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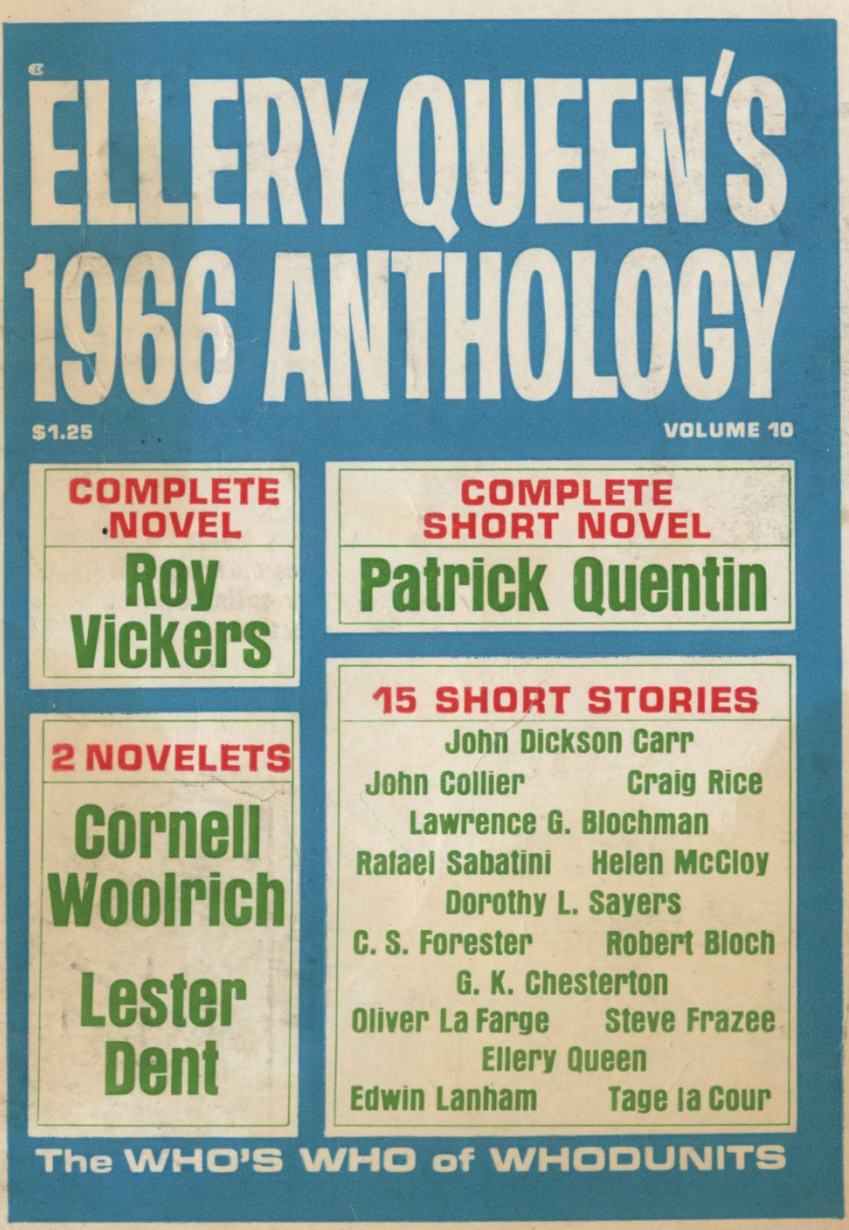

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Mystery Magazine

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

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 46, No. 4, Whole No. 263, OCT., 1965. Published monthly by Davis Publications, Inc., at 50c a copy. Annual subscription $6.00 in U.S.A. and possessions and Canada; $7.00 in the Pan American Union; $7.00 in all other countries. Editorial and General Offices, 505 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. 10022. Change of address notices, undeliverable copies, orders for subscriptions, and other mail items are to be sent to 505 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. 10022. Second-Class postage paid at Concord, N. H.

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"Flair for Murder" is the last short story which Frances and Richard Lockridge wrote jointly. Mrs. Lockridge passed away on February 17, 1963 —and oh, how she is missed! . . . The last collaborative short story is surely one of the best shorts ever written by Richard and Frances Lockridge; it is about a country day—a day for gardening; it is also about a day for noses—first, the dog's, and then the detective's—the latter belonging to our old and always welcome friend, Captain Heimrich.

FLAIR FOR MURDER

by FRANCES & RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THE DOG WAS CONSTANTLY BRINGing things home. This time the thing was a green felt hat with a small, meaningless feather sticking up from its band—a long-worn hat. The dog, whose name was Leonard, carried it over the stone fence from the Blaine place and brought it to Martin Olds, who stopped the power mower just in time. Leonard, not an especially brave dog—almost all cats bullied him—was unawed by power mowers, being confident that they stopped whenever he looked at them.

"Now what?" Martin Olds asked the dog, in that tone of exasperated fondness which was the only tone to adopt with Leonard. The dog opened a large and dripping mouth in a pleased grin, having received the expected praise. Olds reached down for the hat and Leonard became roguish.

"No," Olds said firmly, and held onto the hat.

It was John Adams' hat—the only hat, so far as Martin Olds knew that Old John had ever had. When Martin was a boy, Old John had worn that hat, and twenty years ago he had worn the same hat. Across the wall between the Olds place and the Blaine Place, Martin, a boy of thirteen, would say, "Good morning, Mr. Adams," and Adams would say, " 'Lo, sonny," and take off the feathered hat, mop his forehead, and put the hat on again.

Adams, the Blaine caretaker, had still been wearing the hat two days ago when Martin met him in North Wellwood Center—met him for the first time in three years. Adams had taken his hat off in the old way, mopped his forehead with a clean white handkerchief, and said, " 'Lo, Mr. Olds. Back to stay?"

Martin had said he was afraid not, and had started to ask, "How's Miss Blaine?" But he'd stopped himself, partly because Nancy wasn't "Miss Blaine" any longer—hadn't been for almost the same

three years. And partly for other reasons.

It was hard to imagine John Adams' hat without Old John under it; but there it was now, with only wisps of grass under it. Martin turned the hat around in strong brown hands—the sun burns hands brown in South America, if one is out in it enough. And if a man is second man on a dam construction job, he is out in it enough.

The hat was dirty, which was understandable. But—earth was ground into it. The hat looked as if Leonard had buried it and then dug it up again. I should, Martin Olds thought, let Liz go over and explain. He's her dog. But Martin's sister was at a garden club meeting, which was to be expected, and Old John would surely be missing his hat.

So Martin took long strides to the stone fence, stepped to its top and then down, and was on a path between neat rows of vegetables, well along for late May. Old John's vegetables were always well along, always had been. Beyond rows of young beans there was a rectangle where the raked earth was brown and in which nothing grew—and in the middle of which was the kind of hole a dog digs when he's after something.

Martin Olds walked between rows of beans and looked into the hole. Then he swore sharply and was down on his knees, pawing the earth with his hands. He did not have to paw long—just long enough to make sure there was a foot still in the shoe that a digging dog had uncovered.

Martin Olds ran back, although he knew running would not help. It was a little before five when he reached a telephone in his sister's house, which was nearer than the Blaine house. The New York State Police logged his call in at exactly 4:53 . . .

Charles liked her to be arranged, crisp and clean and smiling, making a pretty picture of young wife awaiting the return of her husband from his city labors. Nancy Compton arranged herself, at a little after five that Thursday afternoon, and knowing that she always so prepared herself for the advent of Charles, felt something almost like guilt—as if, in doing just what Charles wanted, she were at the same time subtly ridiculing her own husband. Which was, she told herself, utterly absurd. I love him, she told herself—and tried not to be conscious that she told herself this with a kind of determination. Of course I want things the way he wants them—to be the pretty picture of a waiting wife. And of course it isn't true that he's more interested in the picture than—

She stretched her slender body, in its lovely dress, on a chaise on the terrace, where he would see her as he drove onto the turnaround. Leaf shadows moved across her slim brown legs. A pretty picture of a

waiting girl, and a *true* picture. I haven't any doubts, she told herself—no *real* doubts. It's just that I'm a little upset about things in general—starting, most prosaically, with this slight, persistent cold. Probably that's really the most important thing. I'm a little under par physically and so—

Certainly there was no reason to be disturbed because old John Adams hadn't been near the house for two days. There was nothing she could tell him about taking care of the big place. He had been taking care of it, with no advice from anybody, for a quarter of a century. "You're the best judge of that, John," her father had always told John Adams, and neither of them had had any doubt that what Arthur Blaine said was true. Sometimes Old John hadn't come near the house for days—had been a faraway, stocky figure, with rake or mower, or a squatting figure setting out plants, or a man distantly busy in his potting shed. It was true that in recent months, since a little after Arthur Blaine died, Old John had come to the house more frequently —daily, sometimes several times a day—and now and then on what Nancy suspected to be pretexts.

This touched her. He still thought of her as a child, a lonely child, with her father dead and a commuting husband. She sometimes, secretly, wished Charles were not quite so resolute about keeping on with his city job. The job wasn't really good enough for him, and with all her father had left them—left her, but it was the same thing, of course—what Charles earned wasn't really needed. But she could never tell him that—not a man like Charles Compton, who had a picture of himself as he had one of her.

Yes, it was touching. For what Old John had been doing was to keep an eye on a child. That he had now, suddenly and for forty-eight hours, stopped doing it was—well, puzzling. Earlier that day, puzzlement had led her to telephone his house, at the far end of the big estate, out of sight from the main house. There had been no answer, but that meant nothing. Good caretakers have little time to be inside houses in the month of May.

And there was—hardly an admissible contribution to her vague uneasiness about the shape of things in general—the fact that Martin Olds was "home" again. Not that the house next door was any longer his home. It was a place in which he visited his maiden sister, briefly, before going off again to some other end of the earth. And that he was there meant nothing to her. Except, since he had made no effort to see her, or even to call her, that he had not forgiven her for preferring Charles. It was better that way—better in all respects. Except there was no reason they shouldn't be friends again. This way makes it seem more important than it ever really was.

It was 5:30, or about that, when she first heard, then saw, the familiar car coming up the drive. So Charles had caught the early train, as he had hoped to do. She felt instant relief. His presence—his solid, familiar presence, his assured presence—would brush these foolish cobwebs from her mind.

Charles got out of the car—a solid man in his middle thirties, a man with a pleasant, open face—and after she had given him a moment to see the picture he so liked, Nancy put a slim brown hand on each metal arm of the chaise and pulled herself up.

There was a sudden sharp pain across the fingers of her right hand. She looked at the hand in surprise. There was a gash across two fingers and a good deal of blood. She said, "Oh!" and shook the bleeding hand.

What a way to spoil things! And how on earth? A hundred times she had used her hands to pull herself out of the chaise and there had been no jagged metal—

"Nancy!" Charles said in quick alarm, coming to her. "Child!" he said. "How—" He stopped with that.

"Clumsy," she said. "I'm always so—"

He interrupted. He said, rather sharply, "Nonsense, Nancy," and took her injured hand in both of his. "We'll have to get something on that," he told her. He took a handkerchief from the breast pocket of his jacket and wrapped it around Nancy's hand. "I'll get the merthiolate," he said, and then looked resentfully at the chaise. "Crime the way they throw these things together nowadays," he muttered, and went into the house.

Trust me to spoil the picture, Nancy thought, and sat down on the edge of the chaise to wait. There was blood—her blood—on the under side of the metal arm of the chaise. Sharp edge, obviously. Funny she had never—

John Adams had been a broad-shouldered, weathered man in his early—and obviously vigorous—seventies. He had had broad hard hands. He had been shot once, accurately, near the heart and had been buried in a new asparagus bed. A hole had been dug, planted roots lifted out, the body placed under them, the roots put back, and the bed raked smooth. That much was evident to Captain M. L. Heimrich, New York State Police, whose professional concern was with homicide.

An ingenious place to dispose of the body, Heimrich thought, looking down at it. New digging explained, which was always something of a problem when they buried. And, even more important, in a place where the soil would not again be disturbed for years since, once planted, asparagus is left to its own devices for a decade or so. It was pure chance the dog had dug there. Unless—

Heimrich reached down and lifted a handful of soil. He sniffed. Bone meal. Not pure chance, after all. The dog had, in a sense, been invited.

"Why would anybody want to kill Old John?" Martin Olds asked, standing tall beside Heimrich. "He was a swell old guy. Everybody around here liked him."

So far as Heimrich had discovered from the briefing by a trooper who knew the area well, everybody had liked John Adams, and called him "Old John." Except, clearly, at least one person—a person with a gun. A .38 from the looks of things, and they would know definitely, because the bullet was still in Adams' thick body. Which was the reason a murderer had sought permanent burial. Slugs from rifled firearms are communicative.

Thirty years as caretaker of the Blaine estate, Adams had been an institution in North Wellwood, as Arthur Blaine himself had been. One of the few big-estate owners hereabouts who hadn't broken up his acreage—Blaine didn't have to. What he had left his daughter when he died was anybody's guess—any high guesser's. And Charles Compton, who had married Nancy Blaine two years before her father died, had come into a good thing.

Not that anybody grudged it to him—a substantial citizen, Charles Compton was, even if he was not a local, even if he was a city man. Some men whose wives had inherited as much as Nancy had would have knocked off work. Not Charles Compton. Even those who had expected her to marry Martin Olds, and were still a little surprised that she hadn't—the two had more or less grown up together—agreed that Compton was an all-right guy.

All of which, Heimrich thought, was rather far from the immediate problem. He said, "Well, thanks, Mr. Olds"—in a tone which dismissed—and "All right, Ted," to the trooper who knew his way around the area. He and the trooper walked through the vegetable garden, past an old asparagus bed—petering out, it was, which accounted for the new one—and along a path, up a hill and down on the other side, to the cottage in which John Adams had lived alone—a neat, well-kept place. And not, they decided quickly, the place in which Adams had died. There were no signs of that, and there would have been.

Adams' work shed—his tool shed, potting shed—was a hundred yards or so from his cottage. It was there he had been killed: that was evident at once from bloodstains on the rough wood flooring. Somebody, Heimrich thought, had tried to scour the stain off the wood and when that failed, the murderer had dirtied it with soil. It still showed.

At one end of the shed there were wooden shelves and one cupboard with a door and a padlock—a

broken padlock. So—it was as simple as that: a thief come upon, a thief turned killer on the instant. As routine as that. What, Heimrich wondered mildly, had the thief expected to find in a wooden cupboard in a tool shed? A miser's hidden gold? And why the tool shed, rather than the cottage which had not, Heimrich was certain, been ransacked?

Heimrich shrugged. There is no real accounting for the actions of minor criminals. He opened the cupboard.

Insecticides. Fungicides. In cans and boxes, a good many of them marked *Poison*. So the padlock was accounted for. Keep poisons locked away, especially from curious children who roam far in the country and are seldom above trespassing.

Heimrich kept cataloguing the shelves. Cut worm bait—active ingredient, arsenic. Rat poison—arsenic again, or thallium, or strychnine. Bichloride of mercury—Old John had been having trouble with cabbage root maggots . . . Enough poison here to kill hundreds. But apparently poison had not been what the thief was after, since he had left so much behind.

Heimrich closed the cupboard. He looked around the shed, his countryman's mind admiring its order. Dry sprayers and wet sprayers arranged in a corner, an arsenal against insects and the ills that plants are heir to. One large, squat bottle half filled with a milky liquid. Heimrich did not at once identify the liquid. He went to the sprayer, picked it up, and shook it. It foamed soapily. Heimrich unscrewed the top, smelled the liquid, screwed the top back on again. It was a day for using his nose. Nicotine in a laundry soap solution. A good thing for tomato aphis. Funny, though, he hadn't seen—

He went back to the cupboard and looked again, this time with a special purpose. There was no small and deadly bottle of nicotine solution. Used up in making this last batch? Likely enough. Still—

"Let's go up to the big house, Ted," Heimrich said. "Tell them about Mr. Adams."

I'm spoiling everything, Nancy Compton thought, and felt a kind of shamed embarrassment. The martini, served in a chilled glass from a beaded silver shaker, had no flavor. The stubborn cold had evidently reached that stage—her sense of smell dimmed, hence her sense of taste diminished.

But it was more than that—although she had drunk less than half her drink, she felt a vague dizziness, a hint of nausea. So the picture was spoiled again—the ritual of terrace cocktails, which Charles so prized, was marred, ruined.

And her hand hurt—it hurt more than it should, hurt with a burning pain under the plastic bandages Charles had wrapped around her cut fingers, wrapped so tenderly after

applying the merthiolate. Which was certainly strange, because merthiolate stings only briefly, does not really burn.

"You all right?" Charles had changed from city clothes, as ritual provided, and now his tone was anxious. "You look—"

He stopped, because a car had come up the drive and halted on the turnaround. Two men got out. One was tall and solid and in slacks and jacket; the other was a New York State Trooper in uniform. Charles Compton stood up slowly and waited for the two men to cross to the terrace.

"State Police," the man in civilian clothes said. "Afraid I've got some bad news for you. John Adams has been killed. Found his body buried in—"

Compton was a pleasant-looking man, Heimrich thought, as he told the rest. His wife was very pretty—brown-haired and blue-eyed and very pretty. She seemed to stare strangely, though. Heimrich moved closer. Pupils dilated.

Heimrich watched the girl as he told them. She said, "Not John! Not—" and started to stand up, swayed and staggered.

All three started toward her, but Heimrich was the nearest and caught her as she fell. He lifted her to the chaise and then, bending over her, caught up her bandaged right hand and held it to his nose. His day for using his nose, certainly.

"Ted!" Heimrich said, his usually soft voice sharp. "Call—no, drive Mrs. Compton to the hospital. Get her there fast!"

"Hospital?" Charles Compton said. "She's—"

"*Fast*, Ted," Heimrich told the trooper again, and as if Compton were not there. "And get another cruiser here and—"

"I'll go with them," Compton said, and the words ran over each other. "She can't be—Nancy!"

But Nancy Compton, being carried to the police car, did not hear him. Compton moved then—moved, obviously, toward the garage, toward his own car.

"No," Heimrich said, and stood in front of him. "A couple of questions first, Mr. Compton. Adams was shot. I'm looking for the gun—a thirty-eight, I'd guess. So if you don't mind—"

It was really foolish to try to run, but some men are foolish. And it had been sprung on Charles Compton so suddenly. John Adams was buried—safely buried for as long as the asparagus grew in its new bed.

Stopped from running—Heimrich produced a gun as deterrent—Compton's face showed fear. It also showed a kind of disbelief.

"Bone meal," Heimrich told him. "When you plant asparagus, Mr. Compton, you plant it deep. The old-timers do, anyway—and with enough fertilizer to last for years. Bone meal, among other things. And bone meal—ground bone—smells like a bone to a dog. And

dogs, Mr. Compton, dig for bones. Where's *your* gun, Mr. Compton?

They found Compton's gun—the right gun for the police, therefore the wrong one for Compton. Heimrich told Martin Olds about it after Compton had been taken away.

This was at a little before midnight, and the two waited at the North Wellwood Hospital—waited to be told. Heimrich spoke also about the dog, explained that dogs often dig where bone meal has been freely used. He said, "A countryman would have known better. Picked a better place—where there was no bone meal to invite a dog."

Olds made a quick gesture, dismissing all that. He said, "About Nancy—" and kept on looking toward the door of the room they waited in.

"Men marry for money," Heimrich remarked, saying the obvious. "Kill for it too. Adams suspected, I suppose. Was afraid—for Mrs. Blaine. Put a lock on the poison cupboard. Found Compton breaking in and got killed for his—vigilance."

"You say nicotine." Olds was still looking at the door through which word would come. "In her drink?"

Heimrich showed surprise, because he felt surprise.

"No—not in her drink. Mixed with the antiseptic," he said. "Put on her cut fingers, for absorption through the skin. Absorbs readily, nicotine does—through broken skin, especially. And it's deadly stuff. So if you file a nasty sawtooth edge on a chair arm, where somebody is sure to cut herself sooner or later, and have a mixture of merthiolate and nicotine waiting—Nicotine doesn't smell of tobacco until it's been exposed to air, you know. Well—"

A nurse came. She came smiling, "She'll be all right," the nurse said. "One of you can go in now for a few minutes."

It was Heimrich's job to go, naturally. But there was not that much hurry. Martin Olds looked at Heimrich and his eyes asked a question—asked it anxiously. Heimrich answered with a nod, and Martin Olds went fast.

A catalytic agent, Heimrich thought, of Martin Olds, and walked out of the waiting room. An element which precipitates action. Specifically, a young man to whom pretty Nancy Blaine had turned once and might, now that he had reappeared, conceivably turn again. And if she had drifted to Olds, her money would drift with her. Compton couldn't chance that, of course.

But how had Charles Compton first betrayed himself to the wise old caretaker? How had Compton revealed what kind of man he was?

They would never know that. But the old man had won in the end—won through losing his own life. And, of course, through a good gardener's generosity with ground bone, which gives long, slow sustenance to questing roots.

Technically, this is one of the most unusual stories you've ever read—a blend of humor and horror that seems to be a lost art these days. The tantalizing tale of an iniquitous and ubiquitous cat, a very abominable cat . . . Enjoy yourself—and shiver!

WANT TO BUY A CAT?

by GERALD KERSH

"I DON'T SUPPOSE I COULD INTEREST YOU IN A LIVER-COLORED CAT?" THE man on my right asked me.

I replied, "You could *interest* me in a liver-colored cat, but you couldn't sell me one."

"I would pay you to take it away. I would pay you one hundred dollars to take it away. A tomcat, but he doesn't go out. He doesn't smell, makes no noise, no mess. Doesn't shed. Doesn't eat. Doesn't bite or scratch. Is affectionate. Follows you about the house like a dog. Unique color—like liver with a green tinge when the light hits his coat against the grain. Loyal, faithful. Say the word and he's yours. And I'll give you one hundred dollars cash money here and now."

As he spoke he pulled out a well-filled wallet.

I stared at him. He was a haggard young man with lank black hair neatly trimmed and his suit, though somewhat wrinkled, was new and well cut. The waterfront bars in Hoboken open at six in the morning, and so one is likely to meet all kinds of people there. Serious drunks of both sexes time their drinking with a certain nicety, so that after the last bar in their home territory closes at four o'clock in the morning, they have leisure to take a cup of coffee, catch the five o'clock ferry, and continue as if they had never been interrupted.

But my neighbor was not drunk. He had bought a bottle of beer for the look of the thing and had left it untouched. He had the eager, exhausted look of a man who must have company, but there was nothing wild in his manner.

I said, "I advise you not to flash that wallet around here. Put it away . . . Liver-colored? You mean like a Liver Spaniel?"

"No, purplish. With green effects, like shot taffeta. It happens that I am allergic to cats—I am allergic to this one, anyway."

"Why not send it to the ASPCA," I suggested.

He laughed. You never know how weary a man is until you hear

him laugh. This one was used up. He said, "I'll be frank with you. It happened one lunchtime in Sardi's, if you please. A man I didn't know from Adam said to me, 'Fond of cats?' I said, 'I can take them or leave them alone. Why do you ask?' Then he said, 'I'm leaving town. There's a very fine liver-colored Sumatra cat I want to give away. I will gladly pay you one hundred dollars to give him a home.'

"Then I asked, 'Why pick on me?' He said, 'Liver-colored Sumatras are very particular. They must have an affinity for you. You are just the man for my Sumatra Liver to love. Here—one hundred dollars. Take it. Will you take the cat?'

"Well, I'd had three martinis with some men, and I'm not a drinker. So I said, 'Glad to oblige.' Then this fellow says, 'It's a deal,' and pushes a hundred-dollar bill into my handkerchief pocket, and dashes out of Sardi's.

"I said to one of the bartenders, 'What kind of a nut is that?' He said he didn't know, never saw the man before in his life. 'He's been sitting here for two hours with a face as long as a fiddle. You seemed to cheer him up though, sir.'

"I had never seen the man before, as I told you. I put the money in my wallet, meaning to give it back to him if I ever saw him again.

"Well, when I got home about five o'clock I saw a cat sitting on the rug near one of the radiators in the living room. There was a saucer of milk in front of it, untouched. The cat looked somehow wet, bedraggled.

"I asked my wife, 'How did that get here?' 'I don't know,' she said; 'when I got back from shopping it was sitting here on the rug. I don't know how in the world it could have got in, but I didn't have the heart to turn it out. Perhaps it's sick. It won't eat or drink.'

"Then she said, 'I tried to put it out—as a matter of fact, I did put it out, and shut the door after it. Then I went to wash my hands—that cat doesn't feel healthy—and when I got back, there it was back on the rug . . . George, don't cats wash themselves? I mean, don't they blink, generally? Oh, and George—aren't cats warm to touch?'

"I said of course they did, and of course they were. My wife said, 'This one's different.'

"I didn't mention anything about the stranger in Sardi's. Went to bed early, having a heavy day ahead. Before I turned in I picked up the cat and dumped it in the corridor. The cat was cold, damp, and heavy as lead. I put the chain on the door. My wife said, 'Thanks, honey. That creature gave me the willies.'

"Next morning at half-past six I got up very quietly as I always do,

not to disturb Janet, and tiptoed into the kitchen to make coffee. Passing through the living room I nearly jumped out of my skin. There, sitting on the rug, was that blasted cat. I had a very unpleasant feeling about it, but I reasoned that it had slipped back past me before I closed the door. It was just possible.

"When I brought Janet a cup of coffee at half-past seven she said, 'What's the matter?' I said, 'Nothing. Nothing. By the way, you saw me put that cat out last night, didn't you?' She said, 'I certainly did. Why?' 'Well, it's back,' I said.

"Janet spilled some of her coffee, but she has good nerves, and is a very resolute woman. She got out of bed, put on her robe, opened the outside door, picked up the cat, put it out, told it to go away, and said to me, 'You couldn't have put it out properly. Let's have breakfast.'

"We had eggs and toast in the kitchen, as we generally do in the morning. In the middle of the meal my wife said, 'I've got the funniest feeling.' I said, 'So have I.'

"We went into the living room. The cat was back on the rug, staring at us. Janet pinched my arm and said, 'Did you ever see such a filthy color in a cat?' I said, 'That's a Sumatra Liver Cat.' I didn't want to tell her how I knew. I said, 'Call the ASPCA. Give them ten bucks, or something—only tell them to take the damned thing away and lose it.'

"I had to leave at 8:30. I called home from the office at noon. Janet said, 'A man came from the ASPCA. He took the cat away in a basket. I gave him five dollars.' So I had lunch. Janet phoned me at half-past three. She said, 'It must have escaped, or something. I was taking a bath, George, and I had the weirdest feeling. There it was, on the living-room rug. What are we going to do?'

"I told her not to worry, I'd come home at once. On the way I stopped at a pet shop and bought one of those baskets you carry small animals in. Then I went home and I picked up that cat and I locked him in the basket and I took a cab to a vet uptown, 'way uptown, and told him I wanted this cat put to sleep. The technique is, they give the animal a strong sedative and then put him in a lethal chamber.

"I told the vet to be sure it worked. He told me it would work on anything up to a grizzly bear and asked me if I wanted the animal buried in a pets' cemetery. He could get me a little gravestone and a site in perpetuity at cut rates.

"I said no, paid him the ten bucks he asked, and watched him slip a hypodermic into this creature. Then, with a load off my mind, I went home. My wife was out at a bridge party. I went into the living room.

"And there was the liver-colored Sumatra cat.

"I called the vet and said, 'I paid you ten dollars to dispose of a cat—' He cut me short and said, 'I know I put him in the chamber. What's the trouble? If you want him back—' '—I don't want him back, I've *got* him back,' I said.

"The vet told me to hold the line. When he came back on he said, 'He's not here!' Argument was useless. I hated the idea of what I was going to do, but it just had to be done. I put the cat into the basket again, this time with two cast-iron doorstops, lashed the basket tight with strong cord, and took it in a cab to the Staten Island ferry.

"I balanced the basket on the rail. Halfway across I let go of it. The basket went into the water and sank immediately.

"Then I went home. My wife was back from her bridge game. I said, 'Well, that disposes of that!' 'Disposes of what?' 'That cat.' She said, 'Are you crazy?' and pointed.

"It was sitting on the rug motionless in a little pool of water.

" 'Look, George,' she said, 'this has made me a little bit edgy. Would you mind awfully if I went to visit mother for a week?'

"I said no, of course I wouldn't—that is, of course I would—but she *was* looking a bit peaked, and a change might do her good. I told her I'd stay at my club.

"That was that. She took off. I packed some things, and went to my club, The Junior Executives, simply leaving the cat in possession of our apartment.

"I get back to the club for dinner the following evening. The Secretary says to me, 'George, you know the rules—postively no pets.' 'Pets?' I said. He said, 'A cat—a wet cat, damn it.' "

"All I could say was, 'Oh.' "

The stranger paused, then took a deep breath. "You think I'm joking?"

I said to him, "It's a good story. I might write it up one day."

He went on, "The point is, as I begin to understand it, you can't get rid of that cat except by paying a sum of money to somebody for whom that cat is likely to have an affinity. I don't quite grasp it entirely. Perhaps that cat is a Symbol of something peculiar to the person it sticks to. Guilt? Conscience? I don't know." He took out a hundred-dollar bill. "Care to try it?"

Laughing I said, "Sure!"

"It's a deal!" he cried, and stuck the bill in my pocket and left the saloon.

"Pal of yours?" the bartender asked.

"Never seen him before in my life," I said.

"Nor me neither."

The ferryboat was in. I put the hundred-dollar bill in my wallet and went home. When I opened the door I saw two discs of yellow-green phosphorescence.

Would anybody like to buy a liver-colored cat?

EDITORS' NOTE NUMBER ONE: *Now, as we reconstruct it, at this point Gerald Kersh must have reread his story and come to the conclusion that the ending was not satisfactory—or, at least, that he wasn't satisfied with it. So Mr. Kersh went back to his typewriter and starting with* "I said to him, 'It's a good story. I might write it up one day,'" *he constructed a new ending—Ending Number Two.*

He went on, "The point is, as I begin to understand it, you can't get rid of that cat except by paying a sum of money to somebody who agrees to take it. And it must be somebody for whom that cat has a mysterious affinity. I don't quite grasp it entirely. Perhaps that cat is a Symbol of something peculiar to the person it sticks to. Guilt? Conscience? Is it a Scapecat? Does it carry a weight of sin? What's your opinion?"

"I don't believe in such stuff," I said.

"You don't have to. Do you believe in one hundred dollars?"

A few drinks always make me excessively particular. I said, "I believe that a hundred dollars exists. I don't believe *in* a hundred dollars."

"Put it this way: If I gave you one hundred dollars, would you take that cat?"

"Not if I believed there was such a cat, no."

"But you don't really believe it, do you?" he said. "So if I give you *two* hundred dollars will you take what you think is a pure figment of my imagination?"

"If you think it would help, give me the money and we'll call it a deal."

He thrust some bills into my hand, saying, "You've got yourself a cat." Then he quickly left the saloon.

The bartender came over and asked, "Friend of yours?"

"Never seen him before in my life," I said. "Have a drink."

"What was the joke?" the bartender asked. "He was laughing like hell."

"Was he?" I said. "Well, it takes all kinds of people to make a world—all kinds."

The bartender muttered, "And *then* what have you got?"

I did not answer. I was suddenly aware of a certain clamminess at my ankles. Looking down, I saw under the table two discs of yellow-green phosphorescence. Something like bedraggled fur—wet fur of a morbid bruise-color—picked up a few lost flecks of reflected light. I daresay I gasped, for I choked on my drink.

The bartender asked, "Hay fever, Mac?"

"That's right," I said.

"Have a belt of rock-'n-rye."

"I will. You have one too." It now occurred to me that there was something warm, something sympathetic about this big, dilapidated, friendly fellow. "Do you by any chance like cats?"

"I can take 'em or leave 'em. They tell me where Arizona is better'n Hoboken for sinuses."

"Care to take a cat off my hands?" I asked.

"No, but thanks all the same. Ever try sniffing salt water up your nose?"

"I want this cat to have a nice home. I'd pay somebody fifty dollars to take a fine cat off my hands right now."

"I tried salt water, and it works wonders. But my roommate made me stop. That's what I call my wife, see? Roommate, sparring partner. Just fooling. She says, 'It's bad enough you make a nerse like a stopped-up sink when you choke in your sleep,' she says. 'Do you got to make like a dying pig in the terlet?' . . . Fifty bucks I should take a *cat?* Are you kidding?"

I took five ten-dollar bills from the roll of money the stranger had given me and said, "Well?"

He said, looking at the ceiling, "Dis is one of dose nights. Tell me, Mac, is it a regular kind of cat?"

"A rare cat, liver-colored," I said.

He asked, very gently, "How many legs?"

"The normal complement, I suppose. Four."

"Sure. I had a customer what he saw like spiders. But dese spiders was like imaginary spiders, see? You insist on giving me fifty bucks, fine, fine! I'll take your cat, Mac."

I put the money into his shirt pocket. "It's a deal," I said, and picked up the creature crouching at my feet. It might have been dead, but for its horrible eyes. I put it on a table, and then instinctively looked at my hands for stains—my hands felt cold and smeary like wet clay.

"Hey, wait a minute!" the bartender cried.

But I did not wait a minute. I left forthwith—which is what I advise you to do if somebody tempts you with a wad of money and a weird cat to keep.

EDITORS' NOTE NUMBER TWO: *Well (again, as we reconstruct it), Mr. Kersh read over his second ending, and once more his creative heart was disturbed. Somehow, the ending still wasn't right to him. So Mr. Kersh turned back to his typewriter and starting this time with* "The normal complement, I suppose. Four,'" *he constructed Ending Number Three.*

"Sure, sure. I once had a customer that saw spiders, and dese spiders had *eight* legs."

I said, "Spiders *do* have eight legs."

"Just take it easy, Mac, take it easy. Dese spiders was like imaginary spiders. Eight legs! You wanna give me fifty bucks, hah? Put your dough away. Tell you what, you give me fifty imaginary bucks and I take your imaginary cat. Okay?"

But I forced the money into his shirt pocket and said, "It's a deal. You've got yourself a cat." With that I picked up the creature crouching at my feet and put it on a table. It might have been dead, but for its eyes. Instinctively I looked at my hands for smears—my hands felt like wet clay.

"I never saw you come in with no cat," the bartender said. "That's one hell of a sick-looking cat."

"So long."

"Hey, wait a minute, Mac—"

I did not wait a minute, but left forthwith. *I must be drunk,* I thought, *to give him fifty dollars. Five bucks would have been plenty.* All the same, I still had a hundred and fifty of the easiest and craziest dollars I ever got.

I thought the matter over on the ferry, where the morning breeze cleared my head. Occultists, at the turn of this century, were fond of writing about what they called "thought forms"—figments of the obsessed subconscious made visible and tangible, forced into being by sheer intensity of thought. The dear old horrific pulp magazines were full of that kind of stuff when I was young. "Conscience grim, that spectre in my path"—Poe's best story, *William Wilson,* imparted true horror to the uneasy theme of Guilt made manifest.

I had no doubt that the man who had given me the money and the cat—that cold and watchful beast which was Secret Guilt incarnate—was as free and light-hearted now as I was. I hoped so, for I never felt better.

As for the bartender, that affable oaf, I was not concerned for him. Nemesis can't get a foothold on Nothing: he was the kind of fellow who would say of The Lord's Prayer, "I don't get dat bit about Trespasses. I never done nuttin' wrong."

And as for me, I have an educated conscience, a civilized conscience. When in Rome—which I wish I were—I do as Rome does; and like it. Guilt is neurasthenia.

So I went cheerfully about my business and got home before nine o'clock that night, and felt only normally tired. My little house smelled pleasantly fresh; my cleaning woman uses some kind of pine-scented cleanser. But I did not like what she had left on the kitchen floor—a saucer of milk.

Bedroom, study, bathroom—these are all as usual. There is nothing in the cellar. There is nothing in the attic.

It remains for me to look in the living room . . .

EDITORS' NOTE NUMBER THREE: *Shall we ask Mr. Kersh to write still another ending? About what happened after the narrator looked in his living room?*

a new story by

HUGH B. CAVE

The Course of Justice

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: HUGH B. CAVE

TITLE: *The Course of Justice*

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: The Caribbean

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Houghton returned to the capital city in the Caribbean with a deadly purpose. His plans were carefully calculated, foolproof. Nothing could stop him—nothing could divert the course of justice . . .*

IT HAPPENED VERY MUCH SOONER than John Houghton expected, and he was glad he had written the two letters beforehand. At that, he might not have had a chance even to mail them had the Immigration Officer been certain.

Apparently the officer was not certain. Not quite. His routine glance at Houghton's face did freeze into a searching stare; he did look down again at the name "John Harper" on Houghton's tourist card; he was still staring when Houghton glanced back after leaving the desk; but he was not sure.

As soon as Houghton had picked up his suitcase in Customs and entered the main part of the St. Joseph airport, he dropped the two letters into a mailbox. They were already stamped. Norma, his wife, had bought several dollars' worth of stamps as souvenirs when they had honeymooned in the Caribbean three years before.

Houghton then took a taxi to the Pension Etoile, where he and his wife had stayed on their earlier visit.

Little Max Haun, the proprietor, shook his hand warmly. "You haven't changed a bit, John," Max said. "Not a bit. And how is Norma?"

"She doesn't know I'm here, Max."

"Doesn't know you're here? What do you mean?"

"I'll explain later over a drink. Let me get rid of this suitcase."

"You must have the room you had before," Max said. "Come." He took the suitcase himself—it was that kind of hotel, small and intimate—and led Houghton upstairs to the large front room which on that other occasion the proprietor had jokingly called the bridal suite. It was the best room in the house, with a little balcony that offered a fine view of the Parc de l'Indépendence and the glittering white Palais National across the square.

"It brings back fond memories, I hope," Max said, his eyes twinkling.

Houghton turned himself slowly to look around the room, then stepped onto the balcony to scowl at the President's palace. "It brings back memories. Not fond ones. Sit down, please, Max. We'll have the drink later."

Puzzled by his guest's strangeness, Max sat down.

"Haven't you wondered," Houghton said, pacing as he spoke, "why I kept asking you in my letters to keep me posted on the political progress of Emile Nerette?"

"You said you were interested in his career."

"And you didn't wonder why I was interested? No, I suppose not. You're not a man to question the motives of your friends." Houghton turned and stared. "You remember the night my wife was arrested by the Palace Guard and taken to headquarters?"

Max almost smiled, but not quite. "For failing to stop her car when the President's cavalcade was passing. Yes, of course."

"How we searched for her for hours and finally found her in this room, on this very bed, crying, when we returned?"

"I remember."

"She said then, Max, that everything was all right, that nothing had happened. She was only upset. You remember that? But the truth, which I didn't find out until weeks later—the truth, Max, is that she was raped."

"Mon dieu!" Max said.

"Yes, Max, and the man who did it was Nerette, then head of the Palace Guard, now your President."

Max Haun placed his hands on his knees to stop their trembling. "So that is why you have come back."

"I waited, Max. It was not enough just to kill him. Anyone can die. In this country of yours men die by violence all the time. You wrote in one of your letters that Nerette was ambitious to be President. Good, I thought. In another letter you said it was rumored he would soon marry one of the most desired women in St. Joseph. Again I thought: good. Let him marry her. Let him have a son or daughter, even. Then when my time comes, he will have that much more to lose."

"Mon dieu!" Max said again, whispering now as though a nor-

mal voice would be unsafe. "As you say, he has much more to lose at this time—a wife, an infant son, the presidency of the republic—but you must be mad, my friend. You would never get near him. In this country a President has enemies always, and is on guard every moment against them."

"I have taken precautions."

"Suppose it is remembered who you are. Suppose someone goes to him and says, 'M'sieu Président, the husband of that American girl whom you—you mistreated—is here again.' Think about it. Such an event is not only possible, it is likely. Very few Americans come to this country now. The political upheavals have ruined our tourist trade."

Houghton said, smiling coldly, "I will get to him, Max. Before leaving home I wrote two letters. At the airport here I mailed them. Not only will those letters protect me, they will get me into the palace and bring me face to face with Nerette himself."

"Impossible. How?"

"You will see. Remember, I've had three years to think about this. All I need is time enough for the letters to be delivered. Until tomorrow, say. Then it will be easy. I've used an assumed name on my tourist card." Houghton turned to the door. "Come on. Let's have that drink together for the sake of things remembered—the *good* things remembered. Then—where are you going?"

"You take too much for granted," Max muttered, stepping onto the balcony to gaze in a trance of terror at the Palais National across the square. "You think because you have used a name not your own—*Mon dieu,* look!"

Houghton, frowning, stepped to his side.

"Those three in uniform by the monument, coming this way across the grass!" Max whispered. "They are coming here!"

"How—"

"I tell you they are coming here! Where else?" Houghton was seized by an arm and pulled back into the room. "You were recognized at the airport!"

"Perhaps." Houghton felt his lips go dry. "An Immigration man looked at me closely. Tall, thin, not so dark—a man with beady eyes and bad teeth."

"God in heaven. Beliard! A former captain in the Palace Guard."

"Would he know me?"

"*Know* you? He was one of those we talked to that night when we searched for your wife—one of those who pretended to know nothing when all the time she was there at headquarters. Now he is the President's eyes and ears in the Immigration Service, planted there to keep Nerette informed of dangers!"

Houghton had turned pale. "Hide my suitcase, Max. I'll go out

the back way, through the garden."

"Where will you go?" Max said, wringing his hands.

Houghton had no answer. Where *could* he go, he asked himself as he sped through the garden at the rear of the pension. With the rest of the day ahead of him, and the night to live through, where would he hide?

St. Joseph was a big city, to be sure. It was home to a hundred thousand people. But it was patrolled these days by hundreds of police and more hundreds of Nerette's private goons, and in every part of the city a foreign face would be conspicuous.

He climbed the wall at the garden's end and dropped into an alley on the other side. Ran down the alley. Stopped running and turned left, slowly, into a street of small shops. Could he hide in a hotel? They were practically empty these days, and watched. In a theater? Theaters did not open until evening and even then were almost never frequented by foreigners. Dear God, where?

He kept to the side streets and walked. Hands in pockets, slowly. Not a tourist enchanted by the sight of *marchandes* singing their wares, peasants riding the rumps of clop-clopping donkeys, naked children playing noisily at games—not that but like a foreign resident on some routine errand, made listless by the noise and tropical heat. An old hand here. Only the eyes alert, reaching ahead like radar to glimpse danger in time . . .

So many policemen in this city! So many footsteps! So many swift changes of direction, crossings of streets, dartings into doorways. If he had any doubt that he was hunted, it was dispelled quickly. Less than a block away a khaki-colored car screeched to a stop beside a pair of uniformed men on a corner. The officer in the car briskly gave them orders. The two looked this way and that along the street, jerked their heads in understanding, and swiftly went their separate ways. Houghton fled.

He crept into an empty church and sat there watching the stained-glass windows break the sunlight into floating flecks of color.

"Dear God, I'm tired. And there's a whole night of this ahead."

An organ began to throb. People came ghosting in. He fled again.

Mustn't walk the same street twice . . . but it's a big city and there are many streets. And the sun is sliding behind the hills now. Darkness is moving in.

"Stop! You, there! Halt!"

He means you, Houghton. Don't stop. Don't run, either. Don't turn, don't hesitate, don't even walk faster. Here now, the corner! Get around it. Now! Run!

The street was empty, thank God, and the next corner close. There was an alley between high wooden buildings, and at the end of the alley he saw a district of peas-

ant hovels, like a jigsaw puzzle dropped from a box. Hands in pockets, mumbling to himself, he trudged through it. The naked children backed out of his way, goggle-eyed. The peasant women squatting at their cookpots peered at him through fogs of charcoal smoke, and some of them laughed.

Now it was dark.

Now by avoiding the streets where there were lights he could walk slowly, stop when tired, then walk on again when the silence bred footfalls. The greatest danger was on wheels—cars that came lurching around a corner with glaring headlamps that made him a performer on a floodlit stage. Each time it happened, he turned to stone and the car sped by trailing a woman's laughter. *That could have been a chatter of gunfire, Houghton.*

Then he would move faster between hiding places and at the sound of approaching cars he'd press himself into cracks where the headlights could not reach him.

At midnight, lost in a part of the city he had not seen before, he found an empty house. First a high stone wall. Then gateposts, but only half a gate. A yard knee-high in weeds. A wooden bungalow—the shell of one—with a collapsed veranda and only empty black holes for window and door.

He stood on the veranda listening, and there was no sound. There was only a car horn on a distant street and a rattle of *chacha* pods on a tree in the garden. With hands thrust in front of him for eyes, he staggered inside and sat down in the dark. Would they look here? They could not look everywhere in one night.

Dear God, I'm tired. I'm dirty. I stink.

I wish I were a nothing
So I could not be seen.
I wish to—get—where I must go
And not be—where I've—been—

Don't go to sleep, Houghton. Don't . . . go . . . to . . . sleep . . .

"Get up," a voice said, and the room was splashed with sunlight stabbing through gaps in the walls, and over him stood men in uniform.

"Get up!" and a hand seized him by an arm and jerked him savagely to his feet, but another man muttered in French and the hand became more gentle.

Houghton looked at his watch. It had stopped. He had forgotten to wind it.

"What time is it?"

"A little after ten o'clock, m'sieu. You are to come with us."

After ten. By now the letter . . .

"Where to? Where are you taking me?"

"To the Palace."

He let his breath out.

They led him through the overgrown garden to a khaki-colored car. They were gentle with him, he noticed. No pushing, no shoving.

"Between us, if you please, m'sieu."

He was surprised at how short the journey was. In no time at all the car had left the grubby streets and was speeding through the business district. It swung into the Parc de l'Indépendence, past the Pension Etoile, past the monument and the statues, and into the Palace driveway. Last night he must have traveled in circles.

"For your audience with the President, perhaps you would like to freshen yourself, m'sieu?"

There was motive in their generosity, of course. When they took his clothes and shoes away to "make them more presentable," there was the opportunity to search for hidden weapons. As if he would be foolish enough to carry a weapon they might discover!

He dressed again slowly after his shave and shower. Even the lining of his jacket had been slit and resewn, he noticed. Had they ripped the soles and heels off his shoes and rebuilt those too?

"The President will see you, m'sieu."

They walked him down a shining white corridor, a man on each side of him, into a kind of reception room. An officer of the Palace Guard, a colonel, rose from a desk to open an inner door.

He stepped into the sanctum. The door clicked shut behind him.

Windowless. Air-conditioned. A gleaming mahogany desk with a top like a dance floor. Behind the desk a man rose to greet him, and the memory of that three-year-old night came back in a rush. Houghton clenched his hands and stepped forward.

The man behind the desk reached down and produced a pistol. "Be seated, m'sieu."

Houghton regained control of himself. He sat in a large red-leather chair and looked at the man he hated. Photographs in newspapers and magazines had prepared him for the fantastically ugly face, but he was stunned by Nerette's hugeness. The man was a bull.

Houghton shuddered. Norma, his wife, was so small and dainty . . .

"I have your letter, m'sieu." The letter lay on the desk and Nerette tapped it with the pistol. "Let me see if I understand it correctly." He sat as though lowered into place by a crane, and the mountain of flesh overflowed the chair.

"You understand it," Houghton said.

"I must be sure. You say you have written also to my wife, giving her Madame Houghton's account of what happened that night. In your letter to my wife you admit you have no proof other than madame's statement. You expect to obtain proof, but as yet you do not have it."

"Go on."

"You point out to my wife that if I am guilty as charged, I will undoubtedly take steps to eliminate you. So you will telephone her

daily. If the calls cease, she will know that I have silenced you—and why."

"You have it right," Houghton said.

"You are ingenious, m'sieu. By writing so to my wife, and making me aware of what you have written, you have made sure you will stay alive—with freedom to use the telephone. What now?"

"I intend to kill you."

"Really? How?"

"There will be ways. You have to travel about the country a good deal, and I will be here. I'm an excellent shot with a high-powered rifle, Nerette. For more than a year now I've been practicing."

"It may take a long time, m'sieu," the bull said with a twisted smile.

"I have time."

"What about your wife? Your work?"

"Thanks to you, Nerette, my wife doesn't know she has a husband. She is in a mental hospital. My work is not important."

"So I am to be shot, eh?"

"Or blown up. Or poisoned. I am several kinds of expert."

"You have thought of everything."

"I hope so."

The huge man leaned over his pistol and looked at Houghton and laughed. His laughter boomed through the room like thunder. "What a fool you are, M'sieu Houghton. What a charming, childish fool!"

"Childish?" Houghton said, rising.

"Sit down. Yes, childish. Your plan, your whole ingenious plan, is based on the assumption that I cherish the woman I married, that I will do anything to keep her from knowing the truth about that night." The fat hands oiled themselves, fondling the pistol between them. "Let me tell you something. Now that I am President, I could not care less what my wife thinks of me. If she leaves me, there are a hundred other women eager to take her place. I married her for one reason only—because her brother was a dangerous political rival."

Houghton slowly sat down, speechless.

"As for you," the President went on with a gigantic shrug, "you came here under an assumed name. Mr. John Houghton is not in St. Joseph at all. Only Mr. Harper is here. But there is really no John Harper—is there?—so he will not be missed."

He turned the pistol and pointed it at Houghton's chest.

Houghton stared at it.

"But I dislike violence," Nerette said. "Personal violence, that is. It is well known how much I dislike violence. So, instead—"

He pressed a button.

The door opened and the colonel from the outer office stepped in. It seemed to Houghton—though perhaps he was not thinking too clear-

ly now—that the door opened even before the button was pressed.

"You have your pistol, Colonel?" Nerette murmured. "Ah, yes. Good. Use it, please."

"Certainly, mon President," the colonel said.

He drew the weapon from its holster and without expression stepped forward. Before Houghton could rise, he halted and turned.

"Your wife's orders, M'sieu Nerette," the colonel said, and taking aim at the big man's heart, squeezed the trigger.

There was almost no sound except the President's gasp.

A slender, attractive woman came into the office, shut the door, and walked to the desk. After glancing at the dead man, she turned to the colonel and nodded. "You had better remove the microphone, Victor," she said calmly.

The colonel reached far into a drawer of the desk and took something out of it. He moved the desk a few inches and ripped some wires from a small hole in the floor. Only then did the woman turn to Houghton.

"In this country we find these things necessary," she said. "I, especially, have found them necessary. Go now, please. Forget that you came here."

She opened the door for him.

As Houghton passed her, an expression of sadness touched her face. "I am so sorry about your wife," she said. "I wish there were something more I could do."

CALENDAR OF CRIME

The September story in the CALENDAR OF CRIME *sequence . . . September suggests "back to school" after summer vacation—and that is the theme of "The Three R's." Beloved Professor Chipp of Barlowe College, Missouri, always left on July 1st for his cabin in the Ozarks and always returned to the campus on the day after Labor Day—always, unfailingly, year in and year out like clockwork—but this September, Professor Chipp was ten days overdue—and that was not just unlikely, it was unheard of . . .*

THE THREE R'S

by ELLERY QUEEN

HAIL MISSOURI! WHICH IS NORTH and also South, upland and river bottom, mountain, plain, factory, and farm. Hail Missouri! for MacArthur's corncob and Pershing's noble mule. Hail! for Hannibal and Mark Twain, for Excelsior Springs and Jesse James, for Barlowe and . . . Barlowe? Barlowe is the site of Barlowe College.

Barlowe College is the last place in Missouri you would go to (Missouri, which yields to no State in the historic redness of its soil) if you yearned for a lesson in the fine art of murder. In fact, the subject being introduced, it is the rare Show Me Stater who will not say, with an informative wink, that Barlowe is the last place in Missouri, and leave all the rest unsaid. But this is a smokeroom witticism, whose origin is as murky as the waters of the Big Muddy.

It may well first have been uttered by the alumnus of some Missouri university whose attitude toward learning is steeped in the traditional embalming fluid—whereas, at little Barlowe, learning leaps: Jove and jive thunder in duet, profound sociological lessons are drawn from "Li'l Abner" and "Terry and the Pirates," and in the seminars of the Philosophy Department you are almost certain to find faith, as a matter of pedagogic policy, paired with Hope.

Scratch a great work and find a great workman.

Dr. Isaiah St. Joseph A. Barlowe, pressed for vital statistics, once remarked that, while he was old enough to have been a Founder,

still he was not so old as to have calcified over a mound of English ivy. But the good man jested; he is as perennial as a sundial.

"Even a cynic," Dr. Barlowe has said, "likes his grain of salt." And the truth is, in the garden where he labors, there is no death and a great deal of healthy laughter.

One might string his academic honors after him, like dutiful beads; one might recount the extraordinary tale of how, in the manner of Uther Pendragon, Dr. Barlowe bewitched some dumfounded Missourians and took a whole series of substantial buildings out of their pockets; one might produce a volume on the subject of his acolytes alone, who have sped his humanistic gospel into the far corners of the land.

Alas, this far more rewarding reportage must await the services of one who has, at the very least, a thousand pages at his disposal. Here there is space merely to record that the liveliness of Barlowe's alarming approach to scholarship is totally the inspiration of Dr. Isaiah St. Joseph A. Barlowe.

Those who would instruct at Barlowe must pass a rather unusual entrance examination. The examination is conducted *in camera,* and its nature is as sacredly undisclosable as the Thirty-Third Rite; nevertheless, leaks have occurred, and it may be significant that in its course Dr. Barlowe employs a 16-millimeter motion-picture projector, a radio, a portable phonograph, one copy each of *The Bible, The Farmer's Almanac,* and *The Complete Sherlock Holmes;* and the latest issue of *The Congressional Record*—among others. During examinations the voices of Donald Duck and Young Widder Brown have been reported; and so on.

It is all very puzzling, but perhaps not unconnected with the fact that visitors often cannot distinguish who are Barlowe students and who are Barlowe professors. Certainly a beard at Barlowe is no index of dignity; even the elderly among the faculty extrude a zest more commonly associated with the fuzzy-chinned undergraduate.

So laughter and not harumphery is rampant upon the Gold and the Puce; and, if corpses dance macabre, it is only upon the dissection tables of Bio III, where the attitude toward extinction is roguishly empirical.

Then imagine—if you can—the impact on Barlowe, not of epic murder as sung by the master troubadours of Classics I; not of romantic murder (Abbot, Anthony to Zangwill, Israel) beckoning from the rental shelves of The Campus Book Shop; but the murder loud and harsh.

Murder, as young Professor Bacon of the Biochemistry Department might say, with a stink.

The letter from Dr. Barlowe

struck Ellery as remarkably woeful.

"One of my faculty has disappeared," wrote the president of Barlowe College, "and I cannot express to you, Mr. Queen, the extent of my apprehension. In short, I fear the worst.

"I am aware of your busy itinerary, but if you are at all informed regarding the institution to which I have devoted my life, you will grasp the full horror of our dilemma. We feel we have erected something here too precious to be befouled by the nastiness of the age; on the other hand, there are humane—not to mention legal—considerations. If, as I suspect, Professor Chipp has met with foul play, it occurred to me that we might investigate *sub rosa* and at least present the not altogether friendly world with *un mystère accompli*. In this way, much anguish may be spared us all.

"Can I prevail upon you to come to Barlowe quietly, and at once? I feel confident I speak for our Trustees when I say we shall have no difficulty about the coarser aspects of the association."

The letter was handwritten, in a hasty and nervous script which seemed to suggest guilty glances over the presidential shoulder.

It was all so at variance with what Ellery had heard about Dr. Isaiah St. Joseph A. Barlowe and his learned vaudeville show that he scribbled a note to Inspector Queen and ran. Nikki, clutching her invaluable notebook, ran with him.

Barlowe, Missouri, lay torpid in the warm September sunshine. And the distant Ozarks seemed to be peering at Barlowe inquisitively.

"Do you suppose it's got out, Ellery?" asked Nikki as a sluggish hack trundled them through the slumbering town. "It's all so still. Not like a college town at all."

"Barlowe is still in its etesian phase," replied Ellery pedantically. "The fall term doesn't begin for another ten days."

"You always make things so darned uninteresting!"

They were whisked into Dr. Barlowe's sanctum.

"You'll forgive my not meeting you at the station," muttered the educator as he quickly shut the door. He was a lean gray-thatched man with an Italianate face and lively black eyes whose present preoccupation did not altogether extinguish the lurking twinkle. Missouri's Petrarch, thought Ellery with a chuckle. As for Nikki, it was love at first sight. "Softly, softly—that must be our watchword."

"Just who is Professor Chipp, Dr. Barlowe?"

"American Lit. You haven't heard of Chipp's seminar on Poe? He's an authority—it's one of our more popular items."

"Poe," exclaimed Nikki. "Ellery,

that should give you a personal interest in the case."

"Leverett Chisholm Chipp," nodded Ellery, remembering. "Monographs in *The Review* on the Poe prose. Enthusiasm and scholarship. *That* Chipp."

"He's been a Barlowe appendage for thirty years," said the doctor unhappily. "We really couldn't go on without him."

"When was Professor Chipp last seen?"

Dr. Barlowe snatched his telephone. "Millie, send Ma Blinker in now . . . Ma runs the boarding house on the campus where old Chipp's had rooms ever since he came to Barlowe to teach, Mr. Queen. Ah, Ma! Come in. And shut the door!"

Ma Blinker was a brawny old Missourian who looked as if she had been summoned to the council chamber from her Friday's batch of apple pies. But it was a landlady's eye she turned on the visitors from New York—an eye which did not surrender until Dr. Barlowe uttered a cryptic reassurance, whereupon it softened and became moist.

"He's an old love, the Professor is," she said brokenly. "Regular? Ye could set your watch by that man."

"I take it," murmured Ellery, "Chipp's regularity is germane?"

Dr. Barlowe nodded. "Now, Ma, you're carrying on. And you with the blood of pioneers! Tell Mr. Queen all about it."

"The Professor," gulped Ma Blinker, "he owns a log cabin up in the Ozarks, 'cross the Arkansas line. Every year he leaves Barlowe first of July to spend his summer vacation in the cabin. First of July, like clockwork."

"Alone, Mrs. Blinker?"

"Yes, sir. Does all his writin' up there, he does."

"Literary textbooks," explained Barlowe. "Although summer before last, to my astonishment, Chipp informed me he was beginning a novel."

"First of July he leaves for the cabin, and one day after Labor Day he's back in Barlowe gettin' ready for the fall term."

"One day after Labor Day, Mr. Queen. Year in, year out. Unfailingly."

"And here 'tis the thirteenth of September and he ain't showed up in town!"

"Day after Labor Day . . . Ten days overdue."

"All this fuss," asked Nikki, "over a measly ten days?"

"Miss Porter, Chipp's being ten days late is as unlikely as—as my being Mrs. Hudson in disguise! Unlikelier. I was so concerned, Mr. Queen, I telephoned the Slater, Arkansas, authorities to send someone up to Chipp's cabin."

"Then he didn't simply linger there past his usual date?"

"I can't impress upon you too

strongly the inflexibility of Chipp's habit pattern. He did not. The Slater man found no sign of Chipp but his trunk."

"But I gathered from your letter, Doctor, that you had a more specific reason for suspecting—"

"And don't we!" Ma Blinker broke out frankly now in bosomy sobs. "I'd never have gone into the Professor's rooms—it was another of his rules—but Dr. Barlowe said I ought to when the Professor didn't show up, so I did, and—and—"

"Yes, Mrs. Blinker?"

"There on the rug, in front of his fireplace," whispered the landlady, "was a great . . . big . . . stain."

"A stain!" gasped Nikki. "A *stain?*"

"A bloodstain."

Ellery raised his brows.

"I examined it myself, Mr. Queen," said Dr. Barlowe nervously. "It's—it's blood, I feel certain. And it's been on the rug for some time. We locked Chipp's rooms up again, and I wrote to you."

And although the September sun filled each cranny of the president's office, it was a cold sun suddenly.

"Have you heard from Professor Chipp at all since July the first, Doctor?" asked Ellery with a frown.

Dr. Barlowe looked startled. "It's been his habit to send a few of us cards at least once during the summer recess." He began to rummage excitedly through a pile of mail on his desk. "I've been away since early June myself. This has so upset me I . . . Why didn't I think of that? Ah, the trained mind . . . Mr. Queen, here it is!"

It was a picture post card illustrating a mountain cascade of improbable blue surrounded by verdure of impossible green. The message and address were in a cramped and spidery script.

July 31

Am rewriting my novel. It will be a huge surprise to you all. Regards—

CHIPP

"His 'novel' again," muttered Ellery. "Bears the postmark Slater, Arkansas, July thirty-first of this year. Dr. Barlowe, was this card written by Professor Chipp?"

"Unmistakably."

"Doesn't the writing seem awfully awkward to you, Ellery?" asked Nikki, in the tradition of the detectival secretary.

"Yes. As if something were wrong with his hand."

"There is," sniffed Ma Blinker. "Middle and forefinger missin' to the second joint—poor, poor old man!"

"Some accident in his youth, I believe."

Ellery rose. "May I see that stain on Chipp's rug, please?"

A man may leave more than his blood on his hearth, he may leave his soul. The blood was there, fad-

ed brown and hard, but so was Professor Chipp, though *in absentia.*

The two small rooms overlooking the campus were as tidy as a barrack. Chairs were rigidly placed. The bed was a sculpture. The mantelpiece was a shop-window display; each pipe in the rack had been reamed and polished and laid away with a mathematical hand.

The papers in the pigeonholes of the old pine desk were ranged according to size. Even the missing professor's books were disciplined: no volume on these shelves leaned carelessly, or lolled dreaming on its back; they stood in battalions, company after company, at attention. And they were ranked by author, in alphabetical order.

"Terrifying," Ellery said; and he turned to examine a small ledger-like volume lying in the exact center of the desk's dropleaf.

"I suppose this invasion is unavoidable," muttered Barlowe, "but I must say I feel as if I were the tailor of Coventry! What's in that ledger, Mr. Queen?"

"Chipp's personal accounts. His daily outlays of cash . . . Ah. This year's entries stop at the thirtieth day of June."

"The day before he left for his cabin!"

"He's even noted down what one postage stamp cost him."

"That's the old Professor," sobbed Ma Blinker. Then she raised her fat arms and shrieked, "Heavens to Bessie, Dr. Barlowe! It's Professor Bacon back!"

"Hi, Ma!"

Professor Bacon's return was in the manner of a charge from third base. Having pumped the presidential hand violently, the young man immediately cried, "Just got back to the shop and found your note, Doctor. What's this nonsense about old Chipp's not showing up for the fall brawl?"

"It's only too true, Bacon," said Dr. Barlowe sadly, and he introduced the young man as a full professor of chemistry and biology, another of Ma Blinker's boarders, and Chipp's closest faculty friend.

"You agree with Dr. Barlowe as to the gravity of the situation?" Ellery asked him.

"Mr. Queen, if the old idiot's not back, something's happened to him." And for a precarious moment Professor Bacon fought tears. "If I'd only known," he mumbled. "But I've been away since the middle of June—biochemical research at Johns Hopkins. Damn it!" he roared. "This is more staggering than nuclear fission!"

"Have you heard from Chipp this summer, Professor?"

"His usual post card. I may still have it on me . . . Yes!"

"Just a greeting," said Ellery, examining it. "Dated July thirty-first and postmarked Slater, Arkansas—exactly like the card he sent Dr. Barlowe. May I keep this, Bacon?"

"By all means. Chipp not

back . . ." And then the young man spied the brown crust on the hearthrug. He collapsed on the missing man's bed, gaping at it.

"Ellery!"

Nikki was standing on tiptoe before Chipp's bookshelves Under *Q* stood a familiar phalanx.

"A complete set of *your* books!"

"Really?" But Ellery did not seem as pleased as an author making such a flattering discovery should. Rather, he eyed one of the volumes as if it were a traitor. And indeed there was a sinister air about it, for it was the only book on all the shelves—he now noted for the first time—which did not exercise the general discipline. It stood on the shelf upside down.

"Queer . . ." He took it down and righted it. In doing so, he opened the back cover; and his lips tightened.

"Oh, yes," said Barlowe gloomily. "Old Chipp's quite unreasonable about your books, Mr. Queen."

"Only detective stories he'd buy," muttered Professor Bacon.

"Rented the others."

"A mystery bug, eh?" murmured Ellery. "Well, here's one Queen title he didn't buy." He tapped the book in his hand.

"The Origin of Evil," read Nikki, craning. "Rental library!"

"The Campus Book Shop. And it gives us our first confirmation of that bloodstain."

"What do you mean?" asked Bacon quickly, jumping off the bed.

"The last library stamp indicates that Professor Chipp rented this book from The Campus Book Shop on June twenty-eight. A man as orderly as these rooms indicate, who moreover scrupulously records his purchase of a postage stamp, would scarcely trot off on a summer vacation and leave a book behind to accumulate eleven weeks' rental-library charges."

"Chipp? Impossible!"

"Contrary to his whole character."

"Since the last entry in that ledger bears the date June thirtieth, and since the bloodstain is on this hearthrug," said Ellery gravely, "I'm afraid, gentlemen, that your colleague was murdered in this room on the eve of his scheduled departure for the Ozarks. He never left this room alive."

No one said anything for a long time.

But finally Ellery patted Ma Blinker's frozen shoulder and said, "You didn't actually see Professor Chipp leave your boarding house on July first, Mrs. Blinker, did you?"

"No, sir," said the landlady stiffly. "The expressman came for his trunk that mornin', but the Professor wasn't here. I thought he'd already left."

"Tell me this, Mrs. Blinker: did Chipp have a visitor on the preceding night—the night of June thirtieth?"

A slow change came over the woman's blotchy features.

"He surely did," she said. "He surely did. That Weems."

"Weems?" Dr. Barlowe said quickly. "Oh, no! I mean . . ."

"Weems," said Nikki. "Ellery, didn't you notice that name on The Campus Book Shop as we drove by?"

Ellery said nothing.

Young Bacon muttered, "Revolting idea. But then . . . Weems and old Chipp were always at each other's throats."

"Weems is the only other one I've discussed Chipp's nonappearance with," said the college president wildly. "He seemed so concerned!"

"A common interest in Poe," said Professor Bacon fiercely.

"Indeed," smiled Ellery. "We begin to discern a certain unity of plot elements, don't we? If you'll excuse us for a little while, gentlemen, Miss Porter and I will have a chat with Mr. Weems."

But Mr. Weems turned out to be a bustly, bald little Missouri countryman, with shrewdly humored eyes and the prevailing jocular manner, the most unmurderous-looking character imaginable. And he presided over a shop so satisfyingly full of books, so aromatic with the odors of printery and bindery, and he did so with such a naked bibliophilic tenderness, that Nikki—for one—instantly dismissed him as a suspect.

Yep, Mr. Queen'd been given to understand correctly that he, Claude Weems, had visited old Chipp's rooms at Ma Blinker's on the night of June thirty last; and, yep, he'd left the old chucklehead in the best of health; and, no, he hadn't laid eyes on him since that evenin'. He'd shut up shop for the summer and left Barlowe on July fifteenth for his annual walking tour cross-country; didn't get back till a couple of days ago to open up for fall.

"Doc Barlowe's fussin' too much about old Chipp's not turnin' up," said little Mr. Weems, beaming. "Now I grant you he's never done it before, and all that, but he's gettin' old, Chipp is. Never can tell what a man'll do when he passes a certain age."

Nikki looked relieved, but Ellery did not.

"May I ask what you dropped in to see Chipp about on the evening of June thirtieth, Mr. Weems?"

"To say goodbye. And then I'd heard tell the old varmint'd just made a great book find—"

"Book find! Chipp had 'found' a book?"

Mr. Weems looked around and lowered his voice. "I heard he'd picked up a first edition of Poe's *Tamerlane* for a few dollars from some fool who didn't know its worth. You a book collector, Mr. Queen?"

"A *Tamerlane* first!" exclaimed Ellery.

"Is that good, Ellery?" asked Nikki with the candor of ignorance.

"Good! A *Tamerlane* first, Nikki, is worth at least $25,000!"

Weems chuckled. "Know the market, I see. Yes, sir, bein' the biggest booster old Edgar Allan ever had west of the Mississip', I wanted to see that copy bad, awful bad. Chipp showed it to me, crowin' like a cock in a roostful. Lucky dog," he said without audible rancor. "'Twas the real article, all right."

Nikki could see Ellery tucking this fact into one of the innumerable cubbyholes of his mind—the one marked *For Future Consideration*. So she was not surprised when he changed the subject abruptly.

"Did Professor Chipp ever mention to you, Weems, that he was engaged in writing a novel?"

"Sure did. I told ye he was gettin' old."

"I suppose he also told you the *kind* of novel it was?"

"Dunno as he did." Mr. Weems looked about as if for some goal for his spittle, but then, with his indignation, he swallowed it.

"Seems likely, seems likely," mumbled Ellery, staring at the rental-library section where murder frolicked.

"*What* seems likely, Ellery?" demanded Nikki.

"Considering that Chipp was a mystery fan, and the fact that he wrote Dr. Barlowe his novel would be a 'huge surprise,' it's my conclusion, Nikki, the old fellow was writing a whodunit."

"No! A Professor of Literature?"

"Say," exclaimed Mr. Weems. "I think you're right."

"Oh?"

"Prof Chipp asked me—in April, it was—to find out if a certain title's ever been used on a detective story!"

"Ah. And what was the title he mentioned, Weems?"

"The Mystery of the Three R's."

"Three R's . . . Three R's?" cried Ellery. "But that's incredible! Nikki—back to the Administration Building!"

"Suppose he was," said Professor Bacon violently. "Readin'! 'Ritin'! 'Rithmetic! Abracadabra and Rubadubdub. What of it?"

"Perhaps nothing, Bacon," scowled Ellery, hugging his pipe. "And yet . . . see here. We found a clue pointing to the strong probability that Chipp never left his rooms at Ma Blinker's alive last June thirtieth. What was that clue? The fact that Chipp failed to return his rented copy of my novel to Weems's lending library. Novel . . . book . . . *reading*, gentlemen? The first of the traditional Three R's."

"Rot!" bellowed the professor, and he began to bite his fingernails.

"I don't blame you," shrugged Ellery. "But has it occurred to you that there is also a *writing* clue?"

At this Nikki went over to the enemy.

"Ellery, are you sure the sun . . . ?"

"Those post cards Chipp wrote, Nikki."

Three glances crossed stealthily.

"But I fail to see the connection, Mr. Queen," said Dr. Barlowe soothingly. "How are those ordinary post cards a clue?"

"And besides," snorted Bacon, "how could Chipp have been bumped off on June thirtieth and have mailed the cards a full month later, on July thirty-first?"

"If you'll examine the date Chipp wrote on the cards," said Ellery evenly, "you'll find that the *3* of *July 31* is crowded between the *y* of *July* and the *1* of *31*. If that isn't a clue, I never saw one."

And Ellery, who was as thin-skinned as the next artist, went on rather tartly to reconstruct the events of the fateful evening of June the thirtieth.

"Chipp wrote those cards in his rooms that night, dating them a day ahead—July first—probably intending to mail them from Slater, Arkansas, the next day on his way to the log cabin—"

"It's true Chipp loathed correspondence," muttered Dr. Barlowe.

"Got his duty cards out of the way before his vacation even began—the old sinner!" mumbled young Bacon.

"Someone then murdered him in his rooms, appropriated the cards, stuffed the body into Chipp's trunk —"

"Which was picked up by the expressman next morning and shipped to the cabin," cried Nikki.

And again the little chill wind cut through the office.

"But the postmarks, Mr. Queen," said Barlowe stiffly. "The postmarks also say July *thirty*-first."

"The murderer merely waited a month before mailing them at the Slater, Arkansas, post office."

"But *why?*" growled Bacon. "You weave beautiful rugs, man—but what do they mean?"

"Obviously it was all done, Professor Bacon," said Ellery, "to leave the impression that on July thirty-first Professor Chipp was *still alive* . . . to keep the world from learning that he was really murdered on the night of June thirtieth. And that, of course, is significant." He sprang to his feet. "We must examine the Professor's cabin—most particularly, his trunk."

It was a little trunk—but then, as Dr. Barlowe pointed out in a very queer voice, Professor Chipp had been a little man.

Outdoors, the Ozarks were shutting up shop for the summer, stripping the faint-hearted trees and busily daubing hillsides; but in the cabin there was no beauty—only dust, and an odor of dampness. And something else.

The little steamer trunk stood just inside the cabin doorway.

They stared at it.

"Well, well," said Bacon finally. "Miss Porter's outside—what are we waiting for?"

And so they knocked off the rusted lock and raised the lid—and found the trunk empty.

Perhaps not quite empty: the interior held a pale, dead-looking mass of crumbly stuff.

Ellery glanced up at Professor Bacon.

"Quicklime," muttered the chemistry teacher.

"Quicklime!" choked the president. "But the body. Where's the body?"

Nikki's scream, augmented a dozen times by the encircling hills, answered Dr. Barlowe's question most unpleasantly.

She had been wandering about the clearing, dreading to catch the first cry of discovery from the cabin, when she came upon a little cairn of stones. And she had sat down upon it.

But the loose rocks gave way, and Miss Porter found herself sitting on Professor Chipp—or, rather, on what was left of Professor Chipp. For Professor Chipp had gone the way of all flesh—which is to say, he was merely bones, and very dry bones, at that.

But that it was the skeleton of Leverett Chisholm Chipp could not be questioned: the medius and index finger of the right skeletal hand were missing to the second joint. And that Leverett Chisholm Chipp had been most foully used was also evident: the top of the skull revealed a deep and ragged chasm, the result of what could only have been a tremendous blow.

Whereupon the old pedagogue and the young took flight, joining Miss Porter, who was quietly being ill on the other side of the cabin; and Mr. Queen found himself alone with Professor Chipp.

Later, Ellery went over the log cabin with a disagreeable sense of anticipation. There was no sensible reason for believing that the cabin held further secrets; but sense is not all, and the already chilling air held a whiff of fatality.

He found it in a cupboard, in a green steel box, beside a rusty can of moldering tobacco.

It was a stapled pile of neat papers, curled by damp, but otherwise intact.

The top sheet, in a cramped, spidery hand, said:

The Mystery of the Three R's
by
L. C. Chipp

The discovery of Professor Chipp's detective story may be said to mark the climax of the case. That the old man had been battered to death in his rooms on the night of June thirtieth; that his corpse had been shipped from Barlowe, Missouri, to the Arkansas cabin in his own trunk, packed in quicklime to

avert detection *en route;* that the murderer had then at his leisure made his way to the cabin, removed the body from the trunk, and buried it under a heap of stones—these were mere facts, dry as the Professor's bones. They did not possess the aroma of the grotesque—the *bouffe*—which rose like a delicious mist from the pages of that incredible manuscript.

Not that Professor Chipp's venture into detective fiction revealed a new master, to tower above the busy little figures of his fellow toilers in this curious vineyard and vie for cloudspace only with Poe and Doyle and Chesterton. To the contrary. *The Mystery of the Three R's,* by L. C. Chipp, was a labored exercise in familiar elements, distinguished chiefly by its enthusiasm.

No, it was not the murdered professor's manuscript which was remarkable; the remarkable thing was the manner in which life had imitated it.

It was a shaken group that gathered in Chipp's rooms the morning after the return from the Arkansas cabin. Ellery had called the meeting, and he had invited Mr. Weems of The Campus Book Shop to participate—who, upon hearing the ghastly news, stopped beaming, clamped his Missouri jaws shut, and began to gaze furtively at the door.

Ellery's own jaws were unshaven, and his eyes were red.

"I've passed the better part of the night," he began abruptly, "reading through Chipp's manuscript. And I must report an amazing—an almost unbelievable—thing. The crime in Chipp's detective story takes place in and about a small Missouri college called . . . Barleigh College."

"Barleigh," muttered the president of Barlowe.

"Moreover, the victim in Chipp's yarn is a methodical old professor of American Literature."

Nikki looked puzzled. "You mean that Professor Chipp—?"

"Took off on himself, Nikki—exactly."

"What's so incredible about that?" demanded young Bacon. "Art imitating life—"

"Considering the fact that Chipp plotted his story long before the events of this summer, Professor Bacon, it's rather a case of life imitating art. Suppose I tell you that the methodical old professor of American Literature in Chipp's story owns a cabin in the Ozarks where his body is found?"

"Even *that?"* squeaked Mr. Weems.

"And more, Weems. The suspects in the story are the President of Barleigh College, whose name is given as Dr. Isaac St. Anthony E. Barleigh; a local bookshop owner named Claudius Deems; a gay young professor of chemistry known as Macon; and, most extraordinary of all, the three main clues in Chipp's detective story re-

volve about—are called—'Readin',' 'Ritin',' and 'Rithmetic'!"

And the icy little wind blew once more.

"You mean," exclaimed Dr. Barlowe, "the crime we're investigating —Chipp's own death— is *an exact counterpart of the fictional crime Chipp invented in his manuscript?*"

"Down to the last character, Doctor."

"But Ellery," said Nikki, "how can that possibly be?"

"Obviously, Chipp's killer managed to get hold of the old fellow's manuscript, read it, and with hellish humor proceeded to copy in real life—actually to duplicate—the crime Chipp had created in fiction."

Ellery began to lunge about the little room, his usually neat hair disordered and a rather wild look on his face. "Everything's the same: the book that wasn't returned to the lending library—the 'readin'' clue; the picture post cards bearing forged dates—the 'ritin'' clue—"

"And the 'rithmetic' clue, Mr. Queen?" asked Barlowe in a quavering voice.

"In the story, Doctor, the victim has found a first edition of Poe's *Tamerlane,* worth $25,000."

Little Weems cried, "That's 'rithmetic,' all right!" and then bit his lip.

"And how," asked Professor Bacon thickly, "how is the book integrated into Chipp's yarn, Mr. Queen?"

"It furnishes the motive for the crime. The killer steals the victim's authentic *Tamerlane*—substituting for it a facsimile copy which is virtually worthless."

"But if everything else is duplicated . . ." began Dr. Barlowe in a mutter.

"Then that must be the motive for Professor Chipp's own murder!" cried Nikki.

"It would seem so, wouldn't it?" Ellery glanced sharply at the proprietor of The Campus Book Shop. "Weems, where is the first edition of *Tamerlane* you told me Chipp showed you on the night of June thirtieth?"

"Why—why—why, reckon it's on his shelves here somewheres, Mr. Queen. Under *P,* for Poe . . ."

And there it was. Under *P,* for Poe.

And when Ellery took it down and turned its pages, he smiled. For the first time since they had found the skeleton under the cairn, he smiled.

"Well, Weems," he said affably, "you're a Poe expert. Is this an authentic *Tamerlane* first?"

"Why—why—why, must be. 'Twas when old Chipp showed it to me that night—"

"Really? Suppose you re-examine it—now."

But they all knew the answer before Weems spoke.

"It ain't," he said feebly. "It's a facsim'le copy. Worth about $5."

"The *Tamerlane*—stolen," whispered Dr. Barlowe.

"So once again," murmured Ellery, "we find duplication. I think that's all. Or should I say, it's too much?"

And he lit a cigarette and seated himself in one of Professor Chipp's chairs, puffing contentedly.

"All!" exclaimed Dr. Barlowe. "I confess, Mr. Queen, you've—you've baffled me no end in this investigation. All? It's barely begun! *Who* has done all this?"

"Wait," said Bacon slowly. "It may be, Doctor, we don't need Queen's eminent services at that. If the rest has followed Chipp's plot so faithfully, why not the most important plot element of all?"

"That's true, Ellery," said Nikki with shining eyes. *"Who is the murderer in Professor Chipp's detective story?"*

Ellery glanced at the cowering little figure of Claude Weems.

"The character," he replied cheerfully, "whom Chipp had named Claudius Deems."

The muscular young professor snarled and sprang.

"In your enthusiasm, Bacon," murmured Ellery, without stirring from his chair, "don't throttle him. After all, he's such a little fellow, and you're so large—and powerful."

"Kill old Chipp, would you!" growled Professor Bacon; but his grip relaxed a little.

"Mr. Weems," said Nikki, looking displeased. "Of course! The murderer forged the dates on the post cards so we wouldn't know the crime had been committed on June thirtieth. And who'd have reason to falsify the true date of the crime? The one man who'd visited Professor Chipp that night!"

"The damned beast could easily have got quicklime," said Bacon, shaking Weems like a rabbit, "by stealing it from the Chemistry Department after everyone'd left the college for the summer."

"Yes!" said Nikki. "Remember Weems himself told us he didn't leave Barlowe until July fifteenth?"

"I do, indeed. And Weems's motive, Nikki?"

"Why, to steal *Tamerlane.*"

"I'm afraid that's so," groaned Barlowe. "Weems as a bookseller could easily have got hold of a cheap facsimile to substitute for the authentic first edition."

"And he said he'd gone on a walking tour, didn't he?" Nikki added, warming to her own logic. "Well, I'll bet he 'walked' into that Arkansas post office, Ellery, on July thirty-first, to mail those post cards!"

Weems found his voice.

"Why, now, listen here, little lady, I didn't kill old Chipp—" he began in the most unconvincing tone imaginable.

They all eyed him with savage scorn—all, that is, but Ellery.

"Very true, Weems," said Ellery,

nodding. "You most certainly did not."

"He didn't . . ." began Dr. Barlowe, blinking.

"I . . . didn't?" gasped Weems, which seemed to Nikki a remarkable thing for him to have said.

"No, although I'm afraid I've been led very cleverly to *believe* that you did, Weems."

"See here, Mr. Queen," said Barlowe's president in a terrible voice. "Precisely what *do* you mean?"

"And how do you know he didn't?" shouted Bacon. "I told you, Doctor—this fellow's grossly overrated. The next thing you'll tell us is that Chipp hasn't been murdered at all!"

"Exactly," said Ellery. "Therefore Weems couldn't have murdered him."

"Ellery—" moaned Nikki.

"Your syllogism seems a bit perverted, Mr. Queen," said Dr. Barlowe severely.

"Yes!" snarled Bacon. "What about the evidence—?"

"Very well," said Ellery briskly, "let's consider the evidence. Let's consider the evidence of the skeleton we found near Chipp's cabin."

"Those dry bones? What about 'em?"

"Just that, Professor—they're so very dry. Bacon, you're a biologist as well as a chemist. Under normal conditions, how long does it take for the soft parts of a body to decompose completely?"

"How long . . . ?" The young man moistened his lips. "Muscles, stomach, liver—from three to four years. But—"

"And for decomposition of the fibrous tissues, the ligaments?"

"Oh, five years or so more. But—"

"And yet," sighed Ellery, "that desiccated skeleton was supposed to be the remains of a man who'd been alive *a mere eleven weeks before*. And not merely that—I now appeal to your chemical knowledge, Professor. Just what is the effect of quicklime on flesh and bones?"

"Well . . . it's pulverulent. Would dry out a body—"

"Would quicklime destroy the tissues?"

"Er . . . no."

"It would tend to preserve them?"

"Er . . . yes."

"Therefore the skeleton we found couldn't possibly have been the remains of Professor Chipp."

"But the right hand, Ellery," cried Nikki. "The missing fingers —just like Professor Chipp's—"

"I shouldn't think," said Ellery dryly, "snapping a couple of dry bones off a man dead eight or ten years would present much of a problem."

"Eight or ten years . . ."

"Surely, Nikki, it suggests the tenant of some outraged grave—or, considering the facts at our disposal, the far likelier theory that it came from a laboratory closet in the Biology Department of Barlowe College." And Professor Bacon cringed before Ellery's accusing glance,

which softened suddenly in laughter. "Now, really, gentlemen. Hasn't this hoax gone far enough?"

"Hoax, Mr. Queen?" choked the president of Barlowe.

"Come, come, Doctor," chuckled Ellery, "the game's up. Let me review the fantastic facts. What is this case? A detective story come to life. Bizarre—fascinating—to be sure. But really, Doctor, so utterly unconvincing!

"How conveniently all the clues in Chipp's manuscript found reflections in reality! The lending-library book, so long overdue—in the story, in the crime. The post cards written in advance—in the story, in the crime. The *Tamerlane* facsimile right here on Chipp's shelf—exactly as the manuscript has it. It would seem as if Chipp collaborated in his own murder."

"Collab—I can't make hide nor hair of this, Mr. Queen," began little Mr. Weems in a crafty wail.

"Now, now, Weems, as the bookseller-Poe-crony you were the key figure in the plot! Although I must confess, Dr. Barlowe, *you* played your role magnificently, too—and, Professor Bacon, you missed a career in the theater; you really did. The only innocent, I daresay, is Ma Blinker—and to you, gentlemen, I gladly leave the trial of facing that doughty lady when she finds out how her honest grief has been exploited in the interest of commerce."

"Commerce?" whimpered Nikki, who by now was holding her pretty head to keep it from flying off.

"Of course, Nikki. I was invited to Barlowe to follow an elaborate trail of carefully placed 'clues' in order to reach the conclusion that Claude Weems had 'murdered' Professor Chipp. When I announced Weems's 'guilt,' the hoax was supposed to blow up in my face. *Old Prof Chipp would pop out grinning from ear to ear.*"

He glared at the three cowering men, "Image the headlines. 'Famous Sleuth Tricked By Hoax —Pins Whodunit On Harmless Prof.' Commerce? I'll say! Chipp's *Mystery of the Three R's,* launched by such splendid publicity, would be swallowed by a publisher as the whale swallowed Jonah—and there we'd have . . . presumably . . . a sensational bestseller.

"The whole thing, Nikki, was a conspiracy hatched by the president of Barlowe, his two favorite professors, and their good friend the campus bookseller—a conspiracy to put old Chipp's first detective story over with a bang!"

And now the little wind blew warm, bringing the blood of shame to six male cheeks.

"Come, come, gentlemen!" cried Ellery. "All is not lost! We'll go through with the plot! I make only one condition. Where the devil is Chipp? I want to shake the old scoundrel's hand!"

Barlowe is an unusual college.

Call it what you will—glockentooter, glockenspoon, glockenbonger, glockenhorn, glockenhummer, or just plain glockenspiel—it's still a hilarious caper . . .

THE GREAT GLOCKENSPIEL GIMMICK

by ARTHUR MOORE

NOBODY EMBEZZLES FROM FACE-less Robert's Horse Parlor. This is a rule which is never broke for reasons that are as durable as headstones. Except that Albert has got carried away and has come up short on the books. Tempted by a hot tip on a cool bangtail, he has dipped his hand into the till and the horse ran out. Not out of the till—out of the money.

Naturally, this is a calamity. Albert figures he has maybe twelve hours to make up the forty clamaroonies before Faceless notices the deficit and it is all over but the final posies and the slow music as the slab goes by.

I am sitting in Katzie's Saloon, nursing a small beer, when he shags in like a barnacle on payday. Only he is sad as a gee who has just been hung. He is walking like it is raining—on nobody but him.

He says to me, "H'lo, Dubois," and downs a straight shot that raises Jonesy's eyebrows, because it is before noon and a long way from the first race. Albert remarks like, "Jonesy, I have got to have the loan of forty frogskins or I am never gonna see another sunrise."

Jonesy blinks at him and his little mustache gets to wiggling. I can tell what he is thinking and I am thinking the same thing. Albert has never got up to see a sunrise in his life. I doubt if he would know what it is.

Jonesy apologizes because, by an oversight, he has just laid out lucre for a few pressing saloon tabs. Albert looks at me, gives that up, and fills us in on the squeeze he is the squeezee of.

Faceless Robert is not about to laugh off forty mintberries—or forty empty jars of mustache wax. Faceless has never been known to laugh about anything. One of his runners, in an attempt to improve the granite image, once spread the rumor that Faceless actually smiled. He admitted that this event took place at the time of the St. Valentine's Day Massacre, a natural thing for Faceless to enjoy.

After Albert swears us all to secrecy he sits down to get in some solid nail-chewing. He is squeezing his smarts very hard, and naturally there is nothing I can help him with in this line; so I bum a fresh beer from Jonesy who is so

wrapped up in Albert's problem that he lets me put it on the cuff.

We will all be sorry that Albert is not around no more. Jonesy is getting sadder than Sitting Bull's Sioux when they run out of cavalrymen, because Albert is always good for a touch—when he is winning, which ain't often. And of course he is grouchy when he is studying the Form post facto—but it is easy to forget them things when a pal is about to take off for the Great Unknown and Heavenly Clambake.

I am reflecting that I can probably get cornflowers for the casket from Sidney's Flower Shop, at half price, when Albert runs a finger around his collar and asks me to stop staring at him.

Just at that time a truck goes by on the street outside, and there is a brace of banjo players sitting in the back. Another guy is yelling through a loudspeaker that we should vote for some bazoo because he has a record of never doing nothing which proves that he never done nothing bad.

I notice Albert's eyes get wide all of a sudden, then he gulps. A thought has hit him like a missile.

"I got it!" he yells, and hops up knocking over the chair.

Jonesy jumps a foot and spills beer all over Left Foot Hamish who has just come in and ordered one. "You got what?"

"The glockenspheen!" he yells again, but now he is chasing out the front door like he is the Lone Ranger and the bad guy is grabbing at his mask.

Left Foot sops up the beer on his shirt as we explain the problem and he becomes sad like us. Left Foot is a wispy little creature with the eyes of a beagle and a brain like a bowl of noodles. He is famous as the Man with the Sock System. He owns three socks—not three pairs, three socks. Every morning he washes one, then he puts the clean sock on the left foot, and moves the one he wore on the left foot yesterday to the right foot. Once he showed up wearing only one sock. He had bollixed up his system by washing two socks—and it took him three days to get straightened out.

Albert don't get back for a half hour, and then he is carrying a parcel which he unwraps and sets up on a table. We all gather round and stare at it.

Left Foot asks, "What is it?" A very reasonable question.

Albert is annoyed. "It's a glockenspiel. I got it in a trunk at an auction."

Jonesy says to me out of the corner of his mouth, "What the hell is a glockenspheen?"

"It's a musical instrument," says Albert like we are a bunch of round haircuts. He hits a couple of steel bars with a little hammer and the thing gives out a shrill squawk, till he stops it quick. "It's worth ninety simoleons if it's worth a

dime. I will let it go at the bargain price of forty." He looks around at us and sighs—there are no takers.

"I never glocked much," says Jonesy, winking at me. "Specially with a spheel."

"Ain't it hard to get parts?" Left Foot asks seriously.

"You don't get—"Albert starts shouting; then he takes a deep breath. "It's an antique from Europe." He gives us all a very hard look. "All right then, we will sell it to Murgatroyd."

I choke on my beer and Left Foot looks at Albert like he is missing some marbles, which is a very difficult thing for Left Foot to do.

"You mean pawn it?" Jonesy asks.

"I mean sell it. Murgatroyd would give nothin' on a loan. We have got to sell it outright."

"You are slippin' the strings on your dulcimer," I tell him. "Murgatroyd won't *buy* that object. He wouldn't buy the Holy Grail unless Galahad was standin' there with Limey scratch, waitin' to take it off his hands."

"Listen," Albert says, and he lowers his voice as we all lean toward him. "I know what I'm doin'. I got it all worked out." He holds up a paper that is covered with notations and scribbles. "Murgatroyd is a guy with an IQ like the fink who invented taxes. He is so sharp he has to wear iron underwear. Right?"

"He don't play the ponies," Jonesy mentions.

Albert ignores him. "Murgatroyd will not pass up a legit buck, right? We will use this failing to our advantage and force him to buy the glockenspiel."

"You're outa your bird," I say.

"You ain't heard the Plan—which you are in," Albert assures me. "He will fall for it like a brass nightingale. You will go along with Left Foot when he takes the glockenspiel to Murgatroyd."

I am astonished. "When *he* takes it?"

Albert looks at me like he has heard I am saving nuts for the winter. "Who else but Left Foot would own a glockenspiel? We got to make this look natural to Unc."

"I forgot," I tell him.

"Now," Albert glances at the paper, "we will hold a dry run." He points to me and Left Foot. "You two will bring the glockenspiel to me—I'm Uncle. You tell me you want to leave this rare musical thingamajig in my joint on consignment until some slob wanders in and buys it. You got that?"

Left Foot picks up the glockenspiel. We go through the motions of coming in the pawnshop. Left Foot stops in front of Albert and bangs on one of the steel bars till it makes a loud humming screech. "Mr. Murgatroyd," he says, "Albert wants you should—"

"Cut!" yells Albert, getting red in the face. "Don't tell him I want—

you're the clown, *you* want to sell it!"

"Oh." Left Foot nods and starts again. "Mr. Murgatroyd, I have got this here swell glockentooter."

"Glockenspiel."

"—yeah, glockenspiel, and I want you should keep it in the window on account of I need forty clamoleons to pay back Faceless."

"No, no, *no!*" screams Albert. "You need the moo but you don't have to tell him why!"

Left Foot grits his teeth and starts again. "Mr. Murgatroyd, I have got this here glockenwhatzit and I need one pair of Jacksons to —er—I just need 'em."

Albert says, "I don't want no dumb glockenspiel."

"Okay." Left Foot turns around and tramps away and Albert yells at him.

"I was just bein' Murgatroyd! That's what he'll say."

Left Foot looks doubtful. "You could be nicer," he pouts. "After all, this here's *your* glockenthing."

"It's just play-actin'," I tell him and he looks up at me with the beagle eyes till it sinks in. This is the knight on the white charger who Albert has picked to be his rescuer.

"I'll be nicer," Albert promises, soothing him. "I just want you should get used to what to expect."

Left Foot starts again, "I got this dumb blocken—"

"Respect!" shouts Albert. "You got to have respect for what you're toutin'. It's a rare antique gimmick which any hoi-polloi crumbum should be proud to shove in a corner of his pad. Now, try it again—and try to get it right this time."

Left Foot does it again—and again—and each time he does it Albert gives him a different answer and pretty soon it doesn't faze him. In about an hour Left Foot is able to go up to Albert without dropping the glockenspiel or forgetting his lines.

In the middle of all this, Alky comes stumbling in and leans on a beer to watch the show. He don't say much, but he is steadily going crazy with curiosity—and he is getting real annoyed at Albert.

Finally he can't hold it any longer. He yells, "Why don't you tell 'im *No* for Pete's sake!" He pounds on the bar and it and Jonesy both jump. "If you don't want the damn thing, why—?"

"We're play-actin'!" Albert shouts, and it percolates through to Alky who opens his mouth at the wonder of it. He is a large lumpy individual, especially around the head; and he is constantly dusting off his baldish dome on account of the birds are flying over it very low. Alky is one of them old-timers who has come through the prohibition days with most everything intact but his teeth and his headbones. He is punchy as yesterday's bus transfer.

When he finds out what we are

practising about, he offers his services to Albert.

"All right," agrees Albert, "you can be the cinch man."

Albert explains that after Murgatroyd has put the glockenbox in the window, Alky is to go in and make a deposit on same. "This is important. We have got to do this by the numbers," he says. "Everybody set their watches."

Left Foot hasn't got a watch, but I set mine with Albert's, and Alky does the same. It is becoming very serious with the watch setting—even Jonesy is looking impressed. This is like D-day when we were all 4-F's, waiting by the radio for the grim command to turn up the volume.

"At eleven thirty," Albert says, trying to look Left Foot in the eye, "Dubois and Left Foot will go into the hockshop and plant the glockenspiel." He points to Alky. "At exactly one fifteen, Alky will make the deposit."

Alky asks, "Why one fifteen?"

Albert looks at him. "You're right. Okay, make it one sixteen." Alky nods wisely and makes a note of it on the edge of his Racing Form.

Alky turns out to be a terrible ham. I have never realized this before, but then I have never seen Alky on the make-believe kick. If he ever played Shakespeare, he would do it with a real spear.

He pretends to walk in Murgatroyd's, and he stops very sudden and reacts. "Holy horrendous hominy grits!" he yells, which breaks up everybody. He points to the instrument. "That there's a honest-to-goodness glockenspoon! I gotta have it, Albert—I mean Murgatroyd. I gotta, I gotta—"

"Cut!" screams Albert. "You don't have to qualify for a Oscar Award!"

Alky sticks out his lower lip. "I gotta feel it, don't I?"

Albert sighs. "All right, feel it, but don't wear it out. Now do it again."

He tries it over and over, and finally he walks in and puts down the deposit without making it sound like he is buying Manhattan Island from a group of scheming redskins.

But Albert is looking less neat by the minute. I never see him work so hard. "Only one more thing," he says, and he comes over and pats me on the shoulder, so then I know that this is the piece-of-resistance. "I have gotta depend on you, Dubois. This is where Left Foot has gotta hit the beanbag outa the park and touch all the bases like Seabiscuit in his prime. This is where I get the forty Irish flags or a plot in Evergreen Acres."

"Leave it to me," I say, and he bites his lip as he turns away with a great sigh—which makes me think of the cornflowers again. Albert takes a deep breath and stops in front of Left Foot.

"You have parked the glocken-

spiel at the popshop and you have told him you gotta have forty clams for it, right?"

"Right," says Left Foot briskly. He has got that down pat.

"Now," says Albert, "Alky has come in and left a deposit on it, tellin' Uncle he will be back right away with the rest of the dough. No matter how much Murgatroyd asks, Alky will agree. Right?"

Everybody, including Alky, nods. We are all with him so far.

"Fine. Then Dubois and Left Foot will go back to Murgatroyd at two fifteen, and they will tell Unc they gotta have the glockenspiel back because they got a hot customer who is going to shell out as soon as he gets his mitts on it."

"Hey!" says Alky suddenly. "I got a deposit on de t'ing." He is wrinkling his low forehead. Hollywood should hear about Alky.

"Good," beams Albert. "That's what Murgatroyd will say. He can't let you have the whozit because then he will have to give Alky his lettuce back, and pass up the profit. Also, Alky could sue."

"I would, too," Alky says, glowering.

"So," Albert continues grandly, "Murgatroyd, knowing he can't stop Dubois and Left Foot from takin' back their own property, will buy the glockenspiel from Left Foot."

Left Foot's mouth drops open. "Albert," he breathes, "you are a genius!"

Albert shrugs, but he is pleased. We rehearse the third act, where me and Left Foot get the scratch from Murgatroyd. We have to do it again and again—because Left Foot is beginning to get over-organized and sometimes he adds things. He is so taken with the Plan that it is all we can do to keep him from offering Uncle free glockenspiel lessons.

Finally Albert gets him cooled off. Jonesy closes the saloon, and all of us go together to the corner like we are going to watch a parade.

Then Left Foot goes to pieces. He sees the pawnshop just down the street and he forgets everything he has learned. He tries to get away and we all grab him. "I'll buy the thing myself," he yells.

Jonesy says, "He's got stage fright."

"A dollar a week!" Left Foot promises. "I allus wanted a—"

Albert saves the day. Grabbing Left Foot by the lapels, he stares into the watery, pink eyes. "Left Foot," he says with deep feeling, "I am dependin' on you—so I can see the sunrise tomorra. This here caper means life to me—more than anything—even more than a daily-double winner! You have just *got* to come through, like the true pal you has always been."

"Sunrise?" says Left Foot, astonished.

"It's a expression," Albert explains.

It seems to do the trick. Left Foot

is so impressed by the idea that Albert would get up to see a sunrise that he forgets to be afraid. He takes the glockenbonger and the two of us shuffle off toward Murgatroyd's put and take.

Right then is where the whole Plan hits an unexpected snag.

Left Foot marches into the shop with me right behind him. Murgatroyd, who is a tall, black-haired type with horn-rimmed glasses and eyes four sizes too big, is having a cup of coffee at his desk in the back of the store.

I see his eyes fasten on the glockenspiel as soon as we get through the door. When Left Foot reaches him, Murgatroyd is standing up and his fingers are twitching. Left Foot don't get a chance to say anything. He opens his mouth and then just leaves it open.

"I'll be blowed," Murgatroyd says. "A glockenspiel! My old man had one in Liverpool. What you want for it, Left Foot?"

"Huh?" Left Foot says.

Murgatroyd does a magic trick and his wallet is open and I am instantly fascinated at how much cabbage can be packed into a small space, lengthways. He riffles through it, then shakes Left Foot's shoulder to help his hearing. "I'll buy it. How much?"

"You ain't doin' this right," Left Foot mumbles.

"Forty bucks," I manage to say, prying the glockenhummer from Left Foot. Murgatroyd counts out the sawbucks without a word and shoves them in Left Foot's fist. He grabs the glockenspiel and is as happy as a Post Office driver with a new corner to park on.

I am staggered, but I recover enough to steer Left Foot out of the store. He is clutching the forty flags in his fist and mumbling to himself.

As soon as we hit the sidewalk, Left Foot bumps into a phone pole; so I stop him, take the clamaroonies for safe keeping, and case the immediate area for a place to work off our numb. Left Foot says, very seriously, "Albert didn't do it that way. We gotta go back and do it right!"

I grab him and hustle him across the street. I am only a pint size myself, but Left Foot could not fight his way out of a Caesar salad. I propel him into a saloon where we take a table and two beers.

We are on our fourth beer each before the shock begins to wear off. Left Foot is beginning to understand what has happened and how the Plan changed at the last second. It is clear to both of us that the rest of the Plan is not necessary. We finish another couple of brews and leave the establishment.

Then I spot Alky approaching the pawnshop. I inform Left Foot who is well ballasted with beer and has developed a heavy list to starboard. He nods and I run across the street.

"We did it!" I tell Alky triumphantly. "We got the moo, and the Plan is a success!"

But Alky is not listening to me. He is mumbling to himself, and I catch some of the words. He is still working on his lines.

"Alky!" I yell. "It's all over. We done it!"

He don't even focus on me. When I get in front of him, he just brushes me out of the way and enters the three-balls.

I am afraid to go in. I can hear voices, which get louder and louder, till finally I don't have to go in. I can hear them fine from a block away. Alky is yelling that he wants to buy the glockenspoon and Murgatroyd is yelling it ain't for sale.

Alky wants to know what the hell kind of a hockshop Murgatroyd is running, and offers to call the mob. Uncle tries to reason with him, gives it up, and goes back to yelling. Cops are mentioned and there are a few smashes, like Alky might be pounding on something —which he is wont to do when he becomes excited. They are standing nose to nose shouting at each other, and they are just beginning to get their second wind.

A big crowd gathers. Albert and Jonesy show up and Albert spots me and tries to talk but there is too much noise. I give him the greenies which pleases him, but he cannot understand what Alky is still doing in the pawnshop.

Then the cops arrive. As the wagon backs up, Left Foot comes to life and blows his beery breath in my face. "It's time to go back and get the glockenhorn," he announces.

He has reverted to being organized. I try to catch him, but he is weighted funny and I cannot get a good clutch on him. He slips through the crowd and into the pawnshop and when I get there he is wrestling for the glockenspiel with a very perplexed and frantic Murgatroyd, and Alky is shouting that he will sue.

It costs Albert the forty skins to get us all out of the sneezer.

★

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LATE BULLETIN

The New On-Sale Date of

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IS

SEPTEMBER 28

Please disregard the September 14 on-sale date which appears in the ad of our second cover of this issue.

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

In France the kiosks are papered with two equally successful series of spy thrillers: the adventures of Ian Fleming's James Bond, 007, and of Jean Bruce's Hubert Bonisseur de la Bath, OSS 117. The first two Bruce novels to appear in America (Crest, 40¢ each; translated by Lowell Bair) are THE LAST QUARTER HOUR (LE DERNIER QUART D'HEURE, 1955; k795) and TROUBLE IN TOKYO (A TOUT COEUR A TOKYO, 1959; k806); they disclose a lighthearted but vigorous approach to intrigue and (especially in TOKYO) a fine gallows humor—something short of GOLDFINGER in effectiveness, but well ahead of the slight and weary last Fleming, THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN GUN (New American Library, $4.50).

★★★★ **THE LOOKING GLASS WAR, *by John le Carré*** (Coward-McCann, $4.95)
Less a story than (in le Carré's words) "a fable: a nightmare expressed, in the Kafka tradition, in terms of coldest reality"; singularly chilling, bitter study in the futilities of international intrigue.

★★★ **THE MIND READERS, *by Margery Allingham*** (Morrow, $4.50)
Spy adventure (starring Mr. Albert Campion) combined with delightfully fresh and vivid science fiction of ESP.

★★★ **THE THIRD SIDE OF THE COIN, *by Francis Clifford*** (Coward-McCann, $3.95)
Another of Clifford's beautifully understated essays in character and morals, dealing this time with embezzlement and earthquake.

★★★ **OF ALL THE BLOODY CHEEK, *by Frank McAuliffe*** (Ballantine U5023, 60¢)
4 episodes from the career of Augustus Mandrell, murderer-to-order, recalling some of the wilder comic criminalities of Gerald Kersh.

★★★ **DEATH BY INCHES, *by Dell Shannon*** (Morrow, $3.95)
A torso murder gets top billing out of 6 homicides handled simultaneously and skilfully by Lt. Mendoza and the rest of the L. A. P. D.

Among reprints, Rex Stout's ROYAL FLUSH (Viking, $3.95) is a grand omnibus of 5 stories, including the first Nero Wolfe novel (FER-DE-LANCE, 1934) and one of the best Wolfe novelets (*Die Like a Dog,* 1954). Latest in Bantam's series of novels of pure detection, with introductions by me, are Helen McCloy's CUE FOR MURDER (1942; F3027, 50¢) and Ellery Queen's CAT OF MANY TAILS (1949; F3026, 50¢).

One of the most amusing (and one of the best so far) in the series about our favorite fictional "crime syndicate" and detective collaboration—King Danforth and Martin Leroy, co-authors under the pseudonym of "Leroy King," who have written more than 50 mystery books of which over 80,000,000 copies in various editions have been sold on six continents . . . Leroy and King are still aboard the Valhalla, accompanied by their charming wives and enjoying a round-the-world cruise —and all the mysteries inevitably pertaining to and resulting from their "bloodhounds' holiday."

THE JAPANESE CARD MYSTERY

by JAMES HOLDING

THE CRUISE SHIP *Valhalla* MOVED SEDATELY ACROSS A MOON-WASHED quiet Pacific toward Japan. Aboard her, King Danforth and Martin Leroy were having a nightcap in the Horseshoe Bar when their wives, who had been playing bridge in the card room, joined them.

Danforth noted at once that his wife's dark eyes were glinting with excitement. He said, "You and Mr. Sakaguchi must have won again, Carol."

"Did they ever!" Helen Leroy said. "They beat Miss Wilkins and me three straight rubbers as easily as if they could see every card in our hands."

"Sakaguchi wouldn't peek," Leroy said judiciously. "That honorable Japanese gentleman is far above cheating at cards."

"You're quite right there," Carol agreed. "And besides, he has much better card sense than you have, King."

"My card sense is impeccable," Danforth stated with dignity. "I happen not to like bridge, that's all."

"I'm glad somebody finally mentioned card sense," Helen said, "because while Mr. Sakaguchi's is quite well developed, it definitely isn't in the same league with his niece's."

Leroy said, "His niece's?"

"Yes. She lives in Tokyo."

"And has this extra special card sense?" Danforth said.

"Exactly. So special it's mysterious."

"If it's a mystery, you have approached the right oracles." Leroy ostentatiously polished his fingernails on his lapel.

"Aren't you going to offer us a nightcap?" his wife asked.

"Certainly. If that's your price for the story."

"It is. I'll have a Grasshopper."

"Me, too," said Carol.

Leroy shuddered. "How you can drink that stuff is mystery enough for me," he muttered. "Two Grasshoppers here," he said to the bar steward.

"You won't believe this," Carol said. "It's wild."

Danforth grinned. "We've told some pretty wild ones ourselves." Under the collaboration name of "Leroy King" he and Martin Leroy had written more than 50 mystery books of which over 80,000,000 copies, in every language except Chinese and Russian, had been sold throughout the world. "So try us."

"Well, then," Carol began, "as we said, Mr. Sakaguchi and I beat Helen and Mrs. Wilkins quite easily. After three rubbers we stopped playing and just sat around exchanging idle conversation. Helen mentioned something about card sense. And that's when Mr. Sakaguchi smiled that darling smile of his that shows his gold tooth in front, and told us he had a niece in Tokyo who *really* had card sense. He wished we could meet her."

The Grasshoppers came. While Carol tested hers, Helen took up the story.

"I asked him what he meant by real card sense," she said, "and he solemnly informed us that if one of us picked a card out of the deck at random and called his niece on the telephone, she could tell us immediately which card we'd picked—just like magic."

"Over the telephone?" Leroy grunted. "That's not magic, that's some kind of con game. When he calls his niece, he simply gives her a signal indicating which card's been drawn."

Carol interrupted. "Oh, no," she said. "*He* doesn't make the call to his niece. *You* do. He doesn't speak to her at all—not one word. So how could he signal her?"

Helen giggled, then tried to conceal it by clearing her throat and brushing a strand of blonde hair out of one sapphire-blue eye.

"That's a guilty giggle," Leroy said suspiciously. He turned to his wife. "Did you actually *telephone* this niece of Sakaguchi's?"

Helen tossed her head. "We couldn't just let an unbelievable statement like that pass, could we?"

Danforth, stricken, said to Carol, "You mean you and Helen actually telephoned Tokyo? By radio telephone? From the middle of the Pacific Ocean?" They nodded brightly. Danforth groaned. "There go our

royalties on *The India Relish Mystery,** Mart! What they charge you to use that radio telephone is murder!" Abruptly he asked his wife, "Did Sakaguchi's niece guess the right card?"

"How could she?" Leroy scoffed. "A thousand miles away and over the telephone!"

But Helen and Carol solemnly lifted their right hands and crossed their hearts. "We swear she did," Helen said. "The six of diamonds."

"Wait a minute." Danforth shook his crewcut head. "That's impossible. Unless *Sakaguchi* picked out the card from the deck, right? Maybe he's a cardsharp—can cut any card he wants to, for example—or his niece had foreknowledge of it . . ."

His voice trailed off as he saw both Helen and Carol shaking their heads. "Good try, buster," Carol sympathized, "but no cigar for you. *I* picked out the card. Mr. Sakaguchi didn't even touch the deck."

Leroy said, "It has to be a trick. Long-distance card sense is nonsense, to coin a bon mot."

Helen gave him a sweet smile. "Mr. Sakaguchi says his niece's senses, all of them, are finely tuned, unnaturally sharp, including her hearing. She can detect in the human voice, even over the telephone, all sorts of revealing vibrations and informative nuances that tell her infallibly exactly which card you've just drawn."

"I'll bet," said Leroy with open skepticism.

Carol laughed. "That's just what we tried to do. I told Mr. Sakaguchi I didn't believe it and offered to bet him on it."

"How much?" asked Danforth in mock alarm, that was not so mock.

"A dollar."

"Not even enough to pay for the telephone call," Danforth said bitterly, "even if you'd won. But there it is, Mart. A bet. It's a con game for sure."

"Oh, no," Carol said, "because Mr. Sakaguchi wouldn't bet with me. Or with Helen or Mrs. Wilkins, either. We all offered to bet."

"A dollar! No wonder he wouldn't bet!"

Helen offered in an off-hand manner, "Mrs. Wilkins is loaded, did you know that? Her husband left her six department stores and a chain of groceries. She offered to bet Mr. Sakaguchi five thousand dollars."

Leroy whistled. Danforth whispered as though in pain, "Five grand!"

Carol said, "Mr. Sakaguchi wouldn't think of exploiting his niece's clairvoyance or clairhearance, or whatever it is. But since we seemed

*Editors' Note: One of the series of novels about culinary crimes that include *The Danish Pastry Mystery*, *The London Broil Mystery*, and *The Bermuda Onion Mystery*.

interested, he insisted that we prove his niece's ability for ourselves, and let him pay for the phone call."

"And then, from the informative vibrations of your dulcet voice," Leroy sneered, "Mr. Sakaguchi's niece divined the six of diamonds?"

"She certainly did."

"If you'll pardon a vulgarity," Danforth said, "nuts!"

The girls drained their Grasshoppers in triumph and licked the last drops of liquor from the glasses' rims. "That's how it happened, fellows," Helen said smugly, "and since you're so notoriously expert at solving mysteries, be our guests!"

Leroy scratched his head and said gloomily, "Tell us more about the telephone call."

"We cut the cards first in the card room," Helen volunteered. "I shuffled the deck a couple of times and Carol cut the six of diamonds and showed it to us. Then we all went up to the radio room together and Carol placed the call with Mr. Holm, the radio operator."

"To what number in Tokyo?" Leroy asked.

"Heavens, I don't remember," Carol said. "Mr. Sakaguchi told Mr. Holm the number."

"Aha?" said Danforth with a glance at Leroy.

"No 'aha' about it," Helen objected. "Mr. Sakaguchi made no secret of the number. He called it out loud and clear, but who remembers telephone numbers, especially Japanese ones?"

"Not you, anyway," Danforth conceded. "Continue."

"It's a clear night," Carol went on, "not a bit of static, so Mr. Holm got the call through quickly, maybe in ten minutes. While we were waiting, Mr. Sakaguchi told us his niece speaks English—he wrote down her name for us on a cablegram blank, and told us how to pronounce it. When the call came through, I took it."

"And what exactly did you say?"

"I said 'Hello'. And a sexy-sounding female voice said 'Hello' right back at me. I said, 'Is this Myanoshima Hakkaido?—that's her name—and she said, 'Yes, who is calling, please?' She had a little trouble with her *l*'s but her English was quite good."

"Then what? Give us every detail."

"Then I told her who I was and that her Uncle Sakaguchi claimed she could tell me what playing card I had just drawn from the deck. She laughed and said, 'He is such a nuisance, my dear uncle! Was it the six of diamonds?' and hung up."

There was a respectful silence when she finished. Finally Danforth breathed, "Beautiful!"

"What's that supposed to mean?" Helen asked.

"I know how it was worked, that's all."

"You don't!"

"Oh, yes," Leroy cut in. "Two possible ways. First, the telephone number. Sakaguchi could have fifty-two telephone numbers lined up, a different one for each card in the deck, at each of which some girl—ostensibly his niece—is prepared to tell you what card you've drawn if she gets a call like yours, Carol. Sakaguchi merely had you call the six-of-diamonds number." He grinned. "A rudimentary system."

Before either of the girls could say anything, Danforth said, "The other possibility's more likely, I think. After all, fifty-two telephone numbers! And fifty-two 'nieces' to answer the phone! Remember, Sakaguchi apparently does this trick just for kicks, since he wouldn't accept Mrs. Wilkins' bet. So why would he go to all that trouble and expense, just to play a practical joke?"

"He wouldn't," Helen decided firmly. "What's your other possibility?"

Danforth said, "The niece's name. Right, Mart?"

"Head of the class," Leroy proclaimed.

"What about her name?" Helen demanded.

"Well, listen," Danforth explained. "Everybody who telephones a stranger invariably begins by asking 'Is this Joe Smith' or 'Is this Suzy Brown,' or whatever, don't they? All right, now suppose the name Smith is the code word for Clubs; let's say Brown is the code name for Diamonds; Gardner means Hearts; and Miller denotes Spades. In addition, there are thirteen code *first* names like Joe and Suzy, each one meaning a number, to go with the four last names. The person called has a list of those code names beside her telephone. So somebody calls up and says, 'Is this Joe Smith? Can you tell me what card I've drawn?' All the 'niece' has to do is look down her list of code names till she finds *Joe* which means six, and *Smith,* which means Diamonds. So she knows right away the card picked is the six of diamonds. She was tipped off by the fall name you've called. Get it? Simple as ABC. The name you've called is the code name Sakaguchi has told you to call. Right?"

Carol said, "Do you mean that when I asked for Myanoshima Hakkaido tonight on the telephone I was really saying 'six of diamonds'?"

"Sure," Leroy said. "If your card had been the deuce of spades, Sakaguchi might have told you his niece's name was Kaori Fujiyama, or something."

Carol and Helen stood up. "You two geniuses take all the joy out of

life!" Helen murmured. "Here we had a good mystery going, and you've punctured it like a toy ballon. Oh, well, let's go to bed, shall we?"

Carol yawned. "Let's. But I'm not convinced. I still think Mr. Sakaguchi's niece has long-distance card sense. She had such a lovely voice."

With which crashing *non-sequitur* she swept out of the bar.

At noon the next day Danforth and Leroy were fifteen minutes late joining their wives for their regular pre-luncheon Gimlets.

"Where in the world have you been?" Helen asked. "Down at the pool, watching that overblown Mrs. Jocelyn in her bikini again?"

"No," answered her husband with a chastened air. "We've been telephoning Mr. Sakaguchi's niece in Tokyo."

"What!"

"Yes. We braced Mr. Sakaguchi and begged him to let us try—purely out of professional interest—his niece's extra-sensory perception."

"And what happened?"

"I cut the nine of hearts," Danforth said. "We called the Tokyo number. It was the same number you called last night, incidentally, according to Mr. Holm. I talked to the niece. And you're right—she has a *very* sexy voice." He paused. "And furthermore, she guessed the nine of hearts quicker than I could say Sakaguchi!"

Leroy grinned. "And guess what Mr. Sakaguchi told us his niece's name was this time?"

"What?" asked Carol and Helen together.

"Myanoshima Hakkaido," Danforth said dismally. "The same name he told you!"

By cocktail time the story was all over the ship.

Carol and Helen couldn't resist the temptation to tease their husbands in front of assorted witnesses about their signal failure to solve such a simple mystery. Scores of passengers begged Mr. Sakaguchi to let them cut a card and test his niece's amazing powers by radio telephone. Scores of scoffers offered to wager him on the outcome.

Smiling his gold-toothed smile, Mr. Sakaguchi steadfastly refused, saying he couldn't permit his niece to be further harassed as the result of an innocent but thoughtless boast on his part. He refused to tell anyone the niece's telephone number; so, also, did the Danforths, Leroys, and Mr. Holm, the radio man, in spite of the numerous requests for it. Mr. Sakaguchi had asked them to keep it to themselves out of consideration for his niece's privacy.

As for Danforth and Leroy, they maintained a detached, preoccupied

air that their wives readily recognized as their "plot conference" mood. Their failure to solve the mystery was obviously rankling; but they did not begrudge Mr. Sakaguchi his little joke.

Until two nights later, when the shattering news ran through the ship that Mr. Sakaguchi had won $50,000 from Mr. Starbuck, a wealthy, loud, and generally disliked passenger, who had bet him that amount that his niece couldn't guess a card which he drew from the deck.

Then Leroy said, "Just as we thought. A con game. Sakaguchi's been waiting for a really big sucker, that's all. Long-distance card sense! That's a laugh!"

Helen ventured, "You were talking only yesterday about authenticated cases of mental telepathy between Australian bushmen a thousand miles apart."

"But not over the telephone!" Danforth said. "Sakaguchi has a gimmick—he's got to have!"

"What he's got," Carol said with spirit, "is a niece with long-distance card sense, that's what *I* think. And that's what I'll keep on thinking until you prove I'm wrong."

"At the risk of repeating myself," said Danforth, "nuts!"

Before their wives were up the next morning, Danforth and Leroy met at the shuffleboard court on the Sports Deck for their regular early morning game. But they did not play. Leroy took an envelope from his pocket.

"It came to me in the night," he said. "Look. I've written down the niece's name and broken it up into what sound like syllables when you say it. See if anything strikes you, King."

He had printed the name *My-an-o-shi-ma Hak-ka-i-do* on the back of the envelope.

Danforth looked at it and presently nodded. "Four syllables in the last name," he said. "And four suits in a deck of cards. That what you mean?"

"Precisely."

"So it's in the pronunciation, eh?"

"Sure. What American, unfamiliar with Japanese words and names, would know, recognize, or remember the *proper* way to pronounce a complicated name like Myanoshima Hakkaido? If Sakaguchi tells one of us his niece's name is Hak-ka-*i*-do with the emphasis on the *i,* and later tells somebody else it's *Hak*-ka-i-do, with the emphasis on the *Hak,* who's to notice the difference if he says it fast and fluently?—as he does. All we do is pronounce the name as nearly as we can."

"So," said Danforth, "we can reasonably conclude that if you say over the telephone to Sakaguchi's niece, 'Is this Miss *HAK*-ka-i-do' it means, say, Clubs; if you ask for Hak-*KA*-i-do, it means Diamonds; Hak-ka-*I*-do means Hearts; and Hak-ka-i-*DO* means Spades. For the life of me, I can't remember exactly how Sakaguchi told *us* to pronounce it." He shrugged. "So I guess variations in syllable emphasis wouldn't be noticed, as you say."

Danforth continued to look at the printed name. "How about this first name, though?" he asked then. "Only five syllables, and we need thirteen variations to cover all the cards."

"That," said Leroy, "is what I hoped *you'd* be able to figure out."

"Give me your envelope and a pen," Danforth said. Rapidly he jotted down this list:

ace ..... *MEE*-an-o-shi-ma
2 ..... Mee-*AN*-o-shi-ma
3 ..... Mee-an-*O*-shi-ma
4 ..... Mee-an-o-*SHI*-ma
5 ..... Mee-an-o-shi-*MA*
6 ..... *MY*-an-o-shi-ma
7 ..... My-*AN*-o-shi-ma
8 ..... My-an-*O*-shi-ma
9 ..... My-an-o-*SHI*-ma
10 ..... My-an-o-shi-*MA*
Jack ..... ?
Queen ..... ?
King ..... ?

He showed it to Leroy. "How about this?" he queried. "Changing the pronunciation of the first syllable from *My* to *Me* would gives us ten of the thirteen variations we need."

"But why pick on the y for a change in pronunciation?"

"Because I have a hunch it's usually pronounced *ee*. Think of Hiroshima, Hirohito, Fujiyama, Nagasaki. But I'm almost sure Sakaguchi pronounced it *eye* when he told us his niece's name. He kind of slurred it, but it was more *my* than *me*. That's how Carol said it, too. That's why I think maybe her six of diamonds was MY-an-o-shi-ma, and my nine of hearts was My-an-o-SHI-ma."

"Not impossible. In fact, quite likely. But what about the Jack, Queen, and King? They're still missing."

Danforth sighed. "How right." Then he stared at his partner. "What did you say just then?"

"I said the Jack, Queen, and King are still missing."

Danforth laughed. "That's it!" he cried. "Miss! Listen, Mart, what word would be a perfectly natural one to add to the question 'Is this Myanoshima Hakkaido'?"

Leroy nodded. "*Miss* Myanoshima Hakkaido. Just add the word *Miss* in in front of the proper pronunciation of Myanoshima for, say, the ace, deuce, and trey—and you tip off the Jack, Queen, and King?"

"It could be. Or even *Mrs.* or *Mr.* for that matter."

Leroy shook his head. "Not with that sexy female voice you raved about. It's got to be *Miss.*" He thought for a moment. "Let's talk to the clever Mr. Sakaguchi without the girls being present, shall we? We may be wrong again, and I don't want to repeat the humiliation of being laughed at by our own wives. Do you?"

"Definitely not. Where'll we talk to him?"

"My cabin, at ten thirty? The girls will be in the beauty shop."

Mr. Sakaguchi accompanied them to Leroy's cabin willingly and smilingly.

Danforth opened proceedings. "Mr. Sakaguchi," he said, "that fifty thousand dollars you won last night—"

"Yes?" Mr. Sakaguchi hissed a little on his *s's.*

"We were astonished that after refusing so many wagers on your niece's card sense, you finally yielded—and bet such a huge sum."

"It *was* a large bet, wasn't it?" Sakagushi's smile tightened, his gold tooth winking. "But I was practically forced into it, you realize. To vindicate my niece, myself—and, ah, you and your wives as well." He was bland. "Mr. Starbuck intimated loudly and publicly that you and your charming ladies were my accomplices, in on my trick, deliberately helping me to perpetrate it out of a twisted sense of humor, or a desire to test out a crime plot."

Leroy crossed one knee over the other and swung his foot. "Well, we still think, Mr. Sakaguchi, that it is a trick. And I'll tell you something else we think. We think you deliberately used our wives and us as a convenient and respectable means of spreading the news about your niece's so-called card sense to everybody on this ship, thus arousing general interest in her ESP or telepathic powers. It was part of a calculated build-up that enabled you to win fifty thousand dollars last night."

Mr. Sakaguchi looked pained.

Danforth said, "It was very ingenious of you to challenge us, through our wives, to try to discredit your trick. That way you got it reported all over the ship that even Leroy King, professional mystery solvers, ad-

mitted defeat. That was the charming fillip, the attractively piquant bait you needed to bring out the really serious skeptics, the rich and eager scoffers, the self-confident debunkers and big bettors like Mr. Starbuck. The kind of sucker who would relish being able to tell his chums later, 'Why, he even fooled that well-known team of mystery writers, Leroy King, but he couldn't fool *me*.'"

"You make me out cleverer than I am," Mr. Sakaguchi said. Without hesitation he went on smoothly, "If my niece's ability is a trick, perhaps you can demonstrate how it was done?"

"Maybe not exactly," Danforth said, "but we can show you how it *could* have been done."

Sakaguchi smiled. "I am fascinated," he said. "Please proceed."

Danforth went over to the bedside stand and got a deck of cards. "Mr. Leroy," he said, grinning in spite of himself, "will pretend to be your niece. And I shall be a credulous cruise passenger. We'll have to dispense with the telephone, but my partner will go into the bathroom where he cannot see which card I draw. Will that be satisfactory?"

"Eminently fair."

Leroy went into the bathroom and closed the door, leaving only a crack wide enough to hear through. Once inside, he pulled from his pocket a penciled list. "Go ahead," he called to Danforth.

Danforth, outside in the cabin, cut the deck of cards a few times, then showed the card he drew to Mr. Sakaguchi. The three of spades. After consulting a list of his own, he then called out to Leroy in the bathroom, "Is this Mee-an-*O*-shi-ma Hak-ka-i-*DO?* What card have I drawn?"

Leroy's voice promptly replied, "The three of spades."

Mr. Sakaguchi's face was expressionless. "Remarkable," he murmured.

Danforth cut the deck again, a few more times, then showed his card to Sakaguchi. "Is this My-an-o-*SHI*-ma Hak-ka-*I*-do? What card have I drawn?" he called to Leroy.

"The nine of hearts."

"Very interesting," Sakaguchi conceded. "May I draw a card myself?" At Danforth's nod, the Japanese leaned forward, cut, and smiled. He held out the King of Hearts. "I rather doubt that your partner can guess this one," he said.

"Is Miss Mee-an-*O*-shi-ma Hak-ka-*I*-do?" Danforth called out.

"No," came Leroy's muffled voice, "but the King of Hearts is here. Will that do?" With these words he opened the bathroom door and emerged.

"It will do very nicely," Mr. Sakaguchi said. "I congratulate you, gentlemen."

"Thanks," said Leroy. "I wish we could say the same. But since you have won fifty thousand dollars by fraud, from a compatriot of ours, using us as unknowing confederates, I believe our next step is clearly indicated: to expose you immediately to the captain of this ship and to our fellow passengers as a cheat, a confidence man."

"Please," said Sakaguchi. He spread his hands in a typical Oriental gesture. "I much prefer to call myself a fund raiser. It is a more truly descriptive term."

Danforth said, "You're a fund raiser, I'll hand you that."

"Only once a year, however," Sakaguchi said, "and in a very good cause." He took out his wallet and pulled from it a check. "Perhaps you would examine this check which Mr. Starbuck wrote me last night?"

Puzzled, Leroy said, "It isn't drawn to you or to your niece. It's made out to The Tokyo Home for Crippled Children."

Sakaguchi beamed. "Exactly," he said. "My favorite charity. My niece, Miss Myanoshima Hakkaido of recent fame, is the Directress of this Home. It is an expensive Home to operate properly, you can understand that. And many Japanese are notoriously chary of giving large charitable donations. So once a year, gentlemen, I conspire with my niece to raise fifty thousand dollars from some unpleasant tourist who is so wealthy he will not miss the money, but whose largess will substantially aid my niece in operating her Crippled Children's Home for another year."

He looked from Danforth to Leroy. "I confessed as much to Mr. Starbuck last night when he paid his bet. Also, I pointed out that he could deduct the full amount on his United States income tax return as a legitimate charitable contribution. He shook hands with me graciously enough—after telephoning a Tokyo lawyer he knows to confirm the existence of the Home, its Directress' name, and its telephone number."

"Well," said Danforth and Leroy, both dazed.

"Mr. Starbuck," Sakaguchi pressed on eagerly, "is willing to forget the entire incident. Can't you do the same? You've lost nothing. On the contrary, you gained the satisfaction of having solved a mystery that has baffled everyone exposed to it save yourselves." He paused. "I'm leaving the ship tomorrow, when we dock at Yokohama. I'm not finishing the cruise. And I would like to think you bear me no ill will for serving charity's sweet cause by using you and your charming wives as shills." He bared his gold tooth in a pleading smile.

Danforth and Leroy returned the grin. "It was our pleasure," Danforth said, bowing. "A privilege to help the Crippled Children's Home. But would you feel offended, Mr. Sakaguchi, if we just check a couple of things with Mr. Starbuck before you leave us tomorrow?"

complete detective *SHORT NOVEL* by

PHILIP WYLIE

Captain Ross, master of the transatlantic luxury liner Ilvania, was disturbed. He sensed and scented trouble—or worse. Twice since the Ilvania started back to the United States, the multimillionaire Emerson Stickney had nearly been killed. Accidents? Attempts at murder? And now the whole ship was tense, apprehensive—as if all the passengers were feeling a psychic expectation of disaster . . .

Meet an interesting cast of characters in this gripping short novel: the pompous Senator Prichard; the mysterious biochemist, Dr. Moklokus; the ambitious, scheming Senor Centora; the multimillionaire's breathtakingly beautiful secretary, Marian Bates; and last but not least, the young ship's doctor, Mark Adams, who finds himself in an incredible situation that compels him to combine detecting with doctoring. (Come to think of it: there aren't many stories in which a ship's doctor doubles as a detective.)

NOT EASY TO KILL

by PHILIP WYLIE

CAPTAIN ROSS, MASTER OF THE ILvania, walked along her boat deck through the warm and sluggish night. Smoke from the cherry-red tip of his cigar eddied behind him. Overhead, smoke also streamed from the two funnels of the passenger ship.

The Captain walked quietly, in a vague after-dinner mood. He was not thinking concretely but, rather, wondering and worrying. Presently he stopped.

Standing near one of the lifeboats was Dr. Adams, the ship's surgeon. A young man. He had taken off his hat. An aura of radiance from the deck below silhouetted his long nose, his sharp chin, his firm lips, the wind-stirred crest of his curly hair. The Captain had resented his youth when he had taken him aboard in New York. He had grumbled to the First Officer, "Doesn't even look like an intern."

But Dr. Adams had been polite, competent, and popular.

Popular. The Captain thought about that. Popular with the passengers. Popular in Paris with Miss Marian Bates. She had fallen in love with him—and probably he had with her.

Ordinarily the Captain would not have considered it a concern of his. Young people fall in love. But Marian Bates was the private secretary of Emerson Stickney. Because she was infatuated with the Ilvania's doctor, she had arranged that Stickney should return to America on that ship.

Perhaps Stickney had known. Perhaps not. Stickney was a rich and powerful man His presence on the Ilvania had attracted other personages who wished to confer with him in the leisure of sea voyaging: Dr. Moklokus, who was president of the Stickney Research Foundation; Senator Prichard; Hypolito Centora, a South American millionaire.

Captain Ross would ordinarily have been glad to have Emerson Stickney aboard. Stickney held a controlling interest in the shipping company which owned the Ilvania, and Captain Ross had become his friend in the course of many crossings.

Indeed, years before, when Ross had been a Third Officer, Stickney had found beneath his silent and taciturn exterior a well-informed and imaginative mind. And, although no mention had ever been made of the fact, Ross had discovered himself master of a ship soon after. Thus, the voyage might have been felicitous.

But there had been trouble. A scent of trouble. It hung now in the heavy, heated night. It seemed to breathe a melancholy uncertainty into the music of the dance orchestra. It was really nothing—but it had infected all the passengers with an unnatural tenseness, a psychic expectation of disaster.

Captain Ross was a large and squarely made man. One would not have believed him attuned to inflections that had almost no existence. But he had spent his life on ships, at sea. He had developed a sixth sense. Or a seventh.

The doctor turned from the rail and stuffed tobacco into a short pipe. He saw the Captain.

"Good evening, sir."

"Evening, Doctor." The Captain slowly crossed the boat deck, and the two men stood together. The Ilvania slid a few hundred yards toward America, carrying its people and its music.

"About that leak," the Captain said finally.

"That's what was on my mind," the young man answered. "A coil in a refrigerator can break down—as that one did. It lets out a poisonous gas. And if a nearby ventilation tube has become disjointed through wear, it will carry the gas into whatever stateroom it serves."

There was a pause. "Stickney wasn't harmed?"

"Not a bit. A light sleeper, I presume. If it had been carbon monoxide, it would have killed him. Sulphur dioxide merely woke him up."

The Captain nodded. "It looked accidental."

"Exactly."

"I haven't told you that Stickney was almost killed—again accidentally—when he came aboard?"

The doctor's face turned quickly toward the Captain. "No, sir. You hadn't."

"He was coming up the gangplank. There was a pile of trunks on A deck. One of them slid overboard."

"And barely missed him, eh?"

"I didn't see it happen. He glanced up, I'm told, as if he had heard it begin to slide. He dodged it. Nobody was seen near the trunks —they formed a regular labyrinth. And—again—one of them *could* have become unbalanced."

"I suppose men like Stickney have enemies."

The ship's master shrugged. "Their millions make them . . . Have you discussed the matter with Miss Bates?"

"Only casually. I—"

There was a silence. "You were going to say—?"

"I was going to say"—the younger man's voice took on a deliberately steadied quality—"that I'm afraid, Captain, I've fallen pretty thoroughly in love with that girl. I met her, as you may know, in Paris. I believe"—his confusion increased —"she persuaded Mr. Stickney to take the Ilvania on my account. You see, we are planning to get married —sometime soon."

The Captain said, "Hunh!" and smoked. Then he continued, "I wouldn't like to have anything happen to Stickney on board my ship. Maybe the trunk and the leaking gas were accidents. But I don't think so. When casual news makes the hair on the back of your neck creep—"

Dr. Adams nodded.

In a stateroom on A deck Marian Bates was standing in front of a mirror. She was singing softly to herself. A brunette with black eyes and white skin. Acquisitive, passionate, composed—a person of flickering inner thoughts, who looked both bold and secretive.

She was about twenty-two or three. If Stickney had been less powerful and more quick to anger, if Miss Bates had been less poised, her position as his secretary might have caused comment. She was extravagantly beautiful.

There was a knock at her door. She said, "Come in," so melodiously that it was almost a part of her song.

The door opened. Emerson Stickney stood there, grinning. He was tall, broad, hard, tanned, grizzled. A man of fifty, with flashing eyes,

beetling brows, and a jaw like a weapon. He wore a dinner jacket. His grin, which had been merry and faintly satanic, ebbed into boyishness.

"You don't need to decorate yourself for the doctor. Nature did better than all the dressmakers on earth could."

"Thanks."

He walked into the room. "Serious about him, aren't you?"

She looked at Stickney. The man of silent might. The man for whom Presidents sent. The man to whom the twanging accent of his native Maine still stuck.

"The doctor is mine—forever," the girl said.

His smile dropped. His brows knit. "Mean it, don't you?"

"I mean it."

"I hope you're right. I don't want to see a good secretary throw herself away. And you'll be quite a responsibility. Have you told him just how much of a responsibility?" His grin returned.

"No."

"How bad a disposition you have —?"

"No."

"Better do it. Or I will. I want to talk to him, anyway."

"You let me do all the talking."

Stickney laughed boyishly. "I would if you told the truth. But I saw you last night. Kissing, my dear, is not talking. All right. He looks good. His stock's old and sound—you can tell that from his face. He started at the bottom. So did I. If he's good enough for you, you'll get my blessing."

The girl walked up to Stickney, kissed him lightly on the forehead, and said, "I'd marry him in a minute without it, you know."

Dr. Adams and Marian Bates stood in the bow of the ship with their arms around each other. "I wouldn't want you to go on working for Stickney," he said. "But my salary is terribly small. You could have a little apartment, and three meals a day. Maybe one canary—and that's about all."

"It would be—plenty."

He kissed her; then he said, "I've been meaning to ask you—about your parents. I know your mother is dead—"

"I was born in Chicago," she replied, "and the less we say about my family, the better. Mind?"

"No."

"What about yours?"

"Poor," he said. "I guess I've always wanted to be a doctor. It's not easy to work your way through college and medical school, but I was lucky. A couple of doctors and a couple of professors helped me. I wanted to do research. But when my internship ended—I had to eat. One of my faculty friends heard of this job. Some day we'll hang out a shingle and go into the real surgery business."

Marian touched his cheeks softly with her lips. "And we'll hope that

rich people get in automobile accidents outside our door every day."

They laughed. They were in love. They were being sweet and gentle and kind to each other. Their words were full of desire. But in the dark over the ship hung the sword which the Captain had detected, and now the young doctor felt its presence.

"I meant to ask you. Did either you or Mr. Stickney ever think that the gas which leaked into his room the other night might have been no accident?"

"I don't think so. No."

"Did you know that a trunk fell overboard and nearly hit him as he came up the gangplank?"

"He mentioned it."

"I suppose a man like Stickney has hundreds of enemies."

"If he has," she answered, "it's because his enemies are crooks or cowards or thieves. He's a pretty swell person." She considered. "Of course, people have tried to kill him in the past. He isn't easy to kill."

"Not very comforting."

"I don't think there's anything in the idea." She observed that another couple were strolling along the deck, toward the bow. "Let's go and see how the bridge game is progressing."

In the smoking room Stickney was playing bridge. Stickney's partner was Dr. Moklokus. A huge, bald, pallid man with slate-colored eyes. They played against the booming-voiced Senator Prichard and sleek, gray-haired Senor Centora.

As Stickney's secretary and the doctor entered, they were settling their debts. Senor Centora and the Senator had taken out pens. "One thousand two hundred and ten, eh?" the Senator said cheerfully.

Dr. Adams flinched a little. The sum would have meant much to him.

Pens scratched.

Stickney looked gleefully at his companions. He winked at the pale Rumanian who headed his institute. "The doctor, here, knows psychology. And I know burglary. You gentlemen shouldn't have asked us to play." He turned. "Hello, Miss Bates, Doctor. How's the weather?"

"Hot," Marian answered, "and gloomy."

Stickney looked at his check and folded it. "We had a fine game."

"And a fine conversation," Dr. Moklokus added. "Emerson and I confounded our opponents throughout the game by talking about murder."

The eyes of the celebrated savant met those of the humbler member of his profession. "You're a doctor. You could have contributed. We four have been trying to decide the best method of killing a person without being detected. I suggested an overlong exposure to radiation. A needle in the medulla. Aconite. The Senator was more brutal, Senor Centora appallingly sadistic. And

Emerson merely contented himself by telling of a few murders he's known of in the Orient."

The men had turned their chairs. Dr. Adams brought two more for Marian and himself. He had a feeling that in this conversation dwelt the essence of the Captain's intangible worries. Behind the macabre entertainment was—what?

Not murder.

A rich and politically important South American gentleman. A Senator. A world-famous doctor. Not murderers.

The young man smiled. "I'm afraid I haven't any ideas," he said. "Murder is the one thing I'd be scared to try."

"But supposing," Dr. Moklokus continued, "you had to murder someone? What method would you choose—if it were only a matter of that choice?"

Stickney leaned forward. "Exactly."

"Well—then—I'd get my victim alone—and kill him—and deny it afterward. Take him hunting and shoot him, and swear it was an accident."

He again looked at the three men who had been playing bridge with Stickney. "Or take him out on deck and push him overboard."

"This," Marian said suddenly, "is my idea of a dull conversation."

She rose, and as the others stood, Stickney touched the arm of the ship's doctor. "Like to see you in my stateroom."

Both men excused themselves. When they were out on deck Stickney said, "Wanted to talk to you. Here." He unlocked a door that opened directly from the deck.

His stateroom was large and impressive. Queens had occupied that stateroom—and princes—and gamblers.

Stickney drew up chairs beside a table. He said to the young doctor, "Sit."

Mark Adams, M.D., a bright young man with slim prospects. Emerson Stickney, for whom Presidents sent when there were crises in Central America.

"My secretary tells me that she wants to marry you."

Mark Adams nodded. "I want to marry her. I love her."

"She is an extraordinary girl. I'm very fond of her. She's been with me as my secretary for three years. She has brains."

"I know it. I don't deserve a girl like that. I have ambitions, naturally. I think I will do some decent surgery some day. And I have a few ideas I'd like to work out by clinical and laboratory investigation."

"Suppose I told Moklokus to give you a job?"

The young man shook his head. "It would be immensely generous of you. But I've made every inch of my way so far in this world, Mr. Stickney. And I couldn't take a job now from the employer of the girl I'm going to steal from him."

"Where'd you go to college?"

"Yale."

"Work your way through?"

"Yes."

"And through medical school?"

"Cornell."

"And now you want to marry this girl. To stow her in a little apartment in New York while you commute back and forth across the Atlantic in order to earn her a few cheap dresses a year and three meals a day she cooks for herself."

"It won't always be just that. But I intend to begin exactly like that—if she's willing."

Stickney grunted. "All right. I'm glad you're determined. You see, I'm pretty keen not to have Miss Bates marry a wrong guy. I like you. I like what you've done in your life so far. But to get and keep a girl with her spirit you'll have to accomplish more."

"I know it."

"All right. How would you like to do a favor for me?"

"I'd like to."

Stickney took a cigar from a humidor on the table. He lighted it attentively. "Mark," he said, producing with that word almost as much shock as he did with those that followed, "what do you think my chances are of getting off this boat alive?"

The doctor paused and returned the steady gaze. "Then the trunk—the refrigerator leak—weren't accidental?"

"I think not."

"Who's doing it?"

Stickney shrugged. "I wish I knew. Who? A hired thug in the crew? A passenger? I don't know. A friend? Somebody is trying to kill me. They have been for the last two weeks I was in Europe. If I were killed now there would be the devil to pay. My holdings—my interest—they'd need a steady rein. And I'd want my murderer caught—because otherwise he—or she—might go on doing harm."

Mark Adams was breathing tensely and slowly. "I see. I'll stand by when I'm not on duty. I'll speak to the Captain and he'll set up a guard."

"It isn't just for the moment that I'm thinking, Mark. You can guard me now. But when I get off the ship—well, when and if it comes I want to have a strong, intelligent hand behind my estates. And I want my death avenged."

"I'm afraid I don't know enough about you, or your business, to help. And if you expect this sort of thing, I think it would be better to take steps to prevent it."

"Can't. Not my way of life. I can't go hiding around, and wearing bulletproof vests, and getting people to taste my food." Stickney chuckled. "Listen, Mark. All this may be wrong. We may catch some annoyed ex-employee of mine who has been sniping at me. I doubt it. What I want to do is to give you the funds, the power, and the authority to act for me if anything does happen. You don't know

much about me—but Marian does. So I want you to have my power of attorney. To be my chief executor."

Mark sat still. He stared at Stickney.

"I'm not insane," the older man said.

"I wasn't thinking that."

"You were—but we'll let it pass. Snap judgments of men have got me my best assistants. I think you have what it takes. You've got nerve—surgeons have to have it. You're sensitive. They have to be. Yesterday I radioed for a report on your work at school and as an intern. Dr. Spelman Grant, at the Medical Center, said you were the best man they'd turned out in ten years. That's more than enough. Now, I'm asking you if you will take over my whole estate and distribute it as I arranged—in case I am killed. Will you?"

The young doctor waited for a full minute. Then he said, "If you want me to—and if you think I can do it."

"Good. Because, Mark, you'd have to anyway—if you married Marian."

"I'm afraid I don't follow that."

"She's my daughter."

Stickney sat back, smiling.

Mark Adams had lost his color. He rose like a man struck hard enough to render him nearly unconscious.

Marian came into the room.

"You haven't any right to monopolize him for so long," she said gaily.

Then she saw Mark's face. She knew he had been told. Her words were tender. "Come on outside with me, Mark."

They walked up to the boat deck.

"I didn't know," he said. "Or I wouldn't have dreamed—"

"Nobody knows." She took his arm. "I'll tell you what happened. Father married his secretary secretly long ago in South Africa. In the first month they quarreled and separated. I was born. Mother died. Father was so bitter that when he heard about me he had me put in a 'good home' and brought up—and he forgot me and I never knew who I was until I was eighteen. The people who raised me weren't told who my father was, either.

"When I was eighteen he came to see me. I looked like my mother. I'd gone to public schools and taken a commercial course. He's a curious and devious man. He told me that he had been a friend of my father—and he offered me a job as a secretary in his office. I took it—and went to New York. I soon became his private secretary—and then, one day, he told me. He said his jealousy had made him do Mother a terrible wrong.

"He offered me the most glittering debut in social history—everything. But I was scared. I hadn't been trained for such things. And I'd grown to be pretty crazy about him. We had a swell time that day

and that evening at dinner—and when I asked him if I couldn't go on being his anonymous daughter —and secretary—at least till I'd learned about his world—he was terribly happy."

The doctor drew a long, tremulous breath. "Strange," he said.

"Darling. You mustn't mind. Don't you see? When I fell in love with you, I thought—if he knew that I was Marian Stickney he'd be stiff and formal and never dare talk to me. Oh—darling"—she realized that her explanation had not removed him from a sort of glassy calm, a studied aloofness—"it can't matter, can it?"

"I don't know, Marian. I wanted to fight for you. To work for you. I've hated the doctors I knew who married rich women in order to ease thier careers."

"Rich women are still women," she said quickly. "Flesh, blood, feelings, hopes, romantic desires." Her voice rose. "Oh, I know what you think. You think I've tricked you. It's cheap of you! You should be telling me that my contribution to —us—will just make you able to get your work done sooner and better. Think of it, Mark! You wanted to be a surgeon. All right. You can have your own hospital. You had ideas for research. All right. You can have the whole Foundation. I've been dreaming of what you'd do when I told you—"

"And I was dreaming," he answered miserably, "of a two-room apartment—"

"But—please understand!"

He shook his head. "I'm afraid I can't. It wasn't your fault. But don't you see? What you get in life without winning—only ruins you—"

Suddenly she was angry. "Ridiculous! Some kinds of idealism are stupid—and your kind is one."

She left him and he did not follow her.

Twenty minutes later Stickney came up to him. "Marian's in her room crying her eyes out. Well, Mark, I understand you. We've played you a sort of dirty trick. But I'm going to play a dirtier one."

"I don't mean to be unappreciative," Mark replied. "But don't you see? I wouldn't have a wife—I'd have a millionairess. I wouldn't have a practice—I'd have a job as a sort of super-banker and custodian of funds."

Stickney talked to him for an hour. Then he gave up. He said with abruptness, "All right, Adams. We'll leave Marian out. But remember your promise. You're going to take over for me if anything happens to me. I've already made arrangements. I've found a couple of lawyers aboard and deposited signed and sworn statements with the Captain."

He walked away through the dark.

For a long time Mark smoked.

He thought with aching irony of the devastating situation. Marian's millions had literally yanked her from his arms. They had taken away the romance, the intimacy, the equality from their relationship, and left only a rich girl trying to buy the object of her infatuation.

Mark was too proud to consider it. He could only ache with disappointment. He decided he was entitled to go back on his agreement to help in the Stickney affairs. He had been tricked into his promise.

Smoke poured into the starless sky. The dance music had stopped long ago. It was late. Below, somewhere, the night watch was hosing a deck. The Ilvania moved forward steadily, ominously.

Mark started below, and realized he would not be able to sleep. He walked around A deck. Marian was sleeping on that deck. And her father. He continued round and round.

There was no one stirring in the shadowy passageways, no one standing at the rail. Only the night and the water.

When he came around the deck forward and started astern for perhaps the tenth time, he saw another person. A passenger, half the boat length away, with his back to the rail. Even at that distance he recognized Stickney.

Mark was on the point of going below to avoid accosting Stickney. But, as his pace slowed, the man at the other end of the promenade suddenly gave a sharp, agonized cry. He buckled backward. There was no one near him, but he acted as if he had been struck.

Mark saw as he rushed forward that Stickney lost his balance. He teetered on the rail and fell into the blackness.

Mark heard the splash. Then, with all his strength, he yelled, "Man overboard!" and charged up the companionway toward the bridge.

His appearance there started things.

A quartermaster grabbed the engine-room telegraph.

The ship dragged as the screws were reversed. Voices yelled commands through speaking tubes.

Dim figures ripped the canvas cover from a searchlight, and its white finger raced out on the obsidian water. Davits creaked. Oars clattered. Other men leaped into places in a lifeboat.

Light burst along the top deck and the decks below. Passengers began to appear. Wakened officers hurried among them. "No alarm. Man overboard. We're putting about and sending over boats."

"Who was it?"

"Stickney."

Stickney. The multimillionaire.

Stickney went overboard. He committed suicide.

But it wasn't suicide.

Mark discovered the rope. A rope taken from a lifeboat and made fast to a davit. A rope on which some-

one had slid down from the boat deck to a point just above A deck—a point over the head of Stickney as he stood with his back to the water.

The man hanging on that rope had given one quick blow and perhaps pulled the stunned Stickney backward by the collar.

That was how Mark reconstructed it for the Captain. "I couldn't see anything well. He cried out, sagged, fell back, and dropped into the water. A man hanging above him on that rope would have been screened thoroughly. Just his arm might have shown for a fraction of a second. At that distance I couldn't have seen the blow struck even if I had been looking for it."

The Captain was satisfied for the moment. A steward came for the doctor. Miss Bates had fainted.

Mark hurried to her cabin. He had a glimpse of the small boat out on the water in the radiance of the searchlight.

Marian lay on her bed, a stewardess at her side.

But as soon as the stewardess moved away and Mark bent over her, she opened her eyes. With them she signaled that he was to get the stewardess out of the room. He sent her on an errand.

Marian spoke quickly, but in spite of the pressure of her thoughts her first words were, "Poor Dad! He was a swell person! I didn't really believe such a thing could happen."

"Are you all right?"

"I am . . . Mark, did you see anything at all, or find anything?"

"Just a rope made fast on the boat deck and dangling over the ship's side. Somebody slid down it to a place above your father's head and struck him."

Grief and pain in her eyes were subdued by the necessity of active thought. "Did Father tell you he had turned his affairs over to you?"

"He said he had."

"Then let everybody go right on thinking I'm his secretary."

Mark looked at her doubtfully. "I think you'll have to establish your identity."

She raised her head and stared at him. "I can't! Everybody on the ship knows you have been making love to me. Plenty of people know you had a long talk with Father tonight. If I reveal that I'm his daughter, and since you were the only person near him when he was killed, everyone will conclude—"

"That I did it." Mark had not thought of that. He sat silently for a moment and then, as he heard the stewardess hurrying back, he said, "I'm sure you'll be all right now, Miss Bates."

Then he left.

A second lifeboat had been put overboard. More than half the passengers were crowded around the rail, watching the eerie search.

Mark stood for a moment, frantically thinking. This was no time to think of his refusal to marry

Marian. She needed help. She might even be in the same danger that her father had been.

The Third Officer hurried through the crowd. "The Old Man wants to see you."

Captain Ross was sitting behind a desk in the reception room of his cabin. Reports were being brought to him from the bridge. Several people were in the room, including Senator Prichard and Senor Centora.

The Captain looked up gravely. "Adams, I've received a call by radio from Stickney's lawyers saying that Stickney informed them earlier this evening that you were to be put in full charge of his effects and that you had authority to act for him. Explain that."

Mark met the Captain's cold gaze steadily. "I can hardly explain it. I've known Stickney only since we left Bordeaux. I'm engaged to his secretary. He called me into his cabin and told me that he was conferring on me powers of attorney and other authority."

"Why?"

Mark kept his composure, although he realized that the Captain, the Senator, and the South American were listening incredulously. "He said that he expected he might be killed—and he wanted someone to take over his affairs and the pursuit of his murderer."

"Was he drunk?"

Senor Centora spoke softly. "Not in the least, Captain."

"He must have been insane then, Adams."

"I think not, sir."

The Captain spread out copies of several radiograms. He said quietly, "From these messages I gather that Stickney made you virtual dictator of his estate. It is unreasonable. If he expected foul play, and felt that he needed a competent person in whose hands to put his affairs, he could have availed himself of Senator Prichard here, or Senor Centora, who is an old friend, or Dr. Moklokus, who is familiar with his great philanthropies. Instead, he selected you, a doctor with no knowledge of business, a young man whom he had known only a few days. There must be some further reason."

Mark shook his head. "I can give none."

Senator Prichard, who had been breathing heavily as he listened, said to Mark, "It's unbelievable that he appointed you to such a position!" He thrust out his jowled face. "I would like to know, Doctor, how it happens that a few hours after you receive this fabulous appointment, Stickney was murdered and you were the only one who saw him go overboard! Wouldn't it have been possible for you to have killed Stickney and then given your cry for help afterward?"

The Captain broke in. "We can make no accusations of that sort, Senator, until we are convinced that Stickney's body has been lost."

The Senator turned around. "You said, yourself, Captain, that it was almost hopeless to look for the body of an unconscious man in the sea."

"I said 'almost.'" He turned to Mark. "That will be all for the moment, Dr. Adams."

It was morning. The ship was under way again and, although Captain Ross had delayed until after dawn to search for Stickney, all efforts had failed.

Dr. Adams went to his table in the saloon and had breakfast. The passengers at his table were silent. Ostentatiously silent. Mark caught them glancing covertly at him, and he realized that the incriminating circumstances surrounding him were already common gossip.

When he had finished his breakfast, the Captain again sent for him, and now he found the ship's chief officer closeted with Dr. Moklokus.

Mark observed instantly that the Captain's manner toward him had changed. At the same time he noticed that the magnified eyes of the bald doctor were regarding him with a strange attention.

The Captain said, "I'm sorry I was so rigorous this morning, Doctor. You see, Stickney's murder is a thing of world-wide consequence. His elevation of yourself in his affairs is of equal consequence. However"—he glanced toward the bald man—"when Dr. Moklokus heard the Senator's opinion about the matter he hurried up here. His stateroom is not far from Stickney's. He has just told me that he was lying in bed reading when he heard Stickney cry out. He rushed to his window in time to see Stickney's legs go over the rail.

"He heard you running down the deck, saw you stop at the place where Stickney had fallen, and as soon as you shouted, 'Man overboard!' he began to dress, realizing that you would be perfectly competent to handle the immediate situation."

This fortunate testimony filled Mark with a sense of immeasurable relief. "That is certainly lucky for me! And I'm immensely obliged to you, Dr. Moklokus."

"Think nothing of it, my boy. As a matter of fact, now that I think of it, I heard you tramping round and round the deck, and in one of your absences I heard Stickney's door open. He couldn't have been standing by that rail for more than two minutes before he was struck. Whoever let that rope down must have expected him to take a late breather. I wonder if it was a habit."

"I couldn't say," Mark answered, "but perhaps Miss Bates could."

The Captain sent for Marian, who told them that Stickney often slept very short hours and that he had taken a post by the rail of the Ilvania on previous nights.

They discussed the situation at length. Captain Ross finally said to

Mark, "It is, conceivably, the work of a stowaway. We will have the ship searched. I, myself, will cross-question all the persons aboard who knew Stickney or who talked to him on this voyage. I would like Miss Bates to go through all classes of the ship's passengers to see if she recognizes any persons who have had dealings with Stickney."

He looked at Mark. "Have you any further ideas, Dr. Adams?"

"Not at the moment, Captain. I'd like to go over the whole thing with Miss Bates."

"Certainly. As far as your authority to act in Stickney's stead is concerned I shall uphold it on shipboard. Mr. Stickney brought to me his sealed deputization of power yesterday evening. I opened those papers after my first conference with you this morning. Frankly, I can't see why Emerson Stickney chose you, but he did, and I respect his choice."

Mark shook his head perplexedly, and said, "If you'll excuse Miss Bates and myself—"

As soon as he had piloted her to a space out of earshot, he said, "It was swell of you to hold back the truth about yourself, because they suspected me of killing your father. But you don't have to do it any longer. Dr. Moklokus has cleared me." Rapidly he explained what had happened.

Marian took his arm, and then let go of it. "I don't think I want anyone to know about me yet," she said. "Look, Mark! If the world suddenly found out that I was his daughter, I might be killed the same way, mightn't I?"

"I don't know," answered Mark. "I don't know."

"As his daughter I would be thrown into a whirlwind. As his secretary I will be safe, and I can help you."

"Help me?"

At that precise moment a boy with a radiogram in his hand spied the doctor and delivered the message.

Mark tore it open.

He read:

DOCTOR MARK ADAMS
STEAMSHIP ILVANIA
WILL CHECK YOUR CREDENTIALS ON ARRIVAL STOP MEANWHILE ARE ACCEPTING YOUR AUTHORITY STOP HAVE YOU ANY INSTRUCTIONS STOP SUGGEST BUYING STICKNEY STOCKS WHEN MARKET OPENS AS NEWS OF MURDER WILL DOUBTLESS CAUSE DANGEROUS PRICE DROP STOP DO YOU AGREE STOP RADIO OR PHONE AT ONCE.

CYRUS BRADLEY
GORDON VANCE
MILTON G. DRESSER
L. Q. BLACK

Mark recognized some of the names. Black was president of the largest bank in the country. Vance was a utilities magnate. Bradley was a famous corporation lawyer. And they were waiting for *his* instructions!

His expression was so shocked

that Marian took the message and read it.

She smiled at him. She almost laughed. "When I said 'help you,' Mark, that's what I meant. Father wanted you to take over his affairs if anything happened to him, because he thought you were going to be my husband and you'd have to manage them some day."

He turned a haggard face toward her as she continued, "Maybe you don't want a wife, but you certainly do need a secretary. I think we ought to radio back and tell them to buy just enough to prevent any dangerous sag."

"I guess so," he said hollowly.

Marian thought for a moment. "Radio them to use the funds in the Conover National Bank. I think there's about seven millions on deposit. It may not hold the market, but we don't want to pay any more interest on brokers' loans than we have to."

Mark, still more baffled by the mention of the sum of money which he was going to authorize spending, suddenly grinned. "You'd better write the radiogram, and I'll sign it. I guess I do need—a secretary."

His grin worked a sudden miracle in him. The diseased night had passed. Emerson Stickney had died. Marian had moved unutterably beyond his possession. But she was still with him, and would be for some time.

That brought him an abrupt and dazzling feeling of comfort. He held he did not know how much power, over he did not know what incalculable resources. His morbidly low spirits lifted.

He looked at the girl, still grinning. "Come on," he said. "The radiogram first. Then I want to talk to you."

They sent the radio message, then they went to the room that had been Stickney's.

Marian sat down, sensing the change in him. Mark walked slowly back and forth in front of her.

"Now," he began; "in the first place I haven't the faintest concept of your father's affairs. Have you?"

"I know a lot about them."

"Enough to make sense in managing them?"

"With the advice of the men he trusted—yes. Even without it—as long as we don't start anything."

"Start anything?"

"You know," the girl replied. "Buy a railroad or build a hydroelectric plant or promote a new project. As long as we just coast."

"Oh. All right. We'll coast. We'll wait until his will is probated before we do more than that."

"Will they probate the will—without the body?"

"Certainly. It happened once while I was an intern. The body was destroyed, never found. Fire. But there was no doubt, no reasonable doubt, that the woman had

been burned. So her will was probated and her etate divided."

"Then, sooner or later, I'll have to become known for what I am."

"Yes." He walked one length of the room. "We get in day after tomorrow. There'll be time enough then to consider that problem. The one thing to think about now is who killed him. Have you any ideas?"

"No definite ones."

"Meaning what?"

She shrugged. "What about clues?"

"There aren't any clues, except the rope. That's been put away for examination by experts."

"Father must have been struck with something."

"Probably thrown into the sea."

"There weren't any fingerprints or anything up on the boat deck where the rope was tied?"

He smiled. "Nothing we could see . . . Next point: Moklokus, Prichard, Centora. Do you know them well?"

"I know the doctor very well. He visited Father a good deal. You see, Father has put millions into the institute that Dr. Moklokus presides over."

Mark nodded. "And a fine institute, too. Doing some of the best biochemical research on earth. You think the Rumanian genius is okay?"

"Except for his looks."

"A lot of doctors are funny-looking . . . How about Prichard?"

"I don't think Father cared much for him. He's from a state in which Father owns two hundred and fifty thousand acres and employs about thirty-five thousand men."

"Gosh!"

She ignored his surprise. "He's a windbag. A demagogue. He curries favor with Father because Father is powerful in his political territory."

"Right . . . Centora, then."

"I never saw him before. He is from Belgian Guiana in South America. Father discovered gold there when he was nineteen. That was the beginning of his fortune. He built and owns the railroads. He owns a steamship company that trades there. The natives have a Spanish nickname for him that's translated into 'The Blue-Eyed Papa.' Centora is a rich *politico.* He's on the side politically that's against outside ownership. But cautious. It wouldn't do to cross Father publicly in Belgian Guiana."

"And all those three gentlemen happened to be in Europe and decided it would be useful to travel on the same boat with your father. Why?"

"Dr. Moklokus was attending a medical conference in Vienna. The Senator was on some mission in Germany. Centora was amusing himself in Paris. At least, that's what they say. But as to why they wanted to see Father . . . There are three good reasons. Father refused to renew Dr. Moklokus' contract as president of the Founda-

tion, just before we went abroad."

Mark whistled. "Why?"

"The books weren't straight. Father called the doctor on the carpet and they had a furious argument."

"And Senator Prichard's reason?"

Marian drummed with her fingers on the arm of her chair. "I don't know much about that. Father hated crookedness. He made his money by imagination and energy. Exploitation, if you will. But never by treachery. The Senator, I just guess, was using knowledge of what the government would do, which he obtained in committees, for swelling his own purse. Father wrote him guardedly about it. I took the letter. And the Senator, after that, was very anxious to explain."

"What would your father have done?"

"Seen to it that he resigned—ill health. Or exposed him."

"That leaves Centora."

"Mr. Centora would like—like, I say—to be the dictator of Belgian Guiana. It's a republic under nominal foreign supervision. It will be—or would be—as long as Father stood in the way."

The young doctor sat down abruptly. "Three men whose careers depended on your father, and whose careers were being threatened by your father, are on this ship. And those three gentlemen, only last night, were all discussing the best way to commit murder."

"And you suggested getting a man alone and throwing him overboard."

Mark looked at Marian.

Her eyes were steady.

He shook his head. Then he got up.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Interview your father's friends."

She regarded him for a moment. "It's not a good idea."

"I think it is."

"All right."

He went toward the door. He turned. He was on the verge of saying something tender and personal.

She looked receptive. She said, "What?"

"Nothing. See you later."

He did not get to his interviews at once. His duties as ship's surgeon occupied him until bouillon was being served on the decks.

He found Senor Centora sprawled in a deck chair. The South American rose when Mark stood before him. "Ah, Doctor! I've wanted to congratulate you, since I heard you have acceded to the charge of the great Stickney's enterprises."

"Thanks. I wanted to see you."

Centora's smile was radiant. "I am honored," he said.

Mark leaned back in his deck chair. "I wanted you to acquaint me with the principal facts of the Stickney holdings in Belgian Guiana."

The South American smiled more broadly. "I shall be happy!

Stickney made my country. He is our national hero. We have quarreled with him often—hated him never."

"You were quarreling with him on the voyage," Mark said, as if the fact were positive knowledge.

Centora's voice became minutely less pleasant. "A small quarrel. We wish to make slight changes in our government."

Mark took a shot in the dark. "And you proposed that Stickney cut in with you on handing over a dictatorship to you. You offered to drop out the other foreign property holders. What?"

Senor Centora politely accepted his broth from the deck steward. His smile, when the man had gone, was no longer in existence. He said icily, "May I be privileged, Dr. Adams, since you have so much power and wish foolishly to wave it in my face, to ask what your attitude from now on will be?"

Mark rose and stretched. "Can you climb ropes, Centora?" he asked.

Senator Prichard was amidships, talking to whoever would listen. He saw the doctor walking toward the group.

"Doctor!" he shouted. "I want a minute alone with you, old man."

"Fine. How about my dispensary?"

"Excellent."

The Senator sat down on a porcelain-finished chair and beamed. "I have a thousand pardons to beg of you, old man, for being so rude in the Captain's office this morning! I jumped to an idiotic conclusion when I insinuated that you might by any conceivable circumstance—"

"I might easily have done it," Mark answered calmly. "But I didn't."

The Senator lost a little of his enthusiasm for apology. "Of course not. A moment of calm reflection—"

Mark lit a cigarette. "Did *you* kill him?"

The eyes under florid folds of flesh, generally full of professional merriment, snapped briefly with a baleful and revealing shrewdness. "I get it, Adams. You have a right to accuse me. Tit for tat, eh? And pretty smart. If I'd done it, you'd have caught me thoroughly off my guard."

He laughed uproariously. "No, sir. Emerson was one of my most esteemed friends. And, by the way, I want to count you as a friend of mine, too. Emerson picked you to look after his estate, and, by George, I'm beginning to see what a clever fellow he picked!"

Mark said, "*M*-m-m-m. One clever fellow can discern another, eh?"

Again the sharp flash of the porcine eyes. Again the humorous wag of the head. "Not guilty, Adams! I'm just a bull-headed politician. Started out as a cow-hand in the old days. I—"

A bell rang. Mark answered a phone.

"Tell him I'll be right down." He looked at his guest. "Sick girl in the second class. I'll be seeing you, Senator. But if you were a cowhand, you must be very clever with ropes —as well as with anticipating Federal business moves, from your inside position."

The Senator tried to hide alarm by boiling to his feet. But Mark had opened the door. "Clever with ropes," he repeated, and left the apoplectic Senator.

Mark knocked on a door in a passageway. A cultured voice said, "Come in!"

Mark walked into the room. He smiled. "Doctor Moklokus."

The celebrated biochemist waved Mark into a chair. "Considerate of you to pay me this visit."

"I was just talking with the Senator."

"Ah?"

"A friendly person. Great men," Mark continued disarmingly, "are always simple."

A faint smile moved the pale lips on Moklokus' still paler face. "Almost always. A few are complicated. I, for example. Tell me. Why did Stickney suddenly authorize you to represent him?"

"Caprice. Whim."

"I've been wondering. Perhaps he was deeply in love with that girl. Perhaps when he found you had won her, he determined to leave her and her lover—yourself—possessed of his goods. Men in love have done stranger things."

Mark looked astounded. "I never thought of such a thing!"

"Then, too, he may have committed suicide last night. And left the evidences of an untraceable murder to keep his memory clear of the taint of self-destruction . . . I wanted," the bald man continued, "to speak of one or two things. As you know, my whole life is bound up with my work at the Foundation."

"I've always admired it."

Moklokus smiled. "Thank you. Now, Stickney refused, two months ago, to renew my contract."

Mark appeared surprised. "But why?"

The Rumanian pondered a moment. Then he said, in his low, eloquent voice, "In all men there are weaknesses. I am a strong man, Adams. Very strong. But I have had, since my days of abject poverty in Bucharest, an almost ungovernable lust for the possession of money. As president of the Foundation I handled staggering sums. And, about a year ago, acting in a trance-like manner—a hypnotic state, the product of long psychic accumulation—I embezzled about fifty thousand dollars from the Foundation."

Moklokus' face was impassive. "Stickney, of course, discovered it. I paid back the money at once. But he naturally refused to renew my contract. He had a fanatical hatred

of dishonesty. I went to Vienna when he sailed this spring. I hoped to see him. I pleaded with him. He was adamant." Moklokus stopped there.

Mark looked at him for a long time. "Why are you telling this to me?"

The Rumanian spread his white, thick-fingered hands. "Because you should know. It will be you, now, who disposes of Stickney's estate—and of me, so to speak. I hoped that you, being a surgeon, might understand the values involved more completely."

His smile returned, slight now, and self-deprecatory. "Obviously, I would never again commit that crime. A treasurer could be set to guard me. But my work—is individual, and important."

Mark thought fast and hard. This was, evidently, the truth. Moklokus had intelligence enough to tell the truth—or part of it—to gain subtler ends. He rose and said, "Dr. Moklokus, if my influence is accepted, you may be sure that I shall keep your—lapse—a secret. And I shall use every energy I possess to have your contract renewed." He held out his hand.

Moklokus took it, impassively shook it, and then turned his head away. Mark left the room.

Mark ate lunch in abstraction, automatically responding to the congratulations of the passengers at his table. He spent two hours after lunch in the ship's hospital—thinking. Once or twice he walked out and through the ship. He saw Moklokus playing chess with Centora. Later he saw the South American talking with the Senator.

He spent a considerable period with the ship's master and his officers. Captain Ross had made as complete an inquiry as he could. But all his efforts added nothing to the known facts of Stickney's death.

At four o'clock Marian telephoned Mark.

He went to see her immediately, and told her in detail what had happened.

When he had finished, her eyes were glowing. "You're brilliant, Mark. Which one do you give first place to?"

"First place? They were all angry enough at your father to have killed him."

"What are you going to do next?"

"Wait and see what they say to me—after they have had time to fix up phony answers."

"Moklokus won't say any more."

"No." Mark suddenly started. "Marian! By golly! Think of this: perhaps Moklokus was asleep when your father was killed and never did hear or see anything. But when he learned I'd been given authority to act for the estate he went up and alibied me—to win my friendship."

"Or—" Marian said breathlessly.

"Or perhaps he wanted to alibi himself. When he got me out of a hole by saying he'd seen the entire

thing, he naturally made all of us assume that he was tucked in bed. He may have seen me, all right, but from that rope."

Marian nodded slowly, several times. "That's a thought to be filed for later reference . . . Now. I've had the radiograms for you sent to me."

"What radiograms?"

She smiled. "The stock market's open. You should be standing at a ticker right now, with a phone in your hand. The Stickney holdings dropped—ten points. They then rallied a bit. The tickers carried the news that you were to represent Dad. That knocked off another five points. I radioed Black to announce secretly, but so it would get around the Street, that you had been in training for years as Dad's bright young man, and had been in virtual management of his properties for the last eighteen months. The rumor spread. The stock rose. We bought our own stuff, and are still buying, and will be for another twenty minutes."

Mark sat down on a chair. "So I'm a sensation in Wall Street."

"You're headlines—all over America."

"Gosh! Say. What are our holdings?"

Marian brushed back her dark hair with her hand. "Do you want to know? Well, Alaska Promontory, Cape Metals, Bicolor Pictures, Trans-America Gas and Light—"

"Never mind," Mark said. "I'm sorry I asked. Will you write them down? And a note about each?"

She nodded. "I was going to—before I called. But last night or this morning somebody came in and stole the typewriter from Dad's room. It was a portable. I've sent a steward to send up another."

"Anything else stolen?"

"No. The typewriter was on the desk, in its case—a black case—ready to be taken."

"Good," Mark answered absently. "I'll never learn all those securities. Never."

"You've got to," she replied. "I'll get it ready right after dinner. And you can cram. The whole world will meet you at the boat, and you've got to be able to seem glib. You'd better go now."

She smiled at him, and her smile made him stand unwillingly at the door.

Marian understood his expression. "Rich women have feelings," she said gently. "But you imposed the conditions, Doctor."

At midnight he threw himself, half dressed, on his bunk. He unfolded the long list of Stickney properties Marian had compiled. "AIP—Alaska Promontory. Gold mines. Valued at $2,250,000; 500,000 shares of common stock. Stickney owns 100,000. BGG—Belgian Guiana Gold. Common and Preferred —"

He realized that he was exhausted. He shut his eyes for a nap . . .

The Ilvania plowed toward America. And Mark slept. He slept while a million Americans spoke his name to a million others. Then it was heard for the first time in India and Australia and England in the hours of dawn. Around the world.

A knock on his door, soft but imperative, woke him. He sat up. "Yes?"

The white face of a steward peered in. "Doctor! Come at once."

"Somebody sick?"

"I think so, yes."

He pulled on his coat and snatched the black bag from a rack. He followed the steward.

Outside a first-class cabin stood two men—seamen—on guard. Mark saw the Captain coming down the passageway.

He stepped back.

Captain Ross jerked his head and went into the cabin first. Mark followed.

There was no one in the room. No one alive. The lights were all on. In his bed lay Senator Prichard. There was a revolver in his partly clenched hand. A .45.

A bullet had made a hole in his forehead and shattered the back of his skull. The pillow was drenched with blood.

Captain Ross shut the door of the cabin and said, "Shot was heard and reported by a passenger about ten minutes ago."

Mark bent over and stared at the butt of the revolver. He saw the initials *M.J.P.* engraved there.

"Killed himself," Mark murmured.

The Captain's face was grave and perplexed. "I don't understand it."

Mark's eyes had fastened themselves on the writing desk. He walked over to it. On it was a portable typewriter. He noted almost automatically that the case top lying beside it was blue—it couldn't be the one that had been stolen from Marian.

There was a sheet of paper in the machine. Several lines had been written on the paper. They were unevenly and rather clumsily typed.

What Mark read aloud was a message from Prichard: "It's no use. I killed Stickney. My reasons for doing it are private and will never be known."

"He was drunk when he wrote that," the Captain said.

Mark nodded. "He probably had something pretty serious on his mind. Prichard wasn't the sort of fellow who would take his own life without plenty of cause."

"No," Ross answered absently.

"There is nothing we can do here, anyway—"

Together they left the room. The ship's master instructed the men on guard to remain at their posts, and walked on deck with the doctor. Some time later Mark bade the Captain good night and went to his quarters. He undressed slowly.

Stickney had been killed by Prichard. That was that.

He stretched out in his bunk with

his eyes closed. The heavy night and the incubus which swam in it made his sleep uneasy. And he sat up tensely when there was another sharp knock on his door.

"Come in!"

It was a member of the crew to tell him that the Captain wanted him.

Daylight was streaming into his room. He glanced at his clock. Half-past eight. A few minutes later he presented himself at the Captain's cabin.

Ross nodded, and unrolled a pair of trousers on the desk top. "These were in Prichard's closet."

Mark picked them up. Except for the fact that they were crumpled from having been rolled, he noticed nothing unusual about them. They were a reddish-brown, heavy tweed. He remembered having seen Prichard in the suit.

"Take a good look at the outside of the right leg."

Mark repeated his examination, and then saw several small spots. "Blood?"

"That's what I want you to tell me," the Captain answered. "These trousers were hanging in Prichard's closet. I went back to have another look at his things myself. I noticed those spots. He didn't dress for dinner on the night Stickney was killed, and he was wearing that suit. Now, if he had slid down the rope and hit Stickney, a few flecks of blood might have spotted his trousers. But there is a more significant item. Sticking to the insides of the trouser legs I found a couple of short hemp fibers."

Mark shook his head. "I'll take a look at those stains under the microscope. It'll be easy enough to tell whether they are human blood or not."

Half an hour later, Mark returned from the ship's hospital and made his report. "It was blood all right. That's a terrible thing to think of—Prichard sliding down that rope, slugging Stickney, and pushing him into the sea."

Ross looked searchingly at the doctor. "It is. Well—thanks, Doctor."

Mark returned to his quarters, bathed, shaved, and breakfasted. Then he went out on deck. The passengers were obviously depressed. Few people were sitting in the sunlight. Marian, however, was in her deck chair. He sat down beside her.

"Do you think," she said, "that Prichard killed my father?"

He nodded.

"I don't."

He turned quickly toward her. "We found bloodstains on the trouser leg of the suit he was wearing that night. And two or three hemp fibers—from the rope."

The girl was staring out to sea and talking in a low tone. "I could see Moklokus murdering somebody. Or Centora. He has ambition. But not Prichard, somehow. He was crooked. He was vain, and he

wouldn't have liked the exposure of his little racket. But he's not a murderer."

Mark smiled. "A woman's intuition? You're upset."

"I'm not. And even if he were a murderer, he simply wouldn't commit suicide. He liked life too much."

"But the facts . . ."

"What facts?" Marian gazed steadily at Mark. "He was found dead with his own gun in his hand. All right. Somebody could have stolen his gun, shot him, and put the gun in his hand. It would take quite a while after the shot for anybody to get there. In fact, it did take quite a while. I asked. In that time a murderer could have easily gotten away.

Mark looked at the girl apprehensively. "But, Marian, that's not all—"

"Of course it's not all. But it would have been a cinch to steal those trousers and put blood and pieces of hemp on them. And that note was written on a typewriter. It wasn't in Prichard's handwriting. Anybody could have done that, too. Senor Centora spent the whole evening in Prichard's cabin. They were both drinking. Centora could have written that note by just pretending he was fooling with the typewriter —then shot Prichard or typed the note right after the murder."

"Wouldn't it be easier, Marian, just to assume that what very evidently took place, *took* place? Wouldn't it be easier not to make up such elaborate explanations?"

She caught his arm. "Do you *really* believe Prichard committed suicide?"

"No."

She relaxed. "I didn't think you did."

"I don't believe it," Mark said slowly. "And I have a hunch Captain Ross doesn't believe it, either. But what can we do?"

"Nothing now, but I think that when Senor Centora gets off the boat tomorrow we ought to have detectives shadow him. I can arrange it by code right now."

Mark started to his feet. "That's a good idea. And what about taking the same precaution in the matter of Dr. Moklokus?"

"You were speaking of me?"

Mark turned his head and smiled blandly. Dr. Moklokus had emerged from a companionway in time to overhear the mention of his name. "Why, yes, Doctor. I was just telling Miss Bates about some of your work in histology."

The bald Rumanian nodded politely and moved down the deck. Mark turned to look back at him. Moklokus had also turned. The friendly expression which he had worn as he emerged from the companionway had vanished.

Five times during the afternoon Mark talked on the radiophone with New York, prompted by Marian. The men with whom he talked were men whose names he had seen in newspaper headlines. Mark

gave the intricate operations which he conducted a calculated aspect of certainty and confidence.

He had to rely on his own invention often. Gordon Vance wanted to know if Stickney's philanthropies could count on their regular annual appropriations. Mark said they could. Vance also said that Moklokus' contract had come up for renewal. Mark ordered it renewed.

Black gave a statement of their market position. Mark requested that unless there was a further sag in the Stickney holdings, stocks be allowed to seek their own levels. Black called again to say that several large accounts were being quietly withdrawn from his bank. Mark put his hand across the telephone and reported that to Marian.

She said quickly, "We've got to do something to restore confidence there."

Mark, reducing the situation to simple elements because he could understand it no other way, whispered quickly, "Why don't we tell Black to buy another bank? Or to announce that he is negotiating to buy one?"

"Good! Suggest it," Marian said.

Mark did so.

Black's dignified voice took on a quality of excitement. "I'd thought of that, Dr. Adams, but I was afraid to offer it. May I say that in my opinion Emerson appointed a brilliant successor?"

Mark replied, "Thank you, Mr. Black," hung up, and grinned at Marian. "I make a first-rate tycoon."

Evening.

There was no festive dinner. No Captain's Ball. Conversations everywhere were subdued.

After dinner Marian and Mark sat together, until she said, "I'm going to try to get some rest. You'd better, too, because tomorrow you will find out what it means to be a national figure. And I suggest that you study your lessons in Stickney stocks."

Reluctantly he bade her good night.

He was very weary. He went to his cabin and pored over the stock lists. After two hours he went to bed.

The Ilvania steamed westward. Montauk Light had been sighted. In the hours after midnight the engines cut their speed and the ship moved into the harbor. She dropped anchor off quarantine. A police boat came alongside. But the murderer of Stickney had killed himself, and the work of the police would be only routine.

Just before daybreak the quarantine ship came out, loaded with reporters.

They woke Dr Adams. They bribed a stewardess to waken Miss Bates. And, as the sun rose over the city, first Adams, then the girl, and later other passengers were interviewed and cross-questioned and photographed.

Mark had one brief moment of

comparative privacy with Marian. They were standing on the boat deck. His face was taut and alert. "You stick with me everywhere I go today. Remember, you're my secretary."

She nodded, and smiled a little. "I remember offering myself for the position. You never really accepted me."

Mark grinned. "It's a fine position."

At lunch, downtown, with President Black of the Conover National Bank, with Vance, the utilities man, and Bradley, the corporation lawyer, Mark looked at Marian. His head spun. All the morning he had been with these celebrated men. He had been talking in millions and tens of millions. Of the situation in Washington. And of the provisions in Stickney's will. He was putting on a good act, but this was not his way of life.

In the afternoon he occupied Stickney's private office on the sixty-eighth floor of a skyscraper. He sat behind Stickney's desk. Marian was at his side. Men with great names came and went. On Mark's desk was a newspaper. Its front page carried his photograph, with the caption, *Czar of Stickney Fortune.*

Between his tightly packed and awesome appointments, Marian had time to say only such little things as, "You're doing fine!" and he to reply, "It's like playing God—and almost as terrifying."

Dinner with three men who had hurried up from Washington. Afterward he went to a suite which Marian had engaged for him at a hotel. At ten o'clock he was closeted with a railroad president who had flown from Chicago. At eleven he had time once again to talk with the reporters.

He found himself mouthing phrases that he had read as the words of other industrialists: "America cannot falter, because, if she wishes, she can be abundantly self-sufficient;" "Science and invention are the parents of wealth and employment—not its enemies."

Then it was one o'clock, and he found himself sitting in the reception room of his suite, looking with a sort of exhausted triumph at Marian.

"I guess," she said, "that's all for today."

"Except that I promised to write a couple of letters. If you've got the strength left, could you write them tonight?"

She nodded, and then hesitated. She picked up the telephone and asked for the desk. She turned to him before she spoke. "I've got to get a typewriter sent up. I forgot that mine was stolen."

She made her request and hung up. When she faced Mark again, she jumped to her feet. "What's the matter?"

Mark was pale. "Your typewriter disappeared just before your father died?"

"I guess so."

"It had been in its case on the desk that evening?"

"Certainly. Somebody stole it either before or after father was killed."

Mark's eyes were shining. "That's it! That means Prichard was murdered!"

Marian was frightened. "Mark! For heaven's sake—!"

"It must have been Centora! He was with Prichard that night, getting him drunk—"

"If you would just take it easy, Mark, and explain—"

"No time! What was the name of the detective agency that we cabled to watch Centora?"

Marian told him.

A moment later he was on the telephone. A man who spoke with painstaking slowness said, "Mr. Centora registered at the Colonnade Hotel, had dinner there, went to bed, and left a call for nine o'clock tomorrow morning. Then he got up, dressed, came down the stairway, and sneaked out of the lobby. He took a cab to the Stickney Foundation."

"When was that?"

"Twenty minutes ago."

Mark looked at Marian. "We're going to visit Dr. Moklokus at once. Come on!"

The Stickney Foundation was an enormous red-brick building on the edge of the Hudson River. Here and there lights burned on its facade, lights that represented people working late over the enigmas of science.

A doorman stopped them. Mark produced his card. "Dr. Stevenson sent for me. A friend of mine."

"Seventh floor. Laboratory K."

They took an elevator.

They got off at seven and walked through gloomy corridors. "What floor is Moklokus on?" he whispered.

"Third."

"We'll go down the stairs."

The door to the great scientist's private suite and laboratories was locked. They tiptoed into the room next to it and tried a connecting door. It was locked. Then the fire escape.

It gave them access to a window in the adjacent laboratory. The window was locked. Mark went back and returned presently with a long, thin-bladed knife. He found Marian waiting tensely on the fire escape. He turned the window lock with the knife.

They stepped gingerly into Moklokus' workrooms. Rooms crowded with intricately blown glass. Walking there in the near-blackness was dangerous.

They found another door beyond, opening into a short, pantry-like chamber filled with shelves of paraphernalia. And a second door at the end of that closet. Mark put his ear to it.

He heard voices, and recognized them.

Centora was talking softly, wickedly to Moklokus. "My dear Doctor, you were a close friend of Emerson Stickney's. Your opinion will have immense weight. I want you simply to suggest that his holdings in Belgian Guiana be liquidated. I, myself, propose to take over the conduct of affairs there. And I am quite sure that you will do everything in your power to assist me."

Moklokus' reponse was faintly strained. "My dear Centora, *why* are you so certain that I'll help you plunder Stickney's estate?"

"I am very certain. You see, Dr. Moklokus, I happened to observe you in the act of filching Senator Prichard's trousers from his room while he was at dinner. From that I conclude that you murdered the worthy politician."

Moklokus spoke slowly. "And what other conclusions have you reached about me, Centora?"

"Merely that you were in a most uncomfortable predicament, which led you to do away with Stickney. And then, since your predicament was still somewhat uncomfortable, you thought that the suicide of a self-confessed murderer would be the most effective method of concealing"—he paused delicately—"whatever the little matter was you wished to conceal."

There was a pause. The Rumanian scientist replied almost lightly. "That's really very perceptive of you, Centora. You reason that I would feel the investigation certain to follow Stickney's murder might become embarrassing to me. That I would do away with Prichard, thereby removing suspicion from myself. However, since you knew that I had committed one murder—since you assumed I had committed two—I am rather surprised at your temerity in coming here to blackmail me tonight, Centora. In fact—"

Marian and Mark had not caught any noticeable change in Moklokus' tone. It was soft and polite. However, his speech was punctuated with a muffled explosion.

There was a moment of absolute silence.

Then the crumpling thud of a body.

After that a longer silence, which was broken by a new voice.

It was the voice of Emerson Stickney saying, "Drop that gun, Moklokus."

Mark, listening at the door, felt Marian shudder and sag as she heard her father speak. He put his arm around her.

On the other side of the door was an unimaginable scene. Moklolus had just shot Centora, and, suddenly, Stickney had appeared from the dead.

There was a long, soundless pause.

Then Moklokus broke it with words that trembled slightly. "Ah, Stickney! You've heard our conversation? I thought that when I shot Centora just now I had executed your murderer. But since you

weren't murdered, I am rather at a loss—"

Stickney's voice was peaceful. "Centora thought you had killed me. You thought Centora had killed me. I'm surprised that you went to such pains to cover up a murder of which you were not guilty. It was adroit—but dangerous."

Moklokus answered, "Not so dangerous. If Centora had not spied me—" He sighed. "It is regrettable that I didn't get you, Emerson. The trunk. The refrigerator gas. But when I heard you were gone, I thought—"

"You thought Centora had done me in. Now, if you'll just come out from behind your desk—"

There was a sound of moving feet, and then the Rumanian spoke again, his voice suddenly vibrant. "Stickney, you will see that I am going to pick up my gun! Before you can get across the room to me! Isn't that light I see shining through the chambers of your revolver?"

"Don't move!" Stickney shouted. "One chamber is loaded."

Moklokus sighed. "Quite so. Your pistol is not loaded. Unfortunately for you, mine is, and now that I have picked it up and you have not shot me, I can complete the undertaking on which I have embarked. I have facilities here for disposing of any amount of biological waste. Your body as well as Centora's."

Stickney had tried to bluff him with an empty revolver and failed.

Moklokus was talking again. "Before I kill you, Emerson, I wish you would explain your appearance. Perhaps, when Centora hit you, you only feigned unconsciousness, and caught yourself on the rail of the deck below?"

"No," Stickney answered in an even tone. "If you're really interested in why I'm not dead—that is to say, why I am not yet dead—I'd be delighted to tell you."

"Please do."

Stickney began talking slowly, with remarkable calm. He talked to gain time in which to think. Talked to save his life, if it were possible.

"My maneuvers would appeal to you, Moklokus. I knew young Adams was making circuits of A deck. I went to the boat deck by the inside stairs. I wore gloves. I tied the rope. Then, between rounds of the young man, I took my post at the rail of A deck.

"When Adams appeared, I pretended to have been struck. I groaned. I toppled backwards, and then slid down the rope. One deck. I might have been seen. There might have been someone on the deck below. As a matter of fact, there was."

Mark and Marian, on the other side of the door, listened with frantic concentration. Moklokus was going to kill Marian's father—but he was in no hurry. And the financier was talking coolly, while part of his mind was unquestionably struggling for a way to escape being murdered.

Moklokus was aware of the fact. "Talk as much as you like, Stickney. Think as much as you like. I believe there is no way out of your present dilemma. But I am curious about one or two facts and I'd be grateful if you'd answer them before I kill you. You were saying that there was someone on the deck below?"

"It was Captain Ross."

"Ah!"

"The Captain has been my friend for a great many years. Earlier in the evening I explained to him that I was going to stage a fake murder."

"Why?"

"Because somebody was trying to kill me. You, for instance. I thought that if I were already dead it would frustrate my enemy. I assumed that by his actions after I had gone I could identify him. Then I had another motive."

"Which was—?"

"Young Dr. Adams. I had become interested in him. I was anxious to see if he would be competent to handle my affairs. It was imperative that I should know his full abilities and his basic character."

In the dark, behind the door, Mark knew what he would have to do. Stickney was coming to the end of the story. Moklokus would soon shoot. There was an even chance that the Rumanian's back would be to the door behind which Mark and Marian listened.

Mark would have to take that chance. He would have to open the door slowly and noiselessly—creep across the room—attack Moklokus.

Of course, Stickney—if it were Stickney who faced the door—would see the whole thing, and Stickney's eyes might betray the attempt. In that case, Moklokus would start shooting, and Mark and Marian's father would have only a slim chance. If it were Moklokus who faced the door, there would be no chance for either of them.

Mark seized the knob in tense fingers and began to turn it. Marian gripped his arm for an instant to indicate that she understood.

He opened the door a little.

Stickney's voice went on, "Yes, Dr. Moklokus, I wanted to test that young man. So I thought that while I was 'dead' I would let him be the dictator of my enterprises. And I am proud to say that Dr. Adams has done a magnificent job."

Mark had opened the door. He was able to look into the room. Moklokus, back toward him, was sitting at a desk twenty feet away.

Mark slid into the room. For a fraction of a second his eyes met Stickney's, and Mark's heart hammered with admiration: Stickney did not move a muscle of his face. He merely went on with his story as Mark started inching toward Moklokus.

Stickney, in fact, arranged that story so that its most dramatic disclosure would surprise the Rumanian at the instant when Mark was

ready to spring. "Of course, Captain Ross assisted me. It was in his own cabin that I hid. I heard your testimony to the Captain that established Dr. Adams' innocence. What was that, Moklokus? An effort to cast suspicion away from yourself? Or an attempt to ingratiate yourself with Dr. Adams when you found he had so much power?"

Moklokus answered lightly, "A little of both."

Mark had covered more than half the distance.

Stickney was nodding almost amiably. "You're a resourceful person. At the very outset of this business you almost got me. Twice. When I went, you thought Centora had done it. But as long as people would be probing my affairs in search of a murderer, your precious reputation was in jeopardy.

"So you provided a murderer—a dead one who couldn't defend himself. Not Centora. You were positive that he'd keep mum, and he was too slick to kill easily, anyway. Prichard . . . But I imagine you were quite surprised when I walked in here this evening."

"Surprised—and delighted."

"Naturally. It gives you the opportunity to settle everything, once and for all. But I will take the liberty of suggesting that from now on you beware of Dr. Adams. He is extremely competent. After my death—or even right now, for that matter—he will be dangerous."

Mark edged forward.

"You can doubtless give the proper psychological term to your particular brand of insanity," Stickney continued. "Megalomania—something like that. And this is your moment, isn't it? Too bad the gun Ross lent me is empty.

"And just one other thing, since I see you're getting impatient. I had an additional motive in pretending to have been murdered. Young Mark Adams was engaged to Miss Bates and—circumstances—had spoiled that engagement. I thought my 'death' would act as a powerful force to bring them back together. You see, Moklokus, my interest in Adams is not entirely detached. He is going to be my son-in-law."

"Son-in-law!" Moklokus was startled.

"Precisely. Miss Bates, my secretary, is actually my daughter."

"Daughter!"

"I'll explain that to you. I—"

Mark had covered the distance. He dove for the hand in which Moklokus held the gun. His chest crashed on the desk. He caught the wrist. The gun went off—but Stickney had dropped to the floor.

Moklokus was up and fighting. He had three times Mark's strength. But Mark hung on with desperation.

Then Stickney hit Moklokus behind the ear. He fell.

Marian was in her father's arms, crying.

Mark picked up the doctor's gun.

He rubbed his shoulder and looked at the gun. When Moklokus tried to rise to his feet, Mark pointed it at him.

Nobody said anything. It wasn't necessary. Then Mark phoned for the police.

Marian was still weeping. But suddenly she went over to Mark and threw her arms around him. He kissed her. He patted her awkwardly, with the hand not holding the gun.

Stickney, keeping his eye on Moklokus, said in his easy voice, "You know, Mark, I've put you to something of a test. I didn't want a bust for a son-in-law. And about this wealth of mine. I had a friend who wanted desperately to fight in the last war. He could have had a commission. But he was one of the best publicity men alive. He knew that his propaganda work would be worth fifty men in the trenches. So he went into that work. You're geared for surgery and research, but also for a great deal more. If you can sacrifice a certain personal pride —which I think was like that other man's—"

Mark's eyes fell on the high-backed chair behind Moklokus' desk.

He knew that some day he would sit in that chair.

But the main thing was not that. The main thing was Marian, trembling in his arms.

"I still don't see how you knew enough to come here tonight. I—" Marian looked puzzled.

Mark grinned. "It was that stolen typewriter. I suddenly realized that the splash I heard had been made not by a body going overboard but by a typewriter! The splash would sound the same, and the typewriter would sink instantly. Of course, it was your father who 'stole' the typewriter.

"That meant your father was still alive—it made the whole rope trick plain as day. It meant Prichard had been murdered, as we suspected. He couldn't have 'confessed' to a crime that hadn't been committed.

"So I wanted to get immediately to Centora. When we heard he was here, I believed that he and Moklokus had worked together. I was sure neither of them knew your father was alive—otherwise, of course, Prichard wouldn't have been killed. So I wanted to hear what Centora and Moklokus had to say to each other."

"So did I," Stickney said. "I almost heard too much."

Outside, police sirens screeched in the distance. Moklokus shivered.

Mark took Marian's arm and led her toward the door. "It was all so obvious," he said.

She smiled—because it had not been obvious at all. But it *was* very satisfactory.

the *newest* story in the

DEPARTMENT OF PATTERNS

A typical case from the files of the Department of Patterns—which always means a strange and puzzling mystery . . . The pattern, on the surface, looked perfectly clear—but what did it mean? Yet, unfathomable as the pattern seemed, Papa Grand penetrated its truth as soon as the odd and baffling facts were fully reported to him . . .

BASKETS OF APPLES AND ROSES

by VICTOR CANNING

THE DEPARTMENT OF PATTERNS IS known to only a very few people in France, and the inside of its offices on the Quai d'Orsay to even fewer. Young men—and sometimes young women—are transferred to it from the security services and the police for periods of training and research. If at the end of two years you come out of it with the rating *Assez bien* from its chief, Papa Grand, you have done well—very well indeed.

Apart from training, the Department specializes in solving old cases which have been abandoned by the police, or in originating cases which arise from its own study of the patterns of crime. Most of the time you sit sifting through masses of data, official records, newspaper reports, and files, hoping that by arrangement and analysis some pattern of significance will emerge. Sometimes, however, you get a pattern handed to you on a plate.

This is what happened to me at the end of my first year in the Department. It had been a good year for me because, of all the other new members, I was the only one without a black mark, and I felt very pleased with myself.

I was called into Papa Grand's office one morning and found him with the head of the Surete's political branch, Monsieur Arbroy. Papa Grand had his feet up on his desk, his back to the little window that looked out over the Seine, and he was smoking a pipe. Papa Grand is Monsieur Alphonse Grand. He could be tough and he could be jovial—a big, fleshy, white-haired man of about 60 with bright blue eyes and a strong Norman accent still distinguishable in his voice.

Papa Grand introduced me to Monsieur Arbroy, then passed a file

across to me and said, "My dear Mascaux, the Surete's political branch is snowed under at the moment with all this O.A.S. stuff and the Algerian trouble, so as our brightest first-year student, consider yourself attached to them until further notice. I want your comments on the contents of that file in twenty-four hours."

He paused, then rubbed the bowl of his pipe against his nose, smiled slyly and said, "I'm not sure about this, but I think I'm right in giving this assignment to you because of all my young men I think you are the least politically minded."

I saw Monsieur Arbroy give a little frown, make a move as though to say something, and then change his mind. And I knew why he had changed his mind. He had once been in the Department and he knew Papa Grand. And I must say, something in Papa Grand's manner made me momentarily uneasy.

I took the file back to my room and went through it. It consisted of police reports on a series of bomb outrages which had occurred over the last twelve months. There had been four of them, all in Paris.

The first had occurred the previous January. An ornamental basketful of roses and apples had been delivered to the house of a Paris editor at six o'clock in the evening. About three o'clock that night an explosion had occurred in the basket which had been left on the sideboard in the dining room, and the editor's house had been almost gutted by the subsequent fire. No lives had been lost. The bomb had been established as a phosphorus incendiary bomb, and it was thought that it had been in the form of an artificial apple.

A card with the gift had indicated that it had come from a personal friend of the editor. This friend, it developed, had denied sending the gift, and the maid who had received it had said that it had been delivered by an elderly man, shabbily dressed, but who spoke with a good accent.

In March a similar basket of flowers and fruit had been delivered to a topflight journalist on another Paris paper, and during the night his house had been badly damaged by the same kind of explosion and fire. In his case there had also been a card from a friend, and once again the same shabbily dressed man had delivered it.

In June another journalist on another Paris paper had been similarly treated.

And in August the editor of still another Paris paper had received the same kind of destructive gift—always roses and apples with the phosphorus bomb concealed in the basket. Surete inquiries had established without doubt that the signatures on all four cards with the baskets had been forged.

There it was—a consistent pattern of roses and apples and incendiary bombs, and always the vic-

tim had been a newspaperman. So far, happily, there had been no loss of life, but there had been a great deal of damage.

I went to work on it, checking the existing police detail, interviewing the victims, and spending some time reading back copies of the newspapers involved. I knew perfectly well that, although Papa Grand had handed this to me as a straight assignment, he had also given it to me as a test. I'd done well in the Department so far. Papa Grand would know that I was pleased with myself—might even think that I was too pleased with myself—and, so, had picked out something extra-special for me.

I knew, too, that Papa Grand had not idly said he had picked me because I was not politically minded. All the papers and men concerned could, from their records, have been the objects of political revenge of one kind or another.

I checked with all the well-known florists in Paris to see if they had made up fruit and floral baskets on the days in question. None of them had. By the time I was ready to go and see Papa Grand, I had a feeling that although I could sense the kind of picture these crimes had made, I was missing the central character in them. That didn't make me very happy as I went into the Old Man's room.

Papa Grand was in a mellow mood. He poured a glass of Calvados for me, took one himself, drank it as he read my report, and then tipped backward in his chair and for a while stared at the ceiling.

Then he said, "All right, Mascaux, you've got it all there. All you need now is to find this shabbily dressed man. He's educated, elderly, clever with his hands, and he probably collects and repairs clocks and watches; also, of course, he knows more than most people about chemistry. A strong character, almost to the point of fanaticism—which, of course, is always based on love. Distorted love, perhaps, but none the less love. You agree?"

"Yes, *Patron*. There's a clear revenge motive. I also think that the dates of the outrages must have some significance. Probably anniversaries of events that mean a great deal to him. But I don't think it's a political revenge pattern."

"Why?" Papa Grand filled his glass but ignored mine. He had to be very mellow indeed to offer you two glasses.

"Because the editors and journalists concerned are not all of the same political convictions. Some are of the right, one of the left, and one is a liberal. So far as I can see, they only have one thing in common."

"Which is?"

I told him. They all acted as dramatic critics for their papers, but because of their standing they only covered the important productions.

"So," said Papa Grand, "we have a revenge motive associated with

the theatre. An explosive mixture." He smiled. "You agree?"

"I do, *Patron.*"

"I see that it is clearly established that the bombs went off around three o'clock at night. Do you agree with me that probably the exact time was three minutes past three?"

I looked blank.

Papa Grand chuckled. "What an actor you are, Mascaux. You want to keep everything to yourself. Very good. Then I shall ask you some more questions and see how blank you can manage to look. The basket of roses and apples—why roses and apples?"

"Because, *Patron,* they are an integral part of the pattern in this man's mind, somehow associated with whatever it is he is compelled to vindicate or revenge."

"True. But specifically, why roses and apples?"

I knew that I was being tested hard, and I knew Papa Grand well enough to know that not one word he spoke now was without significance. He could be helpful, but he never handed out anything openly. I looked stupid again.

Papa Grand made a rumbling noise in his throat and then said, "You stand there acting as innocent as an angel, Mascaux. But I know how deep you are. You want to keep all the credit for yourself. And you shall. Find this man. He will be gentle and make no trouble when you do. He's in love, Mascaux—a rare and dangerous love which some men have for some women. You know her name, of course. Yes, of course, you do. Dorothea. It has to be that, doesn't it?" He smiled, nodded his head at my silence, and said, "I'm glad you agree."

I left the room feeling as limp as a rag and wondering what had ever made me think that I was worthy of being in the Department of Patterns. Just then I knew that I couldn't even hold down a job as a village policeman. And what is more, I knew that Papa Grand had just given me "the treatment"—not humiliation, but a lesson in humility. Somewhere along the line he had spotted that I was getting too cocky, too self-assured about my progress. He was just correcting the balance.

I sat down at my desk, opened the file, checked everything in it, read my own report, and then went back in my mind over every word Papa Grand had used during our interview. It didn't get me very far. According to Papa Grand, this man was presumably revenging an actress named Dorothea. How the devil did he know that? Apples, roses—and Dorothea. It didn't make any sense to me.

The next morning I went back to the newspaper offices, to the files of back copies. I made a list of the female members in the casts of all the plays which had been reviewed by the four men concerned. There wasn't a Dorothea among them.

If it hadn't been for my Depart-

ment training I might have stopped there—but one of Papa Grand's maxims was that things and people are seldom labeled clearly. You must dig deep for the truth. I dug very deep, consulting theatrical agents on the telephone, and poring over reference books—and suddenly Dorothea appeared.

After that it was fairly easy. At five o'clock that afternoon I was admitted into the house of Mlle. Delabre. It was a modest little villa in Passy where she had lived all her life. Mlle. Delabre was a fragile, vague-minded woman of about 50, with gray hair; she wore a large cameo brooch at the tight neck of her black dress.

I said that I was a journalist and wished to have some details of her sister's career for a history of the French theatre which I contemplated writing. She was very happy to help me. Her sister had been the great Clea Delabre who had made her reputation before the war and then, some time after the war, had left the stage.

"She thought she was leaving it for good," said her sister. "But the pull of the theatre was too much for her. We had a little money, but somehow it went. All of it. So, two years ago she decided to return to the stage. Somehow we found help from backers, and then there was the problem of the play. Poor Clea, she liked nothing that was shown to her. In the end—unwisely now, I see—she put on a play of her own writing."

Mlle. Delabre smiled gently. "She was a great actress, monsieur, but not a great playwright. The play was very bad and the critics were very unkind—yes, very unkind. I must confess that dear Clea went to pieces—even the greatest actresses, you know, can give bad performances."

"So it was a failure?"

"Yes. It lasted only one week—one week in January, two years ago. Clea collapsed. She was older than me. She died the following March, literally from a broken heart."

January, I thought, the month of the play's failure, of the scathing notices which I had read in the newspaper files.

Then March, the month of her death, the month also of the second bomb outrage.

"Was June a significant month for your sister?" I asked.

"She was born in June, monsieur."

"And August?"

"That was the month in which she made her first great success, long before the war—the month Paris acclaimed her."

"She was never married?"

"No. She was once very much in love—but he was killed during the war."

"Clea Delabre—the great Delabre," I said. "But her full name was Dorothea Clea Delabre, was it not?"

"Yes. But Clea—that was how the public knew her. In the family she was always Dorothea."

"Who is there left in the family who loved her as much as you do?"

"Only myself and my brother, Arnaud. He was devoted to her. He could tell you much more about her theatrical life than I could. He was her manager. Would you like to see him?"

"If I may."

She took me out of the room and led me across the hall to a study door. She knocked gently, called, "Arnaud," and we went in.

The walls of the room were crowded with books. There was a desk littered with papers, and a work bench under a far window. I was aware of the ticking of innumerable clocks. They were everywhere—on the walls, on the shelves, on brackets, and the bench was littered with an accumulation of clocks to be repaired.

"I'm sorry, he's not here," said Mlle. Delabre. "I remember now—he went out just before you came in. Really, my memory—"

"Where did he go?"

"I think I saw him carrying a basket of roses and apples. He loves giving them to his special friends."

"Apples and roses!"

"Why, yes, monsieur. What is the trouble?"

"I must know where he's gone!"

With a vague gesture of her hand she said, "Well, you could wait and ask him when he comes back. But he is very absent-minded. It sometimes worries me. Often he stays away all night. Then again he might be back in half an hour."

If he stayed away all night, the basket would be sitting in someone's house waiting to go off. I had to do something about it at once.

Vigorously, I said, "Mademoiselle, think! Does this particular day or month have any significance in your sister's life or in her theatrical career?"

To my surprise she nodded her head and said, "Why, of course it does. But why are you so upset, monsieur?"

"Please, just tell me."

"Well, this is the day Dorothea was confirmed. It is also her saint's day, monsieur. Maybe that is where Arnaud has gone—to the little church around the corner where she was confirmed. I remember now—he usually makes the cure a gift on this day. Dear, dear, how forgetful of me."

But I wasn't waiting to hear any more. I ran out of the house and into my car. Arnaud must be completely mad if he was now turning his attention to innocent people who had once been connected to Dorothea.

I caught him as he was coming down the steps of the cure's house, which was next door to the church. A woman was just closing the door and I saw in her hand a golden wickerwork basket piled with apples and roses.

I ran up the steps and held on to Arnaud. He was an elderly, gray-haired man with a long, drawn, tired face and a pair of gentle brown eyes.

I said, "Monsieur Delabre, I am from the police. I must ask you to wait while I get that basket back from—"

"The police?" he interrupted me mildly. "I see." Then he shook his head. "You do not need the basket, monsieur. It will harm no one. They are real apples and roses. You wish me to come with you?"

I nodded. I took him back to Papa Grand, and a man was sent to the cure's house to check the basket. It was harmless, as Arnaud had said.

Papa Grand was very courteous to him. "You loved your sister very much, monsieur?"

"Very much," said Monsieur Delabre. "She was a saint."

"Saint Dorothea." Papa Grand looked at me. "You understand, Mascaux?"

I shook my head.

Papa Grand turned to Monsieur Delabre. "Perhaps you would tell this young man, monsieur, the story of the real Saint Dorothea."

"But, of course," he said meekly.

And he did—the story of Saint Dorothea who was martyred in the year 303 at exactly three minutes past three—what a fund of knowledge there was in Papa Grand! As Dorothea went out from her sentence, the judge's secretary, Theophilus, had said mockingly, "Send me some apples and roses when you get to Paradise." That night as Theophilus roistered with his companions at dinner, an angel appeared to him bearing a basket of roses and apples; the angel said, "From Dorothea, in Paradise," and then vanished.

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 284th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . an exceptional "first story," written with an unusual perception of detail—significant, revealing human detail—and with a sensitivity for the nuances of dialogue, characterization, and physical description. Many a professional, of long and anguished creative experience, would be deeply gratified to have written this delicately conceived and delicately executed "first story" . . .

The author, Caroline Breedlove, grew up in rural Oklahoma—the background of her "first story." She received her B.A. from Northeastern State College, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, and her M.A. from Arizona State College, Flagstaff, Arizona—and both institutions can be proud of what they instilled into Mrs. Breedlove's heart and mind. After college she was "busy with a family, graduate work, and teaching at various grade levels in Oklahoma, on the Navajo Indian Reservation, and on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon." At the time she wrote "The Sound of the Peepers," she was teaching first grade in Fremont, a new city in the San Francisco Bay Area. (What an excellent teacher she must be!)

In 1961 Mrs. Breedlove enrolled in a writing course at Stanford University. "The Sound of the Peepers" is a "first story" that speaks eloquently for that writing course. She is now writing other short stories, and is hoping to finish a book about her life, and her family's, among the Navajo Indians. Her first letter to your Editors ended with: "My husband and three children are all amazingly tolerant of the creature discomforts they suffer whenever I retreat from housewifery to writing." Her husband and children have more than patience and understanding: they have a profound confidence in Mrs. Breedlove's talent—a confidence we share, and after you have read her "first story," you will share it too.

We will be infinitely disappointed if Caroline Breedlove does not send us more of her work.

THE SOUND OF THE PEEPERS

by CAROLINE BREEDLOVE

TRUDY SHAW MADE HER BREATHing slow and regular, with her eyes not moving under the lids so they'd think she was asleep. Beside her on the double bed in the built-on room behind the kitchen her cousin Isabel slept, noisy and slack-mouthed. By opening her eyes only a little, Trudy could see the three neighbor women, Mrs. Barnes, Mrs. Rohland, and Ruby Mertz, moving about the kitchen as they finished the last of the dishes and found places for the bowls and plates and pans of food that had been brought in by other neighbors all afternoon. Mrs. Rohland wiped the sink and hung the dishcloth over its edge. Ruby Mertz swept up a small mound of tracked-in sand on the lineoleum and then onto a dustpan.

The women said little, and the house settled into something of its usual quiet after this long day so full of strange sound and movement. Small noises became big ones. The clock ticked loudly, as on other nights. The *plop, plop* of the new electric percolator was queer this time of night as was the *sst, sst, sst* of the coffee boiling out a little from the spout of the blue enamel pot that Mom had reached down from the top shelf and rinsed so there'd be plenty of coffee all night for the people sitting up.

Trudy was surprised that her mother had let herself be urged off to lie down, with people still in the house and the dishes not finished. In sudden loneliness she wished she could go sleep with Mom, but she knew an eleven-year-old was too big to want to sleep with her mother. Besides there wouldn't be room, with the house so full of company.

Mom must be lying on the couch in the front room. Uncle Herman, who was Pop's brother, and Aunt Thelma were sleeping in Pop's room. Trudy wished they'd taken Isabel in there with them to sleep on a cot, if she was going to breathe like that all night.

Trudy's brother James and his wife were sleeping in the other bedroom—the one he'd shared with her other brother Daniel until James married and moved away. Then it had been Daniel's room alone for a while. But since the day last fall when Daniel went away, Mom had moved her clothes out of the room she'd shared with Pop and had slept in the other bedroom by herself.

Aunt Thelma peeked around the door to see if any men were around, then came through the kitchen wearing a long flannel nightgown. She listened for a moment at the door of Trudy's room, then turned back to the women.

"Sound asleep, and it's a blessing!" No wonder her voice sounded stopped-up, thought Trudy, after all that crying she did when they got here this afternoon.

"Poor little Isabel! She was wore out from the trip, but I was afraid she wouldn't sleep a wink. She took it awful hard." Aunt Thelma's voice broke and she sniffled. "She just thought the world of her Uncle Matt."

Boy, that was a whopper if Trudy ever heard one! It looked like people just tried to think of things to say to get themselves into the middle of it whenever somebody died! To hear Aunt Thelma, you'd think it was Isabel's Pop that'd been murdered instead of Trudy's Pop that Isabel hadn't seen more than a dozen times in her whole life. As far as Trudy knew, Pop had never paid Isabel one speck of attention, nor her him.

Took it hard in a pig's eye! Isabel and her sneaky mosquito-buzzing questions!

"Reckon we'll get to see where your Pop's head was bashed in? My mother says they got ways of fixing them up so you can't tell unless you get to see before the undertaker gets ahold of them."

And, "My mother says your mother don't talk much because she thinks she's better'n other folks. Guess my mother don't like your mother much, huh?"

Trudy had let that pass with no more than a muttered, "Not much love lost, I guess." She had things to think about besides her cousin Isabel. Now she pulled her knees up against her chest to ease the aching in her belly. But it didn't help. Her insides felt all riled up, clear down to her arms and legs. Like the pasture pond when the cows waded into the middle that never went dry winter or summer, stirring soft gray mud off its bottom.

The sawdust-wad feeling in her throat was so big that she hadn't been able to swallow any food. Part of the ache was from being hungry, but that wasn't all of it.

Aunt Thelma said good night to the women and disappeared again into Pop's bedroom. With nothing more to do, the three women sat at the oilcloth-covered table with cups of coffee. The two older ones yawned, but Ruby Mertz wasn't ready to stop talking.

"Mrs. Shaw has held up so good all day. Do you suppose she'll take it hard at the funeral?" Ruby spooned sugar into her coffee as she waited for the others to comment.

Trudy remembered the only funeral she'd ever gone to. Mamie Hitt's bachelor brother had died at Mamie's house. Mamie took it hard, they said. Trudy remembered how she'd got noisier and noisier at the church. At the graveyard she broke away from the crowd and ran to the edge of the grave and started yelling that she was going to throw herself in with her brother's coffin. She didn't try to jump,

though, until her husband and the preacher and someone else, Trudy couldn't remember who, had grabbed her and pulled her back. She'd strained hard against them after they got a good hold on her.

Trudy guessed Ruby Mertz was going to be disappointed if she expected Mom to make a to-do in front of the whole countryside. So far Mom hadn't made any fuss at all. Not even this morning early when Clay Roberts stood shaking on the side porch with his face gray as ashes and told about Pop sitting half in, half out, of his truck, his head so beaten that Clay recognized him only by his clothes. The truck was stopped where the lane dipped out of sight into the wash between the house and the highway.

Mom had stepped back into the kitchen, feeling for a chair. When she found it she sat with her hands over her face, moaning for a little while. Then she'd sat up, her mouth in a straight line, and sent Clay to get Mr. Rohland who was the closest neighbor.

All day Mom had looked at people and talked to them when she needed to, but it was as if she was all locked up inside, thought Trudy. She had answered the questions of the Sheriff and the undertaker and the preacher and the man with the camera who drove all the way from the city and said he worked for the newspaper. Trudy had answered questions, too. Yes, she'd last seen her father when she went to school yesterday morning; yes, he'd already left when she came home in the afternoon.

Trudy shivered under the covers when she remembered that she'd have been the one to find Pop's body if she'd got off the school bus at the end of the lane instead of riding on around to the east road, where she got off the bus to cut through the pasture and across the little creek. It was a shorter walk, but that wasn't the reason she liked to come that way, especially this time of year. She liked the smell of new-growing plants in the pasture and the way the ground was spongy under her feet from the previous day's rain. In spite of warm sunshine there was a sure feeling in the air of more rain, and soon.

Remembering how it had been yesterday eased the turmoil now inside her. The redbud, last month a timid cloud of pink against the first pale greening of the other trees along the creek bank, was surer, bolder, now. The dogwood, blooming thick and unbelievable along the flat branches, was clean and white against the pink.

Trudy loved the little creek. Right now she could hear the rasping click of the young frogs along its bank. For a little while she gave herself up to the feeling she got from the sights and sounds and smells of spring—a shapeless promise of a something, sometime, a time or a place without so many questions that you were afraid to

ask and answers too horrible to think about.

She guessed she was the only person in the world who thought crazy like that. Spring was when you ordered the baby chicks and put seeds into the ground and aired the bedding. She'd sure never heard grownups talking about redbud and dogwood and the sound of peepers on the creek bank giving them the hurting-happy feeling she'd had yesterday for a little while, before she'd climbed the slope to the house.

She'd found Mom scrubbing the side porch. Trudy had forgotten the creek mud on her shoes and had stepped onto the clean part. Instead of scolding her, Mom had scrubbed up the tracks with her mop as if she didn't know she was doing it. Trudy had cleaned the rest of the mud from her shoes before she crossed the shining clean kitchen to go into her room.

"Change your clothes," her mother called. "We'll have to do chores by ourselves."

"Where's Pop?" she had asked.

"He left right after noon. He wanted to be at the cattle auction early tomorrow and thought rain might delay him. He'll spend the night there."

Trudy had changed clothes and gone to get a doughnut from the cabinet. In the bottom of the sink there was an unwashed dish and spoon. Trudy had stood for a moment looking at this forgotten note of disorder in her mother's kitchen. Through the window she watched Mom rinse the mop and hang it beside the bucket on the rail at the back of the porch.

But Trudy hadn't wanted the doughnut after all, and had gone to do her homework. The dish and spoon had been put away when she came back.

Mom talked little as they went about the chores. She went to make sure the pasture gate was closed while Trudy washed the supper dishes. She was ready for bed when Mom came back. Could it be only last night the two of them had slept alone in the silent house? It seemed a million hours ago.

Now she looked again into the kitchen where the neighbor women sat. Their talk had turned to households and gardens, and finally dwindled into silence. They yawned and nodded, the habit of early bedtime asserting itself.

Trudy must have dozed. When she opened her eyes, Uncle Billy Hawkins was lowering himself into the chair at the far end of the kitchen table. Mrs. Seely, his daughter, helped him take the brown woolen scarf from around his neck. Trudy sometimes felt silent giggles well up inside her when she thought that Mrs. Seely, who was an old woman with a husband in his last sickness, was Uncle Billy's daughter, Minnie. She now moved hurriedly and talked to the women, as if Uncle Billy wasn't listening.

"No, no coffee, thank you. I'm afraid to leave Bert for long. Papa wouldn't have it any other way but he'd come set up. He hasn't got a bit of business out in this night air." She sounded exasperated.

Uncle Billy didn't give any sign that he heard. He wasn't Trudy's uncle, or anybody else's that she knew of. Pop said once that he'd been an old man whom everybody called Uncle Billy even when Pop was a boy. Now that the woolen scarf was off, Trudy could see the criss-crossed wrinkles on Uncle Billy's ropy neck where the collar stood too-big around it. Like an old terrapin's neck. Uncle Billy was old, all right, but his eyes were blue and twinkly. They gave his face a pleased look, like babies sometimes have. Maybe he looked pleased because everybody petted him and made a fuss over him.

"Now, Papa, you get tired or feeling bad you have someone phone, and I'll come after you."

"Don't worry about me, Minnie. I'll be just fine. Thank you, Ruby, I will have some coffee. Out of that blue pot, if you don't mind."

As the sound of Mrs. Seely's car receded down the lane, the three women settled themselves with fresh cups of coffee around the table, awake now, and glad of someone who hadn't heard the talk over and over.

"Any idea yet who it was?" asked Uncle Billy.

"No, and if you ask me they'll never know any more than they know right now. Not a track to go on after that rain last night. The weapon was right there by the truck, but there wasn't a print left on it."

"Piece of pipe out of Matt's own tool box. Lid was still standin' open under the truck frame."

"Whoever did it looked in the truck to see what he could take. Left the tailgate open. Matt started with a sheep in the truck and it had got out. Somone found it not far off in the woods."

"I thought Matt got shed of all his sheep last year."

"Mrs. Shaw said this one was kind of a pet. Raised it on the bottle. It'd got to be a nuisance, so Matt took it to market, since he was going anyway."

Trudy had figured Pop would get rid of old Whitey the first chance he got. There'd been a big row about it last year when he sold the other sheep. He wanted to sell Whitey, but Mom had stood up to him because Daniel thought so much of it. For a wonder Pop had given in, but he was sure mad.

She remembered when she was nine how Daniel had carried milk that he'd warmed on the kitchen stove and had sat for hours in the barn with the orphaned lamb that Pop wouldn't let him bring into the house. Trudy liked Whitey well enough, but she couldn't see why Daniel was so crazy about anything

as dumb as a sheep. Mom said it was because he had raised it himself when everybody thought it would die, and felt like it was something that belonged to him.

She became conscious of the voices in the kitchen.

"—like the Sheriff said, it had to be a tramp or a hitchhiker, close like that to the highway and the railroad. There couldn't be any reason but robbery."

Mrs. Barnes looked back at the closed door and spoke in a lowered tone.

"Well, I'm like Will. If Will's said it once he's said it fifty times. He's said, 'Matt Shaw's just asking for trouble,' he says, 'carrying money on him like he does. Too many knows about it,' he says. And they say he checked out extry money a few days ago for this cattle sale. I'm not one to speak ill of the dead, but it does look like plumb foolishness to take a risk like that—"

Trudy drew her knees up to her chest to ease her aching middle. It didn't help, so she straightened her legs again, careful not to touch Isabel.

"James get here yet?" asked Uncle Billy.

"Yes, him and his wife come about noon. Matt's brother and his wife and little girl came later in the afternoon."

"What about the younger boy? He going to be here for the funeral?"

"I guess not, Uncle Billy." Mrs. Rohland sighed and leaned nearer to lower her voice. "I heard Mrs. Shaw tell Brother Ames they don't know where Daniel is. Haven't heard from him since he left last September."

"Guess he's not one to write. He never got far in school."

There was a little time with no talk while the clock ticked loudly. Ruby Mertz broke the silence at last.

"Funny him being like he was, with James such a fine-looking, smart boy, and the girl so bright."

"Mrs. Shaw never mentions it, but it must've been hard, him leaving home like that. She's always watched over him close. I suppose he can take care of himself—he's a good worker, what he knows how to do—but surely she worries about him. She always seemed partial to him. I've heard it said she could understand his talk better than anyone else."

That was queer—that other people had known about Mom being partial to Daniel. It was the truth, all right, but Trudy had never felt mad at Mom about it, nor at Daniel either. Not even when Mom let him get away with things that she'd bawl Trudy out for doing. Like when he'd mess around between meals fixing bread and milk and cinnamon and sugar that no one could understand why he liked so much. If anyone else had cluttered up Mom's kitchen like that they'd have caught it, but

she never said one word about it to Daniel.

Trudy missed Daniel. He was a lot nicer to her than James ever was, even though Pop did think James was so all-fired wonderful. James never let her tag after him the way Daniel did. She had followed Daniel even on the day long ago when he carried what was left of the brindle cat off across the branch and threw it and the bloody two-by-four far into Mr. Rohland's woods where nobody ever went. After the sudden anger had gone from his face, he looked sorry and like he was going to be sick.

Daniel hadn't said she mustn't tell, but she knew not to. When Pop mentioned that his cat that was such a good mouser was gone from the barn Mom had looked quick at Daniel. Trudy had a creepy feeling that Mom knew about the cat and the two-by-four. That was silly, though, because there was no way Mom could know. She hadn't even known about the nest of baby birds in the tree behind the crib, nor that Daniel had climbed to the roof of the crib every day to look across into the nest. Until that morning when the brindle cat got there first.

Mrs. Rohland was right that Mom could understand Daniel's talk better than anyone else, but there was more to it than that. Sometimes it was like she knew things about him without any talk at all.

Uncle Billy was now deep in thought. Trudy didn't see why he cared what kind of pot his coffee came out of. He hadn't drunk any of it. He hugged the cup with both his bony hands as if he were warming himself. She knew how the smooth roundness of the warm mug felt against his palms. As he sank further into his thoughts the silence grew. Ruby Mertz finally spoke.

"Mrs. Shaw sure has it nice here." She looked enviously at the Butane stove, the big white refrigerator, and the sink with its shiny faucets.

Uncle Billy may have heard. Maybe not. He looked at Ruby as if he were answering, but he started talking about something from a long time ago, as he often did.

"I recollect a mule Matt had once. Fine lookin' animal and a good worker, long as he worked in a team where the other mule could do his thinkin' for him. Didn't have a lick of judgment by hisself. He finally got tangled up in a bobwire fence. Cut a gash in his leg. Me and my son-in-law, Bert, came by for some reason. We saw the cut, and it looked like it'd heal all right. Matt says, 'Bert,' he says, 'you want that mule?' He named a price less than the mule was worth. Bert says, 'Matt, I'd like to have him, but I haven't got the money right now.' Matt says, 'Bert, if you can use the mule you can take him now and pay me when you get the

money.' Matt had to turn right around and buy himself another mule. Seemed like the only thing he was studyin' about was gettin' that animal off his place, whether he got anything out of it or not."

Uncle Billy stopped and seemed lost in his thoughts again. The women said nothing. At last he began again.

"Matt was like that. Took pride in what he had and allus wanted the best. Wouldn't give pasture room to a head of stock that wasn't the best. Same way with crops. Send off for costly seed when it looked foolish not to plant what his neighbors used. Seems like things turned out in his favor, and he did well, though."

The women listened politely as everybody did to Uncle Billy, even when he started meandering about things that happened a long time ago. He wasn't finished this time.

"Married away from here. Brought home as pretty a girl as there was anywhere around."

"Mrs. Shaw's family didn't live here?" Ruby Mertz was a newcomer herself.

"No—" began Mrs. Rohland. Uncle Billy interrupted.

"She was a Bascomb. It was the longest while before I knew she was one of the Bascombs lived over south here years ago when the mines were running."

"Why, Uncle Billy, she's never mentioned that! I never knew she'd lived around here. She's close-mouthed, but she did say once she grew up in Missouri, and that her parents were both dead when she married." Mrs. Rohland looked doubtful. Uncle Billy sometimes got things mixed up.

"She never lived here," Uncle Billy explained. "The family left before the first war. That was her grandparents. John Bascomb—that would have been Mrs. Shaw's own father—was still a boy at home. John was the age of my boy that died of flu is how I remember. There was just John and a brother. The other boy wasn't right, somehow. I can't recall just what the trouble was. Don't know as I ever saw him, in fact. Stayed close to home, as I recollect."

The women looked at each other, still doubtful. Trudy knew Uncle Billy was probably right. That must have been what Mom meant once when she told Pop that it was all right for him to blame her for Daniel being the way he was, but that he didn't need to take it out on the boy.

Uncle Billy's chin settled into his chest and he looked like he might go to sleep. Maybe if Isabel would stop that noise, thought Trudy, I could get some sleep. She gently pushed her cousin's shoulder to get her to turn on her side. She stopped when Uncle Billy raised his head and started talking again.

"Let's see, the second boy was born what year? About the time the second war ended. Make him

seventeen, eighteen years old now?"

"That's about right, Uncle Billy." The women listened with little interest, fighting yawns. All of this they knew already. Trudy, wide-eyed now, watched Uncle Billy. He soon raised his head and spoke.

"Looked like he'd make a big man, didn't he? Took after his mother's folks. The Bascombs was tall, big people."

Trudy's knees tightened until they felt like they were bending backward, and she felt cold under the quilt. She watched Uncle Billy, who seemed lost in thought. He stared unseeingly toward the window above the sink. Trudy knew that his thoughts were not standing still. Once his eyebrows lifted in a little jerk that deepened the furrows in his forehead, and his lower jaw moved itself now and then, changing the shape of his mouth a little.

Mrs. Barnes got up and turned off the burner on the stove and pulled out the cord of the percolator, so that the sounds of the coffee became fainter and faded into nothingness. The clock ticked boldly, and Isabel's breathing came loud and regular. Trudy didn't take her eyes away from Uncle Billy.

Finally he moved suddenly as if he had settled something in his own mind. He raised his hand and brushed it across his eyes in a surprised way. At the movement Mrs. Rohland jumped a little and was at once alert.

"Can I get you something, Uncle Billy? You warm enough there?"

"I'm feeling tired. You'd best call Minnie to come get me, please."

Trudy watched Mrs. Rohland at the telephone. Uncle Billy waited and said no more. Like an old turtle that had opened his shell and poked his head out in all directions for a while, then decided to go back inside forever, thought Trudy.

He allowed Mrs. Barnes to place his hat on his thin white hair. She wrapped the brown woolen scarf around his neck. When they heard the car bump into the yard, Ruby Mertz helped him from his chair and out the door which Mrs. Rohland held open.

The idling motor was loud in the night above the hushed murmur of voices. It became louder and Trudy heard Mrs. Barnes call out.

"Remember to bear a little to the right, Minnie, so you don't hit the post."

The car's sound lessened down the lane as the women returned to the kitchen. Mrs. Barnes checked the stove burner again.

"Poor old Uncle Billy. His mind wanders a lot, don't it?"

Ruby Mertz carried the cups to the sink and wiped the oilcloth. Mrs. Rohland wrapped the remaining cake, plate and all, in a tea towel.

"You take someone that old, he's bound to ramble a lot and get things mixed up."

The women looked strange with

their sleepy nighttime faces. Trudy felt herself sinking into sleep again. The sound of the peepers swelled and receded into a murmur as her body jerked in its effort to relax.

On the margin of sleep a whirling of sights and sounds, and things she knew without seeing or hearing, twisted and flashed, relating to each other in strange new ways. Opening her eyes for a moment, she saw Mrs. Barnes, her arm upraised to place the sugar bowl on a shelf.

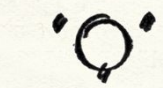
Then something even stranger happened. The sound of the peepers, with their promise of a shapeless sometime, became the murmur of the women's voices in the kitchen, moving in close to become bits and pieces of talk . . .

Trudy dreamed confusedly of the brindle cat in Mr. Rohland's woods that she mustn't let Pop know about, because Daniel would catch it. With a sensation of falling she jerked awake and remembered that it didn't matter about the cat any more. Too long ago, and besides Pop was dead in the box with the greeny-gray furry top that felt like the underside of rabbit tobacco leaves beneath her fingers.

What was it she mustn't tell? Not about the cat and Daniel . . . In a sleep-blurred panic she struggled to remember.

A sound jerked her wide-awake for a moment. Ruby Mertz stood at the sink to rinse the cups. That was it! The dish in the sink. Not even Uncle Billy, in his wise old terrapin shell, would know for sure if Trudy never told anybody what she had seen in the sink yesterday—the dish with remnants of milk-soaked bread clinging to its bottom and bits of sugary cinnamon ringing its side and collaring the spoon.

Mrs. Rohland turned off the big light, leaving only the small one above the sink. The women nodded in their chairs. Trudy's body jerked again and she slept . . .



DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 285th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . It has an interesting history.

The author, Sonora Morrow, is the wife of a Los Angeles Police Sergeant; they have three children. Mrs. Morrow has been a mystery buff since, to quote from her letter, "Arthur Conan Doyle devised Sherlock Holmes"—we seriously doubt this, Sherlock Holmes having first appeared in print in 1887! She admits to being the author of "more unpublished mysteries of all lengths than anyone in the world; and while the raising of children and the writing of mysteries may seem to have no connection, Mary Roberts Rinehart, Craig Rice, and others, God bless them, have proved otherwise."

Well, Mrs. Morrow, persistent and undaunted, enrolled in a night school course—Writing for Publication. During the third session the teacher (an excellent one, Mrs. Morrow said) "lamented the fact that no one can really write a good short-short any more." Whereupon he gave the class this "impossible" assignment—"to write, in 300 words or less, a story involving conflict, description with few or no adjectives, and a snap ending that no one could guess beforehand (shades of Liberty Magazine!)" . . . So Mrs. Morrow, accepting the challenge, wrote the following short short-short.

(If you were Mrs. Morrow's teacher, what grade would you give her?)

THE RIGHT WAY AND THE WRONG

by SONORA MORROW

JIM, I WANT THAT FIFTY BACK YOU took out of my wallet last night."

"Big cop, Mark Chambers, big stinkin' fuzz. Anytime something's missing, shake down little brother —he's the no-good, the small-time crook."

The younger man's tone made Mark want to slap his face, hard.

"With good reason, boy, with good reason," Mark said angrily, holding out his hand for the money.

"And if I don't, you'll tell Mom, I suppose?" It was said sneeringly,

defensively, almost childishly.

The older brother shook his head. "I quit doing that five years ago when you were fourteen and only an *amateur* sneak-thief."

Jim sighed. "We're an old story, aren't we, Mark? The good brother, the pride of the police force, and the younger brother who goes bad."

Mark's animosity vanished and he almost felt sorry for Jim. Sorry because he'd never be anything but a stupid, petty thief, in and out of reform schools and jails with nothing to show for it at the end but a caged, unplanned, frightened existence.

There was a right way and a wrong way to get the most out of living. To get ahead you had to plan and study and work as he had done, and now he was the youngest Lieutenant in the department, in charge of the Vice Squad. He knew all about gambling, prostitution, and narcotics.

How else could he have $70,000 hidden away in a Swiss bank, under an anonymous account number, with much more to come for the full, rich life ahead?

Another heart-warming and, yes, sentimental story about Father Francis Xavier Crumlish and the people of St. Brigid's parish, and of what happened before and after the Ladies' Aid Society's annual supper . . .

FATHER CRUMLISH AND THE CHERUB VASE

by ALICE SCANLAN REACH

THE BATTLE OF THE ROAST CHICKens versus the Baked Hams had progressed to holocaustal proportions when a providential clap of thunder rattled the rafters of St. Brigid's school auditorium. Forthwith, the commanding generals ordered the immediate retreat of their opposing forces—members of the Menu Planning Committee for the Ladies' Aid Society's annual supper.

Thanks be to God, Father Francis Xavier Crumlish murmured fervently as he eased his arthritic joints out of the chair in which he had been confined for almost two hours. He was a Baked Ham man himself. But after more than 40 years in the priesthood, mostly at St. Brigid's, he knew the wisdom of holding his tongue when called upon by the Ladies' Aid to state a culinary preference.

Now, favoring the corn on the little toe of his left foot as he crossed the brief bit of lawn between the school and the rectory, he felt the first onslaught of rain moisten his still-thick snowy crown, and glanced upward.

Hellfire! Stationed in the rectory doorway, as gloomy and gray as the weather, was Emma Catt. From the jut of his housekeeper's jaw, the pastor sensed that trouble was afoot. Abruptly he changed his course. He was in no mood to cope with Emma's vocal prowess, which he privately compared to Gabriel's clarion call.

Ten minutes later he was greeted by a discordant cadence of cowbells as he opened the door to Flynn's Hi-Valu Shoppe and stepped inside. As usual, the interior was a tangle of "genuine" Indian grass mats, several sagging "antique" velour-covered sofas, a cloud of pink feather boas, and a smattering of used tires.

At the clang of the bells, a husky college-age youth emerged from behind a rusted iron bedpost.

"How are you, Vince?" Father

said heartily. "And how's the job going?"

"Swell, Father." Vince Brogan gave the priest a broad smile. "I'm sure grateful—"

Gratitude from his parishioners always embarrassed the pastor. "It's not every day the Lord blesses me with a chance to help a lad who's won a scholarship and is bringing home a few extra pennies besides," he broke in. He was thinking of Vince's widowed mother, Mary, her long illness, and the Brogans' constant struggle to make ends meet. "But you look tuckered out, Vince. Do you think maybe the work and your studies are too much for you?"

Young Brogan shook his head. "I'm just worried about Ma. She might need another operation."

"Now maybe not." The pastor patted Vince's shoulder with a comforting hand. "Tell me, is Mr. Flynn around?"

"In the back room, Father."

Nodding his thanks, Father made his way through the clutter until he reached his destination. Andy Flynn, a trim, dapper man, noted throughout the parish for his Irish humor and temper, greeted him with a warm handshake. But it seemed to the priest that the usual twinkle in Andy's eyes was missing.

"What ails you?" Father asked, seating himself on a battered piano stool.

"I had a terrible accident last night, Reverend," Andy replied gloomily. "I ran out of money."

Father chuckled. Andy's "accidents" playing poker were fairly infrequent. But when they occurred, they spelled cataclysmic disaster in the form of his overbearing wife, Flo.

"Then I suppose this isn't a day to ask you for a donation."

Andy eyed him warily. "Donation?"

"I foolishly promised the Ladies' Aid I'd provide a door prize for their annual supper."

The shopkeeper looked relieved. "Help yourself, Father."

"I'll just pick out a little something colorful," Father said.

Twenty minutes later an object tucked away in a corner caught his eye. It was a vase, the hue and contour of an overgrown summer squash surrounded by garlands of purple grapes, red rosebuds, and yellow daisies, the whole of it upheld by three angelic pink cherubs.

"Now here's a fine thing." The pastor held it up for approval.

"God Almighty!" Andy exclaimed. "You don't want *that* horror, Father. It's the worst-looking piece of junk in the place."

"Wrap it up, lad," Father Crumlish said happily. He paused, his dark blue eyes twinkling. "The Lord will bless you for your good deed—and maybe your bad luck will change."

In ten days the crucial time ar-

rived. Within minutes the pastor was due to preside at the Ladies' Aid supper. To brace himself for his ordeal he decided to risk stepping into the rectory kitchen for a cup of tea. It was foolhardy, he knew. His housekeeper never missed an opportunity to engage him in a lengthy, one-sided conversation. But the thought of the soothing tea swayed him.

Moments later, as he sat sipping the hot brew and listening with half an ear to Emma's dismal discourse, a chance phrase caught his attention.

"What's that?" he said sharply. "Someone was struck by a car?"

Emma folded her herculean arms and eyed him in reproachful silence.

"Who was struck?"

"Me!"

Father stared.

"Well, almost." she said grudgingly. "I was crossing Broad and Fulton Streets when along came this little bright red bug of a car—one of those foreign makes—and nearly crushed me under its wheels." Piously she crossed herself. "It's only by the grace of God that I'm alive and able to pour your tea."

"Thank the Lord you were spared," Father said solemnly.

"I gave that driver a piece of my mind," Emma continued. "His excuse for not keeping his eyes on the road was that he was looking for Andy Flynn's junk shop. I told him how to get there, but not before I'd said my say—" She broke off as the pastor arose.

"I'd better be getting along," he said, and gulped the remains in his cup.

The din was enough to awaken the dead, Father thought wearily as he surveyed the scene in St. Brigid's school basement. It seemed to him that every man, woman, and child in the parish was on hand. Monumental quantities of roast chicken had been consumed (the Baked Hams having bowed to defeat) and he had just announced the winner of the door prize—Stella Zimmer's husband, Joe.

Grateful to be out of the thick of things, while Stella proudly displayed the vase to an admiring audience, the priest was leaning against the wall when he suddenly sensed a change in the jovial atmosphere. Instantly alert, he elbowed his way through the crowd until he reached the two responsible for the disturbance: Joe Zimmer and Sam Corwin.

Joe was a slight, usually mild-mannered man who seemed almost to enjoy his constant arguments with big, quick-tempered Sam. Despite their disagreements, Father knew the two men were fundamentally firm friends and would undoubtedly rally to each others' defense if the occasion arose. Quickly he moved between them.

"What's it all about this time?"

Sam wiped his angry face with a perspiring hand. "He owes me a two buck bet on the dart game and he won't pay off."

"You know darned well our bet was for two games out of three!"

"Any bum who welshes on a bet —"

"Mind your tongues, the two of you! It's ashamed you should be, spoiling this fine evening with your everlasting bickering." Father raised a warning finger. "Now behave yourselves or I'll put you out, the two of you."

"I was just going anyway," Sam muttered as he moved away.

The priest turned and asked no one in particular, "Isn't it about time to turn on the record player?"

It was long past midnight when Father Crumlish tumbled into bed, thankful that the Ladies' Aid supper occurred only once a year. Just as he closed his eyes a glorious thought crossed his mind. But before he had a chance to chuckle over it, he fell asleep.

Late the following afternoon, just as the pastor turned to the sports page to check on Willie Mays's batting average, the rectory doorbell pealed. Recognizing his visitor's voice, Father called to Emma to admit Andy Flynn.

"Sorry to bust in on you this way, Father," Andy apologized. "But I got trouble."

"More bad cards?"

"Worse." Andy fidgeted. "That vase I gave you—turns out it was Flo's pride and joy. I gotta get it back."

"Your luck's still running bad, lad. Joe Zimmer won it at the supper last night."

Andy groaned. "Flo's going to raise hell."

Father had an idea of Andy's punishment: confinement to barracks, indefinitely. Under the circumstances he felt a certain obligation to the fellow, so he made a suggestion. "Why don't you buy it back?"

The shopkeeper's jaw dropped. "*Buy!*"

"Surely you can afford it. You must have made a tidy profit on whatever piece of junk you sold that fellow in the little red foreign car."

"What fellow?"

"Why, the one who almost ran Emma down yesterday. He was looking for your shop. Surely you didn't let him get away without making a purchase?"

Andy shook his head. "Haven't seen the guy."

"He'll turn up," Father said. "Meanwhile, your best bet is to see Joe Zimmer."

Sighing, Flynn moved toward the door. "Okay, Father. As soon as I shut up shop tonight."

The pastor was not unaccustomed to receiving an emergency call at any hour of the day or night from his former altar boy and wayward

hooligan, the now respected member of Lake City's police force, Lieutenant Thomas Patrick Madigan. But when Big Tom's voice boomed over the wire shortly before midnight, his news shook Father to the marrow of his bones.

"Joe Zimmer's been murdered, Father," Tom reported crisply. "I'm at the house now. Thought you'd want to be here."

"Right away, Tom."

Father's first concern as he entered the Zimmers' second-floor walkup ten minutes later was for Stella.

"It was my regular bowling night," she told him, her face deathly pale. "Otherwise I wouldn't have been out of the house two nights in a row." Her voice broke as her body shook with grief. "Just last night Joe was so proud that he won that vase for me. It's right there." She pointed to an empty table at the window, then started a little, surprised. "That's funny—it's gone."

"Never mind about that now, Stella," Father said, patting her hand. "I want to have a word with Lieutenant Madigan."

He left her and walked to the far end of the room where a group of men were clustered. Big Tom swung around at the touch of Father's hand on his shoulder. The policeman's usually warm brown eyes were cold and hard.

"What went on here, Tom?"

"Stella came home about an hour ago. The door was open and the place dark. She turned on the hall light and found Joe on the living room floor—dead."

"God rest his soul."

"That wasn't all Stella found, Father," Madigan said grimly. "Sam Corwin was on the floor too. Dead drunk."

"Corwin!" Father exclaimed.

"I'm taking him to headquarters now to book him on suspicion of murder."

"He's here?"

"In the kitchen—gulping black coffee."

"I'd like a word with him, Tom."

Nodding, Madigan led the way. Sam Corwin's bloodshot eyes looked pleadingly at the priest as he entered the kitchen. "They're saying I killed Joe, Father."

"Did you?"

"I swear it, Father—no! He was one of my best friends."

"What happened, lad?"

Corwin took a swallow of coffee. "Me and Joe were having a beer at Murphy's saloon. We were arguing about that two-buck bet and, well, I guess I talked pretty rough. Anyway, Joe got sore and walked out."

"And you followed him?"

Sam shook his head. "Not then." He paused and rubbed his eyes. "I had a few more beers. I—I guess I had too many, Father."

"So I see."

"I remember coming here—I was going to tell Joe to forget it. The door was open, so I just walked in. But it was dark and I fell over

something. That's the last thing I remember. Honest to God!"

"There was a fight here," Madigan said in a cold voice. "You don't remember that?"

"No!"

"You don't remember hitting Zimmer over the head with an iron poker?"

"I didn't!"

"You didn't? Or you don't remember?"

As Corwin buried his head in his hands, Father moved to his side and placed a hand on his shoulder. "If you didn't do it, lad," he said, "you've nothing to worry about. The law won't convict an innocent man. Now, you have some more of that black coffee and maybe your memory will improve."

Big Tom followed Father to the apartment door. "Why kid yourself, Father? This is an open-and-shut case."

"The same kind of open-and-shut case that would have sent you to reform school if I hadn't known in my heart that you weren't a thief."

Madigan reddened. "This is different. It's murder."

Father shook his head stubbornly. "Sam Corwin might have used his fists on his friend, but drunk or sober, he's not the kind who would pick up a poker and brain a man."

Abruptly the pastor turned away. He was anxious to reach the solace of his rectory room where he could have a private and privileged word with Him.

A nagging drizzle of rain put a glaze on the sidewalks by midmorning, prompting Father Crumlish to step cautiously. The necessary delay irritated him, for he was anxious to hear the answers to questions which had plagued him during the sleepless hours since he'd left Sam Corwin's troubled side.

At what hour had Andy Flynn visited the Zimmers' about the vase? Had he seen Joe? Or Stella? Or both?

Surprisingly, the questions were not answered as readily as Father had anticipated. Andy Flynn appeared uneasy and evasive. "I don't want to get mixed up with the police, Father."

"Lieutenant Madigan will insist on some answers, Andy."

Flynn gave the priest a sharp glance, then looked away. "Not if he doesn't know any questions."

"Are you asking me to withhold information?"

"I just don't want trouble, Father."

"You're going to be in the worst trouble of your life if you don't tell me the truth."

In the face of this uncompromising attitude, Flynn wilted. "I—I was there about nine o'clock, I think."

"Stella was off bowling at that time," Father said, "so you saw Joe."

Andy shook his head. "I didn't see anybody. I rang the bell, but nobody answered."

The priest sat silent, thinking. If it could be proved that Joe was dead around nine o'clock, that Sam Corwin hadn't arrived until later—maybe until just before Stella—Stella! Suddenly Father remembered his brief conversation with the widow of the murdered man.

"You say nobody answered the bell," he said slowly. "Does that mean you were never inside the house?"

"Of course I wasn't."

"Then how did you get hold of the vase?"

Andy gave an exasperated sigh. "I never got the darn thing! How could I?"

Again Father sat in silence, wondering. Then deliberately he glanced at his watch. "I'd better be on my way," he said. "I'm late as it is for my sick calls at the hospital."

An hour later he'd completed his calls and was about to depart when he ran headlong into Vince Brogan. He was disturbed by Brogan's worried appearance. "Is it your mother again, Vince?" he asked anxiously.

"They just brought her in for another operation, Father." Vince's voice was husky with emotion.

"Take me to her, lad."

Moments later Father Crumlish entered Mary Brogan's room and gently took her hand.

"She'll be fine," Father said, with a conviction he did not feel, as he walked with Vince toward the hospital exit doors. "You get on back to her, but meanwhile—" He paused. "If you're in need of a few dollars—"

Vince looked appreciative, but he said, "No, thanks, Father. You've done too much already."

"This is no time for false pride, boy."

"I can manage. Honest."

"I'll take your word for it. And I'll look in on your mother this evening."

The pastor was asking himself questions as he made his way back to the rectory. Had his ears deceived him? Had he only imagined that Stella had said the vase was gone? He had the uneasy feeling that he'd heard rightly. But if so, Andy Flynn must be lying.

Well, there was a simple way to solve the puzzle. He'd be seeing Stella at the funeral parlor tonight, Father thought as he stepped down from the curb to cross the street, and somehow he'd mention—

A car careening around the corner brushed so close to him that he stumbled backward, breathless. In the instant it took him to compose himself, he saw the offending vehicle screech to a halt. A short heavyset man jumped out and rushed to his side.

"Are you harmed, Father?" the man inquired anxiously.

"No," Father replied grimly. "But it's no thanks to devilish drivers like you." He glanced at the car, notic-

ing that it was small, bright red, and a foreign make. "Aren't you the same fellow who nearly ran down my housekeeper—the woman who directed you to Flynn's?"

"I'm afraid so," the man admitted. "I'm Franz Ritter, a stranger here."

"Where are you headed for today in such a rush?"

"I was looking for the thruway entrance."

"Well," Father said, "I'm probably taking my life in my hands, but if you'll promise not to drive more than twenty miles an hour, you can give me a lift home. The entrance is only a few blocks from the rectory."

Effusive in his thanks, Franz Ritter escorted the priest to the car and settled him in the front seat.

"Turn left at the next corner. And mind your promise." Father gave Ritter a curious glance. "What are you doing in Lake City? And what was it you were after at Flynn's?"

"I came here looking for something—and I finally found it."

The priest's heart stumbled as comprehension burst upon him. "You wouldn't be talking about a vase, would you now?"

"Why, yes." Ritter was astonished. "How did you know?"

"With God's help," Father Crumlish said.

"Father Crumlish told me on the phone that you're here from Germany and can clear up a case for me, Mr. Ritter," Madigan said. "I'd like to hear how."

Ritter nodded and cleared his throat. "I was one of the few to get out of Auschwitz. When I returned home, I found I was the only member of my family still alive. The house in which Ritters had lived for more than a hundred years was stripped almost bare.

"The Nazis had stolen everything of value," he continued. "What they left was worthless, except to me. But even these few things had either been bartered for food or sold to the small outfit of Americans who had liberated our village.

"This may be hard for you to understand, Lieutenant," Ritter said slowly, "but I needed desperately to have something that belonged to the people I loved, something to link me with a happier past. I made up my mind that some day, somehow, I would find something."

Madigan stared at him incredulously. "You mean you decided to try to trace the men in that American outfit?"

Ritter gave him a small smile. "The hardest part was having to wait all these years before I had enough money to get here. Your Government gave me the names of the men, most of them from this part of your country. Some of them still had war 'souvenirs' in their cellars or attics. Not always, of course. A watch I gave my wife

turned up in a pawnshop in Detroit. My desk bookends were in a home in Cleveland. And I traced a vase that belonged to my mother to Flynn's Hi-Valu Shoppe."

Father Crumlish bowed his head.

"To repeat, Lieutenant," Ritter said, "you might find it hard to understand why I'd be willing to pay $300 for a worthless piece of porcelain. But when I got to Flynn's, the vase was gone and he wouldn't tell me where it was. I knew the only way I could get it was to meet his price."

"You mean Andy Flynn?"

Ritter shook his head. "No, the young man who works in his store."

With a heavy heart Father Crumlish sat in Madigan's office listening to Vince Brogan's confession.

"I never meant to kill Joe," Vince told the Lieutenant. "When this foreign guy came in the store I was alone. He wanted that vase real bad and I thought it would be easy to lift it from the Zimmers' flat. I went up the fire escape, found a window open, and there it was. Right on a table. But I guess I must have made a noise. Because the next thing I knew, Joe came out of the bedroom and started slugging me. I grabbed a poker and hit him—" He broke off and covered his face.

"Did you leave by the fire escape?"

"No. I just ran out the front door."

The policeman nodded. "That's why it was open when Sam Corwin got there. But how did you happen to set a price of $300?"

"That was the cost of the operation. Ma was always afraid we'd have to go on charity. Or that I'd have to quit school and get a full-time job. I wanted to show her, when she went in for the operation, that everything was taken care of. I didn't want her to worry."

Father Crumlish rose heavily from his chair and placed a hand on Vince's shoulder. He wished there was something comforting he could say to the boy.

Vince looked up at the priest, a pleading expression in his eyes. "I —does Ma have to know about this, Father?"

"No," Father assured him. "She won't know. I promise you that."

It was true: the lad didn't have to be told yet that Mary Brogan had passed away less than an hour ago.

The feeling of deep depression persisted long after St. Brigid's pastor had crawled into bed. Suddenly, however, he recalled the glorious thought that had crossed his mind once before, and he permitted himself a small chuckle.

He knew how he could, once and for all, put an end to the battles between the Roast Chickens and the Baked Hams: in the future he would see to it that the annual suppers of the Ladies' Aid Society took place on Friday.

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **MARGARET AUSTIN**

TITLE: ***The Theft of the Black Jupiter***

TYPE: Puzzle Story

LOCALE: England

TIME: 1641

COMMENTS: *An unusual story . . . the background, the time, the style, the object stolen so mysteriously—all are unusual and "different" . . .*

EACH EVENING THAT I AM HOME—and these are of increasing frequency as the discord between King Charles and the Parliament flares anew—my manservant sets forth a light repast before the fire to accompany my tankard of ale.

This has been my custom for some period, and friends, knowing of the custom and aware of their welcome, are wont to join me in my comfortable study where firelight glows warm against the oak panelling and throws spectres among the chairlegs. There, removed from the street fights which are a result of this unhappy Parliament of 1641, we are free to talk in peace and equality and mutual trust.

While our conversation is hardly to be compared with that of the taverns which the literary circles frequent, still at times it is leavened with wit, for some of my friends are exceeding clever; and at times it is grave, for some of my friends carry great weights within them which the sharing of my bread and the flickering of my fire seem to draw out, much as a poultice draws out the heat of a boil.

This particular evening, my servant had set forth on the low table a tray containing thin slices of the crusty hearth bread which I favor, along with a particularly fine Dutch cheese. Thus, it was with some apprehension that I greeted the first guest who entered, for the massive bulk of Oliver Lambert heralded to all the knowledge that before them was a renowned glutton.

As he crossed the room, the effect of his great cape and plumed

hat was that of an advancing cavalry tent from which a bird arose, and my sentiments were like those of the late, but still popular playwright's Macbeth when he spied the moving woods of great Birnam. Alas, I feared for my cherished foodstuff, but courtesy demanded that after seating him in a sturdy chair, I proffer the tray.

Lambert piled three wedges of cheese upon a piece of bread. I watched the quiver and roll of his chin, if such a smooth expanse of flesh curving from below his mouth to the lace of his collar might be called a chin, and perceived finally that he had finished when his tongue flicked round the curve of his lips in search of strayed crumbs. He sighed heavily so that his waistcoat strained at its fastenings, and it was apparent that something troubled him deeply.

I have found with others who have come to my chambers in a troubled state, that they will speak when the need is upon them, and it depends little upon whether or not I encourage their confidence or merely await it. So thinking, I signaled my servant to refill our tankards and prod the fire to life.

"It has been some time since you last honored my fireside. I trust all has been well with you?"

"My recent investments have proved fruitful, and I have outfitted a ship to Virginia, as I am convinced that fortune lies sleeping in the New World. But I cannot truthfully say that all is well, for I have just come from burying my friend, Lord Colvey. Ah, that I might have prospered early enough to have aided him. How unfortunate that one who a scant decade ago commanded great wealth, should die in near poverty."

"Indeed, a sad mission. I knew not his Lordship, but I have heard of his financial ruin. Was it not brought about by the tulip speculations which caused the crash of many a fortune?"

How well I remembered the tulip speculations of the early '30's, which had spread like a plague of madness from Holland to our country to infect fishmonger and nobleman alike with a vision of riches. How well I remembered frequenting the tavern clubs to sell futures on bulbs I had yet to purchase and to option the increase of flowers that had yet to bloom. Always, there was the hope of a lucky stroke—like a Semper Augustus, the red and white flower with a blue base, for which its breeder was said to have been paid 5500 florins. Yes, I could well understand how Lord Colvey had met his ruin, for only by quickly rebuying outstanding futures had I averted my own downfall.

"Lord Colvey's estate and fortune were mortgaged for the bulbs, but, in itself, this would not have ruined him. It was the disastrous loss of one bulb—the priceless Black Jupiter."

"Rodents, perhaps, or a natural blight?" I asked sympathetically,

for from the troubled expression which again settled on his face, I now felt certain that some memory of Lord Colvey still worried his spirit.

"Neither rodents, nor blight."

"Come, Lambert, this is indeed mysterious. Was it some secret which Lord Colvey wished preserved after his death?"

"At the time, it was, for he wished not to accuse friends and gentlemen of theft."

"Theft! You mean the Black Jupiter was never recovered?"

"No," he replied slowly, "and Lord Colvey was confounded by that as greatly as by the loss itself."

I did not speak, for he seemed to be meditating upon his next words. At length, the tale fair spilled from him, as a millrace when the wheel is loosened.

"Lord Colvey had asked some twelve of us—Sir Isaac, the Earl of Langdon, Edward St. Clair, Lord Boorley, and others—for a fortnight's shooting. I had scarce interest either in hunting or horticulture —indeed, I knew little more of the one than of the other; but her Ladyship was a renowned hostess who set a bountiful table. In those days I was not so portly, but still the tendency was upon me; I had not great liking for the country life, and felt quite at odds with the hearty group who assembled at Colvey Manor.

"Though we were dusty and tired from the rigors of travel, only her Ladyship's pleas forestalled our being shown the gardens and citrus houses immediately upon our arrival.

"But following the next day's hunt, from which I abstained, along with Sir Isaac who had contracted a touch of gout, we were shown the gardens which were our host's consuming passion. As well they might be, for he had collected rare and exotic spice plants and herbs from the Far East, and strange vegetables from the New World, including a maize then ready for harvest, which he said sustained the wild red men, and a strange root vegetable called 'patata,' which he claimed some found tasty.

"In another part of the garden, protected by a sharded wall so as to be as impregnable as the Tower of London itself, were the tulip beds which gardeners were turning and preparing for the winter sleep of the precious bulbs. The Earl of Langdon, whose inclination to levity at inauspicious moments I had previously noted, asked jocularly if at times our host did not feel that he was planting pound notes rather than living plants.

"Lord Colvey laughed, somewhat in discomfort I thought, and replied, 'It would seem that way, for my entire fortune will rest there with the bulbs. But in a year or two, what a harvest I shall reap!'

"I expressed interest, for I had heard much of the tulip speculations —as what person on the Continent or here had not?—although I had

no funds then to invest and, indeed, at that time had not even seen one of the flowers which were bringing such extravagant prices.

"He had other bulbs of great value, but most precious of all, he told us, was the Black Jupiter, for it was the only true black tulip in existence. He had seen it in bloom at The Hague, as softly sooty as the inside of a kitchen fireplace and lacking even a tinge of purple, and following the summer digging, he had outbid a Dutch syndicate for its possession. Although I had believed the widely circulated price to be an exaggerated rumor, he confirmed it now as 10,000 Dutch florins. Even Sir Isaac, who some said outranked the King himself in wealth, appeared astonished that one bulb could command such a sum.

"'Ah,' continued Lord Colvey, 'next year the sum will be returned fourfold, for the natural increase is sold, as is that of the following year and the year following that. Then there are the seeds, for which I have accepted up to four-year options. When all the futurities are realized, the Black Jupiter will prove a fair investment.'

"The next horticultural wonder was to be the boxwood maze, fashioned so successfully, we were told, after the labyrinth at Crete where the Minotaur reigned, that an unwary guest had once been lost until after the dinner hour. I quailed before the prospect and begged leave to await their return in the comfort of the citrus house.

"There, in the open south side of the central room which housed the flowering lemons and oranges, were sturdy chairs and tables where one could bask in the sheltered warmth, and there I sat without entering the various compartments of vegetables and flowers already prepared for the winter use of the household.

"Presently, Sir Isaac hobbled in to join me, but soon complained that the moist air affected his gout adversely; so we departed the citrus house for a dry terrace, where servants supplied us with ale, so that we spent a most pleasant hour talking of sundry subjects until Lord Colvey bid us join the others for the tour of the winter houses. Since I knew aught of plants, it was more the marvel to me that squash and onions and such edibles could be had fresh all winter, as well as flowers for the decoration of the manor.

"When we exclaimed about the marvels he had wrought, he deprecated them, saying that the ancient Romans had done likewise, although, lacking the glass he was experimenting with, they had used sheets of mica.

"Thus, he led us again to the citrus house, saying that he had saved until last the greatest prize of all. He crossed the earthen floor to a great table that stood before potted oleanders, but as he neared it, his pace faltered and he clasped one hand to his heart. 'The tulip bulb—

the Black Jupiter! It is gone!'

"You can imagine, my friend, the consternation which seized us all. Immediately, a search was begun, but nowhere in that exotic structure could the Black Jupiter be found. Under our host's direction, we examined the leaves and flowers of each plant, and the soil in which each grew. We overturned the furniture and prodded the cushions.

"Lord Colvey paled, and his hand, as he held it up for our silence, showed a distinct tremor. 'You are gentlemen and my friends. I can not, I dare not, believe that one of you is a thief. If someone has pocketed the bulb, either as a prank or perhaps unaware of its great value, I plead with him now to let the prank go no further. Will he speak now, knowing that the matter will never again be mentioned by any of those present?'

"We looked at one another, but none spoke until finally Edward St. Clair stepped forward. 'Lord Colvey, in order to be cleared of all suspicion, I request that my person be searched.'

"Lord Colvey protested it as unseemly, but others joined the clamour and finally it was agreed that we should pair off, each member of the pair to search the other in private, and when the priceless bulb was found—for surely it must be found, as no other possibility existed—to remain silent as to whose person had concealed it. When the disagreeable business was finished, however, the bulb was still missing."

Oliver Lambert ended his tale with a great heaving sigh of that massive chest and sat staring into my fire with vast melancholy.

"But surely," I cried, "the bulb must have been found? Could it not have been hidden in one of the other rooms where you viewed the vegetables and flowers?"

"As our host had requested, our group had stayed together without touching the benches or beds in which the plants grew. No, each of us was in full view of the others at all times, but our route was retraced and scanned twice and thrice to eliminate even that unlikely possibility."

Lambert sighed again, heavily. "Lord Colvey's financial speculations with the Black Jupiter and the other bulbs were fully as tangled as the Minotaur maze of boxwood in his garden. The moneys he had received from the futures and seed options on the Black Jupiter had been used to purchase other bulbs on which, in turn, he had sold futures and options. As in a house of jackstraws, removing the Black Jupiter caused the tumble of the whole structure."

I mused to myself, for indeed the mystery was intriguing. Someone had stolen the precious bulb, of that there could be no doubt; but who? And how had he hidden it? All had been in the citrus house; all had had the opportunity—yet, was not Lambert there first? And was

he not the only one who had been there alone? His very actions and agonies of this evening seemed evidence of his guilt. Surely it must have been Lambert.

I was not aware of having voiced the last words, but mayhap I did. Or was Lambert merely attuned to my private musings?

His breast heaved so violently that I feared his very life might be crushed by its corpulency. "Did I steal the tulip? Would that I had, for then I could have returned it, or at least, from the proceeds of its sale could have averted the financial disaster which its loss caused my friend.

"No, I did not steal it. Worse—much worse. You see, while I was awaiting the arrival of the others, I saw the plump, firm, red-skinned bulb lying on the table, and thinking it an onion from his lordship's vegetable house, I opened my penknife, sliced, and ate the confounded thing. I ate the 10,000 florin Black Jupiter and had the temerity to find it strangely lacking in flavor."

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A Labor Day house party at Mud Lake, an interrupted game of nickel-limit poker, a fireworks display and water carnival, a mysterious stranger—they all add up to one of Grandfather Rastin's brightest feats of "pyrotection" . . .

GRANDFATHER AND THE LABOR DAY MYSTERY

by LLOYD BIGGLE, Jr.

THAT LABOR DAY WAS ONE OF those days you'd just as soon forget. I'd have hung out a black flag instead of the Stars and Stripes, if I'd had one handy, and nailed a quarantine sign under it. My Grandfather Rastin has the most contagious dumps you ever saw, not to mention the fact that he was mad enough to bite somebody.

For weeks we'd been looking forward to the annual water carnival on Mud Lake. Grandfather had four invitations, including one to sit in the judges' stand, but that morning at breakfast he announced that he wasn't going. When I told him he was being a poor loser he hit me in the face with a piece of toast, which fortunately he never butters.

We talked him into coming along, and spent the whole afternoon wishing we hadn't. His grumbling all but drowned out the motorboats, and nothing, not even the chance that he might see Sheriff Pilkins blow himself up, would make him stay for the fireworks. So we went home and went to bed, and that should have been the end of it.

A little after eleven the telephone rang. I answered it, and a voice whispered, "This is Mrs. Hanson. Tell your Grandfather to come out here right away. We need him."

And she hung up.

"Maybe she really wants a doctor," I said to Grandfather. "It sounded like laryngitis."

"She whispered so her husband wouldn't know she was calling me. Let's go."

We got dressed in nothing flat, and went.

The trouble started, believe it or not, back in 1936. That was the year that Hiram Mills, who had charge of Borgville's Fourth of July fireworks display, was suddenly taken sick. My Grandfather

Rastin stepped in without hardly any practice, and did so well that the 1936 display is still the only one in Borgville's history in which nobody got burned and nothing was set on fire.

Hiram handled the display the next few years, and then his son took over, and not even Grandfather's best friends realized that this one experience had given him an insatiable appetite for setting off fireworks. I doubt that he realized it himself until last winter, when word got around that the promoters of the Mud Lake Water Carnival had decided to add a fireworks display.

Grandfather didn't waste any time in making it known that his services were available. He cornered Mr. Hanson, who is president of the Borgville Bank and a member of the Carnival Committee, and reminded him about 1936, and Mr. Hanson practically promised Grandfather the job. Grandfather filled his room with books and magazines and catalogues and started planning the best fireworks display in the history of Borg County.

Then it occurred to Sheriff Pilkins that a lot of voters would turn out to watch the fireworks. The Sheriff pulled a few political strings and offered to finance the display, and before Grandfather knew what was going on, the Sheriff had the appointment. Grandfather said publicly that as long as the Sheriff's salary wasn't buying us any police work worth a darn, we might as well have the fireworks; but I could see that Grandfather was awfully disappointed.

Before he got over being disappointed he started to get mad, and from there all roads ran in one direction—down. By the time Mrs. Hanson telephoned he had hit absolute bottom. If he'd known what she wanted he would have gone back to bed, but the only thing on his mind that night was fireworks.

He was certain that Sheriff Pilkins had goofed up the Mud Lake fireworks, and to his ears Mrs. Hanson's whisper was a clarion call for help. And neither snow nor rain nor heat nor the gloom of night could have stayed him from the swift accomplishment of his appointed route to the Hanson cottage. It was the first time since I learned to drive that he bawled me out for not going fast enough.

I did everything but massage my jalopy's radiator cap, but it still took us half an hour to get out to Mud Lake, and another fifteen minutes to find the Hanson house in the dark. The driveway already had four cars in it, so I parked out by the road and was a very bad second to Grandfather in getting up to the door.

It would be an understatement to say that Mr. Hanson was surprised to see us. He was less shocked than he would have been to find Presi-

dent Johnson or Premier de Gaulle knocking on his door at that time of night, but not by much.

"What's wrong with the fireworks?" Grandfather demanded.

"Why, nothing is wrong with the fireworks," Mr. Hanson said. "They were all shot off hours ago."

"Horsefeathers!" Grandfather roared. This is his strongest swear word, but the way he says it never leaves much doubt about what he means.

Mrs. Hanson's voice came from somewhere inside the house. "Is that Mr. Rastin? I asked him to come."

"Oh," Mr. Hanson said. "Well, come on in. We have a kind of missing person problem, and we didn't know whether to call you or the Sheriff. I decided on the Sheriff, because if there's anything to it we'd end up calling him anyway. But evidently Mae—"

"Who's missing?" Grandfather asked, making it sound as if he couldn't have cared less.

"That's part of the problem. We don't know."

Labor Day house parties are a Mud Lake tradition, and the Hansons had a houseful of guests from Detroit. The men were in one room and the women in another, and I was at least half an hour getting the husbands matched up with the right wives. When I did it came out like this:

Mr. and Mrs. Nolte. They made a fine Mutt and Jeff team. Mrs. Nolte was the tall skinny one, and she wasn't any raving beauty.

Mr. and Mrs. Keefer. They were opposites. Mrs. Keefer was young and nice-looking and probably should have been on television because she was already wearing the makeup for it. Her husband was not young, and could have posed as the "before" picture in almost any "before-and-after" advertisement you could name.

Mr. and Mrs. Urschel. They looked like everybody's favorite grandparents.

Mr. Baldridge. He acted like a college boy, and would have looked it if it hadn't been for the gray in his hair. He's the reason I had so much trouble getting the couples matched up, because there wasn't any Mrs. Baldridge.

Sheriff Pilkins arrived before Mr. Hanson finished all the introductions. I expected the Sheriff to shoot off a few more fireworks when he saw Grandfather, but the most scintillating thing on *his* mind was getting back home to bed. We didn't find out about it until later, but he'd had a hard night.

The fireworks, which he shot off from a raft in the middle of the lake, went over pretty well; but at one point he absent-mindedly put a piece of lighted punk in his pocket, and when his pants started to smoke one of his deputies excitedly pushed him into the lake to put out the fire. That got him a lot

of laughs from those close enough to see what was going on, but very few votes. I was sorry Grandfather didn't get to see it, though I doubt that it would have made him feel any better. It would have taken at least a major conflagration to cheer him up.

Mr. Hanson ran through the introductions again, and the Sheriff said, "Yeah, I already know Rastin. What's the trouble here?"

"It's the funniest thing I've ever had happen to me," Mr. Hanson said. "This man walked in here this morning and introduced himself. Said his name was Dick Scott. Everyone was arriving about that time, and I just naturally thought someone brought him."

"And we thought he was Hanson's guest," Mr. Urschel said. "Then tonight during the fireworks he vanished."

"Did you check to see if he got lost in the woods or fell off the dock?" the Sheriff asked.

"The only 'woods' is that little grove of trees," Mr. Hanson said. "He'd have heard us calling him. And there aren't two feet of water around the dock. It wasn't until after the fellow disappeared that we got to comparing notes and found out that none of us had met him before today."

Grandfather looked around for a rocking chair, and had to settle for one of these modern things that look like a lunatic's idea of a better mousetrap. He sat down and started whispering with Mrs. Hanson.

The Sheriff scowled. "He could be one of your neighbors' guests."

"Then why did he spend the day here? Anyway, we've checked with everyone on this side of the lake."

The Sheriff thought for a moment, scratching his head. He still has some hair to muss up, if he scratches hard enough. I haven't a doubt in the world that if Grandfather hadn't been there he would have promised to look into the matter the next day and gone home. He actually got as far as saying, "Well, in the morning—"

Then he saw Grandfather grinning at him.

Pilkins backed into the nearest empty chair, and said grimly, "Tell me everything that's happened. Right from the beginning."

The begining was when the missing man walked around the corner of the house, and said, "Hi. I'm Dick Scott." Mr. Hanson shook hands with him and told him to make himself at home, which he did so thoroughly that a little later he was telling the invited guests to make themselves at home. "He was a friendly bloke," Mr. Hanson said. "Life of the party, and that sort of thing. A good talker. I rather liked him."

Heads nodded.

"He complimented me on my dress," Mrs. Nolte said. "It's been years since a man did that. Even my husband—"

Someone hushed her. It turned out to be Mr. Nolte.

"What'd he look like?" the Sheriff asked.

"Rather heavy-set fellow," Mr. Hanson said. "Curly hair, good-looking. In his forties, I'd say. Dressed expensively. I've seen neckties like his marked twenty bucks and his sports jacket—"

"All right. So he walked in and made himself at home. What have you been doing all day? Sitting around and talking?"

"Mostly. We watched the water skiing and the stunts. We had some motorboat rides and some of us went down to the other end of the lake to watch the boat races. Keefer and Baldridge went fishing."

"Without catching anything," Mr. Keefer grumbled. He really was a funny-looking little fellow, with bushy gray hair, and he kept arching what would have been his eyebrows if he'd had any. "Mud Lake is the name for it. There's nothing out there but mud."

"I warned you the boats might spoil the fishing," Mr. Hanson said, and went on, "We had a barbecue this evening, and then the ladies talked and we played poker until the fireworks started. That's all."

The Sheriff stiffened like a bird dog catching a scent. "Poker! How much did he win?"

"He didn't win anything. He was the worst poker player I ever saw."

"How much did he lose, then?"

"I haven't any idea, but it must have been plenty. He said he'd never played before, and I believe it. Once he called on a pair of tens, when he knew it took jacks or better to open. He couldn't get it through his head that three of a kind beat two pair. I've never seen such a poor poker player, but he was darned good company. Enjoyed himself all the time. Seemed to have more fun losing than most men have winning."

"Sure. How much did he lose?"

"Well, let's see—"

"I'd make it at least three bucks," Mr. Urschel said.

The Sheriff snorted. "What stakes were you playing for?"

"Nickel limit. And he didn't win a pot."

The Sheriff snorted again. "Even so, I doubt that he ran out on his poker losses. What happened next?"

"We went outside to watch the fireworks," Mr. Hanson said. "He kept wanting to start another poker hand. We told him to keep his shirt on until the fireworks were over, and the next thing we knew he was gone."

"He was a poker nut," Mr. Nolte said. "One of these guys that can't stop. A compulsive gambler, maybe —he never won, but he wanted to raise the limit to a dime. I think he wandered off looking for another game."

"Let's go outside," the Sheriff said.

Mud Lake is really a nice-looking lake. It's another of those cases where a rose by any other name would smell as sweet, except I have to admit that sometimes Mud Lake does smell a little odd. The mud is mostly on the bottom and usually doesn't interfere with the fishing and boating, but the lake will never take any prizes as a place to wade. There are lots of expensive cottages around it, because it's the only real lake Borg County has.

There wasn't much to see at that time of night. Mr. Hanson put on a couple of yard lights, and then the Sheriff made him turn them off because he wanted things exactly the way they were when this Mr. Scott disappeared.

We felt our way down to the lake shore, which was about a hundred feet from the cottage, and in that hundred feet I fell over eight lilac bushes and seventeen pieces of lawn furniture. Finally the Sheriff had to have the lights turned on again so they could find the chairs they'd all been sitting in.

Mr. Scott had been sitting off to one side, near the trees. The only persons close to him were Mr. Baldridge, on his left, and Mrs. Urschel, in front of him, and they were too far away for conversation. The Noltes had been sitting in a row of chairs down by the water, with Mr. Keefer and Mrs. Hanson. Mr. Hanson and Mr. Urschel had been sitting nearby, and Mrs. Keefer was in a glider way off on the other side.

"Are you sure Scott came out here?" the Sheriff asked. "What with the dark, and the fireworks, you wouldn't have missed him."

"We all came out together," Mr. Hanson insisted. "And I told you —he kept wanting to play poker."

"All right. What happened next?"

"Later someone said he'd gone back to the porch, and had the hands all dealt for another game."

"That was me," Mr. Baldridge said. "He practically dragged me back there, and said, 'Let's play,' and started to deal. I told him two-handed poker was a bore, so he dealt six hands, and I came back to tell the others. No one wanted to play, so I stayed down here. Then Scott yelled, 'Let's play poker!' and someone called to him—"

"I did," Mr. Keefer said. "I told him we weren't ready, and he should come back and watch the fireworks."

"Did he come?"

"I don't know."

"I'd better have a look at that porch where you were playing," the Sheriff said. He galloped back to the cottage, with the rest of us stringing after him. There was a long screened porch with a door at one end and a cement patio outside the door. At the far end was a round table, with six chairs. At each place was a hand of poker, untouched.

"Is that the way you left it?" the Sheriff asked.

"It's the way *he* left it," Mr. Hanson said. "We started looking for him, and just never paid any attention to the poker hands."

"Where was this Scott sitting?"

"There in the corner," Mr. Hanson said, pointing.

"Don't touch the cards! Was it his deal when you stopped playing?"

They had to think about that. "It was mine," Mr. Nolte said finally.

The Sheriff circled the table, and very carefully peeked at each of the poker hands. "Only one hand has anything," he announced. "His own—Scott's. He dealt himself a full house—three sixes and a pair of jacks."

When the men finally digested that it really broke them up. Mr. Urschel laughed until he had to take off his glasses and wipe his eyes. Mr. Nolte flopped onto a sofa and buried his face in his hands. Mr. Hanson bent over and clutched at his middle. He doesn't have much stomach, but what was there he grabbed. Mr. Baldridge was late getting back and didn't hear the joke, but when they told him he laughed louder than anyone else.

"Lost all evening," Mr. Hanson gasped. "Didn't win a single pot. Couldn't take it any longer, so he came back here and slipped himself a full house. Then he got ashamed and beat it. If we'd thought to look at the cards I wouldn't have bothered to call you."

"Then I'm glad you didn't look," said the Sheriff, who hadn't cracked a smile all the time they were laughing. He moved over to a glider and started to swing, and the longer he swung the grimmer he looked.

"We'd better find this guy before we go any further," he said finally. "I'll send for some help. See how many flashlights you can get hold of."

"If you say so," Mr. Hanson said. "The way I see it, it's a waste of time. He's an hour and a half farther away than he was the last time we looked."

"You were looking for a guy who'd maybe wandered off and gotten lost. This time—well, my hunch is we'd better look for a corpse."

The Sheriff sent for four deputies, and Mr. Hanson rounded up an armful of flashlights and a few neighbors to help out, and when everything was ready we started off. Mr. Hanson found the body himself, just inside the little grove of trees that stood between his cottage and the one on the west.

Scott had been stabbed in the back with an ice pick, which turned out to be one that had been in Mrs. Hanson's kitchen drawer since before the cottage had electricity.

The Sheriff had the men to tiptoe up one at a time for a look—Mr. Hanson's guests to identify the body, and the neighbors to find out

if they'd ever seen the man. None of the neighbors recognized the murdered man.

Then a deputy sheriff named Steve Carling herded us back to the cottage, and we settled down for a long wait.

"If I'd known what I was getting into, I wouldn't have called," Mrs. Hanson told Grandfather.

"Then I'm glad you didn't know," Grandfather said with a smile. "It's worth losing a little sleep to see Pilkins trying to play detective."

"That was a pretty shrewd piece of detection," Mr. Hanson said.

Grandfather nodded. "That's what worries me. If a man's just naturally wrongheaded, a right guess is the worst thing that can happen to him."

"He seems like the most competent Sheriff I've ever seen," Mr. Baldridge said.

"You'll know him better before morning," Grandfather said dryly.

By that time we were all pretty much on edge. Mrs. Keefer got into an argument with her husband about which one of them had wanted to come to Mud Lake in the first place, and she slapped him. The Noltes didn't seem to be speaking to each other, and the Urschels didn't seem to be speaking to Mr. and Mrs. Hanson.

Grandfather moved around trying to get everyone quieted down, and Mrs. Hanson, who is one of these people who think the right thing to do in any crisis is to eat, hurried to make sandwiches. Grandfather passed out the sandwiches and coffee, and put me to the job of cleaning up the mess when Mrs. Keefer dropped her cup; then Grandfather found matches to keep Mr. Urschel's pipe lit, and a pack of cigarettes for Mr. Nolte, who was chain-smoking like he was trying to set a record, and generally got things under control.

He also got in a few licks of detective work, like making Mrs. Hanson show him where the ice pick had been kept under a pile of junk in the back of the knife drawer, and getting one of the neighbors to fill him in on all the current Mud Lake gossip.

Finally Sheriff Pilkins came back. "Sorry to keep you folks waiting," he said. "I only want one of you, but I thought I might as well get statements from the rest while you're all together."

Just then Mrs. Keefer spilled her coffee again, getting some of it on Mrs. Nolte's dress. Mrs. Nolte dropped her lighted cigarette on the carpet, and Mr. Urschel tripped over Mr. Baldridge trying to get the cigarette, and spilled another cup of coffee. All of that made quite a diversion, and it was some minutes before the Sheriff's remarks got through to everyone.

"Just what do you mean, you only want *one* of us?" Mr. Hanson demanded.

"What I said. Sorry, Hanson.

One of your guests is a liar and a murderer."

"But I've known all of these people for years—" Mr. Hanson muttered.

"And you didn't know one of them was a killer. That's usually the case."

Mrs. Nolte suddenly wanted to go home, and Mrs. Urschel seconded the motion. "The party's spoiled anyway," she said.

"Some party," Mrs. Keefer said, glaring at her husband.

The Sheriff ignored them. "Dick Scott was a criminal, too. Just like that poker hand, you've had two knaves in a full house. The murderer isn't a thief, though—if that's any consolation. He left more than five hundred dollars in Dick Scott's wallet."

"Which one of us are you calling a murderer?" Mr. Urschel demanded.

"I'll ask the questions," the Sheriff said. The room got deadly quiet. "Dick Scott didn't accidentally wander in here on foot with five hundred dollars in his pocket looking for a place to play nickel poker. One of you brought him, and he came here for just one purpose. He was a cardsharp, out ot make a killing on a small-town banker and his hick friends."

"Now wait just a minute!" Mr. Hanson sputtered. "One of my guests brought—"

"A cardsharp. A crooked gambler. Couldn't you guess it just by looking at him? Expensive clothes, everybody's pal, and let's raise the limit. The person who brought him here is the person who murdered him, and chances are it wouldn't take your local police long to find out which one of you knew him. It would also embarrass and inconvenience the rest of you, so I'm glad I don't have to ask the local police. I suspected foul play as soon as I saw that poker hand, and I knew who did it. All I want from you now is some careful thinking—to see if you remember anything I can use for evidence. Mr. Urschel, is one of those cars in the driveway yours?"

Mr. Urschel nodded.

"You drove out here this morning?"

Mr. Urschel nodded again. "It was supposed to be a week-end party, but the Hansons had a death in the family last week and had to be out of the state. So we came today, for the water carnival and fireworks, and we were all going home tomorrow morning."

"What time did you arrive this morning?"

"A little before ten. Maybe five of."

"Did you have any passengers?"

"My wife, of course. And Mr. and Mrs. Keefer."

"Who was here when you arrived?"

"Just the Hansons."

"Not Dick Scott?"

"I don't remember seeing him until later."

"Was he a passenger in your car?"

"Certainly not!"

"Mrs. Urschel, was Dick Scott a passenger . . . Mr. Keefer? . . . Mrs. Keefer? I take that as established. I doubt that all four of you would lie, and anyway, I know who the murderer is. Obviously none of you saw the other cars arrive, or there wouldn't have been any mystery about who brought Dick Scott. You'd have seen who he came with. Mr. Baldridge, is one of those cars yours?"

Mr. Baldridge nodded.

"What time did you arrive?"

"Ten, fifteen minutes after ten."

"Did you bring any passengers?"

"I did not."

"Mr Nolte?"

"About ten thirty, and my only passenger was Mrs. Nolte."

"Then you got here last. My crucial question is for you: was Dick Scott here when you arrived?"

Nolte frowned. "I really couldn't say. I stopped by the side of the house to talk with Baldridge, and it was a few minutes before I got around to the patio. By then—"

"But he was!" Mrs. Nolte exclaimed. "He was the first person I saw. He introduced himself, and that was when he complimented me on my dress."

"Thank you," Sheriff Pilkins said. He turned back to Baldridge. "Well, sir, I do believe that you are elected. Would you like to tell us about it?"

Mr. Baldridge was either the guiltiest person west of Detroit or the most astonished. His jaw worked, but no words came out.

"See that he stays put," the Sheriff said to Steve Carling. "How much money had Scott won from you, Baldridge? More than you could pay, obviously. He wanted his money or a satisfactory equivalent, and of course there was a threat of some kind. You're a stockbroker, aren't you?—customer's man? Did he threaten to take your IOU's to your employers?"

Mr. Baldridge still wasn't able to talk.

"The satisfactory equivalent was an introduction to some rich suckers. So you brought Scott here, and he maneuvered your friends into a poker game. I'm sorry I wasn't here to see it. Scott was expecting to win big from these innocents, and they held the limit at a nickel to keep him from losing so much and finally stopped playing to watch the fireworks. It's a wonder he didn't make you eat all those nickels, Baldridge. While the others were getting settled down by the lake, he invited you for a little walk. Knowing what was coming, you took the ice pick along. What sort of an ultimatum did he hand you?"

Baldridge spoke for the first time. "You're crazy—stark, raving crazy!"

"Are you tired, Baldridge?

You've had a busy night. I suppose you looked through Scott's wallet for your IOU's. Did you remember to wipe off your fingerprints? We'll soon know.

"Then came the play-acting. You dealt those hands yourself, and went down to the lake to tell the others that Scott was dealing and wanted to play; then you sneaked back here and shouted in a voice something like Scott's, and then hurried back to the lake. And the others, sitting there in the dark and watching and listening to the fireworks, and maybe doing some oohing and aahing, never realized that Scott's voice was really yours, or that you were covering a lot of ground behind their backs."

"You're crazy," Baldridge said again, "stark, raving mad."

"Save that for yourself. Your lawyer may want to plead insanity, and I hope it's true. I hope you weren't in your right mind when you brought that crook out here to fleece your friends."

"But I tell you I never saw him before," Mr. Baldridge protested. He turned to Grandfather. "Now I see what you mean. Wrongheaded? This guy's nuts!"

The Sheriff glared. "You had one stroke of luck. Scott made his living being friendly with strangers, and he didn't wait for you to introduce him. It must have been a real pleasant surprise when you found out the others didn't know he had come with you. But your mistake with the poker hands more than cancelled that out."

"What about the poker hands?" Mr. Hanson asked.

The Sheriff smiled. "I'm sure Mr. Rastin saw it as soon as I did."

Grandfather, who was whispering with Mrs. Hanson again, looked up in surprise. "The poker hands? No, I can't say that I did. I can't even say that I do yet."

The Sheriff's smile broadened. "Shame on you, Rastin. Scott let these suckers win every hand. When they got greedy enough, and the stakes got high enough, he would have cleaned up, and made it look like he was a stupid poker player having a run of luck—beginner's luck. When they started playing again he wasn't about to discourage them by winning the first hand himself, and he certainly wouldn't have risked making them suspicious by dealing out of turn and giving himself a full house when no one else was at the table.

"As soon as I looked at that hand I knew Scott didn't deal it. Since Baldridge said he *saw* Scott dealing, then Baldridge was lying. A man doesn't lie for no purpose. I didn't have to shake those facts many times before the pieces started falling into place."

"Wow!" Mr. Hanson said. "Now that you mention it—"

"Double wow!" Mr. Nolte said. "But—Baldridge? Ted, did you—"

"Take him away," the Sheriff

said. Steve Carling got up and grabbed hold of Baldridge.

Then Grandfather spoke. "Horsefeathers!"

Grandfather got up slowly, and faced Sheriff Pilkins. "I have a question or two."

"Make it snappy," the Sheriff growled.

"I will," Grandfather promised. "Hanson, your guests are staying overnight. Where's Scott's luggage?"

That got him a roomful of blank looks. "He didn't have any luggage," Mr. Hanson said.

"Isn't that peculiar?" Grandfather drawled. "He came to an overnight party without pajamas, or razor, or even a toothbrush."

"So what?" Sheriff Pilkins snorted. "He left his luggage in Baldridge's car, and Baldridge has had plenty of time to dispose of it."

Grandfather smiled. "Don't waste your time looking for it. When you want to know where it is I'll tell you. Now, about these poker hands. Baldridge, when Scott was dealing that last round where was he sitting?"

"In the rocker," Mr. Baldridge said.

Grandfather nodded. "The hand with the full house is on the other side of the table, where Scott was sitting before the fireworks."

"It is? But the Sheriff said—"

"Maybe Scott hoped to change his luck, or maybe he was tired of that hard folding chair and wanted something more comfortable, like the rocker. So when he returned to the porch he changed chairs, and you were the only one who knew that—though the Sheriff might have known if he'd taken a careful look at the table."

Sheriff Pilkins wasn't giving an inch. "Nonsense," he growled. "Now that Baldridge knows how he goofed, he'll naturally say Scott was sitting somewhere else."

"Think so? I'd enjoy watching you explain to a jury why Baldridge went to all that trouble to create the impression that it was Scott who dealt those hands—and then left the rest of the deck of cards stacked on the opposite side of the table. Wait—you can look at it later. I have one more question. Mrs. Keefer, why did you kill him?"

I think everyone held his breath. I know I did. Then Mrs. Keefer's face puckered up, and she bawled as if her heart were broken, which it may have been. She was trying to say something, but it was a long time before anyone could understand her.

Then she had to say it twice before Steve Carling would let go of Mr. Baldridge. "I didn't mean to," she sobbed.

At first I thought the Sheriff was going to arrest Mr. Baldridge anyway, but finally he had to admit that in most courts a confession would take precedence over his de-

tective work. He took Mrs. Keefer away, and Mr. Keefer, after he called his lawyer in Detroit, insisted on going along even though there wasn't anything he could do until morning, and Mr. Urschel went with him to lend moral support.

By then it was nearly four o'clock in the morning. Mr. Hanson offered beds to Grandfather and me, but Grandfather said he wasn't in the mood for housepartying.

"We aren't, either," Mr. Hanson said with a sigh. "But I guess we're stuck with it. Just tell us how you knew."

"A lot of little things added together," Grandfather said. "It wasn't a rational crime. If the murderer had thought about it at all, he—she—would have waited until Scott got back to Detroit, where there would be an unlimited number of suspects. Baldridge impressed me as being a rational person."

Mr. Baldridge grinned, and thanked him.

"Pilkins thought Scott looked like a cardsharp," Grandfather went on. "Could be, but he also looked like one of those rich-playboy lady chasers. All of you ladies are charming to *me,* but a youngster like Scott is likely to have a narrower outlook. To put it frankly, Mrs. Keefer was the only lady present he was likely to chase, and yet Mrs. Hanson told me he spent the day paying compliments to all the ladies *except* Mrs. Keefer. That seemed so fishy that I got to wondering if maybe they weren't putting on an act so none of you would suspect that they really knew each other.

"Then there was the question of where Scott came from. One of your neighbors told me the third cottage on the west is empty this week. He understood it had been rented, and was surprised nobody had moved in. There's a car there now, but he didn't see anyone around. Of course Scott came over here as soon as he arrived. And he really hadn't played poker before. I doubt that a cardsharp would pretend to be *that* stupid about the game or play all evening without suggesting a hand or two for really big money."

"He suggested raising the limit to a dime," Mr. Hanson said.

"That was only because he'd used up all his nickels and got tired asking for change," Mr. Nolte said.

"I guess it was, at that. What else, Mr. Rastin?"

"If a man had wanted a weapon in a hurry he'd have taken one of the readily available knives, rather than pull the drawer all the way out and sort through that stuff in the back. A woman could have seen the ice pick when she was helping in the kitchen. During the fireworks Mrs. Keefer was sitting off by herself in that glider, as if maybe she was expecting company. As I said, just little things, but they all added up. Those, plus the fact

that I've been watching you folks for hours. I'm surprised Mrs. Keefer didn't break down sooner. Didn't you notice how she dropped the coffee cup and later spilled coffee again? If she wasn't guilty I was willing to eat Pilkins' poker hand."

"She's always had a terrible temper," Mrs. Urschel said softly. "And there *have* been rumors. I hoped they weren't true. Mr. Keefer is such a nice old thing, but with a young and pretty wife, well—"

"Even so, I wonder why she killed him," Mrs. Hanson said.

"Hell hath no fury," Grandfather murmured. "You introduced Scott to a game he'd never played before, and it fascinated him. Maybe the two of them hadn't been able to see each other lately, so they went to all the trouble of planning things so he would be at this party and they could sneak off for a rendezvous or two; but whenever the opportunity came to slip away for a while Scott would say, 'Let's play another hand.' I don't condone what she did, but I can understand how she felt. If he was tired of her he shouldn't have let her know it in that way, and he shouldn't have gone for a walk in the woods with her after he did let her know. There aren't many women who wouldn't feel outraged if they found themselves playing second fiddle to a nickel poker game."

"Poor Keefer," Mr. Hanson said. Then he laughed. "And poor Pilkins."

"Oh, Pilkins," Grandfather said disgustedly. "He's pretty good at shooting off fireworks, but he's always pairing up the wrong knaves. Let's go home, Johnny."

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **J. F. PEIRCE**

TITLE: ***Devil To Pay***

TYPE: Legal Suspense Story

LOCALE: It might happen anywhere . . .

TIME: . . . at any time

COMMENTS: *Seven years before, Boaz had entered into a legal agreement that would stand up in any courtroom in the world. Now it was time to pay . . .*

MISS MERRICK, THE ATTRACTIVE ASsistant librarian, glanced into the reading room and was surprised to discover two men seated next to each other at one of the refectory tables.

It was a few minutes past six, a time when the library was normally deserted.

The older of the two men she did not recognize. Of medium build, his body by Brooks Brothers, he was the prototype of the complete "ad man." And like most of his kind, he was faceless. Ten minutes after spending an evening with him, one would be hard put to describe him.

But not the other. Miss Merrick had been attracted by him before. His name was Boaz. And he had been in often of late—had had her secure a number of law books for him from the main library.

Mrs. Haldane, the head librarian, had been struck not so much by his handsomeness as by his unusual name. There had been another patron of the library by the same name —an older man who had disappeared under mysterious circumstances some years before.

The room being occupied, Miss Merrick put off straightening it and return to her desk.

When the two men were alone again, the older man spoke, and though he spoke softly, his voice seemed unnaturally loud in the silence of the high-ceilinged room.

"Before we settle our account," he said, "I wish to commend you on your promptness."

"It's my one virtue," Boaz said,

and a smile curled the corners of his sensuous mouth.

Seven years before, these two had sat across from one another at this same table. The older man had not changed in any way. But Boaz had been old and nondescript seven years ago, a man the world had passed by. He had been reading at the time, reading being his only pleasure, his only escape from the painful reality of a lonely existence.

He glanced up from his book as the other man sat down opposite him, and the man smiled in apology for disturbing Boaz, then glanced to see what he was reading.

"Ah, *Doctor Faustus*!" he exclaimed.

Boaz smiled shyly. Not many people spoke to him any more, and he found it pleasant to be addressed even out of politeness.

"I'm old," he said "old and foolish!"

His voice sounded rusty, as if from lack of use.

"I haven't read a word in the last hour. I've been wondering what it would be like to be young again. But with the wisdom of age. Was it Oscar Wilde or Bernard Shaw who said that youth is wasted on the young?"

"Shaw, I believe. Though between them, at one time or another, they said just about everything. It's the curse of the Irish. They talk too much."

"Which is almost as bad as thinking too much," Boaz said. "I've been wondering what it would be like to be able to choose one's appearance —not to look the way I do."

The old man touched his wrinkled face with pain-twisted fingers.

"I've been wondering, too, what it would be like to possess Helen of Troy or Cleopatra—*me* who can't even get a word or a smile from the old woman who sells papers on the corner."

Though embarrassed, he hurried on to hold the other's attention, to prolong the moment's painful pleasure.

"A man like yourself," he said, "wouldn't know what it's like to be a nobody, a nothing! It's terrible the life I've led. The loneliness of it. The poverty. Not so much the want of money, but the want of experiences. The things I've hungered for. Food for the soul.

"Have you ever worked in a windowless room? A cubicle. A prison cut off from the world. With not a picture or a human face to brighten it, for fear it might distract you. Cutting and sewing fine suits for other men so that they might embrace a world that never once opened its arms or gave itself to me. The only beauty in life, the skill of my workmanship, the rhythm of my needle, dipping in and out, in and out. The only escape, my thoughts—and the wonder of the printed page."

He paused, then continued, "If I could have what Faustus had for seven years, I'd sell my soul!"

He looked up, waited for the

other's protestation; but instead, the stranger reached for his brief case.

"I know," he said. "That's why I'm here."

He seemed not to notice the emotions that quickly came and went on the old man's face.

"You're not—"

"The Devil? Of course, not."

Relief and disappointment fought for control of the careworn features.

"Do you think the Devil would waste his time on a little soul like yours? There are far too many begging to sell for him to take care of all of them personally. Hell is strictly Big Business. I'm just one of Satan's agents. My name is Legion."

His inflection made the remark seem a play on words. His voice was strong, persuasive, heavy with subliminal suggestion. His sales pitch combined the best features of both the hard and soft sells.

"Here is your contract," he said, taking a legal-looking document from his brief case. "There's no need to read it—you'd only strain your eyes trying to read the fine print. It's the standard form, running seven years. You just fill in the blanks as to the way you want to look, the age you wish to be, the amount of money you would like, the women you wish to possess, and so forth. Just sign on the dotted line."

Legion indicated the proper line with a gold pen that materialized in his long tapered fingers.

"Don't I sign in blood? Prick my finger?"

"What do you think is in this pen? Do you remember cutting yourself shaving this morning? We filled it then. Pricking one's finger is strictly medieval. Now, if you'll just sign, I'll be on my way. I hate to rush you, but I've got a quota to fill. And if I don't fill it, there'll be the Devil to pay."

He smiled at his own joke

Boaz looked about helplessly.

"You mustn't rush me," he said. "This is the most important decision of my life. I need time to think, to make up my mind."

"It's already made up. Otherwise I wouldn't be here."

Boaz nodded dumbly. Still he sought to postpone so irrevocable a decision.

"What is Hell like?" he asked.

Legion made no attempt to conceal his impatience.

"Since you've asked, I'm obliged to tell you. Each man creates his own Hell. The drunkard struggles to keep his head above the sea of liquor that he has consumed in his lifetime, and the aged lecher is faced with a never-ending line of lusty-limbed young maidens."

"And Satan?"

"Look within yourself if you would see his image."

Legion glanced surreptitiously about, then whispered. "He's really quite affected, you know. He's been on one of his Prince-of-Darkness kicks of late. Except for the everlasting fires, we haven't had any light in Hell for weeks. It's most an-

noying—but enough. Do you have any other questions?"

Boaz shook his head.

"I must warn you," Legion said. "Once you've signed there's no way out. Not any more."

"There was a way out in the past?" Boaz asked.

Legion bit his lip at his own carelessness.

"In the beginning," he answered. "Satan was naive at first. He didn't realize how unscrupulous men can be. Some of them took advantage of him. Since then he's become more businesslike in his dealings; he's developed advertising and salesmanship. Now his contracts will stand up in any court in the world."

"You mean this contract is subject to human laws?" Boaz asked, pointing to it with a trembling finger.

"If you can call your laws human," Legion said contemptuously.

Boaz reached for the pen, then once again hesitated.

"Say that I sign," he said. "How do I know that Satan will live up to his end of the bargain?"

"Failure to fulfill the stipulations makes the contract null and void," Legion said mechanically.

"But what proof can you give?"

"Proof!" Legion said angrily. "Aren't six hundred thousand million lost souls proof enough? Hurry, old man! It's later than you think."

Boaz shivered. He stood in the shadow of death, and he knew it. Still he had to risk it.

"Transform me now and then I'll sign."

"What if I do, and then you don't sign?" Legion asked.

"Then you can take my soul without waiting."

Legion smiled. "Say how old you wish to be and it's done. You can fill in the blanks later."

Boaz did not hesitate.

"Twenty!" he said, and instantly he was changed into a handsome young man—even before the word was out of his mouth.

And at the same instant, two demons and an infernal notary materialized to witness and legalize the transaction.

That had been seven years before, —seven wonderful years filled with love, wealth, and happiness beyond imagination. Now they were over. And they had *almost* been worth his everlasting damnation. If only there were still a way out. But he had searched the law books that the librarian had secured for him without finding a single loophole through which he might escape his damnation.

He thought of Helen, whose lusty limbs had destroyed Troy, and of all the others . . . If only there were some way out! If only he could stay twenty forever.

"Well, *young man*," Legion said with obvious irony. "Are you ready?"

That was it! Legion had shown him the way!

"Here's your contract," Legion continued. "All duly signed, witnessed, and legal."

"But it's not legal!" Boaz said excitedly. "It won't stand up in court. You can't touch me! *You can't touch me!*"

"Not legal?" Legion demanded. "What do you mean *not legal*?"

"I was only twenty when I signed. Remember? You transformed me *before I signed*! In this country a minor can't enter into a contract, especially one so obviously against his own best interests."

Legion sat for a moment, his mouth gaping, color suffusing his face. He seemed to grow large, become increasingly apoplectic. Then, in a puff of smoke, he was gone, and a faint odor of sulphur tainted the air.

Miss Merrick entered the reading room just then, and seeing the cloud of smoke above the refectory table she was about to reprimand Mr. Boaz for smoking against regulations when suddenly he smiled—and somehow she could not help smiling in return.

---

the *newest* Jericho story by

HUGH PENTECOST

Another new mystery for John Jericho, painter-detective, to solve . . . The case that involved a VIP—Senator Willard Rice, a dramatic and impressive crusader, committed to government reform and dedicated to moral rearmament, with a host of followers who were certain the Senator would one day be the President of the United States . . . It was not an easy case—indeed, it took Jericho's special sense of perception to see into the heart of the matter . . .

JERICHO AND THE DYING CLUE

by HUGH PENTECOST

THE SCREAMING WOKE JERICHO from a restless sleep. He had stretched out on the bed before midnight, his huge, muscular body covered only by a sheet. He had been troubled by a personal work problem, which, combined with the sultry threat of an electrical storm, had made the sleep that finally came fitful and unrelaxed.

At first, he thought the screaming was part of a nightmare. But, wide-awake, he knew it wasn't part of a bad dream. The screaming was real. It was high-pitched, hysterically rhythmic.

Jericho sat up, tugging at his bright red beard. A jagged streak of lighting seemed to spurt just outside the window, and the almost instant crack of thunder suggested that a tree in the front yard had been struck.

When he first heard it, Jericho thought the screaming had come from the boy. He had known twelve-year-olds who were terrified by thunderstorms. But when the screaming went on and on, he recognized the femaleness of it. Could it be the grim-faced Mrs. Rice? Or the sad daughter, Mrs. Powell, widowed mother of the boy David? Or the glamorous teen-aged girl who was the other house guest?

He put his money on the glamorous young girl, whose name was Joan Latham. She had exhibited a considerable talent for the dramatic during the evening. He had written her down as someone who was going to raise hell with a lot of men's lives before she was much older—if, indeed, she hadn't already begun to do so.

But the persistent intensity of the

screaming suggested real terror, not a mere act.

Jericho heard voices in the hall outside his room. Between violent cracks of thunder one bit of dialogue came to him clearly.

"What is it, grandmother? What's wrong with Joan?" It was little David Powell.

Then the cold sharp voice of Mrs. Rice. "It's nothing, David. Go back to bed. Joan simply had a bad dream."

This was punctuated by another crack of thunder.

Bad dream my foot, Jericho thought. Miss Joan Latham, aged seventeen, already a full-blown woman who was sophisticatedly aware of her charms—very hip, indeed—was not one to be frightened by a bad dream.

Jericho switched on the bedside lamp, noticed it was only a little past one o'clock, and got up. He stood naked in the center of the room, listening. Then he pulled on a pair of trousers and reached for the sports shirt draped on the back of a chair. The screaming had stopped, but the voices, now farther down the hall, were still low, tense, excited.

Jericho's position in the house was unusual. He was there as a guest, yet he had never met any of the family until a few hours ago. He had accepted a commission to paint a portrait of the head of the house, Senator Willard Fulmer Rice. His fee was to be paid by James Latham whose enormous fortune was promoting Senator Rice's crusade for moral rearmament and government reform into a household word. Next stop, if all went according to plan—the White House.

Senator Rice's voice, heard on television and radio, was as instantly familiar as the late Franklin D. Roosevelt's. Rice was a powerful orator and a dramatic-looking figure. He was a big man, over six feet tall, with the shoulders of a blacksmith. His shock of white hair, his black beetling eyebrows, his square jaw and wide strong mouth, his dark eyes hot with the fires of enthusiasm and dedication to his cause, helped to make every movement, every inflection of his deep rich voice, arresting.

But John Jericho was puzzled by Willard Fulmer Rice. Profoundly puzzled. Unknown to the Senator, Jericho had gone to several huge public gatherings where Rice had worked his magic on cheering crowds. He had drawn a few preliminary sketches of Rice in action. These sketches were a kind of free association of pencil on paper, and the results were disturbing. Each of the sketches had a peculiarly sinister quality; a kind of irony; a mockery; a suggestion that Rice was laughing at the people who were so obviously inspired and uplifted by his words.

Jericho put this down to his own personal resistance to all types of

highpowered salesmanship, even when it was related to so worthy a cause as reform. He decided that to rid himself of this off-beat reaction to Rice he should spend a day or two with the Senator in the normal atmosphere of his home—before beginning actual work on the portrait.

The household consisted of Senator Rice, of his grim-faced, gray-haired wife, of their widowed daughter and her twelve-year-old son, David Powell. There was another guest, Joan Latham, teen-aged daughter of Rice's financial sponsor. Her constantly rippling laughter, her gay, flirtatious manner, seemed to light up an otherwise rather somber family setting.

Rice himself remained an impressive man. In his late fifties, he was a constantly boiling caldron of energy. He greeted Jericho with a handshake that would have been bone-crushing except for the fact that Jericho was twenty years younger and more than a match in physical size and strength.

The two men were a striking picture together—the white-haired spellbinder and the artist with his bright red hair and beard. That handshake was like the first hold in a struggle between two giants. In that moment Jericho had the same curious feeling he'd had about Rice at the public meetings. He felt a mocking challenge, as if the older man were daring the painter to find out the inner truth about him.

Jericho told himself he was never going to paint a portrait of this man that would satisfy his many thousands of adoring followers. That insistent quality of mockery, which Jericho could not dismiss, did not belong in a saint.

There was one set of good marks for the Senator, however. They came from what, for Jericho, was an unimpeachable source. Young David Powell idolized his grandfather. Jericho had arrived at the Rice home in his car about an hour earlier than he'd been expected. The family, with the exception of young David and the house servants, had been out somewhere. Jericho was welcomed with grave courtesy by young David.

The boy was immediately fascinated by two things—Jericho's red beard and his painting gear. Jericho had a gift for getting on with children. He treated them like adults, without any affection or condescension. David showed Jericho to his room and was instantly involved with the artist's unpacking, and particularly with his easel, canvases, and paints. He was eager at the prospect of being able to see his grandfather's portrait being painted from the very beginning. Without the boy realizing it, he was carefully pumped by the artist. Facts spilled out like marbles out of a sack.

The boy's father had been drowned in a sailing accident when young David was a baby. There

was no memory whatever of his father. David had grown up in his grandfather's home, and the Senator himself had assumed the role of father. The boy clearly loved him, hero-worshipped him, and trusted him enough to walk into fire if the Senator had suggested it.

It's hard to fool a child, Jericho knew. The boy's adoration for the Senator was a powerful counterweight against Jericho's instinctive distrust, however deep that distrust was . . .

Jericho buttoned his sports shirt and stepped, barefoot, out into the hall.

There is something essentially comic about even so vivid a personality as Willard Rice when he is caught wearing an old-fashioned nightshirt. The Senator stood at the far end of the hall with his wife and daughter, his bare legs bony under the skirt of the nightshirt, his white hair ruffled. David, the boy, stood a few yards away, hunched against the wall.

Jericho closed his door sharply so that they'd be aware of his presence.

"You could have kept her away from the telephone until she calmed down," he heard Rice say.

Then, almost certainly, he heard two words from Mrs. Rice. "You skunk!" she said.

David obviously heard the two words and he turned and started down the hall toward Jericho. His eyes were wide with shock.

"She's a bad woman," he said to Jericho. "Grandfather could never in the world have done such a thing. Not in the whole world!"

And then the boy ran past Jericho toward his own room.

Rice and his wife and daughter were now aware of Jericho's presence. Anne Powell—David's mother—seemed torn between the need to stay where she was and the need to be with her child. She decided in favor of the boy and hurried past Jericho, without even looking at him, to the boy's room.

Rice came down the hall toward Jericho. Mrs. Rice went into the room from which the screaming had come.

"Damned hysterical *women,*" Rice said as he reached Jericho. His jowly face was wet with perspiration. "Sorry you were disturbed."

"What happened?" Jericho asked.

"I went into Joan's room to close the windows—it was raining in from that side," Rice said. "She was still awake. She's like a member of the family, you understand. She's staying here because her father has a houseful of business friends. I—I bent down to kiss her good night, as I've done ever since she was a child. She started to scream as though I'd tried to attack her!" He shook his head as if puzzled by the injustice. "Damned little idiot says I *did* try! A child like that! Now she's phoned her father and there'll be hell to pay."

A glare of light swept across the

windows—the glare was not from the storm. Car lights.

"That'll be Jim Latham come to do battle for his precious daughter!" Rice said bitterly.

A servant evidently was ready to let the visitor in, because a few moments later a small man, his face white as a death mask, came bounding up the stairs.

"Where is she?" he asked, his voice shaking.

"The room at the end of the hall," Rice said. "But wait a minute, Jim —"

Latham ran down the hall to his daughter's room.

A dry pretense of a laugh rattled up from Rice's throat. "If I were a drinking man I'd need one now," he said, "badly. Jim'll listen to reason though, when he calms down."

James Latham was not prepared to listen to reason when he came out of his daughter's room. There was a small automatic in his hand, pointed shakily at the nightshirted Senator.

"I'm going to kill you for this, Willard," he said.

Jericho's reflexes were quick. He stepped toward the little man and brought the edge of his hand sharply down on Latham's wrist. The gun thudded on the carpeted floor.

"You'd better cool off, Mr. Latham," Jericho said softly.

Latham stared at Jericho, startled, rubbing his wrist. Something in the angry eyes suggested that he was marking Jericho down for later destruction. Then he turned and went back into his daughter's room.

"Sorry for interfering," Jericho said to Rice, "but he looked far enough off base to do something cockeyed."

The Senator nodded vaguely. Then he bent down and picked up the gun. He turned it round and round in his hands, thoughtfully. "Damn fool girl," he muttered. He started slowly down the stairs to where Jericho knew his private study was located.

A minute later, Latham came out of the bedroom with his daughter, his arm around her shoulders. She kept her head lowered so that Jericho got only a glimpse of her pale, tear-stained face. They went past him and down the stairs.

In less than a minute Jericho heard the front door slam, and then the suddenly raced engine of Latham's car.

Mrs. Rice came slowly out of the bedroom. There was a bitter smile on her gray face. "It would seem that we can now stop making plans for redecorating the White House," she said.

The storm continued persistently violent. It rolled down the valley and then came blasting its way back, the night streaked again and again with jagged lightning, the house shaken over and over by explosive bursts of thunder.

It was nearly an hour before Jericho could fall asleep again.

When he woke again, at about 8:00, the storm was gone—as if it had never happened—and brilliant sunshine out of a cloudless blue sky filled his room.

Jericho got up, showered and dressed quickly, and went downstairs for breakfast. No one seemed to be about this early except a maid in the dining room—it had been a hard night for all of them. The maid took his order for juice, bacon and eggs, and toasted English muffins. Except for young David, no one else had come downstairs. The boy was outside somewhere, the maid said.

Jericho helped himself to coffee from a percolator on the sideboard, and when the maid brought his breakfast he began to eat with a sharp appetite. He was just finishing when, for the second time since his arrival, screams reverberated through the house.

He ran out into the hall where he saw the maid standing in the open door to Senator Rice's study. It was she who was doing the screaming this time.

Jericho moved quickly up behind her.

"I was going in to dust!" the maid managed to blurt out between screams. Jericho's fingers clamped her arm, trying to silence her. Over the top of her head he saw Senator Rice sprawled forward on his desk, his face resting in a pool of blood that had come from a round black hole in his forehead. There was no need to go closer to see that he was dead.

Jericho pulled the maid away from the door, closed and locked it, pocketing the key. At that moment Mrs. Rice and Anne Powell came running down the stairs. Jericho had to break the news to them.

"It's a matter for the State Police," he said. "Would you like me to handle it for you, Mrs. Rice?"

"Please!" she said in a choked voice.

"Where's David?" Anne Powell asked. She turned and raced out the front door into the yard.

Mrs. Rice's cold hand rested on Jericho's wrist. "Do the police have to know about last night?" she asked.

Yes, the police had to know.

Senator Rice had been shot at very close range. There were powder burns around the wound in his forehead. It would easily have passed for a suicide except for the insurmountable fact that there was no gun in the room.

Jericho, unwillingly, was the primary subject of interrogation by Captain Blaine of the State Police. Mrs. Rice was in no condition to talk, and Anne Powell was upstairs with a heartbroken David, who had come back from an excursion into the woods just as the State Troopers arrived.

Jericho found himself forced to give an account of what had gone on earlier that night.

"There *was* a gun," he said in

conclusion, "Latham's gun. The Senator picked it up after I'd knocked it out of Latham's hand. The last I saw of it he was carrying it with him into the study."

"It's not there now, or anywhere else in the house, for that matter," Blaine said. "You heard no shot in the night? The doctor says the Senator has been dead for about five hours. Killed not later than 4:00 A.M."

Jericho shook his head. "The thunderstorm," he reminded Blaine.

"You didn't hear anyone come back to the house?"

"You think Latham returned?" Jericho countered.

"He might have—it's not improbable. He comes back; the Senator lets him in and tries to explain things; the gun is lying on the desk in the study; Latham, still in a homicidal mood, grabs it and shoots him."

"You'd have a hard job proving it," Jericho said. "There'd be no tire tracks or footprints after all that rain. My bedroom is on the other side of the house. I wouldn't have seen car lights, and I didn't hear anything."

"If no one came in from outside," Blaine said, scowling, "then we have to consider the two women—his wife and daughter."

"Or me," Jericho said. "Or the servants." He heard the faint echo of Mrs. Rice's two words the night before. *"You skunk!"*

He reached in his jacket pocket for his black, curve-stemmed pipe. "Latham may have an ironclad alibi. He took his daughter home from here. He may have stayed with her. He has, I understand, a houseful of guests. It's just possible, if not likely, that he can completely clear himself."

But it developed that James Latham had no alibi. He had, he told Blaine, taken his daughter home, turned her over to his wife, gone back to his car, and driven around in the storm, trying to get a grip on himself, frankly reconsidering the possibility of killing the Senator. "That hypocritical four-flusher, putting his hands on Joan! If it hadn't been for this man," he said, pointing a shaking finger at Jericho, "I would have killed him on the spot. But I didn't—then or later."

"You did kill him! You came back and killed him!" a shrill voice cried from the doorway. They were in the dining room of the Senator's house, and David, his face wet with tears, was suddenly across the room, hurling himself on Latham, kicking, clawing. "He never touched Joan! She lied! She's a liar!"

Blaine pulled the child away from Latham and then Jericho put a strong arm around him. The boy's face buried itself against his coat. "She's a liar, a liar!" he sobbed again and again.

The small boy was rigid with grief and rage. Anne Powell ran

across the room to her child and knelt beside him.

"Come, David. Come with me," she pleaded.

"Let him stay," Jericho said sharply. "He has a right to hear everything." It could be a trauma from which the boy might never recover, particularly if he imagined that secrets were being kept from him.

Captain Blaine had a very hot potato in his hand. The murder of Senator Rice would be a front page story all over the nation. By tomorrow the F.B.I. would be in on it, assuming the possibility that the murderer was a political enemy who had crossed state lines to reach his victim. The story of Rice's alleged attack on Joan Latham could wreck her life if it became a matter of public gossip.

Captain Blaine was confronted by one unassailable fact. No one had broken into the house. No one had let anyone into the house unless it had been Rice himself, and Rice could no longer tell them about it. So it had to be someone Rice had let in—or someone already in.

The boy raised his tear-streaked face to Jericho. "If Joan isn't lying, then it's what grandmother said. She had a bad dream. She imagined it. That's what grandfather told me. She imagined it."

Jericho ran his hand through the boy's dark hair. "When did he tell you that, David?"

"This morning. I mean, it was just about daylight. I wasn't able to sleep much. And I had to know, Mr. Jericho, *I had to know*. So I went to his bedroom and he wasn't there. So I came down to the study —and he told me. She just imagined it. Anybody who says it really happened is a liar." The boy turned his reddened eyes to James Latham.

Jericho stood very straight and still.

"Come with me, David!" Anne Powell pleaded.

The boy tried to turn to his mother, but Jericho's arm around his shoulder held him firmly.

Then the key question, the crucial question, popped into Jericho's mind.

"What did you do with the gun, boy?" Jericho asked gently.

"I took it to my—"

The boy stopped, his mouth open, his eyes dark with terror.

"You have some sort of secret hiding place, David?" Jericho asked. "A playhouse? A cave in the woods? When I was a kid it was a cave, with a secret hiding place in it. Is that where you took the gun? To your own secret hiding place?"

Captain Blaine started toward the boy but Jericho stopped him with a sharp gesture. "Is that it, David?"

Anne Powell was on her feet. She stared at Jericho with a cold fury in her eyes. "You can't try to blame it on David!" she cried. "What kind of a monster are you, Mr. Jericho?

It would be nice to save father's reputation—and Mr. Latham's and Joan's and mother's—by blaming it on a child. No, I tell you! *No!*"

Jericho ignored her, looking down at David with deep sympathy in his eyes. "Was there a note, too, David?"

The boy seemed frozen, unable to speak.

Jericho drew a deep breath and looked up at Captain Blaine. "I think David will show us where the gun and the note are when he gets hold of himself," he said. He shifted his eyes to the white-faced mother. "I'm not trying to blame anything on David, Mrs. Powell—unless he can be blamed for loving a man who wasn't worth it."

There was a long shuddering sigh from Mrs. Rice.

"I'm sorry," Jericho said to her. "David didn't hear all our talk, you see. He didn't hear Captain Blaine say that the Senator had been dead for some five hours when the maid found him. That means David could never have talked to him at daylight. Given that slip, there are only two things we can think. I, for one, can't imagine David killing his grandfather; he adored him. The only other possibility is that he found him dead—a suicide. There was probably a note—the Senator would have left an explanation. But when the Senator and the note were found, it would be clear that he was guilty of Joan Latham's accusation. That David, young as he is, could not bear.

"And so he took away the gun and the note, leaving us with what looked like a murder, and hoping that he had kept his grandfather's reputation intact."

Jericho knelt down and faced the boy, his big hands on the boy's shoulders. "Loyalty is a fine thing, David. But not so fine or so important as truth. We can't live without truth, David. If we try, everything else becomes meaningless."

magazine **BOX SCORE** for **1964**

In editing his third volume of the BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR (published in July 1965 by E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc.) Anthony Boucher selected 16 stories, of which 14 appeared in magazines (and of these 14 best, 6 were chosen from *EQMM*). Mr. Boucher's Honor Roll listed 113 stories from magazines and 8 stories from books. Here is the box score for the 113 best detective-crime-mystery stories published in all American magazines during 1964:

name of magazine	*Honor Roll stories*	*percentage*
Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine	50	44.2%
Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine	13	11.5%
Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine	11	9.7%
The Saint Mystery Magazine	11	9.7%
Playboy	6	5.3%
Saturday Evening Post	4	3.5%
Cosmopolitan	3	2.7%
New Yorker	3	2.7%
Argosy	2	1.8%
McCall's	2	1.8%
This Week	2	1.8%
Atlantic	1	.9%
Baker Street Journal	1	.9%
Cavalier	1	.9%
Chase	1	.9%
Horror	1	.9%
Ladies' Home Journal	1	.9%

The percentages above indicate that *EQMM* published nearly 4 times as many distinguished new mystery stories as our nearest competitor, and nearly 1½ times as many as our 3 nearest competitors put together—and *EQMM's* 50 Honor Roll stories in 1964 did not include the superior reprints, both short stories and short novels, which *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* offers throughout the year.

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