop to where I was looking at some little brooches. There was one shaped like a cat that I thought very pretty.

"They're trash," said Harriet in a scornful voice. In a second she had gone back to her grown-up way of speaking. She picked up a little locket and threw that down, too. "It's not even real," she scoffed.

She was wearing a very pretty locket herself and she began to dangle it before my eyes. She must have accidentally touched a spring in it, because suddenly the chain parted and the locket fell to the ground. I stooped to pick it up. It had a little black band with three pearls in it on one side and initials—*H.W.*—on the other.

"Did it belong to your grandmother?" I said. I had one for Sundays that had been my grandmother's.

"Of course not," said Harriet, bending her head so that I could refasten the chain. "Don't pull my hair. This was given me when I was six years old."

"But it says *H.W.*," I insisted. "Your initials are *H.C.*"

"That's because my father went away," she said. I knew she meant he had died, but nobody in Hilton Abbas ever died; they passed over or passed on or were gathered by the Grim Reaper, but they all meant the same thing. "Before that I was Harriet Winter and we had a house by the sea and my grandmother had a bigger house than yours and her own carriage. I had an aunt, too," she wound up. "Aunt Grace."

"I will take the brown muff," we heard Mrs. Craddock say.

Harriet looked over her shoulder and laughed. "You will look silly with a muff that small," she said. "If you give it to me I shall never use it. I shall throw it out of the window." And she stamped her little foot.

While Elsie was packaging the muff, Mrs. Craddock turned round and said, "You are the little girl from The Dower House, aren't you?"

Maryanne must have heard her; she was buying a pair of corsets in whispers. Although everyone knew we wore underclothes it was thought more polite to pretend they didn't exist.

"Now, Miss Vicky, I've told you, don't bother people," she said. She put out her hand and I went up reluctantly and took it. Mrs. Craddock took her parcel and went out, followed by Harriet.

"She's nothing but a *baby*," I heard Harriet say scornfully. "She liked the little cat brooch."

"I know someone who needs a dose of syrup of figs," said Maryanne as we walked home. "The little lady!"

"Maryanne," I asked—I didn't really want to confide in her, but she

was the only one I had, "if my father died would I have to change my name?"

"Whyever?" Maryanne exclaimed. "The funny things you say, Vicky. What put that idea into your head?"

"Harriet Craddock used to be Harriet Winter until her father passed on," I said. "She lived in a house by the sea, and she has a grandmother, too, and an aunt called Grace."

There was a minute's silence. Then Maryanne said, in a voice I didn't know, "Is that what she told you? Well, fancy me not thinking of it!"

"Not thinking of what?" I pleaded.

She gave my hand a tug and began to hurry us home. "You know what your Grandmother says about repeating gossip," she warned me. "It's vulgar."

There were visitors to lunch, so I had mine in the old nursery that was now the schoolroom. I was never allowed to eat in the kitchen, which I should have liked much better. Afterward, I took my book and went into the garden. The book was dull, and I hoped Uncle Ned would bring me a new one from London, where he worked during the week.

Presently I thought I would try and find a frog in the orchard, but there weren't any, so I decided to ask Gorman, our cook, for a glass of water; even if I couldn't catch a frog I could paint a picture of one.

I skirted round the house, but when I passed the kitchen window I saw Gorman and Maryanne and Jessie and Jessie's sister, Louisa, who was the housemaid, all gathered round the table, with their heads together.

"It's as true as I stand here," said Maryanne. "She couldn't make up a story like that!"

"To think of her coming here and expecting decent people to call on her!" marveled Jessie.

"I think it's lovely," said Louisa. "A real murderer."

"She isn't," said Gorman in her flat Scottish voice. "The court said not. And the poor thing has to live somewhere."

"It's no wonder the little girl's a Tartar," contributed Maryanne. "That's what I can't forgive her, Sarah. (I'd never known Gorman's name was Sarah—I'd never thought of her as having any other name). Letting Harriet be mixed up in it."

"She *was* mixed up in it," asserted Gorman. "Well, it was her father who was poisoned."

I crouched under the sill, shaking with excitement.

"It's a wonder I didn't think of it," Maryanne mused. "Her name being Harriet, I mean—and the pictures in the paper."

Jessie said, "The paper. Let's see, it was four months ago, wasn't it? Has Mr. Coutts called lately, Cook?"

Old newspapers at The Dower House were always stored in the

cellar. Every few months Mr. Coutts called for them and bought them by weight for use in his shop, and Gorman gave the money to save little Chinese girl babies who would otherwise be allowed to die.

I heard the cellar door open, so I knew Jessie was going down to look. I raised myself slightly, but I believe if I had sat on the sill none of them would have noticed me. They were too much engrossed.

When Jessie came back I heard the rustle of papers and after a longish time Louisa said, "Here we are! Here's a picture of Harriet Winter in the box."

I couldn't think what box she meant. I wondered if it could be a coffin, only it was Mr. Winter who was dead, not Harriet. They were all so busy they didn't hear Uncle Ned come in. It was earlier than usual for him and he came straight to the kitchen. He was the only member of the household who would have dared appear in the middle of an afternoon, but they would have done anything for him. It wasn't just that he was so good-looking with his frank, blue eyes and little golden mustache; he was always the same, whatever happened, and hardly anyone is like that.

"Am I interrupting a study group?" I heard him say, and, then, "What a lovely face! I seem to have seen it—of course. But why are you digging up the Winter case? It's closed for good."

It was Maryanne who told him. "It's the new lady at The Dingle House," she said. "Her little girl spoke to Miss Vicky in Robinson's this morning."

When Uncle Ned spoke again I hardly recognized his voice. "So here we go," he said. "The eternal chase. I suppose no one will ever let her forget. Where is she, by the way? Victoria, I mean?"

"In the garden," said Maryanne.

I slipped from under the sill and crawled round the corner of the house. Then I raced down to the orchard and opened my book, waiting for his step on the path.

"Enjoying yourself?" said Uncle Ned. "Since when do you read a book upside down?"

"Did you bring me another?" I asked. "I've read this one."

"How long have you been here?" said Uncle Ned. "Now, Vicky, no lies."

"I didn't mean to listen," I burst out, wondering how Harriet would have coped with the situation. "I went to ask for some water and they were talking, and I heard Harriet's name—"

"And what did you make of it?" my uncle asked.

"That—that Mrs. Craddock poisoned her husband," I faltered.

"No. That Mrs. Craddock was cleared by a jury of poisoning her husband—cleared and sent out to be free."

"If she didn't do it," I said, "why did she have to change her name?"

"Because it's not enough to be innocent—everyone has to believe in your innocence. Do you understand?"

I nodded. "I think so. Last Christmas Aunt Agatha said I had broken the little green vase in the drawing room. And I hadn't. It must have been the wind. But she didn't believe me."

I remembered my dismay at the discovery that you could tell the truth but not be believed because you couldn't prove it. No one but myself knew I hadn't done it—and God, I amended silently. Sometimes I wondered why He didn't speak up for all the people in trouble. But that would mean perfect justice in this world, and what's a heaven for?

"Is it like that for Mrs. Craddock?" I asked.

Uncle Ned nodded. "Yes, Vicky," he said. "It's like that."

When I was crossing the hall that evening, I saw Aunt Agatha pasting long strips of newsprint onto sheets of brown paper. I didn't need to be told it was the story of Mrs. Craddock's trial. Aunt Agatha is like the beasts in the Revelations that had eyes before and behind; she couldn't have seen me, yet she called out, "I've told you before, Victoria (a sign of deep displeasure this) it's vulgar to pry."

I hurried up to bed, resolved that by hook or crook I would get hold of those sheets of brown paper and read the whole story for myself.

I had to wait more than a week. Uncle Ned had gone back to London and I was practically a prisoner in my own house. I wasn't even allowed to go to the mail box alone.

Then one afternoon the hired carriage came round to take Grandmother and Aunt Agatha calling. I heard her say they might be a little late getting back. I supposed they thought it their duty to tell everyone about Mrs. Craddock.

By good luck (for me) Maryanne had a toothache and had to go to have a tooth pulled, Jessie and Louisa (sisters) had their half day together, and only Gorman was left in the house. I was told not to be a nuisance, but to play quietly in the garden.

As soon as I was sure the coast was clear I crept into the study. I was sure the papers would be in Uncle Ned's Wellington chest. This was locked, but I found the keys in a drawer of his desk, and there they were, pages and pages of small print, with pictures of Mrs. Craddock (whom I must learn to call Mrs. Winter) and Harriet and Mr. Winter, referred to as "the deceased."

I snatched up the bundle and fled to the attic where I knew no one would follow me. Past the roll of oilcloth where I used to hide, and the dressmaker's dummy that used to frighten me out of my wits, I

flung myself on the Victorian love seat, with its padding bursting through the fading rose brocade, and started to read.

Some of the wording puzzled me and I had to go back several times to understand certain points; but this was the story I pieced together.

About ten years earlier, Margaret Craddock, then aged 18, married Charles Winter, who was a good deal older; they had one child, Harriet, whom her mother idolized, said Mr. Paull, who was someone called Counsel for the Prosecution, at her husband's expense.

About a month before his death Mr. Winter was offered and accepted a position abroad, where a child could not be taken because of the climate. He proposed to leave Harriet with his mother and his unmarried sister, Grace. Mrs. Winter said nothing should separate her from her child. Harriet created a scene, as Maryanne would have said, declaring that if her mother went away she would drown herself. It was unfortunate, said Mr. Paull, that so much attention was given to the outbreaks of a spoiled child.

Neither side would yield. Mrs. Winter said that if her husband insisted on going overseas she would remain behind. This was the position when, about a week before his untimely death, Mr. Winter fell ill with a sort of fever. It was not denied, said Mr. Paull, that his wife nursed him with exemplary care and patience, though she refused to allow the little girl to stay with her grandmother and Aunt Grace at the Big House.

There was only one servant in the Winter house, the other having recently given notice and not been replaced, since Mr. Winter intended to close his establishment. Therefore, Mrs. Winter cooked most of the food as well as attended the sick man in the bedroom. The doctor (who also gave evidence) said the fever was running its normal course, and there was no reason to anticipate anything but a happy issue of the illness. Mr. Winter still declared his intention of closing the house and taking up his appointment abroad, and he still insisted that his wife should accompany him.

On the fatal afternoon the servant had gone out to visit her parents and, a fine morning having turned to clouds of rain, the child, Harriet, played on the square landing outside the sick-room. She was giving a doll's tea party, and this fact, irrelevant though it might sound, would be shown to be of the greatest significance.

At about four o'clock Mrs. Winter told Harriet she was going downstairs to prepare tea.

"Sit with your father until I come back," she said. "If he should ask for anything, don't cross him, as he is still very ill."

This was in direct opposition to

the doctor's opinion that he was by then well on the road to recovery.

About fifteen minutes later, Mrs. Winter returned with the tea tray, and Harriet went back to her own tea party. Almost immediately, strange sounds were heard from the sick-room, groans and the noise of vomiting. Harriet remained where she was until her mother came to the door to say, "Your father has taken a turn for the worse. We must have Dr. Blair, but who is there to fetch him? Alice has gone out, and I do not like to leave you alone with him when he is so ill."

Harriet said, "I could go for the doctor," and although Mrs. Winter did not like the idea of a little girl going out alone in such weather she felt she had no choice. So she gave Harriet a note, and a little later the child was seen by her Aunt Grace, who was driving home in the family carriage.

The aunt stopped and got out to know why Harriet was wandering about alone. Harriet, who had lost her way, explained about the sudden change, and Miss Winter drove to the doctor's and accompanied both him and the child back to her brother's house.

Mrs. Winter opened the door and said, "Oh, Doctor, come at once, he seems to be sinking fast. I can't think what can have caused the change—it can't be anything he ate, since he's had nothing I haven't prepared myself."

She led the way upstairs, where the door stood open. When Mr. Winter saw his sister he said in a weak voice, "Grace, I have been poisoned."

Miss Winter wanted to stay, but the doctor turned her and Harriet out of the room while he made his examination. It told against Mrs. Winter that she had kept none of the vomited matter. Later, Grace Winter was allowed to come back and she sat by the bedside, holding her brother's hand, and asking him, "Henry, who has done this?" But he was too far gone to speak to her.

Later still, Miss Winter went home with a furious and reluctant Harriet in tow, Mrs. Winter having promised to come and fetch her first thing the next morning. The doctor stayed on at the house, and about 4:00 a.m. Henry Winter died, having drifted into a coma from which he never recovered.

The doctor, in the light of what the dead man had said, declared he could not issue a death certificate until an autopsy had been performed (I wasn't sure what this meant). Mrs. Winter wasn't allowed to go back and get Harriet as she had promised, and she sent the servant Alice with a note. There was no telephone in the house; my grandmother does not have one either, saying she had no intention of being at the beck and call of an "instrument."

Presently the police called at the

Big House and asked to see Harriet. She seemed quite composed, asking, "Is he dead? Was it poison? Could it have been something in the milk?"

The police said that so far as they knew he had had no milk and then Harriet told her story. After her mother had gone downstairs her father said, "I am very thirsty. Can you give me something to drink?"

The water carafe had been taken downstairs by Mrs. Winter to be refilled from the jug of boiled water in the kitchen. There had been a recent typhoid epidemic and all drinking water had to be boiled; so Harriet could not fill a glass from the small sink near the landing. She said she had some milk for her tea party and asked if that would do.

Her father said, "I suppose so." So Harriet poured the milk into a glass and then he said, "Give me my bottle of tablets from the medicine chest." He took one—Harriet was sure it was only one—and it made the milk fizz a little.

He handed back the glass saying, "Do not tell your mother of this—she does not like me to have tablets." And he added half to himself, "Sometimes I think she would be glad if I were dead."

The police asked Harriet, "Why did you say nothing of this before?"

Harriet said, "Because my father told me not to."

"When did you tell your mother?"

"I didn't tell her. I didn't see her again."

"Did you tell anyone?"

"There was no one to tell."

"There was your grandmother and your aunt."

"I should never tell them anything about us," Harriet retorted.

So far as I could understand it, this Mr. Paull wanted to make the jury believe that the story about the milk was just a fabrication to help Mrs. Winter, but Harriet clung to it. She had had no chance of concocting it with her mother, and no one supposed she could have invented it herself.

Since both the glass and the cups from the tea tray had been washed while Mrs. Winter was waiting for the doctor, there was nothing to show how the poison had been introduced. In addition to the tea Mr. Winter had had part of a buttered scone; other scones had been put back on the tray, but the bitten piece that he had not finished had been disposed of. Mrs. Winter said she wanted the sick-room to look tidy and she had no reason to suppose her husband's attack was anything but a natural one.

The autopsy showed that he had had some poison from a tin that had been bought to kill rats in the garden. The tin was kept on a shelf in the garden shed. The gardener, a man named Richards, told the court that he had been given the

tin by Mr. Winter, from whom he took his orders. He only saw Mrs. Winter when she wanted flowers for the house. Mr. Winter did not care for cut blooms, calling them decaying vegetation. Richards said he had sometimes heard arguments about this, but about nothing else. He never came into the house, taking the flowers and vegetables to the kitchen door; if he wanted a cup of tea it was handed to him through the kitchen window by one of the servants.

When Mrs. Winter went into the box (I knew what that meant by now), they seemed to be trying to make out that she liked Richards—who was about as old as Uncle Ned, though less good-looking—better than she liked her own husband, which seemed silly, as he was only the gardener and wouldn't have any money anyway.

Then Harriet was called to the box. The Judge protested, but Mr. Leslie, the Counsel for the Defense, said she was a vital witness. I could imagine her, perfectly composed, not stammering or shuddering as I would, saying, "I don't know," and "I don't remember." She said her mother had not gone into the garden all that day; she herself had been playing on the lawn until the rain started. She had been looking out of the window while her mother got the tea and would have seen her if she had gone to the shed. No trace of wet shoes or skirt had been found, and the police could not trace any more of the poison in the house.

There was a great deal more of this—far too much for me to read; but in the end the jury decided that Mrs. Winter had not done it. They said there was insufficient evidence to show how the poison was administered. I supposed they meant he could have taken it himself.

Then there was a clipping to say that Mrs. Winter was taking her child and leaving the neighborhood for some place where she might begin life afresh. That seemed silly to me, too. You can't start life over again when you are quite old, going on 30.

My chief feeling was an overwhelming jealousy of Harriet. To be a heroine before you are even ten years old! There were pictures of her in the paper. I indulged in a daydream in which I stood in the box and gave evidence on Uncle Ned's behalf. He wouldn't be accused of murder, of course, but something nearly as bad; he might perhaps rob a bank, or people would think he had.

I became so lost in this vision that my grandmother almost caught me putting the papers back when she returned from her visits.

"What have you been doing this afternoon?" Aunt Agatha said, and I told her I had been reading. I had Uncle Ned's new book under my arm. I began to wonder if I was getting almost as cunning as Harriet.

Now I longed to meet her again,

but she and her mother seemed to have gone to ground like a pair of foxes. I decided I must search her out, so one afternoon I let my ball bounce through the front gate and start running down the hill.

The Dingle House stood at the bottom and one of the reasons it was so often vacant was because it was said to be so damp. As I drew near the gate I could hear Harriet talking and I wondered who was bold enough to visit her.

Deliberately I threw my ball up in the air so that it went into her garden; when I looked over the gate I saw that her companions were imaginary. She was sitting on the lawn and the famous tea set was spread on a white cloth. When she saw me she said imperiously, "What do you want?"

"My ball came over into your garden," I said.

She seemed to think for a minute, then she said, "You'd better come in and fetch it."

I was fascinated by the tea service, which was an exact replica of a real one down to the sugar bowl and tiny spoons. Harriet, who clearly did nothing by halves, had arranged colored pebbles and leaves and bits of twigs to represent biscuits and buns.

"You can stay to tea if you like," she said carelessly. "I set a place for you anyway."

In for a penny, in for a pound, I thought. I was already in trouble just by opening the gate.

"How did you know I was coming?" I asked. "The others are rather late, aren't they?"

She gave me a look brimming with scorn. "They're here," she said. "It's not my fault if you can't see them."

She picked up the teapot and poured out a stream of invisible tea.

"Help yourself to cream," she told me, pointing to the jug.

I poured it carefully. I had never seen cream at home, though I supposed my grandmother gave it to her guests. Then I picked up the sugar bowl and shook some of the sugar into the cup. To my surprise Harriet grasped my arm.

"You're not supposed to help yourself till you're invited to," she said, and again I remembered Grandmother slapping my hand away when I helped myself uninvited to cake.

"But I take sugar," I said.

"That cup isn't for you, it's for your grandmother." Harriet pointed to a place on the grass and meekly I set the cup down.

"Now your aunt." She passed me another cup. "And Mrs. Dixon." That was the Rector's wife. "She doesn't take sugar, either."

"And Uncle Ned?" I urged.

"Oh, we don't ask men," said Harriet. "You can't, if you're ladies living alone. Besides, we don't want them."

"I always want Uncle Ned," I said, and I added cruelly, "Don't you miss your father?"

"Oh, he never played with me—he was always too busy," she replied, in the coolest voice imaginable. "Fathers don't, you know. And they travel all over the world." She fixed me with a furious golden glance. "Where's your father? Did he go away too?"

"He went to India; he has another wife now. I think of The Dower House as my home."

"So he did go away." She sounded triumphant. "I've seen your Aunt Agatha. My mother says she withered on a virgin thorn."

I wasn't sure what that meant, but it sounded unpleasant enough even for Aunt Agatha. Before I could think of a reply someone called my name and there was Uncle Ned standing at the gate.

"Your grandmother is getting anxious about you, Victoria," he said. "You should have left word that you had been invited to tea."

He bowed to Harriet and took off his hat.

"She wanted to stay," said Harriet carelessly.

I began to explain about the ball, then I saw he wasn't looking at me any longer. He was staring at the front door that had just opened. Mrs. Craddock came down the path.

"I will introduce myself if I may," he said. "I am Victoria's uncle, Edward O'Hare. Victoria forgot to tell us where she was going."

"It is a pleasure for Harriet to have a playfellow," Mrs. Craddock said. "There are not many young children here."

Harriet said furiously, "I'm nine, that's not young. And I didn't ask her, she wanted to stay, she threw her ball over the wall on purpose!"

"Then she paid us an unusual compliment," said her mother swiftly. She turned back to Uncle Ned. "I should like to ask her again, but we shall be leaving the neighborhood soon."

"I am sorry," said Uncle Ned. "They say the house—"

"Is damp. Yes. But it's not that. It is just that I never cared for industrial cities—not even Coventry."

"If there is a gate into the city there must also be a gate out of it," said my uncle.

"A secret gate," suggested Mrs. Craddock, and once more I saw that golden, life-giving smile. She should smile more often, I thought; she would light up the world.

"If you can't find the key someone else might find it for you."

"And if it only opens in one direction?"

"One could enter."

They were like two people playing tennis, hitting the ball over the net to each other, indifferent to everyone else. I did not understand what they were saying, but I listened, fascinated.

"It's a solitary place," said Mrs. Craddock.

"Surely that depends on your

company. And, you know," Uncle Ned added, "it doesn't do to be swayed by the mob. That is, one doesn't have to believe all one hears."

"You're the first person to tell me that."

This exchange might have gone on endlessly—I could see neither of them remembered we were there—had not Harriet broken in to observe, "If Victoria's grandmother is worried about her, shouldn't she go home?"

"Perhaps you will change your mind, after all," Uncle Ned urged. "I'm sorry to break up your party, Harriet."

"Oh, there are plenty of people left," said Harriet in that grown-up voice she could put on so easily. She looked at me. "I told you we didn't want men. They come and spoil things and then they go away."

"What did Mrs. Craddock mean about Coventry?" I asked Uncle Ned as we went back up the hill.

"It's a place where no one speaks to anyone else."

"Then why go there?"

"You don't go, you're sent. You have no choice."

At the top of the hill Aunt Agatha was waiting. "Where have you been?" she scolded me.

"Her ball ran down the hill, so she had to retrieve it," said Uncle Ned.

Not a word about Mrs. Craddock or Harriet. . . .

Suddenly I lost interest in the Craddocks. A family called Weston came to live nearby and their daughter, Cynthia, joined us for lessons. The first day we met I knew she was what I had been waiting for. Like me, she was an only child, and she understood at once my world of Make Believe.

All through those hot summer days we were inseparable. Grandmother called at once, so I was at liberty to invite Cynthia home; even Maryanne liked her. I thought of Harriet, so capricious and domineering. I still caught sight of her occasionally, so I knew they hadn't left The Dingle House yet; but she didn't matter to me any more—or so I believed.

Then in August the Westons went away to the seashore. We never left the house—Grandmother said there was no better air in the country. I missed Cynthia dreadfully. I used to lie in the long grass in the orchard, making up stories in which I rescued her from plunging horses, charging bulls (though I was terrified of them), and boiling seas.

Aunt Agatha used to scold me. "You will ruin your eyesight and your head will poke forward if you spend all your days with your nose in a book."

Uncle Ned still came on Fridays, but even he had lost some of his glamor. I counted the days until Cynthia's return.

Then came the afternoon when

my whole world blew up in my face.

Bored by my book, I looked about me for some distraction and saw a hedgehog squeezing under the fence between the garden and the wild commonland beyond. Grandmother had been asked to grant a right of way there, but she had refused, because of the gypsies who camped in the neighborhood every summer.

I went down to the wild land through the blue wooden gate of the orchard, but the hedgehog had already gone to ground. I thought I would go a little way farther and see if there were any gypsies camped among the furze bushes—they would be a pleasant change from my aunt and Maryanne. But all I saw were two people, a man and woman, walking together; and suddenly he drew her into his arms and they stood like one person.

They were Mrs. Craddock and Uncle Ned.

I don't remember if I cried out—they were too absorbed to hear me anyway; but I knew without being told that this wasn't the first time they had met here. She went to his embrace as readily as a bird to its nest. Cynthia and I had sometimes talked of love and marriage, linking the two like bacon and eggs, or bread and butter. One without the other was unthinkable, yet how could Uncle Ned even consider marrying Mrs. Craddock?

But it seemed that he did. He told Grandmother about it that same night. I had rushed indoors as soon as I could find the strength to plump in Grandmother's arms.

"What has frightened you so?" she asked. She could be surprisingly gentle at times. "You have not got a touch of the sun, I hope?"

She let me come into the drawing room and gave me the Chinese doll that Grandfather had brought back forty years ago. This was an unusual treat. I settled down behind the sofa, glad to escape Grandmother's fierce eyes. She and Aunt Agatha sat at either end of the long sofa, both embroidering an altar cloth. That was how Uncle Ned found us sometime later.

"Have you heard the latest rumor?" Aunt Agatha asked him. "They say Mrs. Craddock is leaving The Dingle House at last. I can't imagine why she stayed so long."

"You get tired of running," said Uncle Ned.

"She will be running somewhere else now," said Aunt Agatha in a satisfied tone.

"But this time she won't be alone. Or unprotected. I shall be going with her."

"You shouldn't joke about things like that," snapped Aunt Agatha. "Even to suggest bringing a low woman into the family, even to suggest it in fun—"

"Margaret is not a low woman," said Uncle Ned. "Soon she will be my wife."

My grandmother asked, "Have you taken leave of your senses? To marry a woman like that would be your ruination. Who do you suppose will bring you his business when it's known?"

"Oh, we don't propose to compromise you," said Uncle Ned. "I am accepting a position in Canada. You know how I have always wished to travel, and in a new country people have better things to do than gossip about someone who has been unfortunate."

"You don't mind that your children's mother was accused of murdering her former husband, and put on trial?"

"She was acquitted," said Uncle Ned.

"For lack of evidence."

"She was found innocent."

"No," said Grandmother. "She was not found guilty. There is a world of difference. Edward, if you do this thing we shall not speak to each other again."

"I refuse to believe you really mean that," said Uncle Ned, "but in any case I cannot give Margaret up. I love her with all my heart."

I must have made some movement then, for suddenly they recalled my presence behind the sofa. Aunt Agatha pounced on me and shook me and told me how wicked it was to eavesdrop.

"Let her alone," said Uncle Ned, as furious as she. "I should be glad to take her with us. In any case, Vicky, I hope one day not too far off you can come and pay us a visit."

But I pushed him away. "You'll belong to them," I cried. "You will forget us. And you don't *know* she didn't do it."

I thrust at him violently, then rushed out of the room.

I met Harriet in the lane some days later. Already the news was all round the village. The Dingle House had the air of a place soon to be deserted.

"Why couldn't you leave him alone?" I burst out. "We were happy until you came."

"It was he who wouldn't leave us alone," she retorted. "We didn't need anyone."

"Your mother doesn't think so. I saw them together."

"She belongs to me," shrilled Harriet.

"Not any more," I said, as cruel as she. "Now he will come first."

Suddenly the fury drained out of her; she seemed miles away, although we were standing face to face.

"He had better watch out," she said. "I told you—didn't I?—that I'm a witch. When I want things to happen they happen."

"You didn't want this to happen," I taunted.

But she only laughed and went away.

That night there was a tremendous thunderstorm. I lay shivering in my bed, hating the roars and the

reverberations. I thought of Harriet and her claim: "When I want things to happen they happen." What she wanted was her mother all to herself. Once before someone had tried to separate them, and he had died.

It was like a light going on in a dark room.

In that instant I knew the truth about Mr. Winter's death.

I didn't blame the police for not realizing it—who would suspect a child barely nine years old? But in my imagination I saw her deliberately pouring the milk, adding the poison—she had been playing in the garden that morning and would have seen Richards laying it out for all the rats—and who would notice the movements of a child? She must have taken the poison to use as opportunity offered, not knowing that the chance would come the same day. But intending to use it all the same, because she knew that in the end her mother would leave her—her mother's duty as a wife really gave her little choice.

I had wondered why she didn't go down and fill the glass with water in the kitchen where a supply was always kept handy, but of course the rat powder would show less in milk. And then she washed the glass so that no trace remained.

I knew, I tell you I knew—but I didn't know how to prove it. And no one would listen to me, a jealous child—I might even be whipped for suggesting such a thing.

And then I remembered the day of the tea party in the garden of The Dingle House. The sugar bowl! That was it. The police might have searched the house for traces of poison, but they wouldn't think of a child being involved. They wouldn't know, as I knew, that Harriet had never been a child.

Now Uncle Ned had to be warned and there was not much time left; but first I must get hold of the sugar bowl. Accusation without proof would be a waste of time.

So the next day I went openly to The Dingle House. Everything had a very desolate air; pictures had been taken from the walls, and there were no carpets on the floor.

Mrs. Craddock came to meet me. Love had made her even more beautiful, though I wouldn't have believed that possible. I knew I was going to wreck that happiness: I didn't think for a moment that she might know what Harriet had done, because surely she wouldn't risk it happening a second time, not to Uncle Ned.

"I came to see Harriet," I told her.

"She has been helping me pack," said Mrs. Craddock. And she called, "Harriet, here is Victoria come to say goodbye. Or perhaps only *au revoir*."

Harriet came slowly out and stopped halfway down the stairs.

"Goodbye," she said. Her face was dark and unwelcoming.

"That's no way to say goodbye," Mrs. Craddock told her, laughing. "Come in, Victoria. You don't bring a message from your grandmother? No, I see that was a foolish question. What would you like to do while you are here?"

"I should like to play with the tea set once more," I said. "I never saw one I liked so well."

"Oh, but it's already packed," said Harriet carelessly. "You have come too late."

"We have been washing it," Mrs. Craddock said.

Harriet nodded. "Every single piece."

Her eye held mine, and I understood that she knew what I suspected and was mocking me because now I was helpless. I said, "There was sugar in the bowl," and Harriet said, "It wouldn't be much good if there wasn't."

"Why don't you give it to Victoria?" Mrs. Craddock urged. "Something to remember us by."

"Won't she remember us without that?" asked Harriet, but she went docilely enough to fetch the box in which the tea set was packed. I knew I should never play with it. I hated it; I told myself I would trample it to smithereens, but I was saved the trouble.

Mrs. Craddock was saying, "Harriet would have thought of it herself if she had been used to having a playmate," when there came a tremendous crash. We ran to the foot of the stairs and there lay the tea set, a welter of chipped and broken china, with Harriet bent over the fragments.

"Be careful," Mrs. Craddock warned. "You may cut yourself. What happened?"

"I slipped," said Harriet calmly. "I had to let the box go or I would have hurt myself."

"We will send you another, Vicky," promised her mother. "What is left of this one is only fit for the dust bin."

She fetched a brush and swept up the pieces, wrapping them in paper. I knew then that my last chance had slipped between my fingers. Now there was no proof, no proof at all.

"How about a real cup of tea?" Mrs. Craddock said when she had disposed of the parcel. "Fortunately we still have some cake. And, Vicky, my dear, do you take sugar?"

I thought, half dazed, "When I am quite old and write my memoirs I shall be able to say—Once I had tea with a murderer."

That was five days ago. Tomorrow Mrs. Craddock and Harriet leave for London where Uncle Ned will meet them, and Mrs. Craddock and Uncle Ned will be married, and after that it will be too late.

It is three o'clock in the morning —there are still four hours to go. God holds time in the hollow of

His hand—a thousand years are but an instant in His sight—there's still time for a miracle, for a thunderstorm to bring The Dingle House crashing to the ground, smothering its occupants . . . for lightning or a fireball to devour all of them.

I sit waiting for the dawn, a pale green sky with the birds calling, then light stealing back to the world, then a sea of pale rose. It's like that poem by Robert Browning:

All night long I have not stirred
And still God has not said a word.

I don't know what to do.

I don't know, and there's no one to ask . . .

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
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Shannon, Dell	DEATH BY INCHES	Wm. Morrow	$3.95	7/28
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AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
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Coxe, George Harmon	MISSION OF FEAR	Pyramid Books	50¢	7/15
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Gibbs, Mary Ann	THE HOUSE OF RAVENS-BOURNE	Pyramid Books	50¢	7/15
Marlett, Melba	DEATH IS IN A GARDEN	Popular Library	50¢	7/6
Monteilhet, Hubert	THE ROAD TO HELL	Pyramid Books	50¢	7/15
Queen, Ellery	DRURY LANE'S LAST CASE	Popular Library	50¢	7/20

Here is the second story in Edward D. Hoch's new espionage series about Rand, head of the Department of Concealed Communications —the first story, "The Spy Who Did Nothing," appeared in the May 1965 issue of EQMM . . . How, just two minutes before he was assassinated, undercover agent Cecil Montgomery devised the message that would help the British Government make a vital decision . . .

THE SPY WHO HAD FAITH IN DOUBLE-C

by EDWARD D. HOCH

CECIL MONTGOMERY WAS A YOUNG British medical missionary who had come to the island republic of Buhadi filled with noble plans for curihg men's ills and saving their souls. He'd been there just one month when the year-old government toppled during a long night of gunfire and bloodshed, and a bomb hurled at random by a rebel terrorist killed his wife and only child.

Some time after that, during a brief visit back to London, Cecil Montgomery decided to return to Buhadi and work for British Intelligence. His assignment was not a glamorous one, and he barely found time for it between his duties at the little village hospital and his weekly sermons at the chapel in town. But each Monday morning he walked down to the cable office near the docks and sent in his weekly coded report. It was in the form of an innocuous requisition for more supplies—a listing of Bibles and hymnbooks, medicines and foodstuffs to be shipped to his mission—and if the local authorities ever wondered why most of the requested supplies never arrived, they refrained from questioning him about it.

But the political situation on Buhadi remained far from settled, even after the government fell. Down from the tropic hills in the island's center came two opposing rebel armies, one backing the Anglo-Indian Rama Blade, and the other following the bearded giant Xavier Starkada. Each army claimed to represent the people, and each leader claimed the other was a spy and traitor in the pay of Peking.

Oddly enough, British Intelligence agents in Asia had quickly confirmed that one of the two men was indeed a spy in the pay of the Communists, and thus Cecil Montgomery received his last and most important assignment from London.

Though he'd had little training

in the intricacies of modern espionage, Cecil Montgomery did have the advantage of being on the scene. Working day and night among the poor peasants of Buhadi, he heard things and saw things. Soon he came to know both Blade and Starkada well, and made friends with their trusted aides during lulls in the sporadic fighting. And so it was that on a certain Monday morning in January he sent a coded cablegram to the cover address in London that read: CONFIRMING IDENTITY OF SPY THIS WEEK. WILL CABLE NAME NEXT MONDAY.

The next Saturday night, by flickering candlelight in a shabby village shack, Cecil Montgomery read the documents that told him what London wanted to know. Somewhere during the middle of his regular Sunday morning service he had a passing doubt about this undercover work he was doing, knowing in an abstract way that the message he would send the following morning would sooner or later cause the death of a man. But then he remembered the bodies of his wife and child, killed by a bomb with Red Chinese markings on it, and he knew what he had to do. If the spy died as a result of his message, then at least this land of Buhadi—in a sense, his land—could begin to live in peace.

He carried the message in his breast pocket that Monday morning, written in pencil on a standard cablegram form. It was a sunny morning, with a warm wind blowing in off the ocean—the kind of day his wife had always liked. Not until he was across the street from the cable office did Montgomery see the two men who waited there for him.

Something had gone wrong, something had gone terribly wrong. They knew.

Then he was running wildly, and they were after him, through the narrow twisting lanes of the old town, seeking a shelter where he knew there was none. In all this town, among all these people whom he'd helped so much, he knew there would be no hiding place.

Finally, winded from his run, he paused against a rough stone wall in a dead-end alley facing the white marble church that was a town landmark. He took a piece of notepaper from his pocket, and a ballpoint pen, and slowly but deliberately began to write a message. It took him two minutes to write the few words, and when he'd finished he folded the paper twice and scrawled two initials on the outside. Then he stuffed the folded paper deep into his pocket.

By that time the two men were standing at the end of the alley, their dark outlines stark against the whiteness of the church beyond. They walked slowly toward him, knowing there was no way out for Cecil Montgomery. The doctor-missionary waited calmly now, his lips moving in a silent prayer.

The taller of the two assassins had a pistol with a silencer on it. The other carried a dagger with a curved blade that caught the morning sunlight.

The man with the dagger struck first.

It was January in London, and the weather was not good. A three-day fog had all but paralyzed air travel, and even on the ground there seemed to be a slow uncertainty about life. Even in his usually cozy office overlooking the Thames, Rand could feel the chill winter dampness. The weather depressed him, and the man across the desk did nothing to brighten his spirits.

"Rand, are you familiar with the island of Buhadi?" Colonel Nelson liked to open conversations with a question, a habit that may have lingered since his early days as a rural schoolmaster.

"Indian Ocean, isn't it? We granted their independence a year or so ago?"

"That's the place. It's always been an oddity, a mixture of races and national interests—Indians, Africans, British, and even some Chinese. Could be a bigger problem than Cyprus if not handled right. Anyway, the Buhadi government's been pretty much in a state of chaos lately. Two opposing rebel chiefs are claiming authority, and we know the Communists are in there with both feet."

"What's our interest, Colonel?" Rand asked. He never cared much for political background, and he was waiting for Colonel Nelson to get to the point.

The Colonel lit one of his familiar cigars. "We have an agent there—at least, we did have until he was killed last Monday. A minister chap named Montgomery. He started working for us after his wife and child were killed on the island. Every Monday morning he reported by cable, using one of our combination ciphers.

"Anyway, he'd uncovered evidence linking one of the rebel leaders with the Chinese Reds, and he was to send us the man's name last Monday. Somehow they found out, and stabbed him to death in an alley. Of course they went through his pockets and took the cablegram he was going to send, along with his notebook and wallet. But they missed this, or else didn't think it was important."

Colonel Nelson passed over a folded piece of paper. On the outside were the letters *C.C.* Rand felt his pulse quicken. The particular branch of British Intelligence of which he was the head was known to insiders as *Double-C,* from its official designation of Concealed Communications. "How'd you get this?" he asked.

"Our embassy man found it on the body and forwarded it to us in a diplomatic pouch."

Rand unfolded the paper and

read the eight words written on it. *Father come our art in is earth bread.*

"What do you make of it?" Colonel Nelson asked.

"Looks like a code or cipher of some sort."

"Especially since he addressed it to your Department."

"He knew about Double-C?"

"All our agents are told of it."

"You think he wrote this message just before they killed him?"

"I'm sure of it. We've checked the handwriting, and even compared the ink with that in a ballpoint pen found on his body. There's no doubt he wrote it."

Rand was busy doodling the more obvious possibilities on his pad. *Father come our art in is earth bread.* First letters: F-c-o-a-i-i-e-b. Nothing. Last letters: r-e-r-t-n-s-h-d. Nothing.

Rand put down his pencil and said, "I don't think it's one of our standard ciphers. Is it anything your people use?"

"No."

"And yet he must have expected us to read it. What about those rebel leaders you mentioned? Who are they?"

"Well, there's Rama Blade. His father was British and his mother was Indian—both parents are dead now. He came to the island from India just after the war, and almost immediately started organizing the poorer classes. He had the idea we'd leave him in charge after we pulled out, but when we didn't he took to the hills with a couple of hundred followers. The people like him. We'd always considered him our friend until last year."

"And the other man?"

"Blade's bitter enemy—a fellow of vague nationality named Xavier Starkada. He was the first to accuse Blade of being a Red Chinese spy. Starkada is a giant of a man, almost seven feet tall. He wears a full beard and has been known to kill men with his bare hands. Nobody knows just where he came from, but he's a fighter and he claims to be on our side."

"You're sure one of them is an enemy agent?"

Colonel Nelson nodded sadly. "It has to be. The evidence is too conclusive. Our man Montgomery was certain of it too."

"How do you know he sent you the right name in this message?"

"I think his murder proves he identified the right man."

Rand picked up the message again. "Perhaps a quotation from something. There might be a word missing between *in* and *is*. I'll check on it. Is there any urgency?"

"Quite a bit. The government feels it must recognize one of the rebel factions by Sunday—either Starkada or Blade. They're depending on us to uncover the enemy agent before they announce their decision."

Rand sighed and stared out the window at the gray curtain of fog.

"Do you often get jobs like this, Colonel?"

"There have been factional situations everywhere, of course—India, Cyprus, Cuba, the Congo. The classic example was probably Yugoslavia during the war. There we had Mihajlovic and Tito, both killing Germans, both claiming to be patriots. There were reports that Mihajlovic was collaborating with the enemy, and yet the government knew next to nothing about Tito. Some even claimed Tito was really a young woman of unusual beauty.

"We sent a secret mission there, landing them behind enemy lines, and on the basis of their report we decided to back Tito. As you may remember, Mihajlovic was later tried and executed by Tito's people. I leave it to history to determine whether we made the correct choice. The situation on Buhadi is quite similar, and we *must* make the correct choice there."

"Is Buhadi that important?" Rand asked. "A small island in the middle of the Indian Ocean?"

The Colonel got up to leave. "Cecil Montgomery thought it was important. He died for it."

Rand spent the afternoon in the library, pouring over slim books of verse and thick volumes of quotations. There seemed to be no known author named Starkada or Blade, and some time spent on the writings of St. Francis Xavier yielded nothing.

He left the library near closing time, shaking his head in dismay. So it wasn't a quotation after all—at least, not one that he'd been able to locate.

Father come our art in is earth bread.

In the morning he put the cryptanalysis boys on it, and waited all day while they came up with one dead end after another. "It looks like code, but if he wrote the message hastily, just a few minutes before he was killed, it almost has to be some sort of cipher. But breaking it without knowing the system may be impossible because the message is so short. We don't have enough to work with."

Rand stared hard at his fingernails. "And yet it is something he expected us to read. It can't be complicated. It has to be simple."

"Then I'm afraid we're stumped, sir."

"Look, I've given you the message and I've given you the only two possible names we're looking for—Rama Blade and Xavier Starkada. It must be one or the other—so get back at it. Nothing is impossible."

But by late afternoon Rand was depressed. The art of cryptography was a dubious one at best, even in this age of ciphering machines and scrambler telephones. He looked up the master file on Cecil Montgomery and found that the dead man had a sister living in Chelsea. A half hour later he signed out a

government car and drove over there through the fog.

It was a pleasant little house with a garden in front, the only one on the street. Rand stared at the dead earth with its rosebushes and tulip bulbs waiting for another spring. Then he sighed and knocked on the door.

The woman who answered was still young, and a vestige of beauty showed through a face and body beginning to settle into middle age. "My husband's not home," she said, starting to close the door.

Rand cleared his throat. "I believe it's you I want to see—if you're Cecil Montgomery's sister."

She blinked her eyes but didn't change expression. "My name is Linda Jones. Cecil was my brother. He was killed last Monday."

"I know. I'm very sorry. May I speak with you?"

She motioned him inside and indicated a worn straight-backed chair. "You're one of them, I suppose—one of the men he was working for."

Rand seated himself gingerly. "You know a great deal, Mrs. Jones."

"I know my brother was a spy."

"That's hardly the word for it. Your brother was a minister, a medical missionary. He supplied a certain amount of background information to Her Majesty's government."

Linda Jones lit a cigarette and started to pace the floor. "There were others here before you. Yesterday. They talked about giving him a medal, only I'd never be able to show it to anybody. They said I'd have to keep it a secret."

Rand shrugged and said nothing. He was sorry he'd come.

"Cecil wasn't any older than you," she went on. "You took his wife and child, and then his life."

"We didn't take them, Mrs. Jones."

"You sit here in London pushing buttons, and people like Cecil go out and die! For what, I ask? For *what?*"

Outside, the night was beginning to mingle with the fog. Suddenly the little house seemed no longer pleasant. It was a place of death, and the memory of death.

"I'm sorry," he told her again. "I'm only trying to do my job."

"What is your job?" She had calmed a bit, as if the spark of bitterness had died as quickly as it flared.

"Your brother left some information for us," he told her. "It's my job to decipher his message. Could you tell me a little about him, about his interests?"

She sat down and began to twist her handkerchief, nervously staring out the window at some memories Rand could never share.

"I saw him only once in recent years—when he returned to England briefly after the death of his wife and child. He was a different man somehow—still deeply religious, but with new interests too.

He was reading books on politics and world affairs, and even one on codes."

"Codes? Which book was it?"

"I don't remember the name. I just noticed because it seemed an odd thing for him to be interested in. I suppose he was already involved with you people."

"I think your brother was involved with the whole human race, Mrs. Jones."

"He was a good man," she said, and then fell silent, staring at the window where now only her own reflection looked back.

"One more question. Does this sentence mean anything to you? *Father come our art in is earth bread.*"

She thought a moment. "No. Should it?"

"Did he ever write to you and mention the names of Xavier Starkada or Rama Blade?"

"He wrote rarely. I know those names from the newspapers, but he never mentioned them in any of his letters. Mostly he wrote about his wife and child. He loved them very much."

"I have to be going," Rand said. "Thank you for your time."

"Will someone else be going out there now, to take his place? To die?"

"That's not my department, Mrs. Jones. My job is communications."

He left her still staring at the window, and went back through the fog to his office overlooking the Thames.

Rand was much more at ease tracking an enemy agent across London to a secret meeting place, or discovering the location of a hidden radio transmitter. Sitting at his desk, staring at Cecil Montgomery's last message, he had a feeling of utter frustration as bleak and blanketing as the weather. The man had been trying to tell him something with those eight words, trying to reach back from the grave and leave an important message. It was a code that Cecil Montgomery had thought they would recognize, perhaps one he'd remembered from the book he'd read.

But Rand couldn't read it. And in a few hours it would be Sunday, the government's day of decision.

At midnight he went down to the cryptanalysis room and found two of the younger men still working on it, chalking letter combinations on the green blackboard. They were tired and discouraged, and about to give up. "We've tried it backwards and sideways and gotten nowhere. We've cut the words apart and shifted them around. It must be a substitution cipher of some sort, but we can't crack it."

Rand nodded sadly. "Maybe it doesn't mean anything. Maybe we've been wasting our time." But he didn't really believe that. "Go on home and get some sleep."

He stayed on for an hour or so

after they left and then started home himself. In a few hours he'd have to phone Colonel Nelson to report failure. Perhaps the government would choose the right man anyway; they had a 50-50 chance.

In the early hours of Sunday morning, while a breeze from the Thames was beginning finally to dissipate the fog, Rand stopped at a little church in Oxford Street. He stood far in the rear, trying to imagine the final thoughts that might have crossed Cecil Montgomery's mind.

When he left the church the sun was beginning to break through the mists low on the eastern horizon. He shielded his eyes from it and stood there in the center of the street, thinking that truly "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform"; for now he knew what Cecil Montgomery had been trying to tell them.

Colonel Nelson came downstairs in his robe, looking unhappy. "It's Sunday morning, Rand—quite early Sunday morning."

"I know. I thought you'd want to know we broke the cipher."

"Montgomery's message?"

Rand nodded. "The men in cryptanalysis are so young these days. None of them remembered a simple substitution cipher used in German-occupied Belgium during the First World War. It used the first twenty-six words of the Lord's Prayer, not counting repetitions, to stand for the letters of the alphabet. That was the kind of cipher a minister would know by heart and think of in a crisis. I should have spotted it long before I did."

Colonel Nelson ran his tongue over dried lips. "I'll phone the Prime Minister immediately. Which one is it—Blade or Starkada?"

Rand held out a sheet of notepaper. "The twenty-six different words, in order, are: Our - Father - who - art - in - heaven - hallowed - be - Thy - name - kingdom - come - will - done - on - earth - as - it - is - give - us - this - day - daily - bread - and. The message *Father come our art in is earth bread* becomes just eight letters: *BLADE SPY.*"

'Q'

With the current popularity of police procedural stories—Lawrence Treat's about Mitch Taylor and Jub Freeman, J. J. Marric's (John Creasey's) Gideon adventures, Ed McBain's 87th Precinct series, and Robert L. Pike's tales of Clancy—it is only fair and just to remind you of the pioneer work of William MacHarg, whose O'Malley short-shorts certainly pointed the way and stimulated, if not inspired, the contemporary trend. Here, then, is one of the lean, spare, understated "affairs" of O'Malley, whose candid-camera police procedural stories were first published in book form in 1940 but began to appear in American magazines at least a decade before.

MANHATTAN MURDER

by WILLIAM MacHARG

"THIS IS ONE OF THOSE CASES," O'Malley said, "that you can't tell nothing about because there are too many things that might have happened. I got the advantage, though, that they put me on the case while it is fresh.

"This young guy that got killed was what they call a Broadway playboy. Whenever any of his family staked him to some dough he came to New York and blew it in; but he won't blow in no more because they found him in Van Cortlandt Park this morning with a hole shot through him. His name was Hammin and his folks are big people in the Middle West, so there's a stir over who shoved him off."

"What do you suspect?" I asked. "A love affair, jealousy, gangster stuff, or what?"

"I ain't doing any suspecting, because I ain't even looked at anything yet."

We were in the Bronx and we stopped where they had the young man. He was about 25 years old and ought to have been good-looking; but instead he looked merely pampered and dissipated. He had been wearing evening clothes and had been shot just once.

Afterward, we went to the park and looked at the place where they had found him. It was a road running among trees and bushes and the grass was rather long. There were some uniformed cops keeping people away from the spot, and the grass was trampled, but these were the footsteps of police officers.

"They didn't find nothing else here?" O'Malley asked.

"Not a thing but him," one of the officers answered, "and there has been too many cars here to tell if there were any car tracks. It looks to me like he had been somewhere on a party where he got pushed over, and then they brought him here."

We walked all around the spot, peering at the trampled grass and bushes, and O'Malley picked up out of the long grass a partly eaten apple. There were red marks on it.

"That blood?" I asked.

"I wouldn't say so. I'd say it was lipstick."

He had picked the apple up very carefully by the stem, and he gave it to me to carry the same way, and we took it and left it at the police station.

"There's nothing whatever," I remarked, "to show that apple had anything to do with the murder."

"Not a thing," O'Malley assented. "It's just one of them things a cop has to keep in mind, because the case don't offer nothing else that he can think about."

We went back to Manhattan and O'Malley took a list out of his pocket.

"What's that?" I asked.

"This guy Hammin was registered at a swell hotel and these are the telephone numbers he called up the last few days. They been looked up and the parties' names wrote opposite 'em, and I got to go around and talk with some of these people."

We began with the number which appeared most often on the list. The name opposite it was Paxton and it led us to a fine large house, where a remarkably pretty young woman, some 22 years old, came down to talk to us. She knew already what had happened.

"Isn't this terrible!" she said. "Horace was so happy yesterday. It was his twenty-fifth birthday."

"You see him yesterday, Miss Paxton?" O'Malley asked.

"I was with him all afternoon and evening. We went to the races and Horace won eight thousand dollars. So in the evening he gave a birthday. He called up a number of people and we went to dinner and then to a theater and afterwards to a night club."

"Sounds like a wild party to me."

"No," she said, "it wasn't. But it was rather a queer one. Horace had called up anyone he happened to think of, and some of the women were—well, as I said, rather queer."

"You go to more than just one night club?"

"No—only the Gilded Chicken."

"Then what, Miss Paxton?"

"Nothing after that. The party broke up when we left the night club. Horace brought me home in a cab and said good night to me and started back to his hotel."

"In the cab?"

"No, he walked. He said he wanted the air."

O'Malley asked her who had been in the party at the night club, and she gave him the names and some of the addresses and told us how we

could learn the others. We interviewed all of them, and their stories agreed with Miss Paxton's: the party had broken up and they all had gone home.

"We learned one thing," O'Malley said, when we had finished. "This Hammin gathered his lady friends from wherever he found 'em—what they call from all walks of society; but the guy had an eye—they're every one of them a knockout."

"Yes," I agreed, "they are a beautiful but odd assortment of women, and some of them it might be well to know more about."

"Yeah? Well, what you want to know about them you can read in your tomorrow morning's newspaper. The District Attorney will have all those ladies on the mat today and the reporters will tell you all about their pedigrees."

"Do you mean," I inquired, astonished, "that you are not going to follow up any of the leads they offer?"

"No—they look all right to me."

"Then what are you going to do?"

He seemed perplexed. "I don't see nothing I can do. There ain't any lead. I might go around to that night club and check up on their stories that they had no trouble there; but those places don't open up till midnight."

I decided to go with him. So I met him about half-past one next morning and we went to the night club. It was the usual sort of place, with people not all entirely sober who were dancing, and between dances there was a show by young women made remarkable only by the absence of their clothes.

When we came in I saw two men whom I recognized as plain-clothes cops sitting at a table. They left when we came in and, glancing at their table, I saw that each of them had been eating an apple. After we had been there a little while, O'Malley took two apples from his pocket and gave me one of them.

"Have something to eat," he said.

We stayed about an hour, and as we were leaving I saw two more plain-clothes men come in; and looking back from the entrance after they were seated, I saw that they were eating apples too.

The next day I read in the paper that all those connected with the night club had been questioned but knew nothing about the murder; but, in spite of this, we continued to drop in at the club every morning, and we always ate an apple.

The third morning, the manager, who had been friendly, came and sat at our table; he was not friendly now.

"What's the idea?" he demanded of O'Malley. "You cops are driving my performers nuts! You come and sit here like a bunch of half-wits, eating apples, and you got everybody worried because nobody knows what it's all about, and my girls can't do their work."

"Yeah," O'Malley said, "I was just

now noticing that. You got four little girls that do a dance together, but sometimes when they come out it's only three. What is the fourth kid's name?"

The manager looked worried. "Rita Wand," he told us. "She ain't been well these last few days. She's a sweet kid. She used to work in a taxi-dancing place, ten cents a dance, till she worked up to this."

"Sure. She's a nice kid," O'Malley answered. "I think I met her at that dance place. I wonder would she remember me and come to the table and speak to us?"

I was sure he did not know the girl or any of the others. The manager left us but came back almost immediately.

"Sorry," he reported. "She was took real sick while I was talking with you and has gone home."

"All right," O'Malley said. "Where's her 'home'?"

The manager gave us the name of a cheap theatrical hotel and we went there immediately. Miss Wand had come in a few minutes before and was still there. While we were inquiring, she came down and paid her bill, without seeing us, and a boy brought down her bags and she got into a cab.

She was about 18 years old and was amazingly pretty in a street-gamin sort of way. We took a cab and followed her. She rode only a few blocks and paid off the cab and waited, and then a car with three young men stopped and she got in, and they drove to an all-night restaurant.

"They'll park there," O'Malley said, "till they get this talked over and that's plenty of time for us."

He went and telephoned, and we walked over to the police station and by the time we arrived they had the girl and the three young men there and had searched them. We went into the detectives' room, and a cop came in and put a watch down on the table.

"Hammin's watch," he said. "It was on the guy named Freddie."

Then they brought the girl in to us but left the boys outside. She was pale but tried to look composed.

"I don't know what I'm here for," she said at once, "but you've picked up the wrong girl."

"Who? Me?" O'Malley told her smiling. "I didn't pick out nobody, girlie. You picked yourself out for us when you got sick by looking at us eating apples and then tried to get away. Now, do you want to tell me how Hammin got the bullet in him, or shall I tell you?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Well, I'll be kind to you, and tell you. This Hammin guy flirted with you at the club; so after he'd ditched his friends, he came back to the club. The doorman says he didn't but I think he did. You'd seen he had a roll and had tipped off your boy friends; and they follwed you and, when they got a chance, they bumped him off.

"Then they took him in their car, and you went along, eating an apple, and they pushed him out in Van Cortlandt Park and split the money with you. You want we should get the lipstick on the apple analyzed and show it is the same kind you use?"

"Would you really put it all on me like that," she demanded indignantly—"tipping them off to kill him, taking part of the money, eating an apple while I was riding with a dead man!"

"If you don't like that story, how would you tell it different? If your boy friends said they would do something to you if you told, forget it; they're going somewhere where they won't do no harm to nobody."

She looked at O'Malley for a long while in silence, hopelessly.

"I guess it is no use pretending," she decided at last. "I knew you had me spotted when all you cops kept coming in and eating apples while you stared at me; you were only waiting till the right time came to pick me up. I'd have quit and got out of there three days ago, only I had no money and, besides, I thought it would be a signal to you to pick me up the way you did tonight.

"Mr. Hammin made a date with me while his party were at the club, but he didn't come back there to get me. I met him in a restaurant after I got through work. I'd had a date with these three boys, who I didn't know very well, and I broke it to go with him. So they followed me and saw me meet him and came in the restaurant, and when he saw I knew them he asked them to our table.

"He had a roll of money with him that he had won at the races. So they said, 'Let's go dance somewhere at a roadhouse,' and we all got in their car, three of us on the back seat. I was on one side, Mr. Hammin was in the middle, and that boy Freddie was on the other side of him.

"When we got to Van Cortlandt Park, and while I was eating the apple, Freddie shot him. They offered to give me some of the money, but I wouldn't take murder money. Then they told me that if I ever squealed on them they'd bump me off.

"Tonight, when I saw you talking with the manager, I knew the end had come. So I called them up and told them I had to have money to get out of town, no matter where it came from. I had less than a dollar left after I paid my hotel bill. They met me but they hadn't given me anything when the cops picked us up."

"Some case, O'Malley!" I said, when we had left the station house. "But I don't understand yet how you knew that the key to it was in the night club and why you looked for the solution there."

"I was just fishing. We didn't have a thing to go on; but this Hammin was a fancier of women and when his party broke up that early on his birthday I figured he had a

date with someone else. Well, with who?

"Was it a date he had before, or one he made that night? Was it with some woman that had been in the party or with someone else?

"I went around and talked with those women and it didn't seem like it was one of them. The only place it looked like he could have made any other date was at the night club. Who with?

"I wasn't sure even the apple had anything to do with the case, but I thought a woman who had seen a murder done while she was eating an apple wouldn't care to look at apples for a while, and might betray herself by how she acted; and it wasn't no trouble to drop in there every morning and eat an apple while I was working on other features of the case."

"It was cleverly done," I told him, "and you deserve a lot of credit."

"Sure I do! But from who will I get it? There ain't a cop that ate an apple in that place but what will tell you how he worked the whole job out himself."

TALES OF THE REGENT'S CLUB

Another memoir of Dr. Sylvan Moore, the oldest member of the Regent's Club which dabbles in everything, including outré detection . . . In which Dr. Moore faces up to the impossible—the truly, absolutely impossible—and discovers that the impossible and the possible can be exactly the same . . .

THE LOCKED ROOM TO END LOCKED ROOMS

by STEPHEN BARR

THE REGENT'S IS POSSIBLY THE smallest club in London, but it is undoubtedly the most argumentative. Any statement made in the Regent's, no matter how uncontroversial, will instantly be challenged. It is a bad place to be dogmatic. I was talking to two other members one evening, one of them a logician and the other a novelist, and the subject of detective stories came up.

"There are really only two kinds of mystery," the novelist said, rather recklessly.

"Nonsense," said the logician. "What are they?"

"Why, the whodunit," replied the novelist, "and the locked room problem. The whodunit is—"

"I know what it is," interrupted the logician crossly, "but nine times out of ten it's unfair. The author omits to give all the pertinent facts. And if it does happen to be written fairly, the reader will be able to solve the mystery as quickly as the detective. As for the locked room problem, it isn't a mystery at all: it's a self-contradiction."

"I don't see why—"

"Of course you don't," said the logician. "What the author asks the reader to believe is that a man is found murdered in a place from which the murderer could not have escaped, and yet the murderer is not there. Writers have various ways of circumventing this. For example, the victim committed suicide in such a way as to resemble murder. Or the victim was dealt the fatal blow before he locked himself in: let's say, he was shot through the head, and contrary to popular belief, he did not die for some time. Or the murderer locked the door on the inside while he was still on the outside. Or he was still concealed in the room. Or he contrived the murder from the outside.

"The shoddiest solution of all is that he *did,* in fact, get out, and his escape appears impossible only because of the author's incomplete and therefore unfair description of the circumstances. None of these faces squarely up to the real dilemma—that the murderer got out when he *could not.* That, by definition, is absurd."

"Rubbish," said a gentle voice behind the logician who quickly turned around. I saw that it came from Dr. Sylvan Moore, our oldest member, and his usually calm face was determined. "You are making the same mistake that I did once," he went on as we formed a circle to include him. "You are treating this as a problem in topology, and humans as entities—like atoms."

"What the devil have atoms got to do with it?" said the logician, cross again.

"Nothing. That's my point. Did you ever hear of Petrus Dander, the explorer?"

"Certainly not," said the logician. "Why should I?"

If you read the newspapers (Dr. Moore said), you would have seen his obituary some years ago; but what was not told was that he was murdered, and almost certainly by his own son.

The circumstances were somewhat baroque, but because of a confidential mission he'd been on for Whitehall it was hushed up. The son's disappearance was also glossed over; they merely said he'd gone abroad.

Petrus Dander was one of the most charming men I ever met—and one of the most satanic. He inherited a fortune and a town house in Manchester Square from his father, and proceeded to marry Lily Maynard. It is on my conscience that I had introduced them to each other.

Their only child, Jonathan, was born during World War I while his father was with Allenby in the Near East. Dander made a brilliant war record but he never came home on any of his leaves, preferring each time to volunteer for extra duty that gave him in the end a reputation second only to that of Lawrence of Arabia. Lily was bewildered and crushed, but she pretended to believe it was patriotism rather than callousness. Dander arrived in Manchester Square during May of 1919 as though he had just come back from a stroll, and succeeded in fascinating his wife all over again. But this time it was more like the fascination of a serpent for a bird.

I don't think there was ever any physical violence; his bullying was far more subtle. Lily seemed to grow more and more transparent and less alive, so that those of us who knew her learned of her death without surprise—almost without shock. That was in 1931, and Dander was in the Gobi Desert. It very nearly finished off Jonathan then and there—I almost wish it

had. He and his mother had become too close—much too close; and Jonathan was convinced that his father had caused Lily's death, in which he was right. The antipathy was returned—Dander despised his son as a milksop and a mother's boy.

My wife and I had Jonathan down to our place in Sussex after Lily's funeral to see if we could straighten him out a bit—but he was like a lost soul. Then Dander came home and I had my first taste of his temper, if it can be called that. He turned up unannounced one morning, and with a charming smile he proceeded to lay down the law.

"Hello, Mrs. Moore. Now look here, Sylvan,"—he ignored Jonathan—"what the devil d'you mean by bringing my son here?" We were too nonplused to answer him. "If you think you can use the pretext of old acquaintance to interfere in my private affairs you're mistaken. Pack your gear, Jonathan."

My wife recovered herself first.

"But Jonathan *needs* to get away from London. He was all alone—"

"He's not alone now, and I'll decide his needs."

"Look here, Dander," I began, but he interrupted me.

"Jonathan's my son, more's the pity, and I'll not have him subjected to your second-rate middle-class sentimentality." He turned to Jonathan for the first time. "Didn't you hear what I said? Get your gear. You're going with me, and then you're going to a tutor's and then to Sandhurst."

"But Father, I don't want to go into the Army!"

"Shut your mouth, you young swine! You'll do as I tell you."

I looked at Jonathan and for the first time I saw a resemblance to his father, but his father looking out from behind bars, murderous yet helpless. They left a few minutes later.

Some time later I heard a rumor that Jonathan, after some sort of tussle with his father, had gone on a protracted hunger strike, but was sent to the tutor in spite of it. I heard nothing more of either of them for some years, and the Manchester Square house remained closed because Dander had gone abroad. Then Jonathan was sacked from Sandhurst under rather peculiar circumstances and his father came back. I saw him in this room for a few minutes just before he was to meet Jonathan, and judging from the look in his eye I didn't envy the boy.

Dander acted toward me as though nothing had ever happened between us, and in some mysterious way he made me accept it.

"Tell me, old man," he said to me, "can you recommend a really sound psychiatrist? I'm worried about Jonathan."

I am a psychiatrist, as he well knew, and as there were two members within earshot I was not ex-

actly pleased. I believe I mentioned Gideon, the worst faker on Harley Street, and Dander left me with a flashing smile.

The first I heard of his death was a very solemn call from Blake-Smith of the Foreign Office. "Would you come up? Petrus Dander is dead, and you were his closest friend."

"Closest friend!" I said. "I hated the man. How did he die?"

"Well, at any rate you knew him better than anyone else, or at all events longer. Something's come up, but I can't discuss it on the telephone."

When I got to Whitehall I found three other men with Blake-Smith: Paul Gavin the criminologist, ex-Inspector Dowd, and to my astonishment, the Foreign Secretary, Viscount Maturin. Everything was hedged about with protocol and hush-hush, but it was only that they were all at sea, and no wonder. When one of your most distinguished foreign agents is found murdered in his own house under circumstances that absolutely defy logic, you keep it quiet—that is, you do if you are the British Government.

"You knew him and his family, and you are a psychiatrist," said Viscount Maturin heavily. "That is why we have asked you to come here. We would like you to tell us about the son."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because he couldn't possibly have done it."

The facts as they were explained to me (Dr. Moore continued) were as follows. Dander had arrived on a P. & O. liner at the beginning of March and went to the Wanderers Club where he spent the night. The next day was the day I saw him here, during which he arranged to have the Manchester Square house opened, and called up Sandhurst to get the details of Jonathan's escapade.

The headmaster had little to say: to him the outré was un-English and therefore unspeakable. It appeared that during class Jonathan had unexpectedly gone mad. The history master had mentioned Dander Senior's fine war record, as a possible incentive to improved study on the part of the son, and Jonathan had rushed at him.

That in itself was bad enough, particularly as the history master's beard was nearly torn out by the roots. But worse was to follow.

Jonathan escaped from some kind of impoundment later, only to be discovered fingering a Winchester in the rifle room. Dander went and got him, that evening.

The way in which the house in Manchester Square was opened up is important. Dander had cabled his lawyers from Aden to hire cleaners and so on to make the house ready for him, and then to clear out. This is not so remarkable as it might seem when I tell you that he had had the place renovated—at least, on the inside—to the most com-

plete modernism. I don't mean the décor, but everything from central heating to heat-resistant windows, from a water-cooled roof to an incinerator in the cellar. Dander had what he called a machine for living. Also he had put in metal-sash windows and foolproof locks.

A young woman was engaged to come in the mornings to wash things and make the beds, but nothing else. She turned up the first morning and left immediately, terrified by the "dreadful shouting from the two gentlemen upstairs." She never returned.

The next thing we heard was that Dander cut every appointment he had made—at his club, at his lawyer's, and, what was more important, at the Foreign Office. Then the milk bottles began to arrange themselves in sour ranks in the areaway, and the postman could no longer stuff anything into the overfilled mail box on the front door. The London policeman is not too eager to break into the house of a rich man, and the lawyers had had a taste of his fury at any interference. But this case was different.

The search of the premises was instigated by Whitehall. To break in, they smashed a basement window—the doors were metal-lined, and you will have to take my word for it that nothing was overlooked, and that every precaution was taken. Every possible exit that a man could use was locked on the inside; all front and basement doors were barred on the inside, and in such a way that it could not have been done from the outside. No one got out after the investigators entered, and no one was found in the house except Petrus Dander.

They found him face down on his bed upstairs, in two portions as it were. On the pillow his head, and a little farther away, the rest of him. The house was searched, and no clue turned up except the heavy Crusader's ax which had cut off Dander's head, and the ax was found in the cellar, stained brown and flecked with his iron-gray hair. Perhaps I should mention the empty bottle of sleeping pills, but that was something Dander had taken for years. Still, it was a possible clue—but to what? What was needed wasn't clues but logic—and there was none.

Now you may wonder why the authorities made such a careful entrance. It was fear—fear of repercussions on the part of the Police, and fear of entanglements on the part of the Foreign Office. They had not expected to be faced with the impossible—and yet a man was dead in a place from which his murderer could not have left, and yet the murderer was no longer there.

I have a little hobby, which is topology, and I had recently published an article on the Jordan curve theorem in the magazine *Situs*. Thinking to liven up my piece, I made the analogy of a man in a maze with no openings; but

here was a case that seemed to make nonsense of what I wrote. Suicide was out of the question and decapitation had been the sole cause of death.

So I wrote a letter to *Situs* saying I had somehow made a mistake, although I did not yet understand precisely what it was. And yet implicit in my mistake was the solution.

Rid your mind of any idea that the searching party made any slips: let me just assure you that when I was taken to the Manchester Square house I convinced myself that the facts were exactly as I have told them to you; and subsequent findings have proved them to be true —absolutely true.

When I wrote my recantation to *Situs* they managed to get it into the next issue, which was on sale by the next Monday morning. The result was electrifying. Viscount Maturin was waiting for me at his office, to which I had been summoned in the early afternoon, and there was a cabinet minister with him.

"We asked you not to speak of it," Maturin said coldly. "Why did you write that letter in *Situs*?"

"But I said nothing to connect it with the case!" I said. "Besides, who reads the magazine?"

"The War Office reads it, and the connection was obvious. The point is that to the Power that engineered the murder—"

"If I may interrupt," interrupted the cabinet minister, "we do not actually know whether it was done by a Foreign Power."

"My dear Charles," Maturin said, "what we know is neither here nor there. But we must have some reasonable public excuse for believing that the son did it. Otherwise there'll be a bloody mess."

They both looked at me accusingly and expectantly.

"I don't see why," I said finally, "it should be any easier for a nation than for an individual to do the impossible."

"Look at the Pyramids," said the cabinet minister.

I said, "Anyway, what has to be done is to revise our concept of the impossible."

"Is that all you have to offer?" said Maturin.

"Well, somewhere in my subconscious is the recognition of a design and that design includes the son."

"I trust, Doctor, that you will be able to bring it out into the conscious."

"I must have the answers to some questions," I said, "and then I will have to go over the Manchester Square house again—with you and preferably at once."

To get the answers to my questions we had to go through a lot of records, but I learned nothing that I did not already know. At Dander's house the three of us started at the top and my examination of the attic ceiling astonished Maturin. "This has been gone over a thousand

times, my dear Moore! No one could possibly have got out, so what are you looking for?"

I shrugged—the truth is, I didn't know. In Dander's bedroom I stood staring at the ceiling again. "There's no sign of anything having hung there," I said, half to myself.

"If you mean the ax," Maturin said, "if you're thinking of some kind of booby trap, how did the ax get to the cellar? That's where it was found."

"I don't know," I said lamely. "Let's take another look at it."

In the cellar the ax had been pushed to one side, but its original position was marked in chalk on the cement floor. I looked at the childishly drawn outline—a possible scrawl on a pavement came to my mind, *Jonathan hates Petrus* . . . My eyes began to go over the floor.

"If you're thinking about tunnels," said Maturin, "we have already—"

"I am not thinking about tunnels," I said. "I usually look at the floor when I'm thinking. I did it as a child whenever—" I stopped, and realized suddenly that I knew the answer.

"It was suicide," I said.

Maturin looked at me as though I had gone mad, and sat down on the cellar stairs. "How can a man behead himself and then—" He stopped.

"There's only one possible place for it," I said, and went to the incinerator and opened it.

"Place for *what*?" Maturin snapped, and then came over with a flashlight which he shone into the dark interior. "All the doors and windows were locked or barred on the inside, so it makes no difference *what* Jonathan burned up!"

"That's what I thought," I said, "before I wrote the letter to *Situs*."

There was a long silence while I pieced together my thoughts. Then I told them this:

"There was a man who could not bear to be thought small and of no account. He knew he was exceptional, but eventually he found that another was standing in his way, and the woman he loved was more drawn to this other, and by links she did not know nor would have liked to recognize. He pretended rage to himself at this, but underneath this rage was guilt—for the hate he felt made him guilty. Guilt drives a man to a lower hell than hate.

"He had tried to conquer this, but he was fighting the invincible, and he made, over and over again, the futile gesture of running away—of removing himself from this impossible triangle. Then the woman died, and although the triangle no longer existed, he was still trapped—and he must kill his adversary to escape. I do not think he consciously planned what he did, but in the depths of his mind it must have been there all the time.

"He was brought here to this house, by a bullying overbearance which made things worse than ever. They reviled one another all night, and he followed his father up to the bedroom. I am talking of Jonathan, of course—in love with his mother, murderously hating his hateful father, and crawling with a guilt so strong that he had attempted suicide, as we know, at least twice. Once by hunger strike and then, after his attack on the bearded history master, by rifle—for the history master was to him a symbol of his father's authority.

"Petrus Dander lay face down on the bed, exhausted by argument and alcohol. But before lying down he took his usual dose of the sleeping pills. Knowing him, I can imagine one last and unbearable taunt coming muffled by the pillow —a taunt perhaps referring to Jonathan and his mother. And Jonathan looked at him . . . You cannot move a black mark on paper, but you can erase a black mark.

"Jonathan went down to the library and picked out the most suitable of its military relics—one that may have looked to him like an executioner's ax. No doubt he felt very noble until the spasmodic contraction of the body separated it from the head. Then he saw the bottle of sleeping pills, and took them all—like a little boy taking medicine as a punishment. And then he realized that only one of his adversaries had been removed, that the nasty medicine was not enough.

"Jonathan cast away the empty bottle, and trailing the ax came down here to the cellar, as the sleeping pills began to cut off, bit by bit, his sensory system.

"Later, when you searched, you all looked for the murderer—a man. And you say he could not have got out of the house. That was your mistake—not realizing that you were absolutely right."

Maturin stared at me. "You say we were *right?*"

"Yes," I said. "Right in saying he could not have got out—but wrong in thinking that *because a man was no longer in a place he must have got out.*"

I reached into the incinerator. Then I turned, and held out a handful of ashes, which Maturin and the cabinet minister looked at uncomprehendingly.

"Jonathan timed it precisely. Just before he succumbed to the sleeping pills, he turned on this very up-to-date incinerator, and climbed into it. He was totally unconscious before it began to heat up, and dead long before it consumed his body and turned itself off.

"You see, you were looking for a man—not for his ashes."

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BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

On the four basic qualities of an anthology—excellence of choices, unfamiliarity, patterning, and critical commentary—Basil Davenport's 13 WAYS TO KILL A MAN (Dodd, Mead, $4) earns the highest possible marks on three. The stories (by Dahl, Collier, Ellin, etc.) may well be familiar to many crime readers; but they could hardly be of greater stature, or more ingeniously arranged, or discussed with more genuine (and unobtrusive) scholarship and gentle wit.

★★★★ **THE DAY THE CALL CAME, *by Thomas Hinde*** (Vanguard, $4.50)

Extraordinary and disturbing novel on the parallel between our world of tension and subversion and the private world of paranoia.

★★★★ **THE FALSE BEARDS, *by Alan Williams*** (Harper & Row, $4.95)

Realistic melodrama of the Algerian conflict, told with much of John le Carré's bitter conviction.

★★★ **VOTE X FOR TREASON, *by Brian Cleeve*** (Random, $3.95)

Debut of Sean Ryan, Irish patriot in British pay, who promises to be one of the major new secret agents.

★★★ **THE WILLOW PATTERN, *by Robert van Gulik*** (Scribner's, $3.50)

The incomparable Judge Dee returns in a fine seventh-century puzzle of aristocracy, sadism, puppet shows and chinaware patterns.

★★★ **CURTAIN CALL FOR A CORPSE, *by Josephine Bell*** (Macmillan, $3.95)

First U. S. appearance of an attractive formal detective story of 1939, featuring murder among actors, schoolboys and cricketers.

★★★ **MYSTERIOUSER AND MYSTERIOUSER, *by George Bagby*** (Crime Club, $3.50)

Inspector Schmidt and his ghost Bagby in an odd and charming case worthy of its start under Central Park's monument to Alice in Wonderland.

For eery and off-trail tales of mystery and the preternatural, hitherto unfamiliar in America, do not miss the imaginative and perturbing GHOULS IN MY GRAVE by Jean Ray (Berkley F1071, 50¢), translated from the French by Lowell Bair.

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 280th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . A story told with great simplicity and straightforwardness—almost like a reporter's account, almost like a documentary; but it has its punch—its stark, credible, realistic punch . . .

The author, in his mid-20s, was an Assistant Instructor at the University of Kansas where he finished all the work preliminary to getting his Ph.D. His special field is Spanish-American and Luso-Brazilian literature. He was awarded a Fulbright-Hays grant to study literary criticism in Chile, where he and his family went last year.

As soon as Mr. Dyson returns from South America, he expects to begin a full-time teaching schedule—which, he assures us, however contradictory it may sound, will permit him to devote even more of his time to writing. And strangely enough, we believe him! For a college professor it is not only possible but probable!

CONFESSION OF MURDER

by JOHN P. DYSON

THE DISPATCHER LOOKED UP FROM his paper work and rubbed his eyes. I'll never get used to this night work, Conrad thought.

The radio sputtered.

". . . false alarm. Cat locked inside the filling station—Ten-o-four . . ."

The dispatcher said to no one in particular, "Ten-o-four. Quiet night."

Final exams start Monday; kids are staying home this week-end trying to learn in two days what they've been taught all semester.

He got up and went to the front door of the police station. It was still snowing and windy outside. He touched the aluminum-and-glass front door. It was cold, and the coldness refreshed him a little.

Not a soul out tonight, Conrad thought as he turned around and went back to his desk.

He was soon absorbed in sorting out reports and did not realize he had a visitor until the night wind whipped around his ankles. As Conrad looked up he thought: that door closes too slow.

The man who had come in on the bitter wind was as pale as the snow flecks that dotted the brim of his dark hat and the thin shoulders

of his unbuttoned overcoat.

"Yes, sir, may I help you?" the dispatcher asked.

"I'd like to report a murder."

Conrad sat up straight in the swivel chair.

"A murder?"

"Yes."

Conrad pushed a button on the intercom.

"Lieutenant, there's a man out here to report a murder."

"I'll be right out."

A door at the end of the hall opened and the Lieutenant appeared. He took the corridor in long strides.

"I'd like to make a statement," the visitor repeated.

"Will you come with me, please," the Lieutenant said.

As they walked down the hall the Lieutenant opened one of the doors and asked someone inside to come with him.

The dispatcher watched the three men disappear into the Lieutenant's office.

"Thank you, I'm a little unsteady," the man said as he sat in the chair to which the officers had led him. In spite of the cold from which he had just come, there were beads of perspiration on his forehead. He took off his hat and wiped his brow with the back of his hand.

"Would you like to take off your coat?" the second officer asked him.

"No. No, thank you. I feel a little chilled."

"I'm Lieutenant Overbrook and this is Sergeant Arno, Mr. . . .?"

"Clinton—Edward Clinton."

"Well, Mr. Clinton, what's all this about a murder?"

"It's . . . I . . . Do you have a cigarette? I seem to have run out."

Sergeant Arno offered Mr. Clinton a cigarette and lit it for him.

"You don't look very well, Mr. Clinton. Would you like a glass of water?"

"No, thank you. Maybe a cup of coffee—if you have any."

"Now about the murder, Mr. Clinton," Lieutenant Overbrook said.

Clinton wiped his forehead with his handkerchief and said, "First of all, I'm a teacher. I'm in the Biology Department at the university. That's where all this started, in one of my classes. Thank you." He took a cup of steaming coffee from Sergeant Arno.

"Among other things, I was teaching an elementary laboratory section this semester. It was a regular class, just like so many others—at least, that's what I thought at first.

"There was a girl in my class, fresh out of high school. For the first month or so she was just another student in the class. Then one afternoon I was drinking a cup of coffee in the Student Union, and she walked by the table where I was sitting. She said hello and then began talking to me. I asked her if she'd like to sit down, and she did. I think we talked about some exper-

iment we were doing in the lab.

"Well, after that first time we ran into each other quite often, and what's worse, I began to like it. I've been married eleven years, Lieutenant. What on earth was I thinking about? Eleven years, yet I was glad about this girl. Worried, too, because I thought everyone was watching us.

"I stopped going to the Student Union after a few weeks. She even asked me why she hadn't seen me over there, but I told her I was busy working on a new project.

"Well, things went along pretty well until she came to my office one afternoon. It was about the last of October or the first of November. She knocked on the door and stuck her head in and said she wanted to talk to me about a test I had handed back that day. She's a first-rate student, by the way.

"Does it seem stuffy in here to you? I can't seem to catch my breath."

Sergeant Arno raised a window slightly, and Mr. Clinton wiped his forehead again.

"I don't really remember just how it happened, Lieutenant . . . what was your name? Oh, yes, Lieutenant Overbrook. I was pointing out something on the test and my hand came close to hers and all of a sudden we were holding hands. After that I'm not sure what happened. I held her, we kissed—I'm not sure . . .

"But suddenly I realized what I was doing, or rather where I was doing it. If anyone had walked in on us, who knows what might have happened! I told her—what did I tell her? We'd have to stop, she'd have to transfer out of my class—I can't remember now. But it was all a lie, anyhow.

"After she had gone I gathered up my things and went home, but I couldn't eat and I couldn't sit still. After a while I told my wife I was going to the lab to finish up some work I had started that day."

Clinton began to cough violently, and he looked for a place to stub his cigarette. Overbrook pushed an ashtray within his reach.

"I'm dead tired, Lieutenant. It feels good to sit here."

"Go on, Professor. You got to your office—"

"Yes, and I wasn't content there either. I wanted that girl, and I knew she wanted me. I finally called the dormitory where she was living —after I had looked up the number twenty times in the student directory. Well, I got through to her room, and I asked her if she wanted to take a drive.

"She met me a few blocks from the dorm, and we drove out into the country. It was all over quickly, as I knew it would be; but she didn't seem disappointed. I was almost sick when we were finished, but not sick enough to refuse when she asked me when the next time would be.

"That was the way it started, and

with variations that's the way it went on, all through the rest of November and December up to Christmas vacation. We would meet at odd places on the campus on week nights and drive out to some lonely spot. And in spite of the guilt and the sneaking, we enjoyed each other's company. Would you mind shutting that window?"

"Just what has all this to do with a murder, Mr. Clinton? Did you kill this girl?"

The Professor smiled feebly.

"I'm coming to that. Did I tell you how guilty I felt? Yes. Well, I did feel guilty, every day, every night. I was sure everyone in the Department knew what was going on. I began to search their faces to see if they were just being pleasant or if they were really smirking at me. My classes were a horror, although I knew that the girl wouldn't say anything. I think she must have loved me, in a way."

Arno walked over to the Lieutenant's desk and leaned toward Mr. Clinton. "Who was this girl, Professor?" he asked.

"I won't tell you that. There are enough people hurt as it is, and her identity doesn't really matter . . . I suppose if you expect the worst to happen, it will. At least it did with me. There was a young man in the same lab class—Clifford Thayer, that's a name I can give you. Cliff Thayer, a bright boy but a lazy student. He cut two classes in every three until just before the Christmas vacation, then he attended regularly for two weeks straight.

"The last week before school was out, he became very chummy with me, and on the last Friday, as he left the lab, he said, 'And I hope *you* have a real nice vacation, Professor Clinton.' Just like that—and he winked.

"The girl went home over the holidays, and in the two intervening weeks I made up my mind to put an end to the affair. It was too dangerous, too nerve-wracking.

"When school was resumed, the girl and I had our last meeting. She said she understood perfectly and she agreed it was the right thing to do. She even thanked me for the wonderful weeks I had given her! It was a beautiful ending to a ludicrous entanglement. But Clifford Thayer also came back.

"He made an appointment to see me late one afternoon during the first week after vacation. I said he was lazy, didn't I? But he was smart—too smart. I hate to keep asking you for things, but could I possibly have a couple of aspirin? My head is splitting."

The dispatcher was staring out at the snow again when he heard the clicking heels of Sergeaent Arno's shoes come down the hall. "How's it going in there?" the dispatcher asked.

Arno threw both hands into the air and shook his head. "You got any aspirin?" he said.

"Yeah. Here, take the box—there's only a few left. That guy looked pretty unglued when he first came in here, but he wasn't scared."

"We'll know before long whether he should be scared or not. We're going to need somebody soon to take down his statement. Can you leave the radio?"

"Smitty ought to be here in a couple of minutes. If you want, I'll stay over to take it down."

"Okay, we'll call you," Arno said.

The radio crackled, and Conrad turned to acknowledge the call.

"Thank you," Mr. Clinton said as he accepted the aspirin and a paper cupful of water. He took a little to wash down two tablets and drank the rest for his thirst.

"Where was I?"

"Clifford Thayer," Overbrook reminded him.

"Yes, Thayer. He came to me that afternoon and said he knew he was flunking the course, but he thought we could work something out between us—in the light, he said, of what he knew. All he wanted was to pass the lab course with a D. I asked him how in the world I could do that, but he just smiled and said that giving him the benefit of a few points was better than his making a phone call to the head of the Department—or to my wife.

"My insides went cold, but somehow I'd been expecting it. I told him I'd think it over, and he said, 'Yeah, do that, but don't take too long.'

"There wasn't any thinking to do, really. If I refused, it would mean an inquiry at the least, and maybe a formal investigation. If he phoned the right people, it would mean dismissal and shame for myself and my family. Perhaps a divorce.

"He gave me one day to think about it, and the following afternoon I told him he'd get his D. But the next Monday, the last week before finals, he came back with a new idea. He said he had thought about it and a B seemed more suitable for someone as smart as he was. I asked him how I could explain the large gap that was sure to exist between his lab grades and the mark he was bound to get on the final exam, but he grinned and said that was my problem, not his. I think that's when I really began to hate him instead of just fearing him—rather, fearing what he knew. I had no choice but to give in again.

"Friday night before the final examination—when was that? Last night? Last night then, he called me at my home and my wife answered the phone. When she left the room, I told him if he ever did that again, I'd kill him. He told me to shut up, that he'd do as he damn pleased and that I was in no position to threaten anybody.

"He said he wanted to see me Saturday, tonight, at ten thirty, and that I was to pick him up where he lived so that we could talk alone. I refused at first but—well, he was very convincing."

"What was the address, Mr. Clinton?" the Lieutenant asked.

"What? Oh, out on Maple—nine something, nine fourteen. The more I thought about him this morning, the more I hated him. I began to make plans to do away with him, but I discarded them as soon as they were made. When it was time to go, I still had thought of no way to rid myself of him. I made some sort of excuse to my wife for going out so late, but she knew something was wrong.

"He told me to drive out to The Point. You know where that is? The girl and I had gone there often. We didn't say a word all the way out. When I stopped the car, Thayer told me to get that sick look off my face, and he laughed. He said he wasn't going to make me give him an A, that the B was good enough. But then he said, 'Well, almost good enough.'

"I didn't even guess what was coming, although I should have. He said he would need twenty-five dollars a week for the next semester —all semester. He laughed again and said he wouldn't bother me during the summer, because teachers have a hard time in the summer.

"I refused, of course. I told him I wouldn't pay him a cent and that I would call the head of the Department tomorrow and resign, and then I hit him, hard, in the face.

"I'm not sure what happened after that. He banged against the car door when I hit him, and he swore at me. The next thing I knew he had a knife in his hand, one of those switchblade things. I heard it click. We struggled over it and all of a sudden I lurched and the blade went in.

"It felt funny going in—reminded me of all those lab specimens we dissect. The formaldehyde makes their skin tough, but this time the knife went in easy and deep, and I didn't try to pull it out. The door on Thayer's side had come open in the struggle, and I remember seeing a horrible look on his face as he fell backward and rolled over the side of The Point.

"I went to the other side of the car, but I couldn't see him or hear him. It must have started snowing about that time. I don't know, don't remember . . . I turned the car around and came straight here."

Mr. Clinton sighed and rubbed his forehead again, and the two officers got up.

"We'll have to have a formal statement," Overbrook said, motioning to Arno. They both went to the door. "We'll be back in a minute, Professor."

"Brother," Arno said. "How do you like that?"

"I don't," Overbrook mumbled, "but I don't have to like them."

"I'll get Conrad and be right back," Arno said as he walked down the hall.

"Hi, Sarge."

"Hello, Smitty. Where's Conrad? We need him to take a statement."

"Yeah, he said you had a homicide in there. He's getting that shorthand machine."

"By the way, Smitty, send a car and an ambulance out to the base of The Point to pick up a corpus delicti named Clifford Thayer. No description yet, but he'll be the only stiff down there."

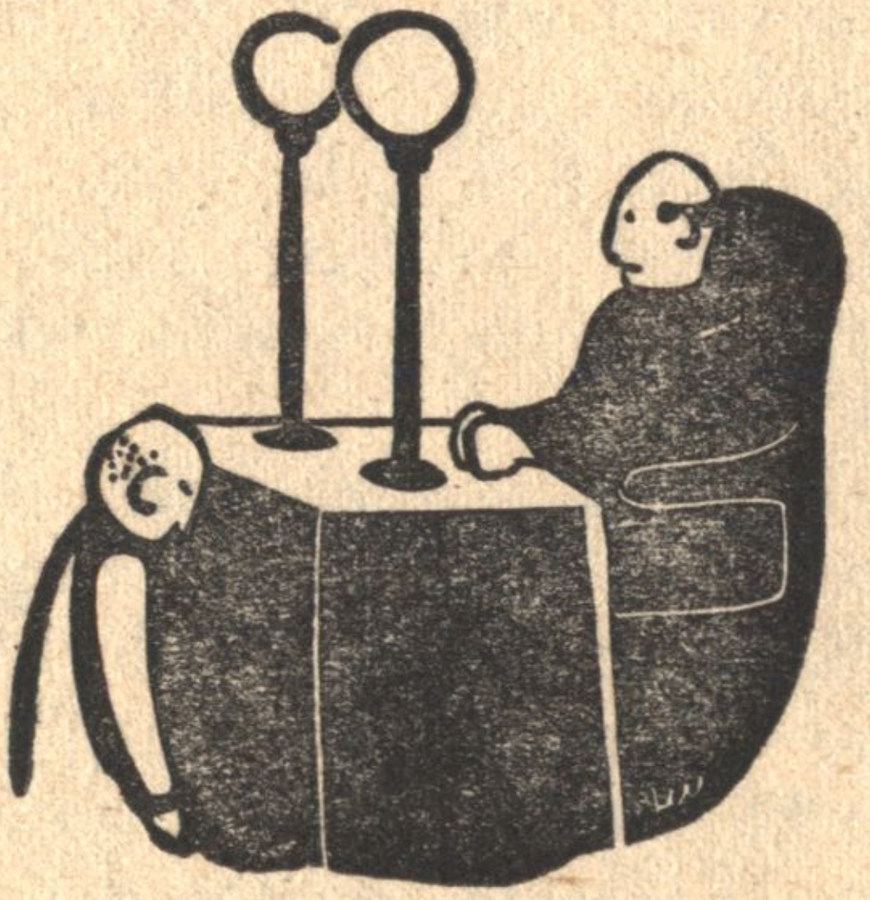
Overbrook was waiting at the door. He opened it when Arno and Conrad appeared.

"Hey, what's this?" Conrad said when he saw the visitor stretched out on the floor.

"I'm surprised he didn't pass out before," Arno said. "He's had a pretty busy night for a college professor."

Overbrook knelt, and said, "Let's get him onto the bench in the hall."

Overbrook took his feet, and Arno stooped to straighten the Professor's clothes. Conrad put his machine on the floor and turned around to steady the Professor's back. He drew in his breath when he saw the black handle of the switchblade knife protruding from the dead man's side, under the open overcoat.



DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 281st "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . an unusual "first story"—caveat lector.

The author tells us that primarily she is a mother, and professionally, a psychologist. She hastens to explain that she does not mix the two—she is her children's mother, not her children's psychologist. She is a practicing psychologist in Westchester County Family Court and in Rye Neck High School; she also teaches in the Mamaroneck Adult Education Center. She has worked professionally in a clinic and a reformatory, and has been a "brainwatcher" evaluating personnel for various businesses. In what she "laughingly calls my spare time," she likes to compose crossword puzzles and read mysteries.

We'll be hearing more from Norma Haigs . . .

IF HANGMAN TREADS

by NORMA HAIGS

On the afternoon that Collam-de Rure Art Galleries opened their ill-fated show, the young reporter, Blaine Haggett, found himself at liberty. He wanted very much to see this show, especially since his good friend Sylvester Dacoit—Latest Discovery of the London art world—was to be the featured artist.

Accordingly, by the time the painters, critics, dilettantes, and sherry were circulating in full swing, the newspaperman was pushing his way through them. At length he found a corner with a lesser density than the room at large. To his delight Thora Gatay was there. She was one of the best artists in England and a good friend as well.

"Thora!" he exclaimed. "How nice to see a familiar—and welcome—face in this mob!"

"What are you doing here?" she smiled. "I should have thought you'd be busy on more important news than an art exhibition."

"I just finished a big story and—what was that?"

"That" punctuated a groan that had come from behind a screen by which they were standing—a groan that had been all but inaudible over the roar of the party.

Blaine walked behind the screen, followed by Thora Gatay. There they found a bearded individual

shapelessly sprawled on the floor. He seemed to be trying to reach out, but the blood trickling from his forehead revealed his serious condition.

Blaine bent over and the man gasped, "Dora, Dor . . ." Then he shuddered and was silent.

"How bad is he?" asked Thora.

"Dead," Blaine replied briefly, and then, "Do you know him?"

"Tim Chivet," she answered. "Difficult person, but a good painter. It's murder, isn't it?"

The reporter nodded.

"But how very queer!" Thora was pale. "How did he get behind the screen? It's—it's impossible!"

But Blaine Haggett was already on his way through the oblivious crowd in search of a phone. At length he was able to talk to his good friend at Scotland Yard, and hear the reassuring news that he would come at once. After making another call, to his newspaper, Blaine returned to the corpse. Thora Gatay was still there, and he told her that Chief Detective Inspector Carroll Dikeyne was on his way.

She smiled at that. "He won't be best pleased to find me here." Blaine agreed, knowing that the Chief Inspector would rather keep his wife out of his cases—professionally, Mrs. Dikeyne used her own name, Thora Gatay.

Then Blaine made his way to the entrance of the gallery and instructed the doorman not to let anybody out until the police arrived. He also verified that no one had left since the gallery opened its doors—so the murderer was still there.

It seemed an age, but was actually only ten minutes later when the tall man, looking more like an aristocratic client of the gallery than the famous detective he was, arrived with his staff. Dikeyne left Rex Forb, his indispensable assistant, to interview the doorman and prevent untimely exits, while he went with Blaine to examine the body.

"I don't know how you manage, Haggett, to be on the scene of so many crimes," Dikeyne remarked wryly.

"I'm not the only one," the young reporter rejoined. "Thora's here too."

The Chief Inspector's lean ascetic face, which had been likened to a monk's and a Spanish grandee's, tightened. Thora Gatay, watching them approach from across the room, thought for the thousandth time, but with joy undiminished, "He *does* have good bones." And she smiled the smile that never failed to turn his heart over.

"Fancy meeting *you* here," he said ironically, but the tone was tender. "However," he added in a more businesslike manner, "you can really be useful, as you must know something about this crowd."

Some time later, Dikeyne and Thora Gatay were sitting in the private office behind the exhibition room, where the noise of the crowd

did not penetrate and distract. Blaine was effacing himself in a corner, hoping to go unnoticed and undismissed. Police routine had efficiently got under way. The crowd was being sorted and cleared. Those who had any known connection with the dead man would be kept for questioning, while others would give their names and addresses and depart, somewhat stunned at the brutal reality that had disturbed their afternoon. The faithful and fiercely loyal Hobey and Lampiston—fingerprints and photography respectively—were performing their duties, and the doctor was waiting to examine the body. Forb was standing by his chief.

"Now," Dikeyne addressed his wife, "do fill me in on these people you told us to detain. Forb, old trooper, take notes—you know my filthy memory." Forb grinned at this familiar statement, knowing full well what a first-class memory Dikeyne possessed. "Haggett," the Chief Inspector threw out to the corner, "you know our usual arrangement. If you stay, your paper gets nothing without my prior approval."

Blaine agreed, and Gatay launched into her resume.

"Tim isn't—wasn't—popular, but he was a first-rate painter. He had a nasty way of sneering at others—especially at aspiring painters who hadn't the talent he had, or, in other instances, just finding an Achilles heel and jeering away at it. He had a paramour—a girl named Maura Orp, who sculpts atrociously. She's in this show, however—I think Tim somehow wangled it with Mr. de Rure."

"And with Tim's gift for antagonizing, if I may put it that way, do you know with whom, particularly, he may not have been on good terms?"

"He quarreled off and on with everyone he knew. That goes for Mr. de Rure at the gallery here, for Maura Orp, his mistress, for Sylvester Dacoit, his most important rival in the art world—and, for that matter, with me. There are plenty of others, but those are the only ones I've seen here this afternoon."

"And you say he found people's vulnerable spots and worked on those. Well, murder's been done for less. Do you know what these people's Achilles heels are?"

"Not really," Thora answered, "outside of the usual artistic touchiness."

"One other question, and then we'll have a go at the suspects. How long were you by that screen before you discovered the body?"

"I've been puzzling about that, Carry. He *couldn't* have got there without my knowing it—yet he did. You know me and crowds. I did want to see the show, because several of my pupils are in it, so I got here before the doors were opened to the public. The doorman knows

me and let me in. There wasn't a soul here then except Mr. de Rure, who was running around adjusting the angles of the paintings, and doing other useless fussing.

"I did go behind the screen for a moment, out of curiosity, and the space was empty then. Later I saw Tim come in, but the minute the room began to fill up I went to that corner and hadn't budged when Blaine found me. I would have seen anyone go behind that screen. I'm certain no one did—in fact, I'm sure all the visitors stayed right in the exhibition room in plain view. So I don't see how it was done."

"No more do I," replied her husband. "Let's go into the main room and have a look at the people."

They went into the gallery, the walls of which—now that most of the crowd had left—could be seen to be covered with an assortment of paintings. The general impression was of vigor, enthusiasm, and ability, but with some rough edges. Dikeyne repressed a shudder as he glanced at a prominent work of sculpture, and grinned at his wife. Then he turned his attention to the little group sitting more or less together, some with sherry glasses still in their hands.

His eyes roved over the dapper, affluent-looking gentleman who could be no one but Mr. de Rure himself, half owner and managing partner of the gallery; the belligerently rumpled young giant who was probably Sylvester Dacoit, fair-haired new discovery; two other youngish men who were also aggressively and badly dressed and therefore also presumably artist-exhibitors; and lastly at the blonde, beatnik-type girl who had been the dead man's lady love, as well as the perpetrator of the offending sculpture.

The young woman leaped up when she saw him and waved her glass. "I know who you are," she cried. "You're Handsome Dikeyne! What's going on here?"

Dikeyne glared at Blaine Haggett, who had coined the loathsome appellation, and then turned his attention back to the suspects.

De Rure was the next to speak. "I'm glad it's you, Dikeyne. I've often sold paintings to your mother, and I'd much rather deal with your class, if I *must* have police in my gallery. But why must I? And why did your man send the others away and keep us? All we know is that there's been an accident. In *my* gallery," he muttered as an outraged afterthought. "And how is Lady Dikeyne these days?" he continued in an effort to link himself with the Chief Inspector and at the same time shut the others out.

Dikeyne, with his usual finesse, answered politely but in a professional tone which did not permit old acquaintance to presume on a police investigation.

"There's been a particularly nasty accident here this afternoon," he explained. "I know this is tiresome

for all of you, and I don't like to inconvenience you, but there *has* been a murder, so we must investigate it. If you'll all just answer one or two questions, perhaps we can clear this up swiftly."

He went first behind the screen, where he learned that the body had been photographed, that no fingerprints had been found, and that Chivet had died from a blow on the head, delivered while his assailant had been facing him. There could have been five to ten minutes between the time Chivet was struck and the time he expired, but no more. The fatal blow had evidently been preceded by a quarrel.

He also noted that there was a door behind the screen. He called de Rure over to ask him about the door, and was informed that it was never used, that it had been locked ever since he had taken over the gallery; he thought it led to his office. Dikeyne murmured something to Hobey, then returned to the others.

"Tim Chivet has been murdered here today, but before he died he mentioned Dora. Does anyone know whom he meant?"

A blank silence greeted this question. Finally Dacoit said doubtfully, "Could he have meant to say 'Maura'? If he was practically dead, his enunciation might not have been too clear."

"I like that!" shrilled the girl. "Listen to me, Sylvester Dacoit. I happen to know Tim had it in for you and was making you plenty uncomfortable. And it had something to do with a painting of yours called 'Doorway.'"

"Now, Maura." It was de Rure. "You needn't get hotheaded and start tattling. We know you're not a murderess. Not," he added almost under his breath, "that you didn't have good reason, the way Tim treated you."

"And you, Mr. de Rure," Dikeyne asked in his pleasant voice, "did he give you good reason too?"

It was Maura who answered, still nettled. "I think he did. Tim hinted about it, but he wouldn't tell me what it was. He just said he could give de Rure a bad time. And 'de Rure' sounds sort of like 'Dora' too. For that matter," she sulked, annoyed probably because Dikeyne had failed to notice her charms, "I can see that you're sweet on Thora Gatay, but why is she any different from the rest of us? Tim was rough on all artists—and 'Thora' sounds like 'Dora' too."

"Miss Orp," Dikeyne replied, "I do indeed draw the line at suspecting my wife. At any rate, I believe I know who the murder is, so I won't keep most of you much longer."

He glanced at Hobey, who nodded, then swung on the owner of the gallery. "Mr. de Rure, how did you get that scratch on your hand?"

"Why—uh—from a nail, while hanging canvases for this show."

"I think not. I think with a microscope we'll find a connection be-

tween that scratch and the victim's fingernails."

"Tell me more, Mr. Dikeyne," sneered de Rure.

"Gladly. You told us the door behind the screen hadn't been used in years, but my man, checking at my direction, learned it has been used today. The victim must have reached the corner through that door, as there was no other way for him to get there without my wife seeing him.

"My wife told me something else of interest too—that no *visitor* passed through, either to or from your office. You alone are not a visitor. Now, obviously it must have been from your office that the body was brought into the exhibition room, and that means you're the only person who could have done it.

"In addition, there was a struggle. Out here with the crowd a struggle would surely have been noticed, so it must have taken place privately—either in your office or before the main doors were opened. Again you and only you.

"You put the body in the public room in an attempt to divert suspicion. We know from Tim's unpleasant character and Maura's statement that he had some hold on you, so you decided to get rid of him." In his own mind Dikeyne also felt that if Chivet could have coerced de Rure into exhibiting Maura Orp's work, the hold must have been powerful indeed.

De Rure made a last protest. "Dora. I'm certainly not Dora, and de Rure does *not* sound like it."

"No," said Dikeyne. "I think Chivet was really calling attention to the place where he'd last seen his murderer, wanting someone to go after him. I think he was saying, 'Door . . . uh . . . door.'"

Then Chief Inspector Carroll Dikeyne added, "There was another clue, of course. Your name, Mr. de Rure, quite gives you away."

EDITORS' NOTE: Yes, indeed, Mr. de Rure's name quite gives him away . . . For by now you probably realize that the whole story is a trick, a bamboozle, a hoax, a veritable snare and delusion.

The very first clue to this artful dodging and homicidal hanky-panky was the title itself: *If Hangman Treads* (fancy enough to be suspicious!) is an anagram, and it tells you from the start what to do—*Find the Anagrams.*

The next clue was the author's name—but more of that later.

Then, in order of their appearance, every proper name in the story was an anagram—to wit:

Collam-de Rure = murder locale
Blaine Haggett = Nigel Bathgate
Sylvester Dacoit = Latest Discovery
Thora Gatay = Agatha Troy
Tim Chivet = the victim
Carroll Dikeyne = Roderick Alleyn
Rex Forb = Brer Fox
Hobey and Lampiston = Bailey and Thompson
Maura Orp = paramour
Mr. de Rure = murderer

A charming idea!—it fooled us completely. A pastiche of the Roderick Alleyn stories, complete with the famous Chief Inspector, his wife, staff, and the suspects in a murder case . . . We wonder if any such wholesale pastiche has ever been done before . . .

It is only fair to give you the author's real name. Her first name really is Norma, but her surname is Schier. To play ultra-fair with the reader, Mrs. Schier invented the name Haigs, substituted it for Schier, combined it with Norma—to make an anagram (the ultimate clue) of the name of "that delightful, incomparable authoress for whom this nonsense" (quoting from Mrs. Schier's letter) "is a token of my admiration—Ngaio Marsh."

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 282nd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . an engaging "first story" with an unusual fillip for the reader . . .

The author is in his mid-forties, married, and the father of a teen-age daughter. He is a public accountant, specializing as a tax consultant. With his "profession now well established and running quite smoothly," Mr. Whitted has "a bit more spare time"; and since he "cannot even remember a time" when he was not interested in writing, and since he and his wife have always been confirmed mystery-story "addicts" (the author's own word), it was inevitable that Mr. Whitted should try his hand at "the grand old game." And now that he has made his first fiction sale, he promises that "other stories will find their way to Ellery Queen's desk." So be it, Mr. Whitted—we hope you will keep your promise . . .

THE INCONCLUSIVE CLUE

by J. C. WHITTED

POLICE LIEUTENANT DAVID SORESKY brought his car to the curb and slid across the seat to get out from the opposite side. He stood for a moment surveying the neat lawn and the obviously well-kept house, then proceeded up the walk.

The gesture he made as he paused before the front door—that quick, unobtrusive movement of his right hand along the front of his coat—had long since become automatic. In part, it merely assured him that his jacket and tie were hanging straight; in part, it assured him access to the lethal weapon under his coat.

He rang the bell.

The man who answered had a dark, thin-featured face and the most eloquent brown eyes Soresky had ever seen. It was difficult to realize that those eyes were blind.

"Mr. Abernathy?"

"Yes." The man's voice had a melodious quality. "Who is calling, please?"

"Lieutenant Soresky. Homicide."

"Oh, yes." The man paused for a barely perceptible moment. "It would be about George Collins, of course."

Since it was a statement, rather

than a question, Soresky did not reply.

Abernathy pushed open the screen door and said, "Please come in, Lieutenant."

Soresky followed the man into a neatly furnished living room, over the windows of which the drapes were still partly drawn. It made sense, he supposed, to exclude the outside heat from a house whose sole occupant had no particular need for the illumination that windows could provide.

However, after motioning the officer to a comfortable couch, the blind man walked to the windows and adjusted the drapes to let in more light.

He then crossed the room to take his own seat in a red leather chair. Soresky noted the cane which leaned against the wall within easy reach of Abernathy's right hand. Since the man had not used the cane when he came to the door or when he walked to the windows, the Lieutenant concluded that the blind man needed the cane only outside the house.

Abernathy himself opened the conversation.

"Of course I expected someone from the police, Lieutenant. Your visit is no surprise to me."

When Soresky did not reply, the man went on, "I assume that standard police procedure in a murder case calls for questioning the victim's associates—both past and present."

There was something possibly a little sad in the smile he gave the Lieutenant.

"Though I have not been a recent associate of his, I was, of course, George Collins' business partner for nearly ten years."

"How about the years after that, Mr. Abernathy? Have you seen —" Soresky checked himself, slightly embarrassed. "Have you associated with Mr. Collins at all since your partnership was dissolved?"

"No, sir, I have not. And for two reasons. First of all, though I have plenty of friends, I find that they are not the same ones I had before I was blinded. This is only natural. I no longer move in the same circles."

"And the second reason, Mr. Abernathy?"

The blind man chuckled. It was the first time Soresky had heard him laugh.

"Oh, come now, Lieutenant! Surely you have investigated me. You must know that I had no love for the man."

The unexpected statement made the detective slightly uncomfortable. "Well, there *is* a rumor that you blamed him for your accident."

"Not as a deliberate act. I don't believe George Collins wanted to cause me any physical harm. Nevertheless, had he had a different personality, I would not be a sightless man today. That is the simple truth."

Abernathy sat forward in his

chair and began to tell the story, almost as if he were speaking to himself. "We had been out of town on business. It was late at night when we started home. George had had too much to drink. He always had that failing—mixing liquor with business.

"I wanted to drive, but he was stubborn. It was his car, so what could I do? He wasn't even hurt in the crash. As for me . . . well, I'm told the doctors worked miracles just to save my life. But could not possibly save my sight."

After a silence the Lieutenant said simply, "I'm sorry." They were the only words that came to his mind.

Abernathy leaned back in his chair and smiled. "Don't be. Blindness has its compensations, Lieutenant. And I am far from helpless. For example, I have no trouble at all in taking care of my own needs, here in this house. And when the occasion demands it, I find that I can move around town with no great difficulty.

"Perhaps I should add, Lieutenant, that George Collins was not ungenerous in the financial arrangements he finally made with me. The business took care of all my expenses for doctors and hospitals—expenses which were, of course, considerable. And he paid me more for my partnership interest than I would have been justified in asking, on the basis of the book value of the business at that time.

"Still, he didn't lose money by being generous to me. I flatter myself, perhaps, but I think my efforts on behalf of the firm had already established the groundwork for the thriving business he later developed—a business now worth ten to fifteen times its value on the day of the accident."

Lieutenant Soresky could not detect, even in these last words, the slightest trace of bitterness in the musical voice.

"All of which, Lieutenant, is quite beside the point. Your job, I know, is to apprehend the person or persons who murdered George. Tell me, do you have any clues?"

"Yes, Mr. Abernathy, in my opinion we have a very good lead."

The blind man got up from his chair.

"You will excuse me, Lieutenant! I have been a poor host. Won't you have something to drink?"

"No, really. Thank you."

But the blind man had already moved to a small liquor cabinet. "I always have something myself at this hour. Your joining me would make me very happy. I can offer bourbon, Scotch and soda, brandy—"

"Scotch and soda, then. And thanks."

The detective marveled at the deftness with which the blind man mixed the drinks.

"Tell me," Abernathy continued when he was back in his chair, glass in hand. "This clue you spoke

of. You say it is a very good one?"

"I think so, sir. In fact, I would say that it is quite conclusive."

Abernathy swirled the ice in his glass. "Something in George's dim and distant past, perhaps?"

The Lieutenant shifted his position on the couch. "No. As a matter of fact, this lead came from something left on the scene of the crime."

"Left by the killer?"

"Yes."

"Fingerprints, Lieutenant?"

"No. The killer wore gloves."

"Yet you said *conclusive*. Was this—er—object . . ."

"It was an object, yes."

"Thank you. Was this object, then, something that would point directly to a specific individual?"

"*As* an individual, no. Say rather to a sort of group."

The blind man considered this information. But when he spoke it was evident his thoughts were following another trend. "Then the murderer must have been exceedingly careless, Lieutenant. To have so conveniently left this object for your men to find?"

"No. You see, he didn't *know* that he had left it behind. Or, perhaps I should have said, he *thought* he had taken it away with him."

The blind man shook his head and smiled. "I'm afraid I don't follow you at all."

Soresky leaned forward to place his glass on a low table. "Mr. Abernathy, the murderer of George Collins will be caught because of something that happened several hours before the murder took place—something that might not seem connected with the murder in any way at all. Shall I explain?"

"Please do."

"First of all, let me ask you a question. Do you recall that Collins had a trick knee? From an old football injury, I understand."

"Yes, I believe that is true. Though it never used to bother him, as I recall."

"As a rule, it didn't. However, on the morning of the day he was killed he tripped on a curb and twisted his bad leg rather painfully. We know this because several people who saw him later in the day told us he was walking with a cane. We have even discovered where he bought the cane—at a store near the place where he twisted his knee."

Abernathy took a long thoughtful sip from his drink, but made no comment.

"Now," the Lieutenant went on, "as to the way the murder was committed. The murderer had somehow gotten inside the house where Collins lived alone. He waited there until Collins came home, at about nine o'clock in the evening. Then, as Collins stepped inside the front door, the murderer stabbed him, inflicting a wound which was quickly fatal."

"Yes," the blind man nodded. "I heard the details on a newscast."

"But there were a couple of items of information which were not

broadcast. First, there was evidence of a struggle—some potted plants near the front door were overturned, for instance. It may not have been much of a struggle, mind you, because the murderer's first stroke with the knife was a good one. Still, we are sure that Collins struck back at his attacker, and may even have knocked the murderer down.

"Secondly, Mr. Abernathy—and this is very important—secondly, we know that the murder also *walked with a cane*."

Abernathy laughed out loud. "Now, really, Lieutenant! How could you possibly know that?"

"In quite the simplest way in the world, sir. A cane was found beside the body—*but it was not the cane Mr. Collins had been using*. Therefore, it must have belonged to the murderer."

"Oh, I see. You think that in the darkness, in the confusion—"

"Confusion, yes, Mr. Abernathy; darkness, no. Collins had turned on the front-door light from a switch inside the garage. We believe he was stabbed before he had time to close the front door. So it would not have been dark on the scene of the crime."

The sensitive face of the blind man was not turned directly toward the couch on which the policeman was sitting. And the light in the room was not too bright. Even so, Soresky felt certain that Abernathy's facial expression had not changed. He was smiling, very slightly. That was all.

"No, Mr. Abernathy, there was no darkness. Yet the murderer retrieved the wrong cane. And under the circumstances it was certainly a most unlikely mistake. You see, the canes were of different colors. Mr. Collins had purchased a black cane. But the cane found beside his body was white—*the kind of white cane that blind people use*."

The detective had to admire the man's self-control. The slight smile had not left Abernathy's face, and the left hand, still holding the liquor glass, did not tremble. But the right hand, resting on the arm of the chair, made the slightest of involuntary movements toward the cane against the wall.

The Lieutenant's voice held compassion—even, perhaps, regret—as he concluded, "Yes, Mr. Abernathy. Now you know. The cane near your chair is black."

Challenge by the Author

The author of this story is fully aware of a fatal flaw in its plot. It has been left uncorrected as a challenge to the reader. So, come now, exercise your powers of perception: *Can you spot the flaw?*

(answer on page 111)

The July story in CALENDAR OF CRIME . . . *about* ***Fire and Water*** *and their proverbial affinity, and the logical evidence that consisted of four elements . . .*

THE FALLEN ANGEL

by ELLERY QUEEN

THAT EVERLASTING CICERONE OF the world forum, Marcus Tullius, somewhere tells us amicably that Fire and Water are "proverbial"; which is to say, these ancient elements of life are truly elementary. If it is further presumed that where life burns, death with his sprinkler cannot be far behind, the case of Miles Senter *et alii* may be considered classic.

In that case there was Fire to the point of pyrotechnics, for though the New York summer was officially a mere ten days old, the sun was already baking the Senter garden to the charred crispness of an overcooked piecrust and barbecuing the stones of the garden walls in a temperature more commonly associated with the Underworld.

As for Water, below the east wall flowed a whole stream of it, for the Senter house was one of those marginal Manhattan affairs clinging splendidly to the island's shore and staring with hauteur at the untidy commercial profile of the Borough of Queens across the commonplace swells of the East River.

Nor was antique harmony restricted to geography and the season. Mythology shared in the Senter case, and art. The house had been designed in the highfalutin' era, when architecture was cathedral and structural decoration full of monsters. The Senter pharmaceutical fortune had been baptized in the font of a purgative whose pink-on-black prose still illuminated the barns and jakes of rural America; and in building his mansion the progenitor of the Senter wealth—possibly in extenuation of its ephemeral source—had turned his eyes heavenward and builded for eternity. Or at least for greater permanence than was promised by cathartic pills.

He had had his architect go for inspiration to the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris. Unfortunately, for all the laxative riches at

his command, the architect had neither an *Ile de la Cité* on which to build nor the papal resources of the Twelfth Century; consequently the astonished neighbors found themselves rubbing walls with a sort of gigantic architectural dwarf, an ecclesiastical Quasimodo of a building, vulgar, ugly, and unbelievably uncomfortable. Miles Senter, who had been born in it, once spent an uneasy six months on his analyst's couch recollecting the horrid Gothic dreams which had visited him in his childhood.

The most frightening of these concerned the grotesque stone carvings which stuck out from the tower roofs like abnormal growths. These were the Senter architect's versions of the *chimères* of Notre Dame cathedral. And the Chimaera, if you remember your Bulfinch and Bellerophon, breathed a particularly effective kind of fire.

Thus Fire again.

As for Water, unhappily the architect had confused chimaeras with gargoyles, and the monsters he had had hewn and installed on the cornices of the Senter towers, while they had the lion's head, goat's body, and dragon's behind of the true Chimaera, served the traditional gargoyle purpose of providing outlets for the rain which collected on the roof. In a word, they were waterspouts.

To complete the chaos, the founding Senter to his dying day persisted in calling them "angels," and his grandson Miles, as he settled substantially into the Founder's shoes, canonized the heresy. Not so Miles's younger brother, David, who broke images as easily as he made them. David was a painter, with a studio on the roof of what—to his brother's vague annoyance—he would call "the Cathedral." David unfailingly remarked before guests, when Miles referred to the waterspout monsters as angels, that it gave an educational insight into their grandfather's view of heaven—if not Miles's.

But these are trifling, if pleasant, divagations. We were at a more serious business in the Senter garden on a recent broiling summer evening, with the East River lapping thirstily at the wall.

Two young ladies were perspiring under the sunlamp moon. One was Miles's wife, the reigning Mrs. Senter; the other was Nikki Porter, who had exercised the private secretarial right of deserting her employer in his evening of direst need —it had something silly to do with a book publisher, and a deadline. But Nikki had run into Dorothy the day before, after a separation of years, and could auld acquaintance be forgot? Thus desertion, and the garden by the river.

The reunion was scented for Nikki with the aromatic news that Dorothy was now Mrs. Miles Senter, which she had certainly not been when Nikki had known her

last, and with a something else that defied analysis and so challenged it. There were moribund shadows under otherwise lively eyes and a kind of "To the barricades!" gaiety which had struck Nikki as out of tune with recent wedding harmonies. Indeed, dinner had had a faintly royal *émigré* flavor—a taste of *noblesse oblige* and tumbrels at the door.

Even Miles Senter's confidential secretary, a Mr. Hart, a Princeton-type man with a crew cut and the well-greased manners of an advertising agency junior executive, took the first opportunity to make a discreet—and relieved—retreat to his room. And thereafter the young matron, with a female smile, had sent her husband packing and steered Nikki into the dark garden and immediately burst into tears.

Nikki let Dorothy cry, wondering if it might not be the house. The house was frightful—musty and catlike, with great clanging rooms, bedrooms uniformly exposed to the noise and damp of the river, and a colossal dinginess; it had not seen decorators for a generation. It was evident that Miles Senter, though kindly and agreeable, was a man of uncompromising conservatism and no imagination. In fact, Nikki had been rather shocked by him. He claimed forty-five, looked sixty, and was probably in mid-fifties. And Dorothy was twenty-six years old.

Of course it could be that, although Dorothy had always been a practical girl, with no nonsense about her and a wonderful respect for accomplishment; it was quite like her to fall in love with a rich man twice her age. Or was it David? Nikki had heard a great deal about David Senter at dinner, although the artist had not joined them—"Has a water color on his mind," Miles Senter had said. "David's always up to something in his studio."

Nikki had gathered that David was a lovable scamp, with all the absurd ideas of extreme youth—"the Greenwich Village type," his brother had said fondly. So she was surprised to learn—from Dorothy—that David was thirty-five years old. To Miles, he would evidently always be a teen-ager, to be indulged or spanked by the hand that held the purse strings.

There was a self-portrait of David in oils in the living room—"the Nave, David calls it," Dorothy had laughed as Miles frowned—and he certainly looked Byronic enough to explain Dorothy's tears in the garden. He was a dark handsome fellow with the devil in his eye, or at least he had painted the devil there. Yes, it might well be David.

And apparently it was. For when Dorothy began to explain her tears, the first thing she did was to praise her husband. Miles was the finest, tenderest, most considerate, most generous husband in the world.

And she, Dorothy, was the most ungrateful, confused, irresponsible little bitch who had ever lured a good man into marriage. Oh, she'd thought she was in love with him, and Miles had been so . . . *solid*. And persistent, of course . . . She really hadn't lured him, he'd sort of lured himself; but then it was equally true that she hadn't been trueblue honest with herself; she'd only thought she was being.

"Oh, Nikki, don't think horrible things of me. I've fallen in love with Somebody Else."

So there it was.

Nikki sipped her Bombay Cooler, which she had had the providence to take into the garden with her. "Well, suppose you have," she said, as brightly and illusively as the long reflections on the river. "Those things happen, Dorothy."

"But Nikki, what shall I do? I don't want to hurt Miles. He's a little limited, of course, but salt of the earth, really a darling, and I'm afraid if I ran out on him now—so soon . . . I mean, I'm afraid—"

"You're afraid what?"

Dorothy began to cry again.

"See here, Dotty," said Nikki. "You've eaten your cake and now you want it back. That's bound to be messy."

"What a horrid way to put it," said Dorothy, wiping her eyes a little peevishly.

"It's the man I work for," said Nikki, taking another sip. "Spells out every spade, and it's catching. Dotty dear, we're a couple of the girls, and no men around. How much do you want this character S.E.?"

"S.E.?"

"Somebody Else."

"Nikki, I love him! I do!"

"And what is Somebody Else's view of the situation?"

"He says—"

"Wait." Nikki put her hand on her friend's bare arm. She said suddenly, "Smile, Dotty. Someone's coming."

Miles Senter's broad figure appeared from around the northeast corner of the house. The lights from the front of the building silhouetted him as he paused in the path, dabbing his half-bald head with a handkerchief, peering into the gloom of the garden.

"Dorothy?" he called uncertainly. "You out there with Miss Porter?"

"Yes, Miles!" said Dorothy.

"Oh," said her husband, and he was silent. Then he cleared his throat. "So stifling indoors—radio says there's no relief in sight. I thought maybe you and Miss Porter might like to play some Canasta." Senter took a slight step toward them, handkerchief in hand.

Nikki found herself thinking aqueously that the poor fish was out of his natural element, and it occurred to her that Miles Senter might be not entirely insensitive after all. And because she felt sorry for him, Nikki looked away as he

stepped forward, and that was how she happened to glimpse the descent of the angel—one of the gargoyle-throated chimaeras which had thrust its unlovely form from the tower roof over the garden for three-quarters of a century. The glimmering mass was falling straight for where Miles Senter's head would be in another step.

Nikki cried out, and the mass fell, and Senter fell, and Dorothy began to shriek with an automatic vitality, as if she were possessed. The burden of her dark litany was death and disenchantment, and the response from the Senter physician, old Dr. Grand, who lived next door and had been dozing in his garden, was more in the nature of a retort.

Devil or angel, Dr. Grand remarked as he stooped over the fallen man, it had missed its mark; and he instructed Miles Senter to get off his backside and onto his knees, in a more fitting attitude to thank his Maker.

At this Dorothy's husband scrambled to his feet, paler than the stone monster in the path, and turned his eyes to the heavens. But it was not out of gratitude for his deliverance. A black head projected from the roof, another gargoyle against the moon, and its owner was demanding in a curious voice what the devil all the noise was about. When neither Miles nor his wife replied, Dr. Grand explained in his crickety way, and there was a silence from the roof, and then David Senter's dark head vanished.

To Nikki the air seemed suddenly chill, and she took no pleasure in it. And when David bounded around the corner to help his brother into the house, Nikki found him even more Byronic-looking than his portrait. And this gave her no pleasure, either.

The next day Ellery patiently pointed out that he made his livelihood inventing far cleverer crimes than Nikki was ever likely to encounter among her acquaintances, and would she please stick to his typing, for her social life was interfering with his contractual obligations—not to mention his publisher's advance, which was not payable until delivery of the finished manuscript.

"But Ellery, it wasn't an accident," said Nikki, using the typewriter as an elbow-rest.

"It wasn't. I suppose," said Ellery, falling back helplessly on irony, "that's a demonstrable conclusion, like most of your conclusions?"

"I've been trying to tell you. I examined that tower roof last night, where the thing fell from—"

"With Lens and Calipers Among the Lotus-Eaters. And you found?"

"I told you. Weren't you listening?"

"You found that the cement holding the doodad to the whatsis was worn as friable as Roquefort.

Astounding! And the waterspout weighed—how much, did you say?"

"About a hundred pounds, Mr. Senter said."

"I refer you to Sir Isaac and the law of gravity. Shall we get back to mere fiction?"

"Be logical, but I still say it was no accident," declared Miss Porter, unmoved. "And that's why I suggested to Miles Senter last night—"

The doorbell trilled, and Nikki stopped.

A terrible suspicion darkened her employer's countenance. "Nikki," he said in a Basil Rathbone voice, "you suggested *what* to Miles Senter last night?"

Nikki glanced mutely toward the foyer, which was in full cry.

Ellery groaned.

"You angel, I knew you wouldn't mind!" and Nikki flew. A moment later Ellery heard her assuring someone that Mr. Queen could hardly wait.

To his astonishment, Ellery found himself immediately feeling sorry for the fellow. The president of Senter Pharmaceuticals all but crawled into view. It was a sort of nervous slither, and it went perfectly with his windy eyes and graying stubble; in fact, Miles Senter gave a creditable impersonation of a dope peddler about to consummate a sale.

He offered a trembling hand, refused a drink—"on principle, Mr. Queen"—accepted a cigarette, failed to puff on it, and through it all he was grateful, abjectly grateful that Mr. Queen was bothering to see him at all. The fact was—well, it was damned awkward—Miss Porter's being Dorothy's friend and so on—if Nikki hadn't saved his life the night before—

"Mr. Senter," said Ellery, "what are you trying to say?"

Senter studied the dead cigarette in his hand, then he crumpled and crushed it between his fingers. "Queen, I think my wife and my brother are in love with each other." There was an ashtray at his elbow, but rather remarkably he placed the remains in his pocket. "In love with each other," he repeated, and he stopped as if he expected Ellery to say something devastating.

But Ellery said nothing at all. And Nikki was finding one of her fingernails interesting.

"Nothing I've been able really to get hold of," Senter mumbled on. "It's just that Dorothy's been acting—well, I can't quite name it, but something's come between us lately. She's too darned polite to me!" he blurted. "And David's a handsome young artist and a devil with the women. Suppose I oughtn't to have expected much else—what do they say about old fools?—but why didn't they come to me? Instead of . . . Well, Mr. Queen," cried Miles Senter, "what would *you* think?"

"Using your major premise? Let's see. Your brother and your

wife are in love, and last night a heavy waterspout parted from the roof where your brother has his studio and missed braining you by a hair. It would seem, Mr. Senter, that your brother tried to murder you."

"Then you agree with me." He sagged against the chair.

"Oh, no," said Ellery, smiling. "I've drawn a possible conclusion from a pair of facts, one of which is not a fact but an opinion."

"Well, there's a third fact I failed to mention," said Senter, and now his voice was hard, "and this one would satisfy a bank examiner. My father left the Senter enterprises to me during my lifetime. But when I die, David gets them."

Ellery sighed. "People will do odd things, won't they?" He rose. "While I can't share your certainty, Mr. Senter, I certainly appreciate your fears. How and when can I examine the roof without your brother David's knowledge? The sooner, I should say, the better."

Miles Senter promised to notify Ellery when the condition could be met, and later that day he telephoned naming that very night for the investigation. "I'll have my secretary meet you at the side gate at midnight," he said, and he hung up before Ellery could raise his brows.

Ellery left his car on First Avenue and he and Nikki walked toward the river, slowly, for they were a few minutes early and the night steamed. There was a simmering lambency over the world that made straight lines fluid, so that when they came to the Senter house the whole incredible mass seemed in motion, as if it were about to change into something else.

Ellery felt his arm clutched and he murmured something soothing about heat waves and optical illusions, but Nikki's hold did not relax until a man stepped from the wrought-iron gateway and she recognized Miles Senter's secretary.

"I'm certainly glad it's you, Mr. Hart, and not some priest of the Black Mass!"

Mr. Hart looked baffled. But then he shook hands footballishly with Ellery, made a hearty remark about the heat, and ushered them across the front lawn. Ellery walked rubbernecking. But at the skyline the mansion was still doing tricks.

Nikki clung.

"I take it you know why I'm here tonight, Mr. Hart?"

"Mr. Senter's just told me." The secretary sounded secretarial.

"What's your opinion?"

"Fellow in my spot has no opinions. Right, Miss Porter? . . . David? Oh, David has a shack in Westport where he gets away from it all when we poor goofs bore him or he wants to paint Connecticut barns. He was to leave tonight for over the holiday, but Mr. Senter

didn't know what train he was making, so he set midnight as . . . I'm sure he must have. I haven't seen him—just got in from a party—but it's so late . . .

"This way, please. Mr. Senter's waiting upstairs for you. His own rooms. He's given the servants the night off, so you'll have a clear field. Mrs. Senter? I really couldn't say. I'd assume Mr. Senter's seen to, er, that arrangement personally."

Mr. Hart, it appeared, was urbanely determined to be the most confidential—and uninvolved—of secretaries.

There were three doors, as in Paris, little early Gothic imitations surmounted by 28 reduced kings of Israel and Judah, a skimpy rose window, and other shrunken wonders. Having passed through the central door, they entered a sort of medieval never-never land which was mercifully in darkness, or at least in that curious negation of light passing for illumination by which material objects are guessed at rather than seen.

No one was about, and the great hall was as deeply hushed as a Hollywood sound stage; in fact, Ellery would not have been surprised had someone suddenly appeared in puttees and in a loud voice ordered the set to be struck. For all its age, blackened oak, and inky iron, it looked as insubstantial as a backdrop.

They were halfway up the grand staircase and Ellery was just remarking respectfully, "Is that a *bona fide* suit of Norman armor, Mr. Hart, or are we in the Metropolitan Museum?" when from somewhere above, slightly damped, came a short explosive *kwap!* like a little clap of thunder.

It brought them to a military halt, and for a moment they listened. But the angry sound was not repeated, and they looked at one another.

"What," asked Nikki in the strangest voice, "was *that?*"

"It couldn't be," said Miles Senter's secretary, with an uneasy laugh, "what it sounded like."

"Why not?" snapped Ellery; and he was away.

They found him a moment later in a sitting room upstairs, kneeling beside an outstretched man who seemed to have run head on into a copious quantity of tomato purée.

"Oh, no," said Hart idiotically.

"Oh, yes," said Nikki. "I was right. He was right. Murdered."

"Not quite." Ellery glanced quickly about. "Head wounds are often a bloody mess. No sign of the gun . . . I don't think it's fatal. Nikki, poke your head out the window and yell."

"Yell?"

"For that doctor! Next door, didn't you say? Hart, you come with me." Ellery was already in the hall.

"But Mr. Senter," began the secretary.

"Don't touch him! Whoever shot

Senter can't have got far. Hart, where's the other way down?"

"Other way down?"

"Damn it, Hart! We came up the front stairs and didn't see anyone, so Senter's assailant must have escaped another way! Isn't there a second stairway?"

"Oh! Yes, Mr. Queen. Backstairs. Up the hall there—"

Ellery ran, and Hart trotted dismally after. Behind them Nikki's demoniac voice shrieked for Dr. Grand.

The backstairs went gloomily down to an iron-clasped oak door which opened on the rear of the great hall.

"Hart, you search the front—lawn, shrubbery, street. I'll take the rear." He gave the man a shove.

The kitchens were dark. Ellery blundered through several coppery caverns, bumping into things and cursing. Finally he sighted a star, set a straight course, and in a moment was plunging through a doorway.

He found himself in a stingy strip of back garden, and the first thing he spied was a spidery figure not ten feet away, clinging to the top of the wall separating the Senter property from its neighbor.

Ellery jumped, clutching. His hands closed triumphantly about a bony ankle.

"Oh, thank you," said a testy voice. "I'm not as spry getting over this wall as I used to be when Elmo Senter imagined himself dying, which was regularly once a week. Catch me, please," and Ellery received in his arms first a medical bag and then a panting old gentleman who was chiefly bones.

"Well, well? What's happened now? Speak up, man! That woman yelled bloody murder. And who, by the way, are you?"

"Miles Senter first, Doctor—his upstairs sitting room. Gunshot scalp wound. You'd better hurry."

Dr. Grand looked incredulous. Snatching his bag, he scurried into the house.

Ellery followed the Senter-Grand wall toward the river. When he met the river wall he turned north and toed his way among the Senter flowerbeds. Two upper windows glared out of the dark mass on the other side of the garden; Ellery saw Nikki swoop across one of them like an agitated fly. Then his hand encountered the splintery side of a wooden structure, which interrupted the river wall apparently for some distance.

Exploring it cautiously, he discovered that it was a long low shed, with its back to the garden and a flight of wooden steps along its north side that went down to the river. A boathouse . . . It struck him that a guilty man might find it irresistible.

Taking a grip on his slippery flashlight, and wishing wistfully that he were Dan'l Boone, Ellery began to edge down the steps. But the steps squeaked and groaned

abominably, as he had known they would, so he jumped the rest of the way, scrambled around the corner of the boathouse, found a doorway, and went in sidewise to sweep the interior with his light and catch in its beam the frightened face of a young woman.

There was no one else in the building, and it was stifling, so Ellery sat down on a coil of nylon rope and he asked, "Has anyone come this way in the last few minutes? Besides yourself, I mean?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I take it you're Mrs. Miles Senter and, if you are," said Ellery regretfully, "it's my melancholy job to inform you that your husband has just stopped a bullet upstairs. And now would you mind answering my question, Mrs. Senter?"

"No one."

"You don't seem surprised."

"Is Miles dead?"

"I couldn't wait for the returns. So you've seen no one, Mrs. Senter. In that case, may I ask—?"

"You needn't," said Dorothy Senter. "I shot him."

When Inspector Queen arrived, there was blood in his sleepy eyes. "You can take this homicidal high life," he snorted to his son, "but I'm old enough to be your father. Couldn't you have let the local men handle this?"

In proper course Dorothy Senter and Nikki Porter had hysterics and got over them, Inspector Queen had settled what facts there were to his peculiar satisfaction, men came and went, telephones rang and were silent, and at last they waited on the pleasure of old Dr. Grand.

At a few minutes before 2 A.M. Dr. Grand opened the door of Miles Senter's bedroom, drying his hands on a monogrammed towel. "Nothing to it," he chirruped. "It's going to give him an interesting part in what hair he's got left, and that's about all, gentlemen. Wonderful constitutions, these Senters. Takes a lot to kill 'em."

Then he saw Dorothy Senter's face, and his own changed. "Short as you can make it, Inspector Queen." He stepped aside.

There was an odd illusion of headlessness in the man who lay on the great testered bed, but when they came near they saw that it was only the effect of bandages against the pillows and a face from which all color had been washed.

Miles Senter looked at his wife with a sort of feeble eagerness, but after a moment the eagerness died and he shut his eyes.

"Mr. Senter," said Inspector Queen, "can you tell us what happened?"

"I don't know. I had been talking to my secretary, Mr. Hart, and I sent him downstairs to wait for Mr. Queen. I was alone. The door opened. I was about to turn around

when something exploded and everything went black."

"Then you didn't see who fired at you?"

"No." The man on the bed sounded remote.

"Well, then, Mrs. Senter," said the Inspector, "suppose you tell your husband what you told me."

Miles Senter opened his eyes quickly.

Dorothy Senter said in a high singsong, "I left the house after dinner saying I was going to visit some friends. I walked over to Central Park and sat down on a bench. After a while I got up and walked some more. Then I walked back to the house. It was almost midnight. I went up to my room, passing Miles's sitting room. He was in there talking to Harry Hart; they didn't hear me. I waited till Harry went downstairs. Then I got a gun from my room that I have had for a long time and I went to Miles's room and I shot him."

The man on the bed made a slight movement, then he was still again. "I ran down the backstairs to the garden. I saw the boathouse. I threw the gun as far as I could out into the water and I ran to the boathouse and stayed in there. I don't know why."

Miles Senter was squinting, as if the light hurt him.

"And now about the gun, Mrs. Senter," said the Inspector, swabbing his face. "A .22 revolver, didn't you tell me?"

"Yes."

"The kind that has a cylinder that turns—that holds the bullets? That's the kind it was, Mrs. Senter?"

"Yes. But I threw it into the river."

"And a .22, you said," said the Inspector, reaming his collar. "That's really interesting, Mrs. Senter. Because when my son found your husband on the floor, he also found the shell of the cartridge. Mrs. Senter, revolvers don't eject shells on being fired; the shell stays in the chamber. It's automatics that eject shells, Mrs. Senter. And another interesting thing, this shell didn't come from a .22, it came from a .38. So I regret to say you've been lying your head off, Mrs. Senter, and now what I would like to know is: Whom are you covering up?"

Dorothy gripped the footrail of her husband's bed.

"I'll tell you whom she's covering up," said her husband, staring at the canopy of his tester. "She's covering up my brother David. Instead of going to Westport, David hid somewhere and then shot me. And Dorothy saw him do it. And because she's crazy in love with him—"

"Harry, no!" screamed Dorothy.

But Miles Senter's secretary was shaking his head. "It's no use, Dotty. I can't let this go on. Senter, David isn't the man. I am."

Miles Senter involuntarily raised himself. He stared at Harry Hart as if for the first time he was aware of

more than a suit of clothes. In that stare he seemed to see everything at once, like a camera. When the wounded man sank back he turned his face away.

Hart was pale to the roots of his crew cut. "We tried our best to avoid it. But how can you stop a thing like that? It happened, and there it was. I wanted to tell you—"

"But there was always the salary," said the man on the bed. "Eh, Harry?"

Hart went on with an effort. "Dorothy thinks I tried to kill you tonight. That's why she said she did it herself."

"Noble."

The other man was silent.

"So this has all been for love, Harry?"

"All for love," said Hart steadily.

"Touching. But I'm a businessman, Harry. I have the commercial mind. The way I see it, you knew I'd willed my estate to Dorothy. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of idle luxury—that's what I think you were after, Harry, and all that stood in the way was a simple-minded husband who's losing his hair. One shot, and the problem was solved—"

"If it only were," said a voice; and, startled, they looked around, even Senter. But it was Ellery, looking thoughtful still. "Harry Hart is unquestionably a talented fellow, Mr. Senter, but to have shot you tonight he'd have to have been a wizard. Hart was coming up the stairs down there between Nikki Porter and me when we heard the report of the gun over our heads. So maybe it's true love, after all . . . Human interest in quantity, Dad, but homicidally a famine. Could we have been right in the first place?"

"Looks like it," said Inspector Queen grouchily. "Well, Mr. Senter, I think you've had enough of us for one night, and Dr. Grand's looking fidgety. We won't disturb you again unless we get a line on your brother."

"My brother?" repeated Miles Senter painfully.

"On your death, I understand, Senter Pharmaceuticals goes to David Senter by the will of your father. And from what I've heard of Senter Pharmaceuticals, that's a goal worth shooting for—so to speak. I'm afraid, Mr. Senter, we're going to have to start looking for your brother."

That was an unmarked night, and when Nikki drifted into the garden she had no idea how much time had passed, if time had passed at all, except that the darkness was grayer, a boiling grayness that reduced everything to a glutenous mass, tasteless and unrecognizable. She groped for one of the bamboo chairs and a human hand clamped on her wrist.

Nikki squealed.

"It's only me," said a voice; and after a moment Nikki made out the long lines of Ellery, lying on the bamboo chaise on one elbow.

Nikki dropped into the bamboo chair. "Well, I finally got Dorothy to sleep with a pill Dr. Grand gave me, and I didn't neglect to tell Mr. Hart a thing or two, either. I know *his* type. Plays golf like a professional—and women—and the stock market like a yokel. Do you suppose New York will ever stop cooking?"

"It looks," said Ellery intently, "as if it's only just begun." He pointed. "The stars, Nikki, the stars."

"*What* stars?" Nikki sighted along his ghostly arm. "Oh, I'm in no condition for games!"

"Nor I." Ellery was still squinting obliquely skyward. "But this game has its points. I was lying here simmering away, waiting for you and wondering how a man who was merely going to Westport could disappear as thoroughly as David Senter seems to have done, when I began to realize there was something new under the moon. Nikki, look at the roof—over there, above the—the apse, I suppose you'd call it. That penthouse thing."

"That's David Senter's studio," said Nikki. "What's come over you?"

"See his chimney?"

"Of course I see his chimney."

"What's hovering over it?"

"A sort of haze, it looks like."

"It's smoke."

"Well, of all things," sniffed Nikki. "What should come out of a chimney?"

"Not smoke, Nikki. Definitely not smoke, when we're a week and a half into what can be described with perfect decorum as a hell of a summer, the hour is almost 3 A.M., and the thermometer sticks at ninety-one."

Ellery rose from the bamboo chaise, still craning. "Nikki, someone's been playing with fire up there and I'm feeling just deep-fried enough to want to know why. Coming along?"

"Yes," said Nikki. "Maybe it's cooler on the roof."

A few minutes later Ellery was on his hands and knees on David Senter's hearth, inspecting the smoldering remains of a fireplace fire with the jerky fixity of an aroused hound. The studio, which was in Byronic disorder, was otherwise dedicated to thermal science and Gabriel Fahrenheit; but Ellery's perspiration hissed onto the grate unnoticed in the profounder concerns absorbing him.

Nikki, hung up in the doorway, thought she could see him dwindling by the inch. The roof was not cooler, Nikki had learned; it was merely less infernal than the studio, whose door and windows they had found shut.

"Who the devil would start a fire in this heat?" moaned Nikki. "Or rather, who but the devil?"

"Exactly," said Ellery, turning his nose this way and that. "Therefore heat wasn't the object. Leaving combustion. Leaving ashes. And

the ashes tell me this curious conflagration," said Ellery, "was set in motion about three hours ago. It was green wood and slow-burning. Also, the damper is partially closed —"

"What," said Nikki wearily, "no Trichinopoly cigars?"

"No," said Ellery, his tone glinting like his skin, "but there's this," and he held up what Nikki thought for a horrified instant was a severed, charred human hand. But it was only a thick white cotton glove, one of those sexless mitts which are purchasable at the gardening counter of any emporium. It was singed, soot-streaked, and spattered with mysterious-looking black specks, and it depressed her. For it sustained the crime story of the long night and made the unspeakable fire not merely devilish but, what was possibly worse, irrelevant. And when Ellery tasted several of the black specks, savored them like a gourmet, and pronounced them grains of gunpowder, Nikki nodded gloomily.

"Then that's the glove he wore when he shot his brother. Had a fire laid, ran up here, tossed the glove on it, and a match, and got away while we were finding Miles. Trust an artist to be inefficient. The least he could have done was make sure it burned up."

"He was in a hurry." Ellery replaced the burned glove meticulously. "He was also unlucky. Look there, Nikki."

Nikki looked. But all she could see were some tiny red scraps of paper or cardboard, clinging like confetti to one of the side walls of the fireplace.

"What are they?"

"Unholy relics, Nikki. A rather perverted miracle. Stay here a minute, will you? I'll send Dad up. Some fur's going to fly around here. The roof's supposed to have been searched."

"Where are you going?"

"I'll be in the garden," said Ellery, and he went out so quickly Nikki had no time to assure him that she wasn't going to stay on the roof alone and he could put *that* in David Senter's fireplace and smoke it. As it was, she had to stay until the Inspector appeared, roaring, and then she left quickly, too, with her hands over her ears.

She found Ellery at the northeast corner of the mansion, prodding the path and nearby shrubbery with the beam of his flashlight, like a man who has lost something.

"Where is it, Nikki?" Ellery demanded without looking around.

"Where is what?"

"The waterspout. That gargoyle that almost conked Miles Senter."

"Well, for heaven's sake," said Nikki crossly. "How should I know?"

"Wasn't it here that it fell?"

Nikki recognized a certain urgency in the Queen manner. It certainly wasn't there. "It was right here on the path last time I saw it.

Night before last. See? Where the flags are chipped?"

"I see where the flags are chipped," said Ellery, suddenly austere, and he went back into the house.

The next hour bubbled. Ellery went about demanding the waterspout, waking people up, whipping them to feats of memory and muscle, and generally making himself unpopular. Why he was so bent on locating an object which, after all, had failed to be lethal he chose not to explain, and the victims of his inquisition went about muttering while they searched. Harry Hart was roused, Dorothy Senter was slapped awake, Dr. Grand was routed from his aged bed next door; not even Miles Senter was spared, although his questioning was executed with tactful dispatch.

In the end, the waterspout was not found, although the house was gone over from cellar to roof, and the grounds inch by inch. Nor could anyone remember having seen it since late afternoon of the day before, when the butler had stumbled over it on the spot in the path where it had crashed the night previous and, being the butler and not the gardener, had merely cursed and gone about his business. The gardener, a hickory-necked Irishman with the succinct philosophy of his profession, merely said, "Nobody told me to take the dom thing away," and went back to bed.

So there it was, or rather wasn't, as Inspector Queen said, and what difference its presence or absence made—

"Except that it's absent," said Ellery absently.

"All *right,* Ellery. So whoever tried to knock Senter's brains out took the dom, the damn thing away because somehow it left a clue to his identity—"

"His fingerprints," said Nikki with a flicker of life.

"On rough stone, Nikki? And anyway, if he used a glove once he'd use it twice, and that reminds me of something a lot more important than missing angels, which is missing brothers who try to burn up evidence in fireplaces. Velie!" shouted the Inspector.

Sergeant Velie came wearily, drying his vast face with a crib-sized handkerchief.

"What did you find out?"

"From the Westport police nothin' except a couple of new cuss words. They swear there's no evidence he's been to his shack in a month. Anyway, he ain't in Westport. The N.Y.N.H. and H. trains stopping at Westport that left New York beginning last night can't remember anyone of his description. The New Haven ticket sellers at Grand Central can't remember ditto. Our taxi investigation—"

"You satisfied now?" demanded Inspector Queen, turning around. "Now where the devil did Ellery go?"

"Miles Senter's study," said Nikki.

At this moment the study door opened and Ellery appeared.

"Senter's definitely missing. You satisfied now?"

"That he's definitely missing? Definitely."

"Velie, general alarm for David Senter. Put it through and then let's all go home and take a shower. I'm not coming back till he's found, and that's that."

"Make it—" Ellery glanced at his wrist watch. "Make it seven or eight hours, Dad. Take some time at this hour to get the equipment here that I phoned for in your name. Oh, say, noon."

"Equipment?"

"You want David Senter, don't you?"

"Certainly I want David Senter!"

"Noon."

"Here?"

Ellery sat down on a settee, his knees apart and his palms supporting him, like an old lady who had been climbing stairs.

"It's the old arithmetic," he said. "Two and two, no trick to it. A solid stone object weighing one hundred pounds is missing. A man is missing. And beside the house runs a river. David Senter was murdered and his body sunk in the East River, and as soon as the harbor police can get their diver and dragging apparatus here . . . Does anyone mind if I catch my forty winks?"

They fished David Senter out with 25 minutes to spare; and Inspector Queen, who had not gone home after all, stamped in to announce with bleary wrath that Miles Senter's artist-brother had an artistic bullet-hole through his head and had had same, from all the superficial signs, for at least twelve hours.

"They're still looking for the gun," said the Inspector, glaring about Miles Senter's bedroom, where everyone was congregated. "But we'll get it, and when we do —"

"I don't think," said Ellery, "we'll have to wait that long. Mrs. Senter, wouldn't you prefer a chair? The evidence of who murdered David and almost murdered you, Mr. Senter—the logical evidence—is all in; we merely have to assemble it. And by the way, Mr. Senter, are you sure you're feeling well enough to go through this? It consists of four elements: the grains of gunpowder peppering the cotton glove which failed to be consumed in David's fireplace; the little scraps of red cardboard clinging to the fireplace wall; the shot that was fired in the upper part of the house while we were coming up the stairs; and, of course, the date."

"The date," said Inspector Queen.

"The date?" said Nikki.

"That's very nearly the best part of it," Ellery said enthusiastically. "Summer became official as usual on June twenty-first, a week and

a half ago, so the holiday David Senter meant to spend reproducing a Westport barn was obviously the Fourth of July, as it's hardly necessary to point out. And putting an incipient Fourth of July holiday together with gunpowder grains, pieces of red cardboard, and a loud noise, you can scarcely avoid getting—a firecracker.

"Now it was midnight when we got here, Nikki," said Ellery, "and I told you at 3 A.M. that the fire in the roof studio was about three hours old. So that noise we heard coming up the stairs on our arrival, Nikki, which we took to be a revolver shot, must have been a firecracker exploding in David Senter's studio fireplace. And since there was only one explosion that we heard, you couldn't have been shot at that time, Mr. Senter. You must have been shot a few minutes earlier."

"Then why didn't we hear the real shot?" Nikki demanded. She knew she looked like the wrath, her clothes felt leprous, and her friend Dorothy insisted on reminding her of something repulsive at Madame Tussaud's. So there was a snap in her voice. "Everything was so quiet we'd certainly have heard it, even from the street."

"The answer to that, I think," said Inspector Queen grimly, "is coming this way right now. The gun, Velie? Wrapped up in a pillow." And now he said, an amiable old gentleman: "*All* right, Sergeant. Wrap it up, and shut the door behind you."

And there was nothing to be heard in that room but Sergeant Velie's weighty tread and the life-cutting switch of the closing door. And the Inspector patted himself under the left arm, looking around.

"An explosion that was planned to be heard," said Ellery pleasantly, "and a prior explosion that was planned not to be heard. What was achieved? A small miracle. The firecracker going off was taken to be the revolver shot. A simple illusion designed to make us think you were being shot while we were coming up the stairs, Mr. Senter, when actually you'd been shot a few minutes before. A falsification of the time of the shooting which could have had only one purpose: to seem to give the shooter an alibi, an alibi for the false time, when the firecracker went off.

"And who had an alibi when the firecracker went off?" Ellery went on, smiling. "You, Dorothy Senter? No, you were alone in the boathouse. You, Mr. Senter—to be absurd? No, you were alone in your sitting room with a well-creased scalp. You, Dr. Grand—to be fantastic? No, even you were alone, dozing in your garden. And David Senter was also alone—alone at the bottom of the East River.

"So I'm afraid," said Ellery, and now he was not smiling, "I'm afraid that leaves you, Hart, and by a curious coincidence you did have an

alibi for the time when the firecracker went off. A very strong alibi, Hart; in fact, the strongest possible. You were walking up the stairs between Nikki Porter and me. An excellent bit of stagecraft.

"But as a technician I find you wanting. You had two tries at Miles Senter and you flubbed both. First you loosened the gargoyle waterspout and pushed it off the roof while Miles Senter was passing along the path below. You chose that method because his brother David, with the money motive, would be the natural suspect.

"When that didn't work, you rather extended yourself. Yesterday you hid the waterspout and last night you shot David to death, weighted his body with the waterspout, and sank it in the river, thinking he would make the perfect scapegoat, since he would presumably never be found. Then you went to Miles Senter's sitting room, had your chat, walked out, and immediately walked back in and shot him in the head through a muffling pillow—and did you witness that, Mrs. Senter? I think you did—and you left your heroine's husband for dead, Hart, which was criminally careless of you.

"The rest was timing. You hurled the gun into the river from one of the windows, dashed up to the studio where you had a firecracker ready on a fuse, dropped the glove with which you'd handled everything into the fireplace, tossed a match on the prearranged fire which was to destroy all the evidence—and didn't—and you hurried downstairs to meet me and Nikki at the gate and copper-rivet your alibi when the firecracker went off. Clever, Harry, clever; but a little on the intricate side, don't you agree? The hard ones are the simple ones."

Thus Fire, and Water, in a case which *aficionados* say has become proverbial. Should time bear them out Ellery will be pleased, for he has always considered Marcus Tullius Cicero one of the soundest old earbenders in the business.

'Q'

"One man's weed is another man's flower," said the small hired man with the bright face and bright hair—and Jody-Ann, plain, dull, work-worn, "felt herself changing with the seasons" . . . Another catch-at-your-throat "tale from home."

ONE MAN'S WEED

by L. E. BEHNEY

THE MEN'S VOICES DRIFTED INTO the kitchen where Jody-Ann stood by the stove listening.

"I agreed to do a week's work and that's what I've done."

"I never said nothin' about a day off, Cleary. You get out to the field and get on with the plowin'."

"No, I'm not working today, Mr. Drummond. God didn't make man to go about like a clod and never take time to admire his handiwork. I'll work six days a week but not seven."

"You want time off to get drunk, you mean. I know your kind. You'll be half a week soberin' up."

"I'll be back this evening to help with the milking."

Lond Drummond swore deeply. "If you ain't, you can pack up your gear and get out!"

"I'll be here." The other man's voice was soft and clear, with an undercurrent of laughter that was like the sound of quick-running water.

Chairs scraped back from the table and the two men came into the kitchen—Lond, square-shouldered and dark-faced, a frown folding the thick brows above his small, close-set, black eyes; the other man slender and small, tawny-haired and gray-eyed, moving with the grace and precision of a mountain cat.

"Mrs. Drummond," the small man said smiling, "I thank you for a fine breakfast."

"It wasn't at all," Jody-Ann said. A slow warmth stole into her throat. Through the grimed window she watched his lithe figure cross the yard and enter the feed barn where she had fixed him a cot, table, and chest of drawers.

Her husband's hard fingers dug into her arm. "What're you starin' at, Jody-Ann?"

"Nothin'."

"Don't let them fine words turn your head. 'I thank you for a fine breakfast, Mrs. Drummond.' Slick-tongued city dude! Puttin' on airs! Lazy good-for-nothin'!"

"You hired him," Jody-Ann said, pulling her arm free.

"Hell, anybody can make a mistake. He comes up to me in town

last week askin' if I had a job for him. Said he'd work cheap."

"He does, don't he? You said he was a good worker yourself."

"He'll do," the man said grudgingly. His small eyes glinted with sly malice. "I betcha he's runnin' away from somethin'. I bet the law'd like to know where he's at."

"I betcha you ain't gonna tell 'em."

Jody-Ann began to pile the breakfast dishes. She smiled secretly. Lond wouldn't fire the new hand. He wouldn't go to the Sheriff with his mean suspicions, either—not that they were true, which they weren't, she could tell that. Not a fine man like Mr. Cleary. Lond was too tight with his money and too hard on his help. He couldn't keep a good man and he couldn't work his two hundred acres of hill and bottomland by himself.

She carried the stacked dishes to the kitchen work-table, put the bar of yellow soap in the pan, and poured a kettle of hot water over it. She saw her husband cross the barn lot to the corral and bring out the horses. She thought fleetingly that it would be nice to spend a day lazing around doing nothing but sleeping and lying in the sun. But the first of the week was washday, and Lond always said that got the week off to a good start.

From the kitchen window she saw the hired man come out of the barn. He was bare-headed and wearing an old blue denim coat. He had a book and a small bundle tucked under his arm. He paused in the doorway and looked up into the sky.

It had been a foggy morning earlier, with a bitter cold chill; but now the fog was breaking and a ray of sunlight illumined his lean uptilted face and his bright hair. He smiled and bounded across the barnyard, hurdled the gate, and ran leaping across the pasture to the hillside that rose abruptly beyond. Then he was swallowed in a blowing wrack of fog.

Jody-Ann looked down at her hands, lying idle in the grease-scummed dishwater. She had no right to waste time when there was so much to do. She wasn't young any more. To feel such a longing to be young and free and pretty was a foolish thing. She had never been pretty or free—not with six younger sisters to look after.

When she was sixteen, Lond Drummond had come looking for a wife. He hadn't cared that she was plain as an old stump; he had needed a strong woman to do his house work and fix his meals. He had never shown her any affection and his lovemaking was emotionless and perfunctory. To Jody-Ann, marriage had made little change in the dull, gray, hopeless round of her existence.

She held her hands up to the cold light from the window. The skin was cracked, red-scaled, and her nails were black-rimmed and bro-

ken. She was nearly thirty, and she was old. Tears flooded her eyes and choked her throat. She hadn't cried since she could remember. She was a fool. What was it that had stirred her so in the past few days? It must be the start of some illness, and she had no time for that either.

She finished the dishes, swept up the rough board floor, and made the bed. She started a batch of bread and put the wash in the tubs to soak. At noon Lond came in from the fields to eat; he was in one of his bad moods and he gobbled his food without a word to her and stomped back to his plowing.

Jody-Ann washed the dishes, put the bread in the oven to bake, finished the washing, and hung the clothes to dry in the pale wintry sunlight.

The bread came out in round, brown, sweet-smelling loaves. She caught a chicken, efficiently chopped off its squawking head on the woodblock, dipped the limp feathery body in boiling water, plucked, singed, cleaned, stuffed it, and then put it into the oven for supper. Lond would yell: fancy cookin' when there weren't no comp'ny.

There hardly ever was any company any more. At first her family had come over to see them right often, but Lond had made it pretty clear they weren't welcome: squallin' kids underfoot—sloppin' up his food! Weeks went by now and they saw no one—day after gray day with the monotony of slow-dripping water.

Jody-Ann bathed herself in the round tin tub in the warm, sweet-smelling kitchen. She dressed in her good dress and carefully combed her limp, mouse-brown hair. Her skin itched from the soap and she wished for a bit of perfume cream to put on it—things like the town women had out of the stores; but Lond would only yell at her for wasting money.

She did the chores, taking care to keep her dress clean. She was out giving the chickens a pail of corn when she saw Mr. Cleary coming back at last, striding across the pasture with a swing in his walk and his yellow hair flying.

She managed to be near the feed barn when he came whistling across the lot.

"I seen you coming back," she said, feeling her face hot with the strange, delicious torment that was driving her.

He laughed. "I said I would. See what I brought you?" He held out a handful of green and gold.

"Fiddlenecks?" she cried. "Them's weeds! What're they for?"

"One man's weed is another man's flower," the small man said, looking at her very directly, his gray eyes full of dancing light. He held up a curled, arched spiral, bright reddish-gold in the late sunlight. "Don't they make you think of charging horses and waving flags? An army of spring challenging the

winter! See how each little flower is shaped so perfect and exact, each curled spike so graceful and bold. The whole hillside above here is covered with them. Beauty is everywhere, if you have eyes to see it, Mrs. Drummond."

Jody-Ann took the flower in her rough hand. She turned the small spiraled bloom slowly. Life seemed to flow from the prickly stem into her fingers.

"It *is* beautiful," she said. "It sure is. Funny I never seen it was so before."

"Perhaps you weren't looking," the man said, smiling at her gravely.

The days flowed quickly after that as winter burst into spring with hills of soft rippling green and skies filled with trilling birds and drifting cloud-shadows. Then almost imperceptibly the grasses turned gold and then brown as the warmth of spring gave way to the fierce heat of summer.

Jody-Ann felt herself changing with the seasons. No longer did the days pass in a monotonous gray blur. She saw the beauty of the sunrises and felt the caress of the wind and the burn of the sun. Outwardly she gave no sign of the tumult within as she moved silently around the house, wearing the same faded, shapeless clothing, combing her mousy hair into its usual tight knot.

The men spent the days in the fields and after dark came in tired and dirty to eat their supper. When they had finished, Lond sat in his chair beneath the lamp, his big, square, work-hard hands folded on his flat belly until he dozed and got up yawning and went off to bed. The hired man went out to his room in the feed barn. His lamp burned until long after Jody-Ann had finished washing the dishes and slipped into bed beside her snoring husband.

One night in late June she could not sleep. The moon's white light poured through the open window onto the floor like a flood of silver. The night trilling of crickets and frogs drifted on the restless wind.

She slipped out of bed without disturbing Lond's noisy sleep. She pulled on her old coat over her flannel nightgown and went out barefoot into the night.

The light still burned in the barn window and she tiptoed toward it. The man sat beside his table, his shining head close to the lamp as he read a book.

She stood by the window a long time—watching him, standing motionless as a stump in the cold moonlight. When he closed the book and leaned over to blow out the lamp, she turned and ran swiftly back to the house.

The next washday she went out to his room to get his bedding to wash. She stripped the old quilts from the cot, folded them over her arm, and stood looking around the small room with its whitewashed walls and meager furnishings. She

saw a pile of papers on the table and stooped to look at them. They were drawings and water-color paintings of the farm.

Jody-Ann exclaimed with pleasure. Even to her unschooled eyes the work was good. She felt instinctively its strength and skill. With paint and pencil the man had caught the beauty of the land, its starkness in shadow and sunlight, the dark symmetry of its hills, the glare of the sun on its acres of ripening grain.

The last picture was a drawing of her. Jody-Ann stared in wondering disbelief. Mr. Cleary had drawn her holding the fiddleneck bloom. It was her face—and yet it was not. This woman, with her wide dark eyes, high cheekbones, and delicate mouth, was beautiful. She seemed alive, as if the parted lips were about to speak, and the look on her face was like the look of a blind woman in the first instant of sight.

Carefully Jody-Ann returned the drawing to its place. She gathered up the quilts and left the room. Every day after that, when the men were working in the fields, she stole in and looked at the picture. If Mr. Cleary knew that she had found his drawing of her, he said nothing. Sometimes he brought her a handful of the deep purply-blue harvest lilies that grew in the grain fields or a stalk of the spicy, fern-leafed yarrow from the creek bottoms.

Through the long hot days of summer Jody-Ann began to hum and sing tunelessly at her work. She brushed and carefully combed her hair. She made new dresses for herself from the empty feed sacks. She cleaned the house and made new curtains. She raked the yard and planted seeds in neat flowerbeds protected from the scratching chickens by wire-net covers.

Lond, slow and dull as he was, began to sense the change in her and his little pig eyes glittered with suspicion. He took to coming in from the fields at odd times and hiding in the out buildings and watching her. It was not that he loved her, Jody-Ann thought; she was merely something that belonged to him, like one of his horses, or a cow, and he was a possessive man.

The farm prospered. The crops were in, the hay was in the barns, the wheat harvested, the cows were fat and sleek in the pastures along the creek bottoms.

One hot August morning Lond went into town in his old truck for a load of feed. By late morning he had not come back. He wasn't one to waste time in idle chatter with the loafers along the street, and Jody-Ann wondered if the old truck had broken down again.

As she readied dinner, she saw a plume of dust above the long driveway and thought absently that it must be Lond getting home. She tested the potatoes in the oven and stirred the gravy. Already the house was stifling hot in spite of the

breeze that stirred the curtains in the open windows.

She heard the sound of cars in the yard and saw two black, shiny sedans pull up in front of the barn. Gold stars were painted on the doors. They were cars from the Sheriff's office at the county seat.

As Jody-Ann watched, cold with dread, men in sweat-streaked tan uniforms got out of the cars and came toward the house. She heard them tramp across the porch. The house seemed to shake at their insistent knocking.

She knew what Lond had done now that the crops were in, and anger rose in her hot and strong to strengthen her shaking knees and color her face that wanted to be pale with fear.

She went calmly to the door.

"Mrs. Drummond?"

"Yes?"

"You have a man that calls himself Cleary working here?"

"Yes, we do," she said, smiling innocently. "He done something?"

"Is this his picture?"

She looked at the photograph. She saw nothing except the pinched face of the wanted man, and his tortured eyes.

"No," she said. "Sure don't look none like the man we got workin' here."

The man in the doorway frowned. Light glittered on the badge pinned to his sweaty shirt. He said to Jody-Ann, "You're sure this isn't the man?"

"'Course I'm sure."

"We'd like to talk to him anyway. Where can we find him?"

"He's out in the far field." She pushed past the man with the badge and pointed. "Up that way. Just foller that fence line."

"Thank you, Ma'am."

Standing on the porch, her hands clenched beneath her apron, she watched them stride across the yard, the chickens scattering from under their feet, dust and white feathers lifting in the breeze.

She waited until they had disappeared behind the barns. Then she ran through the house and across the back yard to the barn lot. She slid under the fence in the hot dust and hurried up the lane toward the creek where she knew Cleary was working.

She heard the sharp tap of his hammer before she saw him. He was fixing fence and driving a staple into a post with quick, hard strokes. He saw her coming and straightened to meet her, a smile on his lean face and his bright hair blowing in the wind.

"Run!" she gasped. "Oh, Mr. Cleary, run for your life—they've come after you!"

"The police," he said quietly. "I knew some day they'd find me."

"Run!" she cried. "Oh, please. That Lond, he must've turned you in!"

"It doesn't matter," he said. He put the hammer carefully on the post. He looked up at the blue of

the sky. "Do you know what it's like to be in prison?" he said softly, as though he were speaking to himself. "The bars—the dark—it's like a never-ending night without stars."

"Run!" she cried again. "Don't waste time a-talkin' now. Run and hide!"

"Where can I hide that they'll never find me?" He looked at her, his eyes wide and clear and without fear. Then he leaned over and kissed her hard on the mouth. The touch of his lips raced through her like a flame. His hands caressed her face as though he was searching for something strong and good to remember.

"I will be free in you, Jody-Ann," he said. "You must see, feel, hear, be all the beautiful things about you. You must feel the wind in your hair and the sun on your face and you must hear the sounds of the rain."

He kissed her again, gently and lingeringly; then he turned from her and without looking back began to run across the stubblefield that was like a glittering pale sea in the hot sunlight. He ran toward the hill beyond the field where the long dry grass sang in the wind. As he reached the bottom of the hill, a small bright figure bounding upward through the clear light, she heard the thud-thud of running feet in the stubble and the Sheriff's men rushed past her.

She stood beside the fence and saw the small figure on the hill climbing higher and higher toward the sun, and his pursuers toiling like dark beetles after him. She heard their shouts and the harsh sound of gunfire that echoed across the valley like a dreadful thunder.

The fugitive reached the top of the hill and stood there swaying, reaching up toward the light. Then the small dark figure crumpled and lay in the grass that rippled and shone like a covering of tawny silk in the wild wind.

She walked back toward the house. The wind blew against her, the stubble crunched like glass splinters beneath her feet, a meadow lark sang a lilting, liquid-throated requiem from the top wire of the fence, and the sun, hot on her face, dried her tears.

'Q'

PARADOX*

by RICHARD M. GORDON

Please don't be confused by our surgical dress
  For you've seen all our faces before,
But how can we really expect you to guess
  Who we were when we aren't any more?

Oh, we are the men who became unemployed
  When the doctors took over TV,
The cops and the Sherlocks whose work you enjoyed
  When a man didn't need an M.D.

But Kildare and Casey have stolen our time,
  And the public has ceased to admire us;
Now nobody cares about solving a crime;
  The thing is to fight with a virus.

If you can't be a dick, you must be a doc—
  Optometrist, né Private Eye.
Your gun and your badge must go into hock;
  Detectives must eat or must die.

Yet none of us starved when the going got rough,
  And the sponsors began to turn cool;
Some darned clever writers were writing our stuff,
  So we all went to medical school.

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* A pun.

EDITORS' FILE CARD

a new story by

AUTHOR: **HUGH B. CAVE**

TITLE: ***Naked in Darkness***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Sheppard

LOCALE: The island of Jamaica

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Near the end of this story the detective finds himself in so utterly hopeless a predicament that you'll wonder how in the world he can possibly extricate himself.*

THEY WERE NEAR THE ENTRANCE now. Sheppard could see the slit of daylight ahead and hear the rain pounding the mountain. Had Hurricane Flora been drowning the island all the time he was in the cave?

She probably had. Just before his departure from Moore Town the weather office at Palisadoes had issued a warning. Flora was slowing down over Cuba. The island of Jamaica could expect torrential rains until she picked up speed again.

Sheppard frowned. The return trip down the mountain would be a nightmare, and he had already gone 36 hours without sleep.

Ahead of him, his prisoner stumbled on the rough stone floor and began cursing again. Sheppard only raised the barrel of his shotgun an inch. The man looked back, his small eyes blazing in the gleam of his captor's flashlight.

"You could at least take these handcuffs off before I break my neck!" he snarled.

"Keep moving."

"Why don't you shoot me and get it over with?"

"Try jumping me again," Sheppard said, "and I will."

Last time he hadn't. McCoy, taken by surprise in the depths of the cave, had come at him like a mad-

man, but Sheppard had simply spun the little single-bore Beretta in his hands and slapped its stock against the man's jaw. He was fond of that little Beretta. It gave you only one shot, true, but it was feather-light for quick action.

McCoy looked into the muzzle of it now and stumbled on toward the entrance.

Then Sheppard heard the muttering.

It began high above their heads and swelled to a thunder. It became a spectral train careening down the mountain at top speed. Suddenly it exploded into a monstrous, earth-shaking convulsion.

Sheppard braced himself and watched the slit of daylight at the mouth of the cave. He had lived in Jamaica's mountains as a boy, and had seen landslides before. The slit was vulnerable. It opened on a scrap of ledge about the size of his yard in Kingston. The mountain above the ledge was all but vertical.

A boulder crashed on the ledge, rolled, and dropped over the edge. A rain of debris followed, piling up with fantastic quickness. Then came the slide itself, earth and trees and rocks, with a roar so loud that the shockwave staggered him.

He watched the earth fill the opening and block out the light. By the gleam of his flash he watched it flow toward McCoy and himself, filling the tunnel from floor to ceiling.

They backed away and it followed for twenty, thirty feet, like a giant worm, before it slowed and finally stopped. The awful thunder had stopped, too. The only sound now was a soft slithering as the face of the earth wall settled.

For a long moment neither man moved. Then McCoy turned his head. "Well, mister, what you suppose now, huh?" McCoy was Kingston-born, with a good schooling, but he looked like a peasant and thought it amusing to talk like one.

Sheppard said slowly, "Is there another way out of here?"

"No way 'ceptin' this one, mister."

Sheppard was silent. He did not know the cave well, himself. He had only known there *was* one in this almost inaccessible region, and it was a logical place to look for his quarry. He did know it was a big cave, with dozens of chambers and a maze of tunnels. To explore it would take more days than he could hope to stay alive.

He walked forward to examine the great worm of earth. Behind him McCoy said dryly, "Us can't dig through it, mister. It want a bulldozer, and them couldn't get any 'dozer up here even if them knew we was trapped. Anyhow, them would never know where to begin. That slide cover the cave mouth."

"Talk English," Sheppard said.

"Certainly, pal. Any other orders while we sit here and wait to die?"

Sheppard gave it a moment's

thought. "Yes," he said then. "Walk back to that last chamber we came through, and sit down. I don't like the smell of you in a tight place like this."

McCoy grinned. "You hide in a cave for two weeks, pal, and you mightn't smell so sweet yourself. It's these clothes."

"Walk," Sheppard ordered.

The chamber was not a large one. In it they sat twenty feet apart, their backs against opposite walls. McCoy laid his manacled hands on drawn-up knees and gazed calmly at his captor.

"What are you, mister? What kind of work you do?"

"I'm in coffee."

"So you a planter, huh?"

"Something like that," Sheppard said quietly.

"Then why you so down on me? What me ever do you?"

Sheppard fixed him with a cold stare. "In the past two months you've assaulted four women, McCoy."

"So?"

"One was my sister."

McCoy shaped his slack mouth into an O of astonishment. "Now what a thing you say. That too bad, mister. If me know she you sister, me never do that."

"And you've murdered two policemen."

"Them get too close to catching me."

"You're an animal, McCoy."

The handcuffed man lifted his massive shoulders and let them fall. "Me told you is not me you smell. Is me clothes." He frowned at his rags. "You change clothes with me, you be the one that stinks." His laugh was half grunt. "You got any cigarettes, mister?"

"I don't smoke."

"A flask of white rum in you pocket, maybe?"

"I don't drink."

"Shoo!" McCoy said. "You not very good company. Me goin' get some sleep."

Sheppard's eyelids were heavy with fatigue, too, but he willed them to remain open. He sat with the Beretta across his knees, the flashlight glowing on the floor beside him. He had brought extra batteries for the light but they were in it now, burning themselves up. When they were finished, he and McCoy would be in darkness.

"Naked in darkness," Sheppard murmured, gazing at his prisoner.

McCoy opened one eye. "What that you say?"

"You wouldn't understand."

"'Naked in darkness.' Me hear you say it. What that suppose to mean?"

"I said you wouldn't understand. It's a line from a poem. 'Naked in darkness we sit and wait.'"

"Very good," McCoy said, dropping the patois. "I like that." He closed his open eye and seemed to doze for a moment, then opened both eyes and looked at Sheppard and grinned. "Yes, man. 'Naked in

darkness'—that's good. I'll remember that." After a while he said, "How did you find me, mister? You must be smarter than the police. They couldn't do it."

"I studied you."

"Studied me? How?"

"When that last girl identified you, I went to people who knew you. I talked to your teachers, and people you grew up with and worked with. I could write your life story, McCoy. I found out you're a man given to wild rages when things go wrong for you. I learned about your hunting pigeons in this region, and how when you shot those two fingers off your left hand you began calling yourself Three-finger Jack because you admired the original Three-finger Jack so much. He was a killer too."

"So?" McCoy said.

"The original Jack hid in caves when he was hunted, McCoy. I knew there was a big cave here where you did your pigeon shooting. So I tracked you down."

McCoy chuckled. "You're smart. You should be almost smart enough to figure a way out of here." He waited, and when Sheppard remained silent he chuckled again. "Are you married?"

Sheppard nodded.

"Kids?"

Again Sheppard nodded.

McCoy shook his head. "You poor slob. For me it was only the hangman—sooner or later, the hangman—but look what you've got yourself into. Well, it's your own damned fault. I'm going to sleep."

He closed his eyes again. This time he slept.

Half an hour later Sheppard, too, allowed his eyes to close. He was very tired . . . He awoke with a grime-encrusted foot nudging his neck and McCoy triumphantly standing over him with the shotgun. The muzzle of the Beretta was an inch from Sheppard's head.

"Just give me the key to these handcuffs, mister," McCoy said.

Sheppard did not move.

"The key! You think I won't shoot you for it?" The Beretta's barrel was a long black tunnel in front of Sheppard's right eye. "This gun is loaded, mister. I thought maybe you'd emptied it while I was sleeping, so I looked. It's loaded, mister—so hand over that key!"

Sheppard took the key from his pocket and watched the handcuffs fall to the floor. He said slowly, "So there is a way out of here. You were lying."

McCoy laughed. "You're dumb, mister. You said yourself I turn crazy-wild when things go wrong. When you first found me I jumped you, didn't I?—even with this gun aimed at my gut. Did I go crazy when that slide blocked the entrance?"

"I see," Sheppard said.

"But only one of us is leaving here, mister. Take off your shoes and those clothes—all of them.

They'll be a big help to me outside."

Sheppard looked away from McCoy's face at last and slowly made himself naked. McCoy reached for the handcuffs. "You can wear these."

The cuffs clicked shut on Sheppard's wrists. McCoy took off his rags, dressed himself in Sheppard's clothing, and laced on Sheppard's shoes. Then with his rags wadded under one arm, he gathered up the shotgun and flashlight.

"So long, mister."

Sheppard said slowly, "You're leaving me like this?"

"'Naked in darkness,'" McCoy chuckled. "You put the idea right into my head—I was only going to swap clothes with you and take the gun. Anyway, you wouldn't feel clean in these rags of mine, not even crawling under them to keep warm. You said yourself they stink." He looked down at the naked man and laughed. "Now just try finding your way out of here," he said, "in the dark and without using your hands."

He slid along the wall to one of the chamber's openings. Just before disappearing he turned his head. "'Naked in darkness.' Man, that's good. I'll just have to tell that to a little girl I got picked out in Spanish Town." He was gone.

Sheppard lay still as the sound of footfalls died away in the dark. He shivered. Then he squirmed along the floor until his manacled hands touched a flat stone.

He turned the stone over. His fingers found the spare key he had hidden beneath it while McCoy slept. The handcuffs fell from him and he stood up. He walked slowly toward the tunnel into which McCoy had vanished, and slowly along it, testing the shape of the floor before each step. His hands kept up a continual weaving in front of him.

In time he reached a place where the tunnel branched, and he hesitated. But not for long. On he went again, groping.

Naked in darkness, he thought. Naked he was, naked he felt. Still, bare feet were better than shoes for feeling out the irregularities of the floor or the edge of an unseen pit around which he must make his way.

The strain on his senses began to tell. He stopped to rest. But after he had rested he went on again through the maze, step by step by step.

Near the end of the second hour he found McCoy's discarded rags. He did not touch them. Twenty minutes later he saw daylight. It was only a shining pinpoint far ahead, but it grew in size as he approached it. It became an opening large enough for a man to crawl through.

The floor of the tunnel, slanting up to it, was littered with stones. He studied them. He stooped. A moment later he wriggled through the

opening and found himself on a yard-wide ledge thick with stunted tropical growth. The mountainside fell steeply to a lush valley where wisps of kitchen smoke rose from a cluster of peasant houses. Rain was falling.

Twenty feet distant on the same ledge, McCoy snatched up the Beretta and lurched to his feet from a study of the houses. His expression of astonishment changed slowly to one of amusement as the naked figure of Sheppard emerged from the mouth of the cave, straightened, and then faced him.

"Well, I'll be damned," McCoy said. "You found it."

Sheppard's hands were at his sides. He was very tired. Still, he was relaxed.

"You left your trail, McCoy."

"Don't move, mister. This gun is still loaded," McCoy warned. "What trail did I leave?"

"The smell, McCoy. The smell of your clothes. Even after you dropped them, the smell stayed with you." With his gaze fixed on the gun, Sheppard shifted his bare feet ever so slightly, to grip the ledge better. "I told you I was in coffee. I didn't say I was a planter, McCoy. You said that. I'm a coffee taster. I can smell you from here."

McCoy, after a moment of silence, said with a sneer, "Can you smell the powder in this shell, mister?"

"There isn't any to smell."

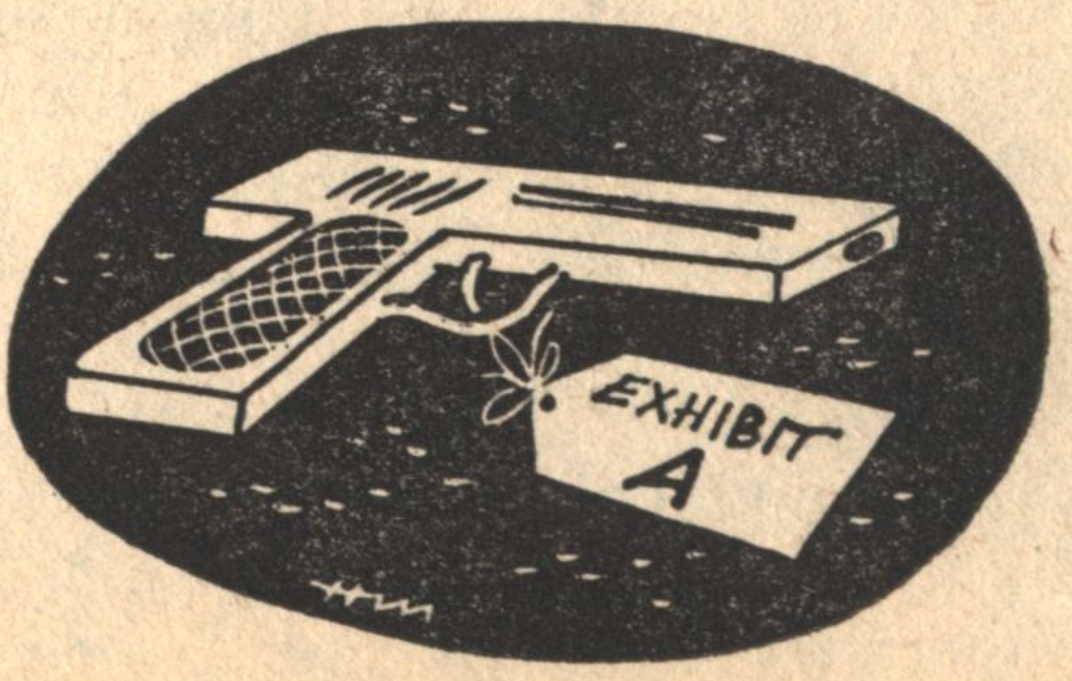
McCoy laughed. "I looked, mister. You forgot."

The naked man at the cave mouth shook his head. "You looked to see if the gun had a shell in it. You should have taken the shell out and looked at that. I emptied it, McCoy, while you were sleeping. Pull the trigger. Find out."

McCoy fired. True to form, when there was no explosion he flung the gun down the mountainside and hurled himself, cursing, at his adversary.

Sheppard's right hand flashed up. As a boy, he too had hunted pigeons in Jamaica's mountains. Not with a gun, of course. With stones.

He was still good at it. He didn't miss.



EDITORS' FILE CARD

a new story by

AUTHOR: **HELEN NIELSEN**

TITLE: ***The Breaking Point***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *A moving story—that will sadden you and also enrage you . . . about Michael Quade III, who will enrage you, and Monique, who will sadden you . . .*

MICHAEL QUADE III WAS A HUGE bearish man with a mop of unruly brown hair and pensive brown eyes that sometimes gave him the look of a poet. He was not a poet. At 35 he was indifferently engaged in a number of things: sports car driving, deep-sea fishing, following the fashionable race tracks, and being a member of several Boards of Directors of major industries about which he knew nothing.

Michael Quade III was an expert on only one subject—women. He despised and enjoyed them all because he was invulnerable; he was a man who couldn't be hurt.

On the last night of their marriage he he took his third wife, Sandra, to dinner at the smartest supper club in Manhattan, knowing full well how the post Café Society atmosphere thrilled her middle-class soul. He ordered lavishly from both the menu and the wine list, and watched her preen like a queen before her court.

He watched her eyes—narrow, green, and catlike. He watched the diamond and emerald necklace he had bestowed on her as a reconciliation gift sparkle in the candlelight. He watched the process of satisfying her ravenous appetite and calculated the number of pounds that had been added to that fantastically exciting body in the eight months of their marriage.

Sandra was only 23, but she

would age early. By 30, unless she adhered to a strict reducing diet or suffered hard times, she would be obese. In spite of almost ceaseless jaw action, there was already the shadow of a double chin. And since Sandra had nothing whatsoever to offer a man except her body, she would mature into a shrew and a frightful bore.

She swallowed the last morsel, licked her sensuous lips, and smiled at Michael. She now resembled an overdressed and slightly drowsy Kewpie doll. Food and wine, especially wine, always made Sandra drowsy. It was one of her few genuinely attractive attributes. Then, as she sat basking in the rich possession of her soon-to-be-terminated identity—Mrs. Michael Quade III—the catlike eyes widened and the sensuous mouth opened to emit a high-pitched squeal that carried across the room.

"Hol-lee!"

Michael Quade shuddered and sought solace in his glass. Holly Gaye wrote one of the more vitriolic gossip columns for a local daily. An old and unloved acquaintance, she had received abundant copy from the marital and extra-marital adventures of Michael Quade for the past fifteen years. A sharp featured, long-legged woman, she approached at a stride only slightly hobbled by the folds of her Galanos skirt. At the table's edge she leered expectantly.

"You two!" she shrieked. "How absolutely *ape* to see you out together again! I've been hearing naughty rumors—marriage going smash, Mike playing the town, Sandy seen with a handsome count."

"The family that preys together stays together," Michael said dryly.

Wit was lost on Holly. She would be amused by nothing less than a duel to the death with maces or a mass murder in Central Park at dawn. And tonight, Holly, who was formidable enough alone, was armed. She held a loaded Polaroid pointed at their heads.

"Say cheese!" she shrilled. "No! Better idea! Big smooch. End all rumors. Kiss the bride, Mik-ee!"

Michael Quade put down the wine glass. He looked at Sandra. Never in their entire eight months of marital encumbrance had she looked so disgusting. He picked up the linen napkin from the table and wiped a last gluttonous morsel from her moist lips. Then he put down the napkin, smiled blandly for Holly's benefit, and lunged at Sandra.

He caught her mid-riff, kissed her hard and cruelly on the mouth, and then, using one hand to force her back against the booth, with the other he rudely ripped the necklace from her throat.

Holly Gaye's camera captured an expression of priceless horror on the little Kewpie face.

"Mik-ee!" Holly gasped. "Not

like that! Save the cave man stuff for home!"

Michael Quade stood up. "Sandra is home," he announced. "This is where I picked her up eight months ago, and I always return items taken by mistake. I have only one excuse—it was a cold and chilly night."

"But Mik-ee—"

"Holly, child, listen to Uncle Michael. I'm giving you a nice juicy exclusive—so exclusive that dear Sandra is only now beginning to catch on. Hear this: Mrs. Michael Quade the third is flying to Reno in the morning. There she will obtain an uncontested divorce from Michael Quade, from whom she will receive a cash settlement of $10,000, one mink coat, one twelve-carat diamond—"

Sandra's shock was wearing off. She stirred. She bristled.

"Mike—damn you!" she cried.

"—and no alimony," Quade concluded. "A generous settlement in view of Mr. Quade's collection of intimate photographs of Mrs. Quade and a handsome count—and a handsome jockey—and a handsome—"

"Pig!" Sandra exploded. "You filthy pig!"

Michael Quade dangled the new necklace in the candlelight. He enjoyed the greedy gleam it brought to Sandra's narrowing eyes—the light of pathetic hope that this might be just another of his sadistic jokes. Then, in a gesture of finality, he pocketed the necklace and quickly walked away.

Holly Gaye's lively story made the front page of the morning edition.

"You're a beast," Leah said over the breakfast coffee. "You're an even worse beast than your father. You deliberately staged that scene, didn't you? You deliberately gave that poor wretch—what was her name? Sandra—yes. You gave her an expensive necklace just for the evening."

"Actually, I didn't give it to her," Michael corrected. "I had it on loan from the jeweler. He's picking it up this morning."

"Pure savage!"

There was a note of near admiration in Leah's voice. She was a handsome woman. At 56 her black hair had developed a fashionable and carefully groomed streak of white, and her ageless body had held to a neat 115 pounds for the past 30 years. Still astonishingly attractive to men, she was once widowed, twice divorced, and had been Michael's first love and first hate—his mother.

"It *was* a sadistic touch," he reflected, "but Sandra was so horribly vulgar. Remember, Leah, you always taught me that it's the little things that count."

"She'll divorce you, of course."

"She has no choice. She's on the plane now."

"And then you'll find another

cheap little gold-digger and go through the whole sordid mess all over again. Michael, darling, why don't you marry for love—just once?"

Michael poured a second cup of coffee from the Georg Jensen carafe and walked to the edge of the balcony. Leah's apartment was on the East River, and on sullen mornings like this one Michael had an eerie feeling that the world terminated somewhere off the edge of the fog.

"Love," he repeated. "What an idea! Have you?"

"Have I what, darling?"

"Ever married for love?"

"What a thing to say! Of course I have! Richard—"

"But not my father."

Michael's statement surprised himself. It was like an old ghost neither of them remembered that suddenly rose up from the subconscious to chill the very air. He turned and stared at Leah, and when their eyes met she had become suddenly old and haggard. Embarrassed, she forced a too-cheerful brightness.

"Michael, how really *awful* you are!" she scolded. "Do you know that at this moment you look exactly like him? But you couldn't remember, of course. Your father and I had a very convenient arrangement—satisfying in every way. But I won't sit here talking about the past. I'm off to Miami with Robin —and, darling, please don't marry again before we return!"

Leah put her cup down on the breakfast table, blew him a kiss off the tips of her fingers, and disappeared into the apartment. Michael tasted his coffee. It was cold, but he drank it to the last bitter drop. It seemed appropriate.

On the evening the telegram came from Reno informing him that he was once more a free man, Michael Quade got splendidly drunk. At some time near dawn he met Monique. She was half Irish, half Belgian, 26 years old, six months in the United States, and too beautiful to walk home alone from her hat check job at the bar where they met. She was also independent and suspicious of solicitous men driving expensive imported sports cars.

Michael followed her for seven blocks before she providentially walked into a switchblade brawl. The door of the sports car opened and Monique leaped in. She was breathless and frightened, and Michael was able to drive her home without protest.

Not fluent in the use of English, Monique then found herself with an insistent house guest. Her apartment was tiny. It could have been dark and gloomy, but it wasn't. It could have been cold and depressing, but it wasn't. It was warm because Monique was warm; it was bright because Monique was bright.

She made hot chocolate—the last

thing Michael wanted—but it did give him an excuse to stay.

"I am so—what is the word?—scared of those switchblade fighters," she said.

"Good!" Michael exclaimed.

"Good? Why good?"

"Because you are so—what is the word?—proper. Without those switchblade fighters I wouldn't be here. I'd be out in the rainy night—driving, driving, driving."

"It isn't raining," Monique declared soberly.

"It's raining," Michael insisted, "inside of me."

"You've been drinking."

"Celebrating. This day I lost a wife—"

"Oh, I'm sorry!"

"—a shrew," Michael added. "A leech and a vulgar, gluttonous conniving female from whom I have this day, praise whatever gods there be, received my divorce."

Monique busied herself with cups on a small table, and Michael watched her drowsily from the sofa. She had a small childlike face. Her skin was fashionably pale, her eyes luminous and large. In the glowing euphoria induced by his alcoholic intake, she took on a pixie-like quality. She smiled shyly, embarrassed and amused by his frankness.

"Then it isn't so bad," she said. "I mean, if you didn't like your wife—"

"I loathed her," Michael said, "and besides, she depressed me. So let's forget her, shall we? What is your name, damsel in distress?"

"Monique," she said.

"Monique." He rolled the name on his tongue like brandy. It had a sound of music—or wind in the tree tops, or firelight and snow piling against the window panes. "Monique," he repeated, "do you know who I am? I am Michael Quade the third. I have somewhere between five and seven million dollars, excellent health, no children—and a very great problem."

"What is it?" she asked.

"I can't bear to be alone. Honestly! It's psychological. I've been analyzed six times and it always comes out the same—I just can't bear to be alone. Monique, will you marry me?"

Before she could answer, Michael conveniently fell asleep.

Three months passed before Monique married Michael Quade. The courtship—and it was old-fashioned enough to be called just that—was the longest and strangest in his experience. She was fresh and exciting—a war orphan with an eager zest for life and a childlike acceptance of every fairy-tale dream of her adopted country.

Monique's idea of fun took them to Coney Island, Central Park Zoo, and even the tour boat around Manhattan. Michael plied her with popcorn and peanuts, hero sandwiches and canned beer, and finally, at 11:20 one evening on the top of

the Empire State building, he presented her with the 12-carat diamond that was his signature of intention to wed. They flew to Mexico City in the morning.

Two weeks later Michael and his bride dined with Leah in her East River apartment. It was a cozy family affair—a quartet for cocktails and quietly elegant supper, because Leah had a slight sadistic streak of her own.

An intimate party left Monique with no place to hide. Robin—Leah's pet name for Jeff Robinson, a brilliant trial lawyer who had seen the light and left a life of crime among the Great Unwashed for a life of luxury among the Great Unloved—Robin was completely mesmerized. Monique's charm never faltered. She played her role flawlessly, and Michael had to restrain a desire to applaud when, on perfect cue, she left the table of subtle inquisition and went to the powder room.

"Michael!" Leah exclaimed, the moment she was out of earshot, "she's charming! You've actually done it! You've married for love!"

It was an amusing idea. Michael decided to play with it a while.

"A woman couldn't be wrong about a thing like that, could she?" he challenged.

"Never!" Leah insisted. "And it's so wonderfully primitive I could cry. She adores you! What do you say, Robin? Doesn't she adore Michael?"

"I wish I could remember a time when a woman looked at me the way Monique looks at Michael," Robin answered. "I'd probably be saved—whatever that is."

"Monique looks at everything the way she looks at me," Michael said. "It's called greed."

Leah squealed in dismay. "Michael, don't say that! I must have my illusions!"

"Illusions?"

The word echoed strangely from the doorway. Monique had returned. Michael wasn't certain how much of the conversation she had heard, but he didn't like the look in her eyes.

He got up from the table and went to the bar. He poured himself a double Scotch and pretended to be unaware that Monique's question was directed to him.

"What is it—the illusion?" she asked.

It was Robin who answered.

"Illusion, my dear Monique," he explained, "is the magic veil that makes one face adored and another commonplace."

Michael drained his glass.

"Michael," Monique said in a quiet voice, "you know what happens when you drink so—"

Michael slammed the glass down on the bar. "I get drunk!" he shouted. "When I drink so much, I get drunk—and I like it!"

He whirled about and faced her—so sweet, so innocent, so wounded. Her face was pale and

her eyes were the eyes of a hurt puppy. He glared at her while across the room, still seated like some Oriental matriarch, Leah shrieked with laughter.

"Robin, look and behold!" she cried. "My one and only son, Michael, is afraid! He's terrified of being loved!"

Michael never forgave Leah for that night. Later, when it was all over, he could blame it on her. She made him want to smash something—and he did.

The first time Michael was unfaithful to Monique, she reacted like a disillusioned bride. She wept. She sulked. She temporarily withdrew. But she didn't retaliate or fight back in any way. Gradually she deepened. She lost some of her childlike charm and buoyancy and began to be an understanding wife.

Small cords were being woven about Michael that tore at his muscles and frayed the raw edges of his nerves. He fought them with traditional Michael Quade methods. He took Monique on a cruise and spent it in an alcoholic haze. He migrated from cabin to cabin and flaunted his conquests before her. Monique remained faithful.

Back in New York he met Robin at a favorite bar.

"Michael, when are you going to grow up?" Robin demanded. "You're behaving like an idiot."

"I'm behaving like a man," Michael said. "I didn't misrepresent myself to Monique. She knew what she married."

"Then this marriage is to be like all the others?"

"It's to be the way it works out. For God's sake, Robin, get off your pedestal! It doesn't suit you. Who are you, anyway?"

"A bachelor," Robin replied quietly, "and your friend. And sometimes I wish I weren't, because right now I'd like to give you a very unfriendly punch in the nose."

"Are you in love with my wife?" Michael demanded.

"No, but somebody should be. She deserves it."

"Monique the chaste," Michael taunted. "Monique the faithful! Monique the long-suffering! Why don't you have a medal cast of her, Robin? She may be sainted one day . . . Get off that noble kick. She's like all the others. She knew what she married, and she knew why. But she's clever. If she played around like my other wives, I could get rid of her like the others."

Michael tried to sound casual, but it didn't quite come off. Robin put down his glass and studied him narrowly.

"Not quite like the others," he said. "No other woman ever made you bitter. Watch it, Michael. Whatever you're thinking—and I'm not sure that you know what it is—somebody's going to get hurt."

It was at one of Leah's after-theater parties that Michael reached a decision. Monique, as usual, was

the center of male attention. Uncomplicated and direct, her imperfect English, her unconscious humor and naivete were refreshing to everyone but Michael.

Sullenly he regarded his bride from across the room in unhappy confidence that no flirtation would get out of hand and no retaliation would be made for his bad behavior.

Leah moved to Michael's side.

"Michael," she explained, "don't you understand your wife at all? She's European. She thinks you're just being male, and when you've had your kicks you'll settle down. She's a hausfrau, darling. Under that saintlike exterior—and that exquisite Givinchy not withstanding—she's a thoroughly domesticated hausfrau. Your playboy days are over, darling. You may be bored to an early grave, but this female will never let you go!"

Michael glared at Leah and she smiled back graciously.

"And don't tell your analyst it's Mother's fault," she added. "You're the bright boy who gave her that 'I'm a lonely little rich boy' routine. Now live with it."

Michael gravitated to the bar. The marital bonds were becoming unbearable. He was strangling inside. He ordered a double Scotch from a bartender who looked like Noel Coward—at Leah's parties one could never be sure—and began a deliberate journey into a drunken stupor.

But that was so obvious. Somewhere between the third and fourth double Scotch this idea struck him with the stimulating thrill of discovery. He turned his empty glass upside down on the bar and began to think.

And then a strange thing happened. He began to get interested in Monique. Leah, with all her worldly wisdom, was wrong. Monique wasn't simpler than the other women he had known, only more devious. Every woman had a price—or a breaking point. He had only to use ingenuity to expose Monique's.

Michael decided to use Monique's strategy—simplicity. A few days after Leah's party he bluntly asked Monique for a divorce.

She was in the kitchen of what had once been Michael's fashionable bachelor apartment. It was now filled with fresh flowers and other strictly feminine touches of astonishingly good taste. Even the kitchen had a brighter look because Monique was wearing a yellow cotton dress with a full skirt, a crisp organdy cocktail apron, and a yellow ribbon in her hair. She stood at the cutting board with a French steel chopping knife in one hand and a half-used head of Romaine lettuce in the other.

"Michael," she scolded, "didn't anyone ever tell you not to *cut* lettuce? It should be torn with the fingers—so." She dropped the knife on the block and began to rip at the

lettuce in demonstration, and then, as if only hearing his words for the first time, she turned slowly toward him.

"Divorce?" she echoed.

"I can't stick it," Michael said. "I'm not the Papa Bear type after all. You can see Robin about the settlement."

She didn't seem to hear that part at all.

"Is it gone so soon?" she asked.

"Gone?" Michael echoed.

"The—what did he call it?—illusion?"

For just an instant Michael felt a pain—a deep penetrating pain he could not quite identify. It was as if—if only one dared to believe—a miracle might happen. And then he remembered who he was and what kind of world he lived in, and he closed the door on the living pain.

He didn't mention a divorce again.

August Bremen was a plump, middle-aged Dutchman who had never owned a trench coat, never drank anything stronger than a light beer, and hated his job. Sometimes a private investigator contributed to society. He might work with the police on a major crime, or uncover a blackmail ring. Most of the time, however, he sorted through the dirty linen of people's private lives, and then hung it out where the whole world could look at it and get a cheap thrill from somebody else's misery. Most of the time August Bremen worked on divorce cases.

He knew Michael Quade well. He had gathered the evidence to terminate Michael's three previous marriages. The fee was always good and the work easy, because Michael Quade got his thrills from making cheap women look cheaper. Bremen didn't moralize. He assumed that Quade's women got what they deserved.

But the Monique Quade assignment was more difficult. True, Quade picked her up in a manner similar to his other wives, but her job as a hat check girl at a bar was her first job since coming to the United States, and there was no evidence of any prior Prince Charming or generous supplier of goodies in her background.

As a result Bremen's first report was negative. Michael Quade then informed him that he was leaving on an extended business trip to California, and that Mrs. Quade would remain in New York.

Michael Quade was away from New York for four weeks. During the first week he met Veronica Jones at a swim-cocktail party in Beverly Hills. She was a tall lean blonde with a wide smile and a bright mind. There was nothing old-worldly about her at all.

They ducked the party and went to her home in the Palisades. The pool was larger and less crowded. Veronica was cooling off after a divorce from an electronics tycoon.

The house was hers prior to the divorce because, it developed, Veronica was an heiress in her own right. She was 36, magnetically beautiful, and strangely reminiscent of Leah.

After two weeks of light sparring they decided to marry.

"There's one complication," Michael confessed. "I have a wife."

"You usually do," Veronica answered.

She mixed the world's most electrifying martini and wasn't at all devious. Michael felt relaxed for the first time since the night he had followed Monique in the sports car.

"Can you cook?" he asked.

"I can't boil water," she said.

"Wonderful!" Michael said. "Is your divorce final?"

She brought him a martini and placed it gently on the tile facing of the pool. She knelt beside him and kissed him on the mouth, and then she drew back and smiled wisely.

"It is now," she said.

Back in New York August Bremen made a disturbing report.

"Your wife is clean," he said. "Absolutely clean."

Michael glared at him. "Impossible! Why should she be?"

"Don't ask me philosophical questions, Mr. Quade. I deal in facts. Your wife didn't go near a man the whole four weeks you were away."

"What did she do—watch television?"

"Sometimes. She went to a couple of movies alone. She went to art galleries—"

"Art galleries?"

"She went to the markets early in the morning—"

"—and bought lettuce!" Michael snapped. "All right, I get the picture. It's my fault. I shouldn't have mentioned a divorce and tipped her off."

Bremen sighed. "You want a divorce—that means there's another woman. I'm sorry, Mr. Quade, but your wife's given you no grounds for divorce. You know the laws in this state. You've got to prove infidelity. There's just one thing—the lobby of the Waldorf."

"The what?"

"The lobby of the Waldorf-Astoria." Bremen took a file from his desk and flipped open the cover. "Sunday, May 10," he read. "Mrs. Quade left her apartment at two p.m. and walked to the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. She entered and took a seat in the lobby. She remained in the lobby until five p.m. and then walked back to her apartment. During that time she spoke to no one and was approached by no one."

He flipped the pages.

"Sunday, May 17," he read. "Mrs. Quade left her apartment at two thirty p.m. and walked to the Roosevelt Hotel. She entered and sat in the lobby until five ten p.m."

He flipped the pages again.

"Sunday, May 24," he read. "Mrs. Quade left her apartment at two fif-

teen p.m. She walked to the Ambassador Hotel and sat in the lobby until—"

"What is this," Michael demanded, "a weekly rendezvous?"

Bremen closed the file and sighed. "No rendezvous, Mr. Quade. For four consecutive Sundays—I left out the Americana—your wife spent at least three hours seated in the lobby of a large hotel. She was conspicuous. My operator began to worry. Twice he saw plainclothes detectives watching her. How does it look—a beautiful, well-dressed young lady sitting alone in the lobby of a busy hotel? The vice squad, Mr. Quade. Even on your side of the social register you must have heard of the vice squad. Your wife just missed being picked up on suspicion of soliciting. You should warn her about that."

Michael returned to the apartment to find a home-cooked dinner waiting. It was cozy, domestic, and dull, and to keep from falling asleep he asked Monique what she had done with herself in his absence. She teased a little and then confessed that Sundays were particularly lonely, so she had gone to different hotels and sat in the lobbies.

"I like to watch people," she said, "and see nice things. Things I didn't see before I came to this country. So many people in fine clothes having such good times. Michael! You're laughing at me!"

"Not at you," Michael insisted, "at myself. I'm the one who who always said it was the little things that count, and I almost missed it."

He stood up abruptly.

"You're not going out again?" she asked.

"Just to my study," Michael said. "I have to make a telephone call."

Michael went to his study and closed the door. He started to reach for the telephone and was suddenly aware of that sharp sweet pain that belonged to Monique of the yellow ribbons and the yellow dress. The illusion.

Absently he took a platinum cigarette case from his pocket and snapped open the top. It was a gift from Veronica with a one word inscription inside: *Soon?*

Illusions were fancy. Reality was hard. A poor girl married a rich man for only one reason. Veronica had money of her own.

Michael closed the cigarette case and picked up the telephone. He dialed carefully and then said, "Mr. Bremen? I think you've found the solution to my problem."

One week later Michael flew to Chicago and remained there until he received a wire from the New York police. He caught the next plane back and was met at the airport by Robin, who filled in the details on the way to the police station.

On Sunday Monique had gone to the lobby of a large hotel. "To watch people!" Robin explained. "Have you ever heard anything so

ridiculous!" While there she was paged and called to the telephone. A man's voice instructed her to go to a certain room on the sixth floor. Thinking it was Michael with a surprise, she obeyed and found the room occupied by a detective of the vice squad.

"The oldest ruse in the world, a frameup—and Monique walked into it!" Robin raged. "Michael, this stinks. If you're responsible I'll strangle you with my own two well-groomed hands!"

Michael knew his friend too well to fear anything so drastic as action. The police station was crawling with reporters whom he rudely ignored on his way to the Lieutenant's office. Somebody opened a door and he was pushed into a room where Monique was being questioned. He hardly recognized her. Her face was drained of all living color, and her eyes were filled with disbelief and horror.

She saw Michael and came slowly to her feet like a mechanical doll on the last turn of its spring.

"Michael—oh, thank God!" she cried. "Tell these policemen who I am! Tell them it's all a mistake!"

Michael had no chance to answer. An exploding flash bulb captured Monique's tragic face for the embellishment of the morning edition, and Holly Gaye's voice shrieked above the din as the working press swept forward on its sordid mission.

"Michael—darling!" she cried. "How awful for you to be married to one of *those* women!"

In the end it was Holly's version that the public accepted and believed. Once more they were allowed to live vicariously through another's sin, and Michael, certain he wouldn't be believed, retired to his apartment to remain incommunicado until sufficient time passed to press for a divorce.

The day came when Robin arrived with a brief case and a grim expression. Michael waved the brief case aside.

"You freed me three times before," he declared. "I leave it in your hands to get me free again."

But Robin stood before him like an avenging angel.

"I hear rumors," he said. "I hear that your next wife is to be Veronica Jones. I hear that you met her on the coast just a few weeks *before* Monique's sensational arrest. Is she a patient woman, Michael? Will she wait for you?"

Michael was only half listening, but he caught the key word.

"Wait?" he echoed.

"Have you seen Monique lately?"

"No . . . but she won't make trouble."

"You're right, *she* won't. Come with me, Michael. I have something to show you."

They drove to a small rest home with bars on the windows; and while an attendant unlocked the

door to a private room, Robin explained the situation.

"You underestimated yourself," he said. "It is possible for a woman to love Michael Quade. We know Monique did because what happened to her after your scheme to rig evidence for a divorce wasn't what happens to a frustrated gold-digger—as you will see."

The door swung open. Monique was inside the room. She was strapped to a narrow cot. She twisted her head and impaled Michael with a penetrating stare.

"Monique," Robin said softly, "do you know who this is?"

The stare held for several seconds, and then Monique's childlike face became an ecstatic smile.

"Michael!" she cried. "You came back! Did you get the lettuce, darling? I can't serve salad made of stale lettuce."

Michael fled into the hall. Robin followed.

"You see," Robin said, in a matter-of-fact tone, "there's a legal complication. According to the laws of this state, a mentally ill spouse can't be divorced for a period of five years; and if said spouse is female, the husband is financially responsible for that period or until such time as the patient is found legally sane . . . What do you think, Michael? Can you make Monique's mind well again? Will Veronica wait five years for your freedom?"

J. C. WHITTED's *The Inconclusive Clue*

Canes have more than one identifying characteristic. In addition to color, they can differ in weight, size, shape, and finish. If we rule out the highly improbable coincidence that the victim's cane and the murderer's were identical in *every* respect except color, then we must concede that Abernathy would have known at once, the moment his blind man's fingers touched Collins' walking stick, that he had picked up the wrong cane.

EDITORS' FILE CARD

first publication in the U.S.

AUTHOR: **JOAN AIKEN**

TITLE: ***A Walk in the Wood***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: England

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *For all his brilliance, there was one thing Sir William Deering failed to think of . . . a beautifully told story by the daughter of Conrad Aiken, the famous poet-novelist.*

"PARADISE," BLACKER SAID TO HIMself, moving forward into the wood. "Paradise. Fairyland."

He was a man given to exaggeration—poetic license, he called it, and his friends called it "Blacker's little flights of fancy," or something less polite; but on this occasion he spoke nothing but the truth. The wood stood silent about him, tall, golden, with afternoon sunlight slanting through the half-unfurled leaves of early summer. Underfoot, anemones palely carpeted the ground. A cuckoo called.

"Paradise," Blacker repeated, closed the gate behind him, and strode down the overgrown path, looking for a spot in which to eat his ham sandwich. Hazel bushes thickened at either side until the circular blue eye of the gateway through which he had come dwindled to a pinpoint and vanished. The taller trees overtopping the hazels were not yet in full leaf and gave little cover; it was very hot in the wood, and very still.

Suddenly Blacker stopped short with an exclamation of surprise and regret: lying among the dog's-mercury by the path was the body of a cock pheasant in the full splendor of his spring plumage. Blacker turned the bird over with the townsman's pity and curiosity at such evidence of nature's unkindness; the feathers, purple-bronze, green, and gold, were as smooth under his hand as a girl's hair.

"Poor thing," he said aloud, "what can have happened to it?"

 (Please see page 118 for Anthology extra coupon)

He walked on, wondering if he could turn the incident to account. *Threnody for a Pheasant in May?* Too precious? Too sentimental? Perhaps a weekly would take it. He began choosing rhymes, staring at his feet as he walked, abandoning his conscious rapture at the beauty round him.

Stricken to death . . . and something . . . leafy ride,

Before his . . . something . . . fully flaunt his pride.

Or would a shorter line be better, something utterly simple and heartfelt—limpid tears of grief like spring rain dripping off the petals of a flower?

It was odd, Blacker thought, increasing his pace, how difficult he found the writing of nature poetry; nature was beautiful, maybe, but it was not creatively stimulating to him. And it was nature poetry that "Field and Garden" wanted. Still, that pheasant ought to be worth five guineas. *Tread lightly past, Where he lies still, And something last . . .*

Damn! In his absorption he had nearly trodden on *another* pheasant. What was happening to the birds? Blacker, who objected to occurrences with no visible explanation, walked on frowning. The path bore downhill to the right, and leaving the hazel coppice, crossed a tiny valley. Below him Blacker was surprised to see a small, secretive flint cottage, surrounded on three sides by trees. In front of it was a patch of turf. A deck chair stood there, and a man was peacefully stretched out in it, enjoying the afternoon sun.

Blacker's first impulse was to turn back. He felt as if he had walked into somebody's garden, and was filled with mild irritation at the unexpectedness of the encounter; there ought to have been some warning sign, dash it all. The wood had seemed as deserted as Eden itself.

But his turning round now would have an appearance of guilt and furtiveness; on second thought, he decided to go boldly past the cottage. After all there was no fence, and the path was not marked Private in any way. Yes, he had a perfect right to be there.

"Good afternoon," said the man pleasantly as Blacker approached. "Remarkably fine weather, is it not?"

"I do hope I'm not trespassing."

Studying the man, Blacker revised his first guess. This was no gamekeeper; there was distinction in every line of the thin, sculptured face. What most attracted Blacker's attention were the hands, holding a small gilt coffee cup; they were as white, frail, and attenuated as the pale roots of water plants.

"Not at all," the man said cordially. "In fact, you arrive at a most opportune moment—you are very welcome. I was just wishing for a little company. Delightful as I find this sylvan retreat, it becomes, all of a sudden, a little *dull,* a little *banal.*

I do trust you have time to sit down and share my after-lunch coffee and liqueur."

As he spoke he reached behind him and brought out a second deck chair from the cottage porch.

"Why, thank you, I should be delighted," said Blacker, wondering if he had the strength of character to take out the ham sandwich and eat it in front of this patrician hermit.

Before he made up his mind the man had gone into the house and returned with another gilt cup full of black, fragrant coffee, hot as Tartarus, which he handed to Blacker. He carried also a tiny glass, and into this, from a blackcurrant-cordial bottle, he carefully poured a clear, colorless liquor.

Blacker sniffed his glassful with caution, mistrusting the bottle and its evidence of home brewing; but the scent, aromatic and powerful, was similar to that of curacao, and the liquid moved in its glass with an oily smoothness. It certainly was not cowslip wine.

"Well," said his host, reseating himself and gesturing slightly with his glass, "how do you do?" He sipped delicately.

"Cheers," said Blacker, and added, "My name's Roger Blacker." It sounded a little lame. The liqueur was not curaçao, but akin to it, and quite remarkably potent. Blacker, who was very hungry, felt the fumes rise up inside his head as if an orange tree had taken root there and was putting out leaves and golden glowing fruit.

"Sir William Deering," the other man said, and then Blacker understood why his hands had seemed so spectacular, so portentously out of the common.

"The surgeon? But surely you don't live down here?"

Deering waved a hand deprecatingly. "A week-end retreat. A hermitage, to which I can retire from the strain of my calling."

"It certainly is very remote," Blacker remarked. "It must be five miles from the nearest road."

"Six. And you, my dear Mr. Blacker, what is your profession?"

"Oh, a writer," said Blacker modestly.

The drink was having its usual effect on him; he managed to convey not that he was a journalist on a twopenny daily with literary yearnings, but that he was a philosopher and essayist of rare quality, a sort of second Franacis Bacon. All the time he spoke, while drawn out most flatteringly by the questions of Sir William, he was recalling journalistic scraps of information about his host: the operation on the King of Greece; the Prime Minister's appendix; the amputation performed on that unfortunate ballerina who had both feet crushed in a railway accident.

"You must feel like a god," he said suddenly, noticing with surprise that his glass was empty. Sir William waved the remark aside.

"We all have our godlike attributes," he said, leaning forward. "Now you, Mr. Blacker, a writer, a creative artist—do you not know a power akin to godhead when you transfer your thoughts to paper?"

"Well, not exactly then," said Blacker, feeling the liqueur moving inside his head in golden and russet-colored clouds. "Not *so* much then, but I do have one unusual power, a power not shared by many people—the power of foretelling the future. For instance, as I was coming through the wood, I *knew* this house would be here. I knew I should find you sitting in front of it. I can look at the list of horses in a race, and the name of the winner fairly leaps out at me from the page, as if it was printed in red ink. Forthcoming events—air disasters, train wrecks—I always sense them in advance. I have a terrible feeling of impending doom, as if my brain was a volcano on the point of eruption."

What was that other item of news about Sir William Deering, he wondered, a recent report, a tiny paragraph that had caught his eye in the "Times"? He could not recall it.

"*Really?*" Sir William was looking at him with the keenest interest; his eyes, hooded and fanatical under their heavy lids, held brilliant points of light. "I have always wanted to know someone with such a power. It must be a terrifying responsibility."

"Oh, it is," Blacker said. He contrived to look bowed under the weight of supernatural cares; then he noticed that his glass was full again, and he drained it. "Of course I don't use the faculty for my own ends—something fundamental in me rises up to prevent that. It's as basic, you know, as the instinct forbidding cannibalism—"

"Quite, quite," Sir William agreed. "But for another person you would be able to give warnings, advise profitable courses of action? My dear fellow, your glass is empty. Allow me."

"This is marvelous stuff," Blacker said hazily. "It's like a wreath of orange blossoms." He gestured with his finger.

"I distill it myself from marmalade. But do go on with what you were saying. Could you, for instance, tell me the winner of this afternoon's Manchester Handicap?"

"Bow Bells," Blacker said unhesitatingly. It was the only name he could remember.

"You interest me enormously. And the result of today's Westminster by-election?"

"Unwin, the Liberal, will get in by a majority of 282. He won't take his seat though. He'll be killed at seven this evening in a lift accident at the Savoy." Blacker was well away by now.

"Will he indeed?" Sir William appeared delighted. "A pestilent fellow. I have sat on several boards with him. Do continue."

Blacker required little encouragement. He told the story of the finan-

cier whom he had warned in advance of the Stock Exchange crash; the dream about the famous violinist which had resulted in the man's canceling his passage on the ill-fated *Orion;* and the tragic tale of the bullfighter who had ignored his warning. The stories lost nothing in the telling.

"But I'm talking too much about myself," Blacker said at length, partly because he noticed an ominous clogging of his tongue, a refusal of his thoughts to marshal themselves. He cast about for an impersonal topic, something simple.

"The pheasants," he said. "What's happened to the pheasants? Cut down in their prime. It—it's terrible. I found four in the wood up there, four or five."

"Really?" Sir William seemed callously uninterested in the fate of the pheasants. "It's the chemical sprays they use on the crops, I understand. Bound to upset the ecology; they never work out the probable results beforehand. Now if *you* were in charge, my dear Mr. Blacker—but forgive me, it is a hot afternoon and you must be tired and footsore if you have walked from Witherstow this morning. Let me suggest that you have a short sleep . . ."

His voice seemed to come from farther and farther away. A network of sun-colored leaves began to lace themselves in front of Blacker's eyes. Gratefully he leaned back and stretched out his aching feet.

Sometime after this Blacker roused a little—or was it only a dream?—to see Sir William standing by him, rubbing his hands, with a face of jubilation.

"My dear fellow, my dear Mr. Blacker, what a *lusus naturae* you are. I can never be sufficiently grateful that you came my way. Bow Bells walked home—positively *ambled*. I have been listening to the radio. What a misfortune that I had no time to place a bet on the horse—but never mind, never mind, that can be remedied another time. It is unkind of me to disturb your well-earned rest, though. Drink this last thimbleful and finish your nap while the sun is on the wood."

As Blacker's head sank back against the deck chair again, Sir William leaned forward and gently took the glass from his hand.

Sweet river of dreams, thought Blacker—fancy the horse actually winning! I wish I'd had a fiver on it myself; I could do with a new pair of shoes. I should have undone these before I dozed off, they're too tight or something. I must wake up soon, ought to be on my way in half an hour or so . . .

When Blacker finally woke he found that he was lying on a narrow bed, indoors, covered with a couple of blankets. His head ached and throbbed with a shattering intensity, and it took a few minutes for his vision to clear. Then he saw that he was in a small white cell-like room

which contained nothing but the bed he was on and a chair. It was very nearly dark.

He tried to struggle up but a strange numbness and heaviness had invaded the lower part of his body, and after hoisting himself to his elbows he felt so sick that he abandoned the effort and lay down again.

That stuff must have the effect of knockout drops, he thought ruefully; what a fool I was to drink it. I'll have to apologize to Sir William. What time can it be?

Brisk footsteps approached the door and Sir William came in. He was carrying a portable radio which he placed on the window sill.

"Ah, my dear Blacker, I see you have come round. Allow me to offer you a drink."

He raised Blacker skillfully, and gave him a drink of water from a cup with a rim and a spout. "Now let me settle you down again. Excellent. We shall soon have you—well, not on your feet, but sitting up and taking nourishment." He laughed a little. "You can have some beef tea presently."

"I am so sorry," Blacker said. "I really need not trespass on your hospitality any longer. I shall be quite all right in a minute."

"No trespass, my dear friend. You are not at all in the way. I hope that you will be here for a long and pleasant stay. These surroundings, so restful, so conducive to a writer's inspiration—what could be more suitable for you? You need not think I shall disturb you. I am in London all week, but shall keep you company on week-ends—pray, pray don't think that you will be a nuisance or *de trop*. On the contrary, I am hoping that you can do me the kindness of giving me the Stock Exchange prices in advance, which will amply compensate for any small trouble I have taken. No, no, you must feel quite at home—please consider, indeed, that this *is* your home."

Stock Exchange prices? It took Blacker a moment to remember; then he thought, Oh, Lord, my tongue has played me false as usual. He tried to recall what stupidities he had been guilty of.

"Those stories," he said lamely, "they were all a bit exaggerated, you know. About my foretelling the future. I can't really. That horse's winning was a pure coincidence, I'm afraid."

"Modesty, modesty." Sir William was smiling, but he had gone rather pale, and Blacker noticed a beading of sweat along his cheekbones. "I am sure you will be invaluable. Since my retirement I find it absolutely necessary to augment my income by judicious investment."

All of a sudden Blacker remembered the gist of that small paragraph in the "Times." Nervous breakdown, complete rest . . .

"I—I really must go now," he said uneasily, trying to push himself

upright. "I meant to be back in London by seven."

"Oh, but Mr. Blacker, that is quite out of the question. Indeed, so as to preclude any such action, I have amputated your feet. But you need not worry; I know you will be very happy here. And I feel certain that you are wrong to doubt your own powers. Let us listen to the nine o'clock news in order to be quite satisfied that the detestable Unwin did fall down the shaft of the Savoy lift."

He walked over to the portable radio and switched it on.

EDITORIAL NOTE: *If Blacker really could foretell the future, why didn't he foresee what would happen to him if he accepted Sir William's hospitality and drank the marmalade wine? Surely the brilliant Sir William should have perceived this flaw in Blacker's claim of supernatural powers . . .*

the *NEWEST* police procedural story by

LAWRENCE TREAT

A bookbindery, miniature books of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, a banker who burbles, a strange robbery, a not so strange robbery, an old gun, an old army blanket, an old station wagon, a first edition of Dickens, a beautiful woman with bright red lips, and—oh, yes, a rosebush thorn . . . some of the pieces in a mosaic of murder so carefully collected and fitted together by the Homicide Squad and the Technical Laboratory, in this fine example of modern police procedure . . .

R AS IN ROBBERY

by LAWRENCE TREAT

THE MAIN FACTS WERE EASY enough to get. Name: Nicholas Yates. Age: about 45. Occupation: bookbinder and manuscript restorer. Married, no children. Cause of death: bullet wound.

Jub Freeman, Director of the Laboratory, appreciated the fact that the body hadn't been found until after 11:00 a.m. It gave him time to read his morning mail, run a couple of alcohol tests through the gas chromatograph, and make out his reports. He did the tasks cheerfully, for he was a cheerful guy and he looked it, with bright eyes, round, shiny cheeks, and a quick grin that dimpled him up like an adolescent.

When the call came, Jub picked up his bag with the portable equipment and drove out with Lieutenant Decker, Chief of Homicide. The rest of the gang came in from their various assignments.

The house was in an isolated, wooded section in the northern reaches of the city. Yates's shop, a converted garage, faced the house, and Fred Briscoe, who worked for Yates and had discovered the body, was waiting on the lawn when the police arrived.

Briscoe was young and dreamy-eyed, with loose limbs and a sensitive face under a shock of yellowish brown hair that looked as if it would tear a comb apart.

"I'm sort of shook up," he said. "Mr. Yates was more than just a boss to me. He took me in when I was a kid and taught me the trade."

"You got here early?" Decker asked.

"No, late. The shop—right now Nick has only two other assistants—the shop works Saturdays and we take Monday mornings off, but I don't put in regular hours."

Lieutenant Decker, tall, gray-haired, brisk, fired his questions, and Briscoe answered them straightforwardly. Yes, he had a key to the place. He had a room nearby and he'd come in a half hour ago and found Yates dead, in the shop. No, Briscoe hadn't touched anything. Mrs. Yates? Away for the week-end—she had gone to a wedding, but Yates stayed here to work; besides, he hated weddings. Yes, that was Yates's car over there, the black, beat-up station wagon. Mrs. Yates had her own car. The other employees? A couple of girls. They'd be along some time after lunch. Sure, Briscoe would stick around, he wanted to. Mrs. Yates was due back, and when she arrived she might need him.

Decker nodded, dismissed him, and went into the garage. Jub followed, carrying his bag.

The place told Jub a lot, and at the same time told him nothing. The guillotine—a big paper-cutter with a four-foot blade—dominated the room and was surrounded by discarded slices of paper, most of which had fallen to the floor. The nearest worktable had scraps of leather and paste pots and a lithograph stone on which the binding leather was pared. Beyond, in the tooling area, Jub noticed strips of gold leaf near the stamping machine. The filets and gouges and designing tools were ranged along the wall. For the rest, presses and book-frames and vises, all in use, told the story of a small but thriving business.

Jub blinked, and concentrated on the job that had brought him here. The body of a small frail man lay on its back, near the entrance. There was no blood and no sign of disturbance other than the confusion of half-done work. Jub and Decker bent down and studied the corpse. They both noticed the blade of grass and bits of leaf wedged between the rubber heel and the sole of one of Yates's shoes.

"I'll bet you two bits to a dime that the heels are scuffed," Decker said.

"No take," Jub said. "Anybody can tell he was dragged in here and placed down too carefully, and that it happened at least twenty-four hours ago."

"Before the rain," Decker said wryly. "That Sunday morning shower must have washed out any marks that were outside."

"Sure," Jub said, unperturbed. "Usually happens, doesn't it?"

They both stood up as the door opened and Inspector Mitch Taylor stuck his head inside. "Boss," he said to Decker, "somebody broke into the house and did a job. Better take a look."

Decker nodded and went out, but Jub stayed. His work was to

collect the physical evidence, dust for prints, and chalk-mark whatever he wanted to have photographed. He sighed and bent down to open his bag. He was hidden by the table and squatting next to it when he heard someone enter the room cautiously and close the door.

"Want something?" he asked.

Fred Briscoe gave a start, and the bulge of his Adam's apple pumped up and down. "Didn't know anybody was here," he said. "I wanted to see if anything was taken. We have some pretty valuable stuff, first editions and so on, but right now we were working on something special. The Trumbull Collection."

"What's special about it?" Jub asked.

"Miniature books, from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, worth thousands. There's a Bible the size of a postage stamp—the binding's embossed in silver and every word is in there, but you need a magnifying glass to read it. Then there's a Medici copy of the *Inferno,* this big." With his thumb and forefinger Briscoe indicated the size.

"Who's Trumbull?" Jub asked.

"Thomas Trumbull, banker. You never heard of him?"

Jub disregarded the question. "Where are these miniatures?" he asked.

"That's what I came to see," Briscoe said, and started forward.

Jub held up his hand. "I'll do the looking," he said. "Just tell me where."

"There's a steel box in that cabinet on the right, near those glue pots. That's where Nick kept the Collection."

Jub crossed the room and opened the cabinet. The steel box was lying on a shelf and he lifted the catch gingerly, touching only the edge and being careful neither to deposit nor destroy any fingerprints. The box was unlocked, and he raised the lid and then dropped it with a bang.

"Empty," he said.

Briscoe let out a long low whistle. "Geez!" he said. "Maybe that's what he was killed for."

Maybe, Jub thought, and with Briscoe following him, he went out to give Decker the news. He met Decker coming from the house, but the Lieutenant was on fire with his own angle.

"Somebody slit a screen, busted a windowpane, and broke in, and whoever it was, he left his signature. Pulled all the shades down, dumped drawers, dropped cigar ashes, and stayed downstairs. We might get something from the M.O. file out of that. I'm calling in now."

"Any sign of Yates having been killed in the house?" Jub asked.

"Nothing I noticed, but I'll sure want a second look."

"You'll want some second thoughts, too," Jub said, "because you've got a robbery." And he told

Decker about the missing miniature books.

The Lieutenant grimaced. "Brother!" he exclaimed. "Just when I thought this was going to be simple."

"Looks simple to me," Jub said. "How many people would steal a collection of miniature books? And where would you sell them?"

"I wouldn't sell them," Decker remarked. "I'd keep them. And that's the whole damn trouble."

For the rest of the day information poured in, and suspects and witnesses were questioned. Jub did his homework in the lab—on the bullet, on Yates's clothing, on the bits of evidence he'd collected in the house and in the shop. The jacket, a gray, herringbone weave, had a small rip just below one elbow.

Most of the fingerprints that Jub examined turned out to be the ones he expected—Yates's, Mrs. Yates's Briscoe's, Yates's assistants'. Nothing suspicious. But to Jub's surprise the only prints on the steel box belonged to Nicholas Yates. Apparently he'd been the last person to handle it.

Meanwhile, Thomas Trumbull took his loss philosophically enough, and why not? He was insured for $35,000. Mrs. Yates returned from her trip, got over the shock of murder and robbery, and reported that nothing of value had been taken from the house. She could account for every minute of her time—at least, she said she could. She offered the information that her husband had owned a gun, but she hadn't seen it in years and didn't remember where he'd kept it. Fred Briscoe confirmed the existence of the gun but was equally vague about its whereabouts. He devoted himself to consoling Mrs. Yates, and seemed to enjoy doing it.

The Modus Operandi File dug up five names of known robbers who specialized in B & E (Breaking and Entering) and who fitted the pattern of the marauder in the main house. The Homicide Squad was busy tracking them down; they located the first four and checked them off the same day. The fifth man, Frank Nolte, apparently had disappeared on Sunday, and Decker put Nolte's name on the teletype and sent out a five-state flyer, with pictures.

Jub, concentrating on Yates's clothing, found a number of brownish woollen fibers. He guessed that they might have come from an army blanket and he phoned Mrs. Yates to verify his suspicion.

"Oh, yes," she said. "Nicholas had one that he kept in his car. He wrapped up all sorts of things in it. I can't find it, which is just as well. It was always filthy." From the tone of her voice Jub gathered that she thought Nicholas had been filthy, too. Jub thanked her and hung up. But he now had a secret.

The secret was the thorn. He had dug it out of the seat of Nicholas

Yates's pants, studied it under a microscope, and sent it for identification to the Botany Department of the local university. The identification came at noon on Tuesday. *Rosa damascena,* and apparently from a large bush. A small boy could have told him that much in plain English—rosebush.

Jub went downstairs with his information, to consult Decker. The Lieutenant was in the anteroom just outside his office and was ushering out a suave, heavily built man with a gray mustache. The man wore a dark suit and had a pink-and-yellow rose in his lapel. He looked like a banker, and he was.

"Mr. Trumbull—Sergeant Freeman," Decker said, introducing them. Then, to Jub, "Mr. Trumbull just gave us a list of the people who might be interested in acquiring the miniature books. Friends of his, mostly."

Trumbull burbled. "Not friends. Acquaintances. But my guess is that the Collection will be sent to Europe and sold there. I told the insurance company to watch all transatlantic planes."

"When did you notify them about the loss?" the Lieutenant asked.

Trumbull hesitated, but when he spoke, his voice was defiant. "Sunday," he said.

"That was before the body was discovered," Decker said gently.

"That's right. Yates phoned me Saturday night to tell me about the theft. Said he was going to inform the police."

"He didn't," Decker said. "He was killed first."

"Well, find out who killed him."

"That's what we're working at," Decker said.

Trumbull burbled again. It was a trick he'd practised often, and he used it with effect. "Then do it," he said, "without bothering me."

Jub broke up the battle with what seemed the most innocent of remarks. "That's a nice rose you're wearing, Mr. Trumbull," he said casually. "Unusual tints."

"My hobby," Trumbull said. "I grow eighty-four varieties."

"I'd like to drop by and look them over some time," Jub remarked. "I'm interested in roses."

Trumbull grunted as if he thought the police should pay more attention to crime and less to roses. Decker teetered forward as if he was going to snatch Trumbull's boutonniere, but Trumbull wheeled and marched off. Decker brushed his lapel in mock vanity.

"Come in and tell me about this sudden interest of yours in roses," Decker said to Jub.

Jub followed the Lieutenant into his tiny cubicle of an office. The chair Trumbull had sat in was empty, but the other two were piled with papers. The small stuffed crocodile glared balefully from a bookshelf, and Jub sat down on the window sill and told Decker about the thorn.

"Judging by where it was stuck," he said, "Yates could not have sat down. Not comfortably, anyhow. Therefore he probably acquired that thorn while being dragged. And he was dragged headfirst, according to the angle at which the point went in. Notice any rosebushes at the Yates place?"

Decker shook his head. "Couldn't say. I've been more interested in a guy named Frank Nolte, who is apparently on the lam. If form means anything, he'll show up in a couple of months and won't be able to remember what he did on a particular Sunday so long ago. He'll claim the police are picking on him. Whatever evidence we have will be stale by that time, and the D.A. will tell us to forget it, we have no case. Besides, Nolte's a pro; he wouldn't kill if he could help it, and why would he haul a body from the house all the way over to the shop? And he wouldn't go for miniature books, or for that matter, for any books. The guy's not the literary type."

"Ever think we might have two separate crimes here?" Jub asked.

"I've thought of it, but I hate to base a case on coincidence. Seems more logical to me that the B & E in the house was some kind of a blind to take attention away from the robbery in the shop."

"But why was the body moved?" Jub said.

"Ask Yates," Decker said sourly. "He knows."

"What about Briscoe?" Jub said. "Got anything on him?"

"I think he was playing around with Mrs. Yates, who's an attractive wench, but what of it? You don't kill a man because you're in love with his wife, and Briscoe wasn't really in love with her or with anybody else. He was in love with himself, and still is."

"Well," Jub said, "I want to find a rosebush with bent or broken branches and with a few shreds of gray herringbone caught on it. And I know where to start looking."

"Take Taylor and Small with you," Decker said. He made a note on the torn flap of an envelope. Then his phone rang and he picked it up. "Decker, Homicide," he said. His eyes lit up and he said into the phone, "Right. Send him in." He plunked the receiver down and said crisply to Jub, "Nolte. Here."

Frank Nolte, a big slow ox of a man, came in a minute later, with a small sad little guy with tiny eyes. Nolte introduced the small sad man as his lawyer.

"I hear it around that you want to see me," Nolte said. "I got nothing to hide, but this Yates got knocked off and the papers say I'm hot. I like to cooperate." He fought through all four syllables of the last word, but only with minor success. "So I come in."

"You broke into the Yates house Saturday night," Decker said. "What time?"

"It wasn't no break," Nolte said in an injured tone. "I was invited."

"He wasn't even a trespasser," the sad little lawyer said. "Tell him, Frank."

"Yates paid me," Nolte said. "Five C's. He told me to cut the screen and bust a window. He gave me permission, see? I was his guest. He says I should go in and dump the drawers and take what I want, which I didn't do on account there was nothing worth grabbing, except maybe a few trading stamps."

"Why," Decker said, "all this hocus-pocus?"

"That's it," Nolte said. "Hoax. Hoax is pokes. Yates said he wanted to play a joke on his wife, see? She was away, and he wants her to come back and think the joint got cleaned out. Teach her a lesson for going off and leaving him alone."

"And that," the little lawyer said, "is the whole story. Frank did him a favor, and if you got any questions don't ask them. Because on my advice he doesn't have to answer and he won't."

Decker stared in disbelief. "Brother!" he said. "The time has come. Oh, wonder of wonders! The only improvement you could add would be a tape recording of your conversation with Yates. Or have you got that on you too?"

"Don't answer him," the little lawyer said. And Nolte didn't.

After the pair had left, Decker said to Jub, "You know, up to a point I believe the guy. Remember that Yates was the last one to touch the box with the miniature books, so suppose he stole them himself, and sold them. Then, to cover himself, he faked a robbery and set Nolte up as the fall guy. If Yates had lived, he'd probably have planted some loot on Nolte, and Yates would have been in a tough spot. Nolte's word against his, and who'd believe a whopper like the one Nolte just handed out? Not me, anyhow."

"Kind of a mess, isn't it?" Jub said cheerfully.

"I don't think so," the Lieutenant said. "If we're right, if Yates did set up a fake robbery, then we can forget all about Nolte."

"Glad to," Jub said.

"Okay, now let's try to follow Yates's actions. Trumbull says Yates phoned him Saturday night with news of the theft. Maybe so, but maybe Yates went there, instead. And Trumbull's nobody's fool; he'd ask how anybody could have known Yates had the miniature books unless Yates himself told them. So Trumbull would figure out he was being tricked, and he'd get mad and accuse Yates, and maybe they had a fight and Trumbull killed him. And then moved the body. Who else would want to move it?"

"I don't know," Jub said, "and won't until the facts are in."

Decker picked up a scrap of paper, crumpled it and flipped it at the crocodile. He missed. "Sure," he

said. "All we have to do is locate the gun and the blanket."

"And the rosebush," Jub added. "I think I'll go have a look now."

He found it late that afternoon, with the help of Mitch Taylor and Charlie Small. It was in a flowerbed near the entrance to the Trumbull estate. Rain had washed away most of the evidence that must have been there on Saturday, but it was apparent where some rosebushes had been trampled and the body dragged, and a shred of herringbone was still caught on a thorn. As a result, Decker had a session with Trumbull the next morning.

"The guy knows his onions," the Lieutenant told Jub afterward. "He told me not to bother him until we had some real evidence. If Yates came to the Trumbull place, he says, Yates never even went inside. Trumbull claims he was home reading." Decker winced. "They usually say they were watching TV, but Trumbull's literary."

"What about the money?" Jub said. "If Yates stole the miniatures, he probably sold them and got paid plenty, and probably in cash. So where is it? Who has it?"

Decker said complacently, "If I was a banker, that would be no problem. I'd put it in the bank, and nobody would be able to trace it."

"What are you driving at?" Jub asked.

"I have a feeling that I'm missing out somewhere. Here's the problem, Jub. If Trumbull did it, we have a weak motive but everything else scans. If Briscoe did it, we have a strong motive—he'd practically inherit the business, he'd get his hands on a nice hunk of cash, and maybe on Mrs. Yates, too. But with Briscoe living so near Yates, Briscoe would never bring the body back to his own doorstep."

"He might have, if he had to bring the car back anyhow. Maybe he wanted to frame Nolte instead of Trumbull."

"Then he's an idiot," Decker said. "And why would he want to bring the car back? Why, Jub?"

Jub didn't answer, and absentmindedly Decker crumpled up another scrap of paper, rolled it into a ball, and aimed it at the jaws of the crocodile. As usual, he missed. "Jub," he said, "let's me and you go back to the shop. I want to rummage."

When they entered the bindery, it was the picture of peace and contentment. The two girls whom Yates employed had been checked out carefully and were in the clear. One of them was pasting down end papers in a green leather volume, the other was sewing some book signatures together. Their smocked figures seemed almost part of the shop. Briscoe, humming to himself, was bent over a manuscript. He was piecing fragments of it on a silk base that was almost transparent.

He glanced up briefly. "With you in a few minutes," he muttered.

"Can't leave this now, not in this state."

Decker approached Briscoe and peered over his shoulder. Jub, lingering in the doorway, heard a car approach and turned around to see the Yates station wagon drive up. An attractive woman with dark hair and bright red lips was at the wheel. Jub swung around and went over to her.

"Mrs. Yates?" he said. She nodded casually, disinterestedly, until he identified himself. "I'm Sergeant Freeman, Technical Laboratory," he said.

She gave a start. "Oh!" she exclaimed. Her black eyes were worried and searching, her red mouth was tight.

Jub smiled. "I thought you had your own car," he said.

Her gravity increased, as if some part of her had to be gathered together in defense. She spoke slowly, choosing her words with care. "I have," she said, "but it's being repaired, so I used this one. I often do."

"I'd like to examine it later on," Jub said. "Didn't have time the other day." She was still watching him, almost transfixed, and he said, "Something you want to tell me?"

"No, nothing." Her grip tightened on the wheel. "Nothing at all."

"Well, a couple of things I'd like to find out," Jub said. "Mind if I sit down?" And he circled the car, opened the door, and took the seat next to her. He bounced up with a yelp, and felt the seat of his pants. "Wow!" he said, pulling a thorn and holding it up. "How did that get there?"

"I'm sorry," she said. "I should have brushed off the seat. I put some rosebushes on it the other day."

"Where did you get them?" Jub asked.

"From Mr. Trumbull. He grows them, and we got to know each other the afternoon he came here with his miniature books. He offered me some bushes, and I picked them up Saturday morning."

"What did you do with them?"

"I brought them to my niece. She has a new house and she needed some shrubs, so I gave her the bushes."

She smiled finally, and Jub said gently, "Want to tell me now? Want to tell me what's bothering you?"

"It's nothing, and I'm not even sure. But I think I remember where Nicholas used to keep his gun."

"Yes?"

"In the storeroom behind the shop." She took a quick breath and seemed to force herself to continue. "An old filing cabinet. There's a humidor inside it. Nicholas used to smoke cigars but I made him stop. I think he kept the gun in the humidor." Her voice dropped to a whisper. "But I'm not sure—not really."

She was sure. Jub was convinced of it, but she was afraid that ad-

mitting certainty would point suspicion to herself.

Jub swung the door open. "The Lieutenant's here," he said. "He'll want to talk to you later on."

She nodded, then glanced down and gasped. "Oh—just look at my stocking!" she exclaimed. "It's ruined!"

Jub followed her glance and saw that her ankle was slim and shapely, and that her stocking had a broad oval stain of oil across the toe, where the open-work of her shoe exposed it.

"Leak?" he said.

She nodded. "From the speedometer cable. It started two or three days ago, and Nicholas promised to have it fixed. I never could rely on him to get anything done."

Jub slipped his finger under the dashboard to confirm her diagnosis. Then, without comment, he took the keys from the ignition and dropped them in his pocket. "Thanks," he said pleasantly, and he stepped out.

Nothing had changed inside the shop. Briscoe was still intent on his manuscript job and the two girls were doing their best to pretend that Lieutenant Decker wasn't there. Jub signaled him to follow him into the storeroom in back. There, with one eye on the old-fashioned, wooden filing cabinet, Jub whispered what Mrs. Yates had just told him. Then he opened the top drawer of the filing cabinet.

Inside were a pair of old rubbers and a humidor. The wood, highly polished, had streaks of dust near the edges. The rest of the surface had obviously been wiped clean.

"No fingerprints, you can bet on it," Jub remarked, and opened the box.

The gun, an old H & R with a short barrel, was the right caliber—a .22. Jub picked it up, hefted it, then broke it open. The hinge pins were stiff and there were six cartridges in the cylinder. One of them was shiny and new, the other five were dull and corroded.

"I guess that's it," Jub said, and handed it to the Lieutenant. "Fired once, and the used cartridge replaced."

Decker examined the revolver. "It's a wonder the damn thing didn't explode in his face," he said. "Or misfire. A hell of a way to keep a gun." He stuck it in his pocket and said, "I'll slap this at him right now. You follow up fast, while he's off-balance."

"Follow up with what?"

"Anything," Decker said. "Just fuss around and keep needling him."

When they returned to the workroom, Mrs. Yates was standing next to Briscoe and talking to him, but she broke off and gave Jub a look of inquiry. He gave no sign that he noticed.

Briscoe swung around and slid off his stool. "Got that thing done," he said with satisfaction. "It's the original record of the land purchase

from the Indians, when this town was founded. The city museum people had it stuck away somewhere practically falling apart. What a job! Like to look at it?"

"Later on," Decker said. "We just found the gun. The one that killed Yates."

"No kidding!" Briscoe said. "Where?"

"You tell me," Decker said.

"Tell you what?"

"How much did Yates get for the collection of miniature books?" Decker asked.

Briscoe smiled. "I didn't know he got anything."

Decker made a sudden swoop, grabbed Briscoe by the wrists, and held up his hands. "Your fingers are kind of scratched up, aren't they?" Decker said.

"No more than usual, in this kind of work," Briscoe answered.

Jub only half listened. The Lieutenant was stalling, feeling his way. The gun, the blanket, the money. Well, they had the gun, they knew a good deal about the blanket, but the money was still missing. Jub thought of what the Lieutenant had said earlier in the day: "When a banker wants to hide money, he puts it in a bank." Well, when a bookbinder wants to hide something, where would he put it? In a book. He doesn't hide it in his closet or in an old sock. He puts it in a book.

There were plenty of books here, but how do you hide a thick bundle of money? A few bills in each volume? Hardly. You don't want to run the risk of somebody accidentally finding one of the books. So you lock them up. Or else—

He glanced at the books locked up in the various presses. Some glue had been squeezed out of the pages of a red volume held in the cheeks of a wooden screw-press near him, and he wondered why anybody would glue the pages of a book together. He stepped over and started to loosen the screws. Briscoe leaped at him.

"Don't—that's a Dickens first edition—you'll spoil it—a week's work—it has to stay like that—for the glue to set!"

Decker grabbed Briscoe's arm and spun him around before he could reach Jub. Briscoe stiffened, grabbed the edge of the table, and stared tensely. Jub kept untwisting the thick wooden screws that held the press. When they were loose, he bent down, removed the shiny red leather volume carefully, and examined it.

He'd seen book-boxes like this before. They were sold as cigarette boxes. The pages were first glued together and then the inside was gouged out to form a compartment, with the cover for a lid. Jub, using his thumb, tipped up the lid. The box was empty.

Briscoe let out a burst of nervous laughter. "Well?" he snapped.

Decker turned to Jub. "Any prints?" Decker asked.

Jub nodded. They were there all right. He'd worked on the fingerprints of everybody concerned in the case, and the general characteristics that he'd been studying those long hours yesterday were still fixed in his mind. He squinted and angled his head until the light struck at the proper angle to show him the pattern. Then he stood up.

"Mrs. Yates's," Jub said.

She reacted like a taut spring let loose. "It's my money!" she shrieked. "Nicholas got it and so it's mine. Fred stole it, he had no right to it, he killed Nicholas and took the money and hid it there and so I took it. I had a *right* to it, didn't I?"

"How did you know where the money was?" Decker asked.

"Nicholas had been working on a Dickens first edition and he *did* have it in that press, so I looked through the shop on Monday night and instead of the Dickens, that red leather volume was there, with the money in it. And I knew Fred was the last person to use the station wagon—I knew from the way it was parked. The brake was off and the gears were left in first, with the wheels turned away from the curb. Fred *always* parks that way—so it had to be him."

"You should have been a detective," Decker said wryly. "But instead, you're an accomplice after the fact."

"What fact?" Briscoe asked quietly. "You don't believe the lies she just told you, do you? You can't be that naive. Besides, I haven't been in that car for a week."

"You had access to the gun," Decker said.

"So did she," Briscoe said. "And if I'd killed anyone at Trumbull's, do you think I'd be fool enough to move the body? I'd have left it there with the car, and walked home. Why would *I* have moved the body?"

"Why would *I?*" Mrs. Yates asked, her eyes flashing.

It was a fair question, and although later the Commissioner ordered Briscoe and Mrs. Yates held as material witnesses, there was no proof as to which of them had killed Nicholas Yates. Mrs. Yates insisted Briscoe did it, and he said she did.

Balenky and Bankhart tackled her alibi and found out that on the night of the murder she'd slept at a motel only thirty miles away and could easily have slipped out unnoticed. But had she?

Decker questioned her and questioned Briscoe all that day and most of the next, but with no results. Trumbull left town—on important business, he claimed. Jub vacuum-cleaned the Yates station wagon in the forlorn hope of picking up a miracle. He didn't. Charlie Small fine-combed the murder site, scraped up soil samples, and brought them to the lab. He could have saved himself the trouble.

A work gang dug in back yards

and sifted rubbish heaps on the chance of finding the army blanket. They found the wrong one and went back to their drudgery. Mitch Taylor collected clothes from Briscoe's room and from Mrs. Yates's closet and dumped the collection on the lab floor.

"What the hell do you want me to do with all that?" Jub asked in amazement.

Mitch shrugged. "The Lieutenant didn't say. He just said to cart the stuff up here." Mitch held up his thumb and sucked it. "Damn thorn pricked me," he said.

Jub stared. "Thorn?" he said in a low voice. "From what?"

"From that thing," Mitch said, and kicked a torn sneaker free of the pile. "Don't know why I bothered with all this. Just junk."

Jub let out a yell. "Junk?" he said. "Maybe!"

A couple of hours later, after a short phone conference with Decker in which Jub summarized his findings, Jub came downstairs. He was carrying a pair of worn-out sneakers, several gas chromatograph charts, and a notebook. He walked into Decker's office without knocking.

Fred Briscoe was there, and Decker was still getting nowhere. The Lieutenant looked up at Jub and said with feigned innocence. "Want something?"

Jub tossed the sneakers on Decker's desk. "There's your proof," Jub said. "Whoever wore those, drove Yates's car and trampled down Trumbull's rosebushes."

"Not me," Briscoe said firmly.

Jub faced him aggressively. "Do you still state that you hadn't driven Yates's car for a week?"

"What's that got to do with it?" Briscoe demanded.

"Oil," Jub said. "There's a leak under the dashboard, and oil drips down and onto the shoe of whoever is driving. You can barely see it on this, but it's there all right."

"Lots of people get oil on their shoes," Briscoe said.

"This is a very special oil," Jub said, "with distinctive characteristics. I analyzed a drop of it, and then a smear from the sneaker. The chromatograms match. See?" He held up a pair of charts showing zigzag lines with similar peaks and troughs.

"That proves something?" Briscoe sneered.

"Plenty. And the sneakers are full of thorns that had worked through the canvas. That's why you couldn't walk. Your feet hurt, and you *had* to drive back."

"Those sneakers?" Briscoe said. "They look like the pair that I gave to Mrs. Yates once. For garden work."

"They were in your closet."

For the first time Briscoe looked worried, and Jub sensed that it was touch and go whether Briscoe would break or survive his crisis and send the Homicide Squad back to work. Finding more evidence.

Piling up more details. Methodically digging, questioning, investigating, analyzing.

Then the phone rang and the Lieutenant picked it up. "Decker, Homicide," he said. He said crisply, "Yes . . . Good." When he hung up, his expression was grim, fixed, but with no hint of triumph.

"They just found the blanket," he said to Briscoe. "You buried it in the woods behind the Yates house. The blanket is bloody, full of thorns, and has a stained cotton jacket wrapped up in it. We'll prove the jacket's yours—yours and only yours."

Briscoe gave a gasp, leaned forward, and buried his head in his hands. "All right," he sobbed. "I did it. Now let me alone. Go away and leave me alone."

"Tell us about it first," Decker said.

"I came to the shop Saturday night intending to work on that land-purchase manuscript, but I saw Yates and another man inside. They were looking at the miniature books, and this man took them and put them in a suitcase. Then he handed Yates a roll of bills and left. I waited outside and heard Yates phone Trumbull and tell him there'd been a robbery. From what Yates said, Trumbull must have been suspicious and wanted to see Yates right away."

"So Trumbull told the truth," Decker murmured.

"Then I went into the shop and pretended I didn't know what Yates had done. He told me there'd been a robbery and he was going up to Trumbull's. I asked if I could come along, and Yates said sure. While he was getting the car, I took the gun from the humidor in the filing cabinet.

"The whole idea came to me in a flash—how I could kill Yates up at Trumbull's. I could leave the car there, then walk back, replace the gun, and hide the money—and who would ever suspect me? Trumbull would be the goat. And it would have worked, too, except for those damn thorns. It was agony to walk—I just couldn't! If it hadn't been for those damn—"

He made a lunge for the sneakers, as if he wanted to tear them apart. Decker yanked them out of reach, and Briscoe banged into the desk and jerked back.

Decker dropped the sneakers as if they were red-hot. "Ouch!" he said. "Those thorns!"

'Q'

a NERO WOLFE detective *SHORT NOVEL*

—complete!

The United Restaurant Workers of America—10,000 strong—celebrated the Fourth of July by holding a picnic at Culp's Meadows on Long Island. It seemed to be a typical Independence Day celebration, complete with speeches—although "the eagle didn't scream as much or as loud" as Archie Goodwin had expected. But this Fourth of July observance, for all its ceremonies and festivities, had one added feature—something not on the calendar of events . . .

One of Rex Stout's liveliest Nero Wolfe short novels—a detective delight to read, and, as Archie makes clear just before the climactic scene, a challenge to your wits. Indeed, this short novel might have been titled "The Locked Tent" . . .

THE FOURTH OF JULY MURDER

by REX STOUT

FLORA KORBY SWIVELED HER HEAD, with no hat hiding any of her dark brown hair, to face me with her dark brown eyes. She spoke.

"I guess I should have brought my car and led the way."

"I'm doing fine," I assured her. "I could shut one eye too."

"Please don't," she begged. "I'm stupefied as it is. May I have your autograph—I mean, when we stop?"

Since she was highly presentable I didn't mind her assuming that I was driving with one hand because my right arm wanted to stretch across her shoulders, though she was wrong. I had left the cradle long ago. But there was no point in explaining to her that Nero Wolfe, who was in the back seat, had a deep distrust of moving vehicles and hated to ride in one unless I drove it, and therefore I was glad to have an excuse to drive with one hand because that would make it more thrilling for him.

Anyway, she might have guessed it. The only outside interest that Wolfe permits to interfere with his personal routine of comfort, not to mention luxury, is Rusterman's restaurant. Its founder, Marko Vukcic, was Wolfe's oldest and closest friend; and when Vukcic died, leaving the restaurant to members of the staff and making Wolfe executor of his estate, he also left a letter asking Wolfe to see to it that the restaurant's standards and repu-

tation were maintained; and Wolfe had done so, making unannounced visits there once or twice a week, and sometimes even oftener, without ever grumbling—well, hardly ever. But he sure did grumble when Felix, the maître d'hôtel, asked him to make a speech at the Independence Day picnic of the United Restaurant Workers of America. Hereafter I'll make it URWA.

He not only grumbled, he refused. But Felix kept after him, and Wolfe finally gave in when Felix came to the office one day with reinforcements: Paul Rago, the sauce chef at the Churchill; James Korby, the president of URWA; H. L. Griffin, a food and wine importer who supplied hard-to-get items not only for Rusterman's but also for Wolfe's own table; and Philip Holt, URWA's director of organization.

They also were to be on the program at the picnic, and their main appeal was that they simply had to have the man who was responsible for keeping Rusterman's the best restaurant in New York after the death of Marko Vukcic. Since Wolfe is only as vain as three peacocks, and since he had loved Marko if he ever loved anyone, that got him.

There had been another inducement: Philip Holt had agreed to lay off of Fritz, Wolfe's chef and housekeeper. For three years Fritz had been visiting the kitchen at Rusterman's off and on as a consultant, and Holt had been pestering him, insisting that he had to join URWA. You can guess how Wolfe liked that.

Since I do everything that has to be done in connection with Wolfe's business and his rare social activities, except that he thinks he does all the thinking, and we won't go into that now, it would be up to me to get him to the scene of the picnic, Culp's Meadows on Long Island, on the Fourth of July. Around the end of June, James Korby phoned and introduced his daughter, Flora. She told me that the directions to Culp's Meadows were very complicated, and I said that all directions on Long Island were very complicated, and she said she had better drive us out in her car.

I liked her voice, that is true, but also I have a lot of foresight, and it occurred to me immediately that it would be a new and exciting experience for my employer to watch me drive with one hand; so I told her that, while it must be Wolfe's car and I must drive, I would deeply appreciate it if she would come along and tell me the way. That was how it happened, and that was why, when we finally rolled through the gate at Culp's Meadows, after some thirty miles of Long Island parkways and another ten of grade intersections and trick turns, Wolfe's lips were pressed so tight he didn't have any. He had spoken only once, around the

fourth or fifth mile, when I had swept around a slowpoke.

"Archie. You know quite well."

"Yes, sir." Of course I kept my eyes straight ahead. "But it's an impulse, having my arm like this, and I'm afraid to take it away because if I fight an impulse it makes me nervous, and driving when I'm nervous is bad."

A glance in the mirror showed me his lips tightening, and they stayed tight.

Passing through the gate at Culp's Meadows, and winding around as directed by Flora Korby, I used both hands. It was a quarter to three, so we were on time, since the speeches were scheduled for three o'clock. Flora was sure a space would have been saved for us back of the tent, and after threading through a few acres of parked cars I found she was right, and rolled to a stop with the radiator only a couple of yards from the canvas.

She hopped out and opened the rear door on her side, and I did likewise on mine. Wolfe's eyes went right to her, and then left to me. He was torn. He didn't want to favor a woman, even a young and pretty one, but he absolutely had to show me what he thought of one-hand driving. His eyes went right again, the whole seventh of a ton of him moved, and he climbed out on her side.

The tent, on a wooden platform raised three feet above the ground, not much bigger than Wolfe's office, was crowded with people, and I wormed through to the front entrance and on out, where the platform extended into the open air. There was plenty of air, with a breeze dancing in from the direction of the ocean, and plenty of sunshine. A fine day for the Fourth of July.

The platform extension was crammed with chairs, most of them empty. I can't report on the condition of the meadow's grass because my view was obstructed by 10,000 restaurant workers and their guests, maybe more. A couple of thousand of them were in a solid mass facing the platform, presumably those who wanted to be up front for the speeches, and the rest were sprayed around all over, clear across to a fringe of trees and a row of sheds.

Flora's voice came from behind my shoulder. "They're coming out, so if there's a chair you like, grab it. Except the six up front; they're for the speakers."

Naturally I started to tell her I wanted the one next to hers, but didn't get it out because people came jostling out of the tent onto the extension. Thinking I had better warn Wolfe that the chair he was about to occupy for an hour or so was about half as wide as his fanny, I worked past to the edge of the entrance, and when the exodus had thinned out I entered the tent.

Five men were standing grouped beside a cot which was touching the

canvas of the far side, and a man was lying on the cot. To my left Nero Wolfe was bending over to peer at the contents of a metal box there on a table with its lid open. I stepped over for a look and saw a collection of bone-handled knives, eight of them, with blades varying in length from six inches up to twelve. They weren't shiny, but they looked sharp, worn narrow by a lot of use for a lot of years. I asked Wolfe whose throat he was going to cut.

"They are Dubois," he said. "Real old Dubois. The best. They belong to Mr. Korby. He brought them to use in a carving contest, and he won, as he should. I would gladly steal them." He turned. "Why don't they let that man alone?"

I turned too, and through a gap in the group saw that the man on the cot was Philip Holt, URWA's director of organization. "What's the matter with him?" I asked.

"Something he ate. They think snails. Probably the wrong kind of snails. A doctor gave him something. Why don't they leave him alone?"

"I'll go ask," I said, and moved.

As I approached the cot James Korby was speaking. "I say he should be taken to a hospital, in spite of what that doctor said. Look at his color!"

Korby, short, pudgy, and bald, looked more like a restaurant customer than a restaurant worker, which may have been one reason he was president of URWA.

"I agree," Dick Vetter said emphatically. I had never seen Dick Vetter in person, but I had seen him often enough on his TV show—in fact, a little too often. If I quit dialing his channel he wouldn't miss me, since 20,000,000 Americans, mostly female, were convinced that he was the youngest and handsomest MC on the waves. Flora Korby had told me he would be there, and why. His father had been a busboy in a Broadway restaurant for thirty years, and still was because he wouldn't quit.

Paul Rago did not agree, and said so. "It would be a pity," he declared. He made it "peety," his accent having tapered off enough not to make it "peetee." With his broad shoulders and six feet, his slick black hair going gray, and his mustache with pointed tips that was still all black, he looked more like an ambassador from below the border than a sauce chef. He was going on. "He is the most important man in the union—except, of course, the president—and he should make an appearance on the platform. Perhaps he can before we are through."

"I hope you will pardon me." That was H. L. Griffin, the food and wine importer. He was a skinny little runt, with a long narrow chin and something wrong with one eye; but he spoke with the authority of a man whose firm occu-

pied a whole floor in one of the midtown hives. "I may have no right to an opinion, since I am not a member of your great organization, but you have done me the honor of inviting me to take part in your celebration of our country's independence, and I do know of Phil Holt's high standing and wide popularity among your members. I would merely say that I feel that Mr. Rago is right, that they will be disappointed not to see him on the platform. I hope I am not being presumptuous."

From outside the tent, from the loudspeakers at the corners of the platform, a booming voice had been calling to the picnickers scattered over the meadow to close in and prepare to listen. As the group by the cot went on arguing, a state trooper in uniform, who had been standing politely aside, came over and joined them and took a look at Philip Holt, but offered no advice. Wolfe also approached for a look. Myself, I would have said that the place for Holt was a good bed with an attractive nurse smoothing his brow. I saw him shiver all over at least three times.

He decided it himself, finally, by muttering at them to let him alone and turning on his side to face the canvas. Flora Korby had come in, and she put a blanket over him, and I noticed that Dick Vetter made a point of helping her. The breeze was sweeping through and one of them said he shouldn't be in a draft, and Wolfe told me to lower the flap of the rear entrance, and I did so.

The flap didn't want to stay down, so I tied the plastic-tape fastening to hold it, in a single bowknot. Then they all marched out through the front entrance to the platform, including the state trooper, and I brought up the rear. As Korby passed the table he stopped to lower the lid on the box of knives, real old Dubois.

The speeches lasted an hour and eight minutes, and the 10,000 URWA members and guests took them standing like ladies and gentlemen. You are probably hoping I will report them word for word, but I didn't take them down and I didn't listen hard enough to engrave them on my memory. At that, the eagle didn't scream as much or as loud as I had expected. From my seat in the back row I could see most of the audience, and it was quite a sight.

The first speaker was a stranger, evidently the one who had been calling on them to gather around while we were in the tent, and after a few fitting remarks he introduced James Korby. While Korby was orating, Paul Rago left his seat, passed down the aisle in the center, and entered the tent. Since he had plugged for an appearance by Philip Holt, I thought his purpose might be to drag him out alive or dead, but it wasn't. In a minute he was back again, and just in time,

for he had just sat down when Korby finished and Rago was introduced.

The faces out front had all been serious for Korby, but Rago's accent through the loudspeakers had most of them grinning by the time he warmed up. When Korby left his chair and started down the aisle I suspected him of walking out on Rago because Rago had walked out on him, but maybe not, since his visit in the tent was even shorter than Rago's had been. He came back out and returned to his chair, and listened attentively to the accent.

Next came H. L. Griffin, the importer, and the chairman had to lower the mike for him. His voice took the loudspeakers better than any of the others, and in fact he was darned good. It was only fair, I thought, to have the runt of the bunch take the cake, and I was all for the cheers from the throng that kept him on his feet a full minute after he finished. He really woke them up, and they were still yelling when he turned and went down the aisle to the tent, and it took the chairman a while to calm them down.

Then, just as he started to introduce Dick Vetter, the TV star suddenly bounced up and started down the aisle with a determined look on his face, and it was easy to guess why. He thought Griffin was going to take advantage of the enthusiasm he had aroused by hauling Philip Holt out to the platform, and he was going to stop him. But he didn't have to. He was still two steps short of the tent entrance when Griffin emerged alone.

Vetter moved aside to let him pass and then disappeared into the tent. As Griffin proceeded to his chair in the front row there were some scattered cheers from the crowd, and the chairman had to quiet them again before he could go on. Then he introduced Dick Vetter, who came out of the tent and along to the mike, which had to be raised again, at just the right moment.

As Vetter started to speak, Nero Wolfe arose and headed for the tent, and I raised my brows. Surely, I thought, he's not going to involve himself in the Holt problem; and then, seeing the look on his face, I caught on. The edges of the wooden chair seat had been cutting into his fanny for nearly an hour and he was in a tantrum, and he wanted to cool off a little before he was called to the mike.

I grinned at him sympathetically as he passed and then gave my ear to Vetter. His soapy voice (I say soapy) came through the loudspeakers in a flow of lather, and after a couple of minutes of it I was thinking that it was only fair for Griffin, the runt, to sound like a man, and for Vetter, the handsome young idol of millions, to sound like whipped cream, when my attention was called.

Wolfe was at the tent entrance, crooking a finger at me. As I got up and approached he backed into the tent, and I followed. He crossed to the rear entrance, lifted the flap, maneuvered his bulk through the hole, and held the flap for me. When I had made it he descended the five steps to the ground, walked to the car, grabbed the handle of the rear door, and pulled. Nothing doing. He turned to me.

"Unlock it."

I stood. "Do you want something?"

"Unlock it and get in and get the thing started. We're going."

"We are like hell. You've got a speech to make."

He glared at me. He knows my tones of voice as well as I know his. "Archie," he said, "I am not being eccentric. There is a sound and cogent reason and I'll explain on the way. Unlock this door."

I shook my head. "Not till I hear the reason. I admit it's your car." I took the keys from my pocket and offered them. "Here. I resign."

"Very well." He was grim. "That man on the cot is dead. I lifted the blanket to adjust it. One of those knives is in his back, clear to the handle. He is dead. If we are still here when the discovery is made you know what will happen. We will be here all day, all night, a week, indefinitely. That is intolerable. We can answer questions at home as well as here. Confound it, unlock the door!"

"How dead is he?"

"I have told you he is dead."

"Okay. You ought to know better. You do know better. We're stuck. They wouldn't ask us questions at home, they'd haul us back out here. They'd be waiting for us on the stoop and you wouldn't get inside the house." I returned the keys to my pocket. "Running out when you're next on the program, that would be nice. The only question is do we report it now or do you make your speech and let someone else find it, and you can answer that."

He had stopped glaring. He took in a long deep breath, and when it was out again he said, "I'll make my speech."

"Fine. It'd be a shame to waste it. A question. Just now when you lifted the flap to come out I didn't see you untie the tape fastening. Was it already untied?"

"Yes."

"That makes it nice." I turned and went to the steps, mounted, raised the flap for him, and followed him into the tent. He crossed to the front and on out, and I stepped to the cot.

Philip Holt lay facing the wall, with the blanket up to his neck, and I pulled it down far enough to see the handle of the knife, an inch to the right of the point of the shoulder blade. The knife blade was all buried. I lowered the blanket some more to get at a hand, pinched a fingertip hard for ten sec-

onds, released it, and saw it stay white.

I picked some fluff from the blanket and dangled it against his nostrils for half a minute. No movement. I put the blanket back as I had found it, went to the metal box on the table and lifted the lid, and saw that the shortest knife, the one with the six-inch blade, wasn't there.

As I went to the rear entrance and raised the flap, Dick Vetter's lather or whipped cream, whichever you prefer, came to an end through the loudspeakers, and as I descended the five steps the meadowful of picknickers was cheering.

Our sedan was the third car on the right from the foot of the steps. The second car to the left of the steps was a Plymouth, and I was pleased to see that it still had an occupant, having previously noticed her—a woman with careless gray hair topping a wide face and a square chin, in the front seat but not behind the wheel.

I circled around to her side and spoke through the open window. "I beg your pardon. May I introduce myself?"

"You don't have to, young man. Your name's Archie Goodwin, and you work for Nero Wolfe, the detective." She had tired gray eyes. "You were just out here with him."

"Right. I hope you won't mind if I ask you something. How long have you been sitting here?"

"Long enough. But it's all right, I can hear the speeches. Nero Wolfe is just starting to speak now."

"Have you been here since the speeches started?"

"Yes, I have. I ate too much of the picnic stuff and I didn't feel like standing up in that crowd, so I came to sit in the car."

"Then you've been here all the time since the speeches began?"

"That's what I said. Why do you want to know?"

"I'm just checking on something. If you don't mind. Has anyone gone into the tent or come out of it while you've been here?"

Her tired eyes woke up a little. "Ha," she said, "so something's missing. I'm not surprised. What's missing?"

"Nothing, as far as I know. I'm just checking on a certain fact. Of course you saw Mr. Wolfe and me come out and go back in. Anyone else, either going or coming?"

"You're not fooling me, young man. Something's missing, and you're a detective."

I grinned at her. "All right, have it your way. But I do want to know, if you don't object."

"I don't object. As I told you, I've been right here ever since the speeches started, I got here before that. And nobody has gone into the tent, nobody but you and Nero Wolfe, and I haven't either. I've been right here. If you want to know about me, my name is Anna Banau, Mrs. Alexander Banau, and

my husband is a captain at Zoller's —"

A scream came from inside the tent, an all-out scream from a good pair of lungs. I moved to the steps, up, and past the flap into the tent. Flora Korby was standing near the cot with her back to it, her hand covering her mouth. I was disappointed in her. Granting that a woman has a right to scream when she finds a corpse, she might have kept it down until Wolfe had finished his speech.

It was a little after four o'clock when Flora Korby screamed. It was 4:34 when a glance outside through a crack past the flap of the tent's rear entrance, the third such glance I had managed to make, showed me that the Plymouth containing Mrs. Alexander Banau was gone.

It was 4:39 when the medical examiner arrived with his bag and found that Philip Holt was still dead. It was 4:48 when the scientists came, with cameras and fingerprint kits and other items of equipment, and Wolfe and I and the others were herded out to the extension, under guard. It was 5:16 when I counted a total of seventeen cops, state and county, in uniform and out, on the job. It was 5:30 when Wolfe muttered at me bitterly that it would certainly be all night.

It was 5:52 when a Chief of Detectives named Baxter got so personal with me that I decided, finally and definitely, not to play. It was 6:21 when we all left Culp's Meadows for an official destination. There were four in our car: one in uniform with Wolfe in the back seat, and one in his own clothes with me in front. Again I had someone beside me to tell me the way, but I didn't put my arm across his shoulders.

There had been some conversing with us separately, but most of it had been a panel discussion, open air, out on the platform extension, so I knew pretty well how things stood. Nobody was accusing anybody. Three of them—Korby, Rago, and Griffin—gave approximately the same reason for their visits to the tent during the speechmaking: that they were concerned about Philip Holt and wanted to see if he was all right.

The fourth, Dick Vetter, gave the reason I had guessed—that he thought Griffin might bring Holt out to the platform, and he intended to stop him. Vetter, by the way, was the only one who raised a fuss about being detained. He said that it hadn't been easy to get away from his duties that afternoon, and he had a studio rehearsal scheduled for six o'clock, and he absolutely had to be there. At 6:21, when we all left for the official destination, he was fit to be tied.

None of them claimed to know for sure that Holt had been alive at the time he visited the tent; they all

had supposed he had fallen asleep. All except Vetter said they had gone to the cot and looked at him, at his face, and had suspected nothing wrong. None of them had spoken to him. To the question, "Who do you think did it and why?" they all gave the same answer: someone must have entered the tent by the rear entrance, stabbed him, and departed. The fact that the URWA director of organization had got his stomach into trouble and had been attended by a doctor in the tent had been no secret, anything but.

I have been leaving Flora out, since I knew and you know she was clear, but the cops didn't. I overheard one of them tell another one it was probably her, because stabbing a sick man was more like something a woman would do than a man.

Of course, the theory that someone had entered by the back door made the fastening of the tent flap an important item. I said I had tied the tape before we left the tent, and they all agreed that they had seen me do so except Dick Vetter, who said he hadn't noticed because he had been helping to arrange the blanket over Holt; and Wolfe and I both testified that the tape was hanging loose when we had entered the tent while Vetter was speaking.

Under this theory the point wasn't who had untied it, since the murderer could have easily reached through the crack from the outside and jerked the knot loose; the question was when. On that none of them was any help. All four said they hadn't noticed whether the tape was tied or not when they went inside the tent.

That was how it stood, as far as I knew, when we left Culp's Meadows. The official destination turned out to be a building I had been in before, but not as a murder suspect —a county courthouse back of a smooth green lawn with a couple of big trees. First we were collected in a room on the ground floor, and, after a long wait, were escorted up one flight and through a door that was inscribed DISTRICT ATTORNEY.

At least 91.2 per cent of the District Attorneys in the State of New York think they would make fine tenants of the governor's mansion at Albany, and that should be kept in mind in considering the conduct of D.A. James R. Delaney. To him at least four of that bunch, and possibly all five, were upright, important citizens in positions to influence segments of the electorate. His attitude as he attacked the problem implied that he was merely chairing a meeting of a community council called to deal with a grave and difficult emergency—except, I noticed, when he was looking at or speaking to Wolfe or me. Then his smile quit working, his tone sharpened, and his eyes had a different look.

With a stenographer at a side ta-

ble taking it down, he spent an hour going over it with us, or rather with them, with scattered contributions from Chief of Detectives Baxter and others who had been at the scene, and then spoke his mind.

"It seems," he said, "to be the consensus that some person unknown entered the tent from the rear, stabbed him, and departed. There is the question, how could such a person have known the knife would be there at hand? But he need not have known. He might have decided to murder only when he saw the knives, or he might have had some other weapon with him, and, seeing the knives, thought one of them would better serve his purpose and used it instead. Either is plausible. It must be admitted that the whole theory is plausible, and none of the facts now known are in contradiction to it. You agree, Chief?"

"Right," Baxter conceded. "Up to now. As long as the known facts are facts."

Delaney nodded. "Certainly. They have to be checked." His eyes took in the audience. "You gentlemen, and you, Miss Korby, understand that you are to remain in this jurisdiction, the State of New York, until further notice, and you are to be available. With that understood, it seems unnecessary at present to put you under bond as material witnesses. We have your addresses and know where to find you."

He focused on Wolfe, and his tone changed. "With you, Wolfe, the situation is somewhat different. You're a licensed private detective, and so is Goodwin, and the record of your high-handed performances does not inspire confidence in your —uh—candor. There may be some complicated and subtle reasons why the New York City authorities have stood for your tricks, but out here in the suburbs we're more simple-minded. We don't like tricks."

He lowered his chin, which made his eyes slant up under his heavy brows. "Let's see if I've got your story straight. You say that as Vetter started to speak you felt in your pocket for a paper on which you had made notes for your speech, found it wasn't there, thought you had left it in your car, went to get it, and when, after you had entered the tent, it occurred to you that the car was locked and Goodwin had the keys, you summoned him and you and he went out to the car. Then Goodwin remembered that the paper had been left on your desk at your office, and you and he returned to the tent, and you went out to the platform and resumed your seat. Another item: when you went to the rear entrance to leave the tent to go out to the car, the tape fastening of the flap was hanging loose, not tied. Is that your story?"

Wolfe cleared his throat. "Mr. Delaney. I suppose it is pointless to challenge your remark about my

candor or to ask you to phrase your question less offensively." His shoulders went up an eighth of an inch, and down. "Yes, that's my story."

"I merely asked you the question."

"I answered it."

"So you did." The D.A.'s eyes came to me. "And of course, Goodwin, your story is the same. If it needed arranging, there was ample time for that during the hubbub that followed Miss Korby's scream. But with you there's more to it. You say that after you and Wolfe re-entered the tent, and he continued through the front entrance to the platform, it occurred to you that there was a possibility that he had taken the paper from his desk and put it in his pocket, had consulted it during the ride, had left it in the car, and you went out back again to look, and you were out there when Miss Korby screamed. Is that correct?"

As I had long since decided not to play, when Baxter had got too personal, I merely said, "Check."

Delaney returned to Wolfe. "If you object to my being offensive, Wolfe, I'll put it this way: I find some of this hard to believe. Anyone as glib as you are needing notes for a little speech like that? And you thinking you had left the paper in the car, and Goodwin remembering it had been left at home on your desk and then thinking it might be in the car after all? Also there are certain facts. You and Godwin were the last people inside the tent before Miss Korby entered and found the body. You admit it. The others all state that they don't know whether the tape was tied or not when they visited the tent; you and Goodwin can't very well say that, since you went out that way, so you say you found it untied."

He cocked his head. "You admit you had had words with Philip Holt during the past year. You admit he had become obnoxious to you—your word, obnoxious—by his insistence that your personal chef must join his union. The record of your past performances justifies me in saying that a man who renders himself obnoxious to you had better watch his step. I'll say this, if it weren't for the probability that some unknown person entered from the rear, and I concede that it's quite possible, you and Goodwin would be held in custody until a judge could be found to issue a warrant for your arrest as material witnesses. As it is, I'll make it easier for you."

He looked at his wrist watch. "It's five minutes to eight. I'll send a man with you to a restaurant down the street, and we'll expect you back here at nine thirty. I want to cover all the details with you, thoroughly." His eyes moved. "The rest of you may go for the present, but you are to be available."

Wolfe stood up. "Mr. Goodwin and I are going home," he an-

nounced. "We will not be back this evening."

Delaney's eyes narrowed. "If that's the way you feel about it, you'll stay. You can send out for sandwiches."

"Are we under arrest?"

The D.A. opened his mouth, closed it, and opened it again. "No."

"Then we're going." Wolfe was assured but not belligerent. "I understand your annoyance, sir, at this interference with your holiday, and I'm aware that you don't like me—or what you know, or think you know, of my record. But I will not surrender my convenience to your humor. You can detain me only if you charge me, and with what? Mr. Goodwin and I have supplied all the information we have. Your intimation that I am capable of murdering a man, or of inciting Mr. Goodwin to murder him, because he has made a nuisance of himself, is puerile. You concede that the murderer could have been anyone in that throng of thousands. You have no basis whatever for any supposition that Mr. Goodwin and I are concealing any knowledge that would help you. Should such a basis appear, you know where to find us. Come, Archie."

He turned and headed for the door, and I followed. I can't report the reaction because Delaney at his desk was behind me, and it would have been bad tactics to look back over my shoulder. All I knew was that Baxter took two steps and stopped, and none of the other cops moved.

We made the hall, and the entrance, and down the path to the sidewalk, without a shot being fired; and half a block to where the car was parked. Wolfe told me to find a phone booth and call Fritz to tell him when we would arrive for dinner, and I steered for the center of town.

As I had holiday traffic to cope with, it was half-past nine by the time we got home and washed and seated at the dinner table. A moving car is no place to give Wolfe bad news, or good news either for that matter, and there was no point in spoiling his dinner, so I waited until after we had finished with the poached and truffled broilers and broccoli and stuffed potatoes with herbs, and salad and cheese, and Fritz had brought coffee to us in the office, to open the bag.

Wolfe was reaching for the remote-control television gadget, to turn it on so as to have the pleasure of turning it off again, when I said, "Hold a minute. I have a report to make. I don't blame you for feeling self-satisfied. You got us away very neatly, but there's a catch. It wasn't somebody that came in the back way. It was one of them."

"Indeed." He was placid, after-dinner placid, in the comfortable big made-to-order chair back of his desk. "What is this, flummery?"

"No, sir. Nor am I trying to show

that I'm smarter than you are for once. It's just that I know more. When you left the tent to go to the car your mind was on a quick get-away, so you may not have noticed that a woman was sitting there in a car to the left, but I did. When we returned to the tent and you went on out front, I had an idea and went out back again and had a talk with her. I'll give it to you verbatim, since it's important."

I did so. That was simple, compared with the three-way and four-way conversations I have been called on to report word for word. When I finished he was scowling at me, as black as the coffee in his cup.

"Confound it," he growled.

"Yes, sir. I was going to tell you —when we were settling the details of why we went out to the car, the paper with your notes—but as you know we were interrupted, and after that there was no opportunity that I liked, and anyway I had seen that Mrs. Banau and the car were gone, and that baboon named Baxter had hurt my feelings, and I had decided not to play. Of course, the main thing was your wanting to go home. If they had known it was one of us six—or seven, counting Flora—we would all have been held as material witnesses, and you couldn't have got bail on the Fourth of July. I can manage in a cell, but you're too big. Also, if I got you home you might feel like discussing a raise in pay. Do you?"

"Shut up." He closed his eyes, and after a moment opened them again. "We're in a pickle. They may find that woman any moment, or she may disclose herself. What about her? You have given me her words, but what about her?"

"She's good. They'll believe her. I did. You would. From where she sat the steps and tent entrance were in her minimum field of vision, no obstructions, less than ten yards away."

"If she kept her eyes open."

"She thinks she did, and that will do for the cops when they find her. Anyhow, I think she did too. When she said nobody had gone into the tent but you and me she meant it."

"There's the possibility that she herself, or someone she knew and would protect—No, that's absurd, since she stayed there in the car for some time after the body was found. We're in a fix."

"Yes, sir." Meeting his eyes, I saw no sign of the gratitude I might reasonably have expected, so I went on. "I would like to suggest, in considering the situation, that you don't bother about me. I can't be charged with withholding evidence because I didn't report my talk with her. I can just say I didn't believe her and saw no point in making it tougher for us by dragging it in. The fact that someone might have come in the back way didn't eliminate us. Of course, I'll have to account for my questioning her, but that's easy. I can say I

discovered that he was dead after you went back out to the platform to make your speech, and, having noticed her there in the car, I went out to question her before reporting the discovery, and was interrupted by the scream in the tent. So don't mind me. Anything you say. I can phone Delaney in the morning, or you can, and spill it, or we can just sit tight and wait for the fireworks."

"Pfui," he said.

"Amen," I said.

He took in air, audibly, and let it out. "That woman may be communicating with them at this moment, or they may be finding her. I don't complain of your performance; indeed, I commend it. If you had reported that conversation we would both be spending tonight in jail." He made a face. "Bah. As it is, at least we can try something. What time is it?"

I looked at my wrist watch. He would have had to turn his head almost to a right angle to glance at the wall clock, which was too much to expect. "Eight after eleven."

"Could you get them here tonight?"

"I doubt it. All five of them?"

"Yes."

"Possibly by sunup. Bring them to your bedroom?"

He rubbed his nose with a fingertip. "Very well. But you can call them now, as many as you can get. Make it eleven in the morning. Tell them I have a disclosure to make and must consult with them."

"That should interest them," I granted, and reached for the phone.

By the time Wolfe came down from the plant rooms to greet the guests, at two minutes past eleven the next morning, there hadn't been a peep out of the Long Island law. Which didn't mean there couldn't be one at three minutes past eleven. According to the morning paper, District Attorney Delaney and Chief of Detectives Baxter had both conceded that anyone could have entered the tent from the back and therefore it was wide open. If Anna Banau read newspapers, and she probably did, she might at any moment be going to the phone to make a call.

I had made several, both the night before and that morning, getting the guests lined up; and one special one. There was an address and phone number for an Alexander Banau in the Manhattan book, but I decided not to dial it. I also decided not to ring Zoller's restaurant on Fifty-second Street. I hadn't eaten at Zoller's more than a couple of times, but I knew a man who had been patronizing it for years, and I called him.

Yes, he said, there was a captain at Zoller's named Alex, and yes, his last name was Banau. He liked Alex and hoped that my asking about him didn't mean that he was headed for some kind of trou-

ble. I said no trouble was contemplated, I just might want to check a little detail, and thanked him. Then I sat and looked at the slip on which I had scribbled the Banau home phone number, with my finger itching to dial it, but to say what? No.

I mention that around ten thirty I got the Marley .38 from the drawer, saw that it was loaded, and put it in my side pocket, not to prepare you for bloodshed, but just to show that I was sold on Mrs. Banau. With a murderer for a guest, and an extremely nervy one, there was no telling.

H. L. Griffin, the importer, and Paul Rago, the sauce chef, came alone and separately, but Korby and Flora had Dick Vetter with them. I had intended to let Flora have the red leather chair, but when I showed them to the office, Rago, the six-footer with the mustache and the accent, had copped it, and she took one of the yellow chairs in a row facing Wolfe's desk, with her father on her right and Vetter on her left. Griffin, the runt who had made the best speech, was at the end of the row nearest my desk.

When Wolfe came down from the plant rooms, entered, greeted them, and headed for his desk, Vetter spoke up before he was seated.

"I hope this won't last long, Mr. Wolfe. I asked Mr. Goodwin if it couldn't be earlier, and he said it couldn't. Miss Korby and I must have an early lunch because I have a script conference at one thirty."

I raised a brow. I had been honored. I had driven a car with my arm across the shoulders of a girl whom Dick Vetter himself thought worthy of a lunch.

Wolfe, adjusted in his chair, said mildly, "I won't prolong it beyond necessity, sir. Are you and Miss Koby friends?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Possibly nothing. But now, nothing about any of you is beyond the bounds of my curiosity. It is a distressing thing to have to say, in view of the occasion of our meeting yesterday, the anniversary of the birth of this land of freedom, but I must. One of you killed Philip Holt."

The idea is to watch them and see who faints or jumps up and runs. But nobody did. They all stared.

"One of us?" Griffin demanded.

Wolfe nodded. "I thought it best to begin with that bald statement, instead of leading up to it. I thought —"

Korby cut in. "This is funny. This is a joke. After what you said yesterday to that District Attorney. It's a *bad* joke."

"It's no joke, Mr. Korby. I wish it were. I thought yesterday I was on solid ground, but I wasn't. I now know that there is a witness, a credible and confident witness, to testify that no one entered the tent from the rear between the time the speeches began and the discovery

of the body. I also know that neither Mr. Goodwin nor I killed him, so it was one of you. So I think we should discuss it."

"You say a witness?" Rago made it "weetnuss."

"Who is he?" Korby wanted to know. "Where is he?"

"It's a woman, and she is available. Mr. Goodwin, who has spoken with her, is completely satisfied of her competence and bona fides, and he is hard to satisfy. It is highly unlikely that she can be impeached. That's all I—"

"I don't get it," Vetter blurted. "If they've got a witness like that why haven't they come for us?"

"Because they haven't got her. They know nothing about her. But they may find her at any moment, or she may go to them. If so, you will soon be discussing the matter not with me but with officers of the law—and so will I. Unless you do discuss it with me, and unless the discussion is productive, I shall of course be constrained to tell Mr. Delaney about her. I wouldn't like that and neither would you. After hearing her story his manner with you, and with me, would be quite different from yesterday. I want to ask you some questions."

"Who is she?" Korby demanded. "Where is she?"

Wolfe shook his head. "I'm not going to identify her or place her for you. I note your expressions—especially yours, Mr. Korby, and yours, Mr. Griffin. You are skeptical. But what conceivable reason could there be for my getting you here to point this weapon at you except the coercion of events? Why would I invent or contrive such a dilemma? I, like you, would vastly prefer to have it as it was—that the murderer came from without—but that's no good now. I concede that you may suspect me too, and Mr. Goodwin, and you may question us as I may question you. But one of us killed Philip Holt, and getting answers to questions is clearly in the interest of all the rest of us."

They exchanged glances. But they were not the kind of glances they would have exchanged five minutes earlier. They were glances of doubt, suspicion, and surmise, and they weren't friendly.

"I don't see," Griffin objected, "what good questions will do. We were all there together and we all know what happened. We all know what everybody said."

Wolfe nodded. "But we were all supporting the theory that excluded us. Now we're not. We can't. One of us has something in his background which, if known, would account for his determination to kill that man. I suggest beginning with autobiographical sketches from each of us, and here is mine. I was born in Montenegro and spent my early boyhood there. At the age of sixteen I decided to move around, and in fourteen years I became acquainted with most of Europe, a little of Africa,

and much of Asia, in a variety of roles and activities. Coming to this country in nineteen thirty, not penniless, I bought this house and entered into practice as a private detective. I am a naturalized American citizen. I first heard of Philip Holt about two years ago when Fritz Brenner, who works for me, came to me with a complaint about him. My only reason for wishing him harm, but not the extremity of death, was removed, as you know, when he agreed to stop annoying Mr. Brenner about joining your union if I would make a speech at your blasted picnic. Mr. Goodwin?"

I turned my face to the audience. "Born in Ohio. Public high school, pretty good at geometry and football, graduated with honor but no honors. Went to college two weeks, decided it was childish, came to New York and got a job guarding a pier, shot and killed two men and was fired, was recommended to Nero Wolfe for a chore he wanted done, did it, was offered a full-time job by Mr. Wolfe, took it, still have it. Personally, was more entertained than bothered by Holt's trying to get union dues out of Fritz Brenner. Otherwise no connection with him."

"You may," Wolfe told them, "question us later if you wish. Miss Korby?"

"Well—" Flora said. She glanced at her father, and when he nodded she aimed at Wolfe and went on, "My autobiography doesn't amount to much. I was born in New York and have always lived here. I'm twenty years old. I didn't kill Phil Holt and had no reason to kill him." She turned her palms up. "What else?"

"If I may suggest," H. L. Griffin offered, "if there's a witness as Wolfe says, if there *is* such a witness, they'll dig everything up. For instance, about you and Phil."

She gave him an eye. "What about us, Mr. Griffin?"

"I don't know. I've only heard talk, that's all, but they'll dig up that talk."

"To hell with the talk," Dick Vetter blurted, the whipped cream sounding sour.

Flora looked at Wolfe. "I can't help talk," she said. "It certainly is no secret that Phil Holt was—well, he liked women. And it's no secret that I'm a woman, and I guess it's no secret that I didn't like Phil. For me he was what you called him, a nuisance. When he wanted something."

Wolfe grunted. "And he wanted you?"

"He thought he did. That's all there was to it. He was a pest, that's all there is to say about it."

"You said you had no reason to kill him."

"Good heavens, I didn't! A girl doesn't kill a man just because he won't believe her when she says no!"

"No to what? A marriage proposal?"

Her father cut in. "Look here," he told Wolfe, "you're barking up the wrong tree. Everybody knows how Phil Holt was about women. He never asked one to marry him and probably he never would. My daughter is old enough and smart enough to take care of herself, and she does, but not by sticking a knife in a man's back." He turned to Griffin. "Much obliged, Harry."

The importer wasn't fazed. "It was bound to come out, Jim, and I thought it ought to be mentioned now."

Wolfe was regarding Korby. "Naturally it raises the question how far a father might go to relieve his daughter of a pest."

Korby snorted. "If you're asking it, the answer is no. My daughter can take care of herself. If you want a reason why I might have killed Phil Holt you'll have to do better than that."

"Then I'll try, Mr. Korby. You are the president of your union, and Mr. Holt was an important figure in it, and at the moment the affairs of unions, especially their financial affairs, are front-page news. Have you any reason to fear an investigation, or had Mr. Holt any reason?"

"No. They can investigate as much as they damn please."

"Have you been summoned?"

"No."

"Had Mr. Holt been summoned?"

"No."

"Have any officials of your union been summoned?"

"No." Korby's pudgy face and bald top were pinking up. "You're barking up the wrong tree again."

"But at least another tree. You realize, sir, that if Mr. Delaney starts after us in earnest, the affairs of the United Restaurant Workers of America will be one of his major concerns. For the murder of Philip Holt we all had opportunity, and the means were there at hand; what he will seek is the motive. If there was a vulnerable spot in the operation of your union, financial or otherwise, I suggest that it would be wise for you to disclose it now for discussion."

"There wasn't anything." Korby was pinker. "There's nothing wrong with my union except rumors. That's all it is, rumors, and where's a union that hasn't got rumors with all the stink they've raised? We're not vulnerable to anything or anybody."

"What kind of rumors?"

"Any kind you want to name. I'm a crook. All the officers are crooks. We've raided the Benefit Fund. We've sold out to the big operators. We steal lead pencils and paper clips."

"Can you be more specific? What was the most embarrassing rumor?"

Korby was suddenly not listen-

ing. He took a folded handkerchief from his pocket, opened it up, wiped his face and his baldness, refolded the handkerchief at the creases, and returned it to his pocket. Then his eyes went back to Wolfe.

"If you want something specific," he said, "it's not a rumor. It's a strictly internal union matter, but it's sure to leak now and it might as well leak here first. There have been some charges made, and they're being looked into, about kickbacks from dealers to union officers and members. Phil Holt had something to do with some of the charges, though that wasn't in his department. He got hot about it."

"Were you the target of any of the charges?"

"I was not. I have the complete trust of my associates and my staff."

"You said 'dealers.' Does that include importers?"

"Sure, importers are dealers."

"Was Mr. Griffin's name mentioned in any of the charges?"

"I'm not giving any names, not without authority from my board. Those things are confidential."

"Much obliged, Jim," H. L. Griffin said, sounding the opposite of obliged. "Even exchange?"

"Excuse me." It was Dick Vetter, on his feet. "It's nearly twelve o'clock and Miss Korby and I have to go. We've got to get some lunch and I can't be late for that conference. Anyway, I think it's a lot of hooey. Come on, Flora."

She hesitated a moment, then left her chair, and he moved. But when Wolfe snapped out his name he turned. "Well?"

Wolfe swiveled his chair. "My apologies. I should have remembered that you are pressed for time. If you can give us, say, five minutes?"

The TV star smiled indulgently. "For my autobiography? You can look it up. It's in print—*TV Guide* a couple of months ago, or *Clock* magazine, I don't remember the date. I say this is hooey. If one of us is a murderer, okay, I wish you luck, but this isn't getting you anywhere. Couldn't I just tell you anything I felt like?"

"You could indeed, Mr. Vetter. But if inquiry reveals that you have lied or have omitted something plainly relevant that will be of interest. The magazine articles you mentioned—do they tell of your interest in Miss Korby?"

"Nuts." Many of his 20,000,000 admirers wouldn't have liked either his tone or his diction.

Wolfe shook his head. "If you insist, Mr. Vetter, you may of course be disdainful about it with me, but not with the police once they get interested in you. I asked you before if you and Miss Korby are friends, and you asked what that had to do with it, and I said possibly nothing. I now say possibly something, since Philip Holt

was hounding her—how savagely I don't know yet. Are you and Miss Korby friends?"

"Certainly we're friends. I'm taking her to lunch."

"Are you devoted to her?"

His smile wasn't quite so indulgent, but it was still a smile. "Now that's a delicate question," he said. "I'll tell you how it is. I'm a public figure and I have to watch my tongue. If I said yes, I'm devoted to Miss Korby, it would be in all the columns tomorrow and I'd get ten thousand telegrams and a million letters. If I said no, I'm not devoted to Miss Korby, that wouldn't be polite with her here at my elbow. So I'll just skip it. Come on, Flora."

"One more question. I understand that your father works in a New York restaurant. Do you know whether he is involved in any of the charges Mr. Korby spoke of?"

"Oh, for God's sake. Talk about hooey." He turned and headed for the door, taking Flora with him. I got up and went to the hall and on to the front door, opened it for them, closed it after them, put the chain bolt on, and returned to the office. Wolfe was speaking.

". . . and I assure you, Mr. Rago, my interest runs with yours—with all of you except one. You don't want the police crawling over you and neither do I."

The sauce chef had straightened up in the red leather chair, and the points of his mustache seemed to have straightened up too. "Treeks," he said.

"No, sir," Wolfe said. "I have no objection to tricks, if they work, but this is merely a forthright discussion of a lamentable situation. No trick. Do you object to telling us what dealings you had with Philip Holt?"

"I am deesappointed," Rago declared. "Of course I knew you made a living with detective work, everybody knows that, but to me your glory is your great contributions to cuisine—your *sauce printemps,* your oyster pie, your *artichauts drigants,* and others. I know what Pierre Mondor said of you. So it is a deesappointment when I am in your company that the only talk is of the ugliness of murder."

"I don't like it any better than you do, Mr. Rago. I am pleased to know that Pierre Mondor spoke well of me. Now about Philip Holt?"

"If you insist, certainly. But what can I say? Nothing."

"Didn't you know him?"

Rago spread his hands and raised his shoulders and brows. "I had met him. As one meets people. Did I know him? Whom does one know? Do I know you?"

"But you never saw me until two weeks ago. Surely you must have seen something of Mr. Holt. He was an important official of your union, in which you were active."

"I have not been active in the union."

"You were a speaker at its picnic yesterday."

Rago nodded and smiled. "Yes, that is so. But that was because of my activity in the kitchen, not in the union. It may be said, even by me, that in sauces I am supreme. It was for that distinction that it was thought desirable to have me." His head turned. "So, Mr. Korby?"

The president of URWA nodded yes. "That's right," he told Wolfe. "We thought the finest cooking should be represented, and we picked Rago for it. So far as I know, he has never come to a union meeting. We wish he would, and more like him."

"I am a man of the kitchen," Rago declared. "I am an artist. The business I leave to others."

Wolfe was on Korby. "Did Mr. Rago's name appear in any of the charges you spoke of?"

"No. I said I wouldn't give names, but I can say no. No, it didn't."

"You didn't say no when I asked about Mr. Griffin." Wolfe turned to the importer. "Do you wish to comment on that, sir?"

I still hadn't decided exactly what was wrong with Griffin's left eye. There was no sign of an injury, and it seemed to function okay, but it appeared to be a little off center. From an angle, the slant I had from my desk, it looked normal.

He lifted his long narrow chin. "What do you expect?" he demanded.

"My expectations are of no consequence. I merely invite comment."

"On that, I have none. I know nothing about any charges. What I want, I want to see that witness."

Wolfe shook his head. "As I said, I will not produce the witness—for the present. Are you still skeptical?"

"I'm always skeptical." Griffin's voice would have suited a man twice his size. "I want to see that witness and hear what she has to say. I admit I can see no reason why you would invent her—if there is one it's too deep for me, since it puts you in the same boat with us—but I'm not going to believe her until I see her. Maybe I will then, and maybe I won't."

"I think you will. Meanwhile, what about your relations with Philip Holt? How long and how well did you know him?"

"Oh, to hell with this jabber!" Griffin bounced up, not having far to bounce. "If there was anything in my relations with him that made me kill him, would I be telling you?" He flattened his palms on Wolfe's desk. "Are you going to produce that witness? No?" He wheeled. "I've had enough of this! You, Jim? Rago?"

That ended the party. Wolfe could have held Korby and Rago for more jabber, but apparently he didn't think it worth the effort. They asked some questions—what

was Wolfe going to do now, and what was the witness going to do, and why couldn't they see her, and why did Wolfe believe her, and was he going to see her and question her; and of course nobody got anything out of that. The atmosphere wasn't very cordial when they left. After letting them out I returned to the office and stood in front of Wolfe's desk. He was leaning back with his arms folded.

"Lunch in twenty minutes," I said cheerfully.

"Not in peace," he growled.

"No, sir. Any instructions?"

"Pfui. It would take an army, and I haven't got one. To go into all of them, to trace all their connections and dealings with the man one of them murdered . . ."

He unfolded his arms and put his fists on the desk. "I can't even limit it by assuming that it was an act of urgency, resulting from something that had been said or done that day or in the immediate past. The need or desire to kill him might have dated from a week ago, or a month, or even a year, and it was satisfied yesterday in that tent only because circumstances offered the opportunity. No matter which one it was—Rago, who visited the tent first, or Korby or Griffin or Vetter, who visited it after him in that order—no matter which, the opportunity was tempting. The man was there, recumbent and disabled, and the weapon was there. The murderer had a plausible excuse for entering the tent. To spread the cloud of suspicion to the multitude, all he had to do was untie the tape that held the flap. Even if the body were discovered soon after he left the tent, even seconds after, there would be no question he couldn't answer."

He grunted. "No. Confound it, no. The motive may be buried not only in a complexity of associations but also in history. It might take months. I will have to contrive something."

"Yeah. Any time."

"There may be none. That's the devil of it. Get Saul and Fred and Orrie and have them on call. I have no idea for what, but no matter, get them. And let me alone."

I went to my desk and pulled the phone over.

There have been only five occasions in my memory when Wolfe has cut short his afternoon session with the orchids in the plant rooms, from four o'clock to six, and that was the fifth.

If there had been any developments inside his skull I hadn't been informed. There had been none outside, unless you count my calling Saul and Fred and Orrie, our three best bets when we needed outside help, and telling them to stand by.

Back at his desk after lunch, Wolfe fiddled around with papers on his desk, counted the week's collection of bottle caps in his

drawer, rang for Fritz to bring beer and then didn't drink it, and picked up his current book, *The Fall* by Albert Camus, three or four times, and put it down again.

In between he brushed specks of dust from his desk with his little finger. When I turned on the radio for the four o'clock newscast he waited until it was finished to leave for his elevator trip up to the roof.

Later, nearly an hour later, I caught myself brushing a speck of dust off my desk with my little finger, said something I needn't repeat here, and went to the kitchen for a glass of milk.

When the doorbell rang at a quarter past five I jumped up and shot for the hall, realized that was unmanly, and controlled my legs to a normal gait. Through the one-way glass panel of the front door I saw, out on the stoop, a tall lanky guy, narrow from top to bottom, in a brown suit that needed pressing and a brown straw hat.

I took a breath, which I needed apparently, and opened the door the two inches allowed by the chain bolt. His appearance was all against it, but there was no telling what kind of a specimen District Attorney Delaney or Chief of Detectives Baxter might have on his staff.

I spoke through the crack. "Yes, sir?"

"I would like to see Mr. Nero Wolfe. My name is Banau, Alexander Banau."

"Yes, sir." I took the bolt off and swung the door open, and he crossed the sill. "Your hat, sir?" He gave it to me and I put it on the shelf. "This way, sir." I waited until I had him in the office and in the red leather chair to say, "Mr. Wolfe is engaged at the moment. I'll tell him you're here."

I went to the hall and on to the kitchen, shutting doors on the way, buzzed the plant rooms on the house phone, and in three seconds, instead of the usual fifteen or twenty, had a growl in my ear. "Yes?"

"Company. Captain Alexander Banau."

Silence, then: "Let him in."

"He's already in. Have you any suggestions how I keep him occupied until six o'clock?"

"No." A longer silence. "I'll be down."

As I said, that was the fifth time in all the years I have been with him. I went back to the office and asked the guest if he would like something to drink, and he said no, and in two minutes there was the sound of Wolfe's elevator descending and stopping, the door opening and shutting, and his tread. He entered, circled around the red leather chair, and offered a hand.

"Mr. Banau? I'm Nero Wolfe. How do you do, sir?"

He was certainly spreading it on. He doesn't like to shake hands, and rarely does. When he was adjusted in his chair, he gave Banau

a look so sociable it was damn close to fawning, for him.

"Well, sir?"

"I fear," Banau said, "that I may have to make myself disagreeable. I don't like to be disagreeable. Is that gentleman"—he nodded at me —"Mr. Archie Goodwin?"

"He is, yes, sir."

"Then it will be doubly disagreeable, but it can't be helped. It concerns the tragic event at Culp's Meadows yesterday. According to the newspaper accounts, the police are proceeding on the probability that the murderer entered the tent from the rear, and left that way after he had performed the deed. Just an hour ago I telephoned to Long Island to ask if they still regard that as probable, and was told that they do."

He stopped to clear his throat. I would have liked to get my fingers around it to help. He resumed.

"It is also reported that you and Mr. Goodwin were among those interviewed, and that compels me to conclude, reluctantly, that Mr. Goodwin has failed to tell you of a conversation he had with my wife as she sat in our car outside the tent. I should explain that I was in the crowd in front, and when your speech was interrupted by the scream, and confusion resulted, I made my way around to the car, with some difficulty, and got in and drove away. I do not like tumult. My wife did not tell me of her conversation with Mr. Goodwin until after we got home. She regards it as unwise to talk while I am driving. What she told me was that Mr. Goodwin approached the car and spoke to her through the open window. He asked her if anyone—"

"If you please." Wolfe wiggled a finger. "Your assumption that he hasn't reported the conversation to me is incorrect. He has."

"What! He has?"

"Yes, sir. If you will—"

"Then you know that my wife is certain that no one entered the tent from the rear while the speeches were being made? No one but you and Mr. Goodwin? Absolutely certain? You know she told him that?"

"I know what she told him, yes. But if you will—"

"And you haven't told the police?"

"No, not yet. I would like—"

"Then she has no choice." Banau was on his feet. "It is even more disagreeable than I feared. She must communicate with them at once. This is terrible—a man of your standing, and the others too. It is terrible, but it must be done. In a country of law the law must be served."

He turned and headed for the door.

I left my chair. Stopping him and wrapping him up would have been no problem, but I was myself stopped by the expression on Wolfe's face. He looked relieved;

he even looked pleased. I stared at him, and was still staring when the sound came of the front door closing. I stepped to the hall, saw that Banau was gone and hadn't forgotten his hat, and returned and stood at Wolfe's desk.

"Goody," I said. "Cream? Give me some."

He took in air, all the way, and let it out. "This is more like it," he declared. "I've had all the humiliation I can stand. Jumping out of my skin every time the phone rang. Did you notice how quickly I answered your ring upstairs? Afraid, by heaven, afraid to go into the tropical room to look over the *Renanthera imschootiana!* Now we know where we are."

"Yeah. Also where we soon will be. If it had been me I would have kept him at least long enough to tell him—"

"Shut up."

I did so. There are certain times when it is understood that I am not to badger, and the most important is when he leans back in his chair and shuts his eyes and his lips start to work. He pushes them out, pulls them in, out and in, out and in . . .

That means his brain has crashed the sound barrier. I have seen him, dealing with a tough one, go on with the lip action for up to an hour. I sat down at my desk, thinking I might as well be near the phone.

That time he didn't take an hour, not having one. More like eight minutes. He opened his eyes, straightened up, and spoke.

"Archie. Did he tell you where his wife was?"

"No. He told me nothing. He was saving it for you. She could have been in the drug store at the corner, sitting in the phone booth."

He grunted. "Then we must clear out of here. I am going to find out which of them killed that man before we are all hauled in. The motive and the evidence will have to come later; the thing now is to identify him as a bone to toss to Mr. Delaney. Where is Saul?"

"At home, waiting to hear. Fred and Orrie—"

"We need only Saul. Call him. Tell him we are coming there at once. Where would Mr. Vetter have his conference?"

"I suppose at the MXO studio."

"Get him. And if Miss Korby is there, get her also. And the others. You must get them all before they hear from Mr. Delaney. They are all to be at Saul's place without delay. At the earliest possible moment. Tell them they are to meet and question the witness, and it is desperately urgent. If they balk I'll speak to them and—"

I had the phone, dialing.

After they were all there and Wolfe started in, it took him less than fifteen minutes to learn which one was it. I might have managed it in fifteen days, with luck.

If you like games you might lean back now, close your eyes and start pushing your lips out and in, and see how long it takes you to decide how you would do it. Fair enough, since you know everything that Wolfe and I knew.

But get it straight; don't try to name him or come up with evidence that would nail him; the idea is, how do you use what you now know to put the finger on him? That was what Wolfe did, and I wouldn't expect more of you than of him.

Saul Panzer, below average in size but miles above it in savvy, lived alone on the top floor—living room, bedroom, kitchenette, and bath—of a remodeled house on Thirty-eighth Street between Lexington and Third. The living room was big, lighted with two floor lamps and two table lamps, even at seven o'clock of a July evening, because the blinds were drawn. One wall had windows, another was solid with books, and the other two had pictures and shelves that were cluttered with everything from chunks of minerals to walrus tusks. In the far corner was a grand piano.

Wolfe sent his eyes around and said, "This shouldn't take long."

He was in the biggest chair Saul had, by a floor lamp, almost big enough for him. I was on a stool to his left and front, and Saul was off to his right, on the piano bench. The chairs of the five suspects were in an arc facing him. Of course, it would have been sensible and desirable to arrange the seating so that the murderer was next to either Saul or me, but that wasn't practical since we had no idea which one it was—and neither did Wolfe at that time.

"Where's the witness?" Griffin demanded. "Goodwin said she'd be here."

Wolfe nodded. "I know. Mr. Goodwin is sometimes careless with his pronouns. The witness is present." He aimed a thumb at the piano bench. "There. Mr. Saul Panzer, who is not only credible and confident but—"

"You said it was a woman!"

"There is another witness who is a woman; doubtless there will be others when one of you goes on trial. The urgency Mr. Goodwin spoke of relates to what Mr. Panzer will tell you. Before he does so, some explanation is required."

"Let him talk first," Dick Vetter said, "and then explain. We've heard from you already."

"I'll make it brief." Wolfe was unruffled. "It concerns the tape fastening on the flap of the rear entrance of the tent. As you know, Mr. Goodwin tied it before we left to go to the platform, and when he and I entered the tent later and left by the rear entrance it had been untied. By whom? Not by someone entering from the outside, since there is a witness to testify that no one had —"

James Korby cut in. "That's the witness we want to see. Goodwin said she'd be here."

"You'll see her, Mr. Korby, in good time. Please bear with me. Therefore the tape had been untied by someone who had entered from the front—by one of you four men. Why? The presumption is overwhelming that it was untied by the murderer, to create and support the probability that Philip Holt had been stabbed by someone who entered from the rear. It is more than a presumption; it approaches certainty. So it seemed to me that it was highly desirable, if possible, to learn who had untied the tape; and I enlisted the services of Mr. Panzer." His head turned. "Saul, if you please?"

Saul had his hand on a black leather case beside him on the bench. "Do you want it all, Mr. Wolfe? How I got it?"

"Not at the moment, I think. Later, if they want to know. What you have is more important than how you got it."

"Yes, sir." He opened the lid of the case and took something from it. "I'd rather not explain how I got it because it might make trouble for somebody."

I horned in. "What do you mean 'might'? You know damn well it would make trouble for somebody."

"Okay, Archie, okay." His eyes went to the audience. "What I've got is these photographs of fingerprints that were lifted from the tape on the flap of the rear entrance of the tent. There are some blurry ones, but there are four good ones. Two of the good ones are Mr. Goodwin's, and that leaves two unidentified."

He turned to the case and took things out. He cocked his head to the audience. "The idea is, I take your prints and—"

"Not so fast, Saul." Wolfe's eyes went right, and left again. "You see how it is, and you understand why Mr. Goodwin said it was urgent. Surely those of you who did *not* untie the tape will not object to having your prints compared with the photographs. If anyone does object he cannot complain if an inference is made. Of course there is the possibility that none of your prints will match the two unidentified ones in the photographs, and in that case the results will be negative and not conclusive. Mr. Panzer has the equipment to take your prints, and he is an expert. Will you let him?"

Glances were exchanged.

"What the hell," Vetter said. "Mine are on file anyway. Sure."

"Mine also," Griffin said. "I have no objection."

Paul Rago abruptly exploded. "Treeks again!"

All eyes went to him. Wolfe spoke. "No, Mr. Rago, no tricks. Mr. Panzer would prefer not to explain how he got the photographs, but he will if you insist. I assure you—"

"I don't mean treeks how he gets

them." The sauce chef uncrossed his legs. "I mean what you said, it was murderer who untied the tape. That is not necessary. I can say that was a lie! When I entered the tent and looked at him it seemed to me he did not breathe good, there was not enough air, and I went and untied the tape so the air could come through. So if you take my print and find it is like the photograph, what will that prove? Nothing at all. Nuh-theeng! So I say it is treeks again, and in this great land of freedom—"

I wasn't trying to panic him. I wasn't even going to touch him. And I had the Marley .38 in my pocket, and Saul had one too, so if he had tried to start something he would have got stopped quick. But using a gun, especially in a crowd, is always bad management unless you have to, and he was twelve feet away from me, and I got up and moved merely because I wanted to be closer.

Saul had the same notion at the same instant, and the sight of us two heading for him, with all that he knew that we didn't know yet, was too much for him. He was out of his chair and plunging toward the door as I took my second step.

Then, of course, we had to touch him. I reached him first, not because I'm faster than Saul but because Saul was farther off. And the damn fool put up a fight, although I had him wrapped. He kicked Saul where it hurt, and knocked a lamp over, and bumped my nose with his skull. When he sank his teeth in my arm, I thought, That will do for you, mister, and jerked the Marley from my pocket and slapped him above the ear, and he went down.

Turning, I saw that Dick Vetter had also wrapped his arms around someone, and she was neither kicking nor biting. In moments of stress people usually show what is really on their minds, even important public figures like TV stars. There wasn't a word about it in the columns next day.

I have often wondered how Paul Rago felt when, at his trial a couple of months later, no evidence whatever was introduced about fingerprints. He knew then, of course, that it had been a "treek" and nothing but—that no prints had been lifted from the tape by Saul or anyone else, and that if he had kept his mouth shut and played along he might have been playing yet.

I once asked Wolfe what he would have done if that had happened.

He said, "It didn't happen."

I said, "What if it had?"

He said, "Pfui. The contingency was too remote to consider. It was as good as certain that the murderer had untied the tape. Confronted with the strong probability that it was about to be disclosed that his print was on the tape, he had to say something. He had to explain how

it got there, and it was vastly preferable to do so voluntarily instead of waiting until evidence compelled it."

I hung on. "Okay, it was a good trick, but I still say what if?"

"And I still say it is pointless to consider remote contingencies. What if your mother had abandoned you in a tiger's cage at the age of three months? What would you have done?"

I told him I'd think it over and let him know.

As for motive, you can have three guesses if you want them, but you'll never get warm if you dig them out of what I have reported. In all the jabber in Wolfe's office that day, there wasn't one word that had the slightest bearing on why Philip Holt died, which goes to show why detectives get ulcers.

No, I'm wrong; it was mentioned that Philip Holt liked women, and certainly that had a bearing. One of the women he had liked was Paul Rago's wife, an attractive blue-eyed number about half as old as her husband, and he was still liking her, and, unlike Flora Korby, she had liked Philip Holt and had proved it.

Paul Rago hadn't liked that.

(Continued from other side)

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