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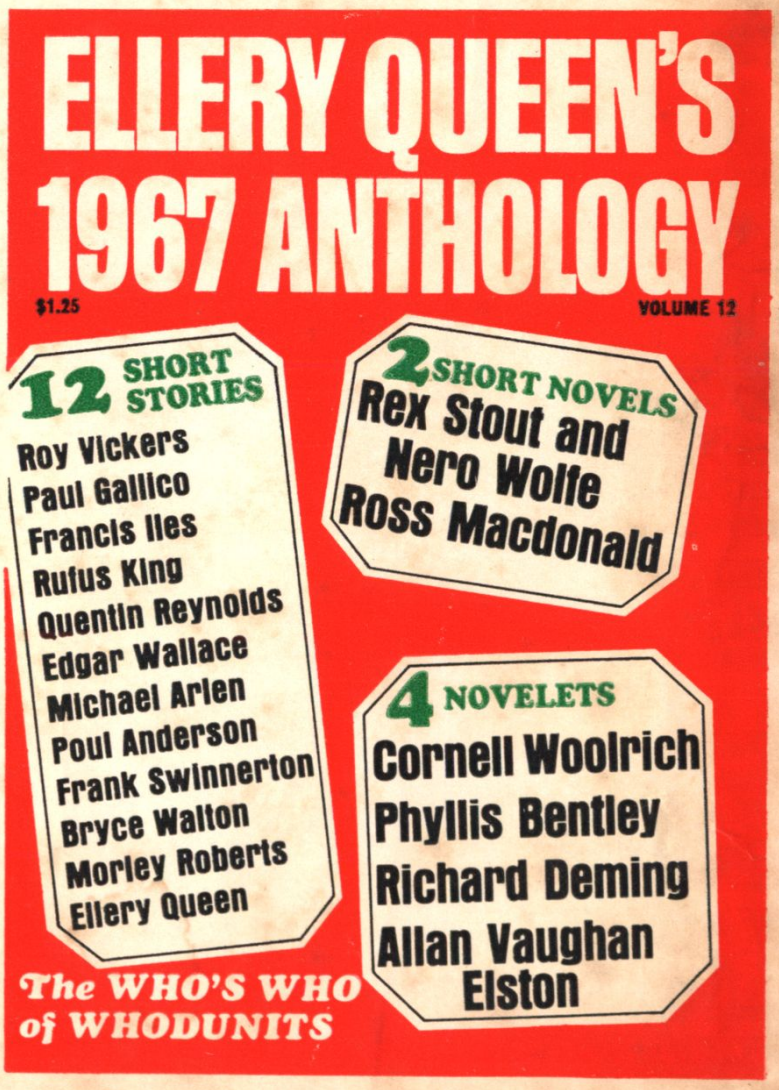

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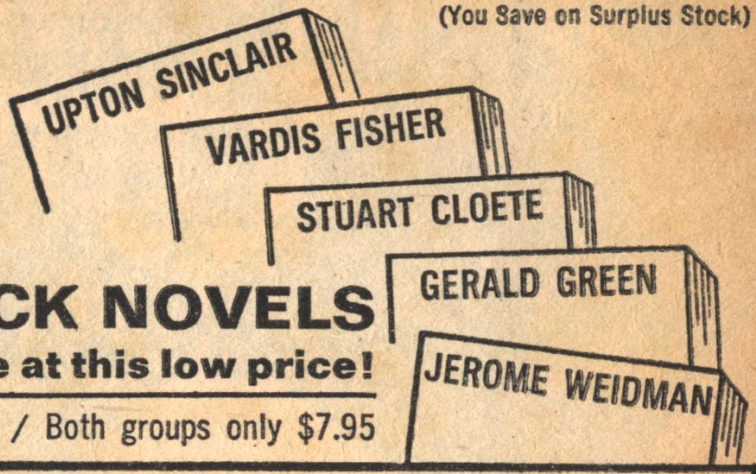

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Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 49, No. 1, Whole No. 278, JAN., 1967. Published monthly by Davis Publications, Inc., at 50c a copy. Annual subscription $6.00 in U.S.A., and possessions and Canada; $7.00 in the Pan American Union; $7.00 in all 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. Office of Publication—10 Ferry St., Concord, N. H. 03301. Second-Class postage paid at Concord, N. H. *© 1966 by Davis Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention. Printed in U.S.A. Submission must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts.*

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VOLCANO IN THE MIND

by HUGH PENTECOST

THE SMALL GRAY MAN KNELT BE-side the body. The others stood in a circle focusing the lights of their electric torches on him. It was a brief examination. He stood up, and instinctively the others lifted their torches to light his expressionless face.

"He's quite dead," he said. "I doubt if there's a single bone left unbroken in his body."

There was the sound of a muffled sob that came from a woman somewhere outside the circle of light.

"There's no doubt about it, Dr. Smith?" The questioner was a State Trooper.

"None, Captain Walsh," the doctor said. He raised his eyes to the darkness which seemed to be pressing down on them. "How far up are the ledges?"

"A good two hundred feet," Walsh said.

The doctor shrugged. "That accounts for it."

"Dangerous place to be at night."

A toneless voice spoke from deep in the shadows. "Especially if you're with a murderer."

The torches turned to light the face of the man who'd spoken. He was tall and dark. He looked shriveled inside his tweed jacket. The torches accentuated lines and shadows, but this man's eyes seemed to be sunk into his head.

He was standing next to a girl with red-gold hair. His arm was around her shoulder and his hand looked large and white against the black cloth of her coat.

"Stephen! Stephen, darling!" the girl said in a protesting tone.

The man looked down at her and a nerve quivered in his cheek. Then he lifted his weary, dark eyes to the line of torches.

I think I murdered him," he said.

"Take it easy, Mr. Drake," Walsh said: "Everybody knows Dr. Bristow was one of your closest friends. You can't blame yourself for an accident."

"I don't think it was an accident," Stephen Drake said. "I think I murdered him."

A young man came out of the crowd to stand beside Dr. Smith and Captain Walsh. His face in profile was sharply, handsomely modeled. He had on riding clothes. "Look, Captain Walsh," he said, in a voice lowered so that it would not carry beyond the doctor and the State Trooper. "Stephen's been very sick. He's overwrought. He doesn't know what he's saying. We ought to get him back home." He turned to the doctor. "I understand you're vacationing here in town, sir?"

Copyright 1947 by Judson P. Philips; originally titled, "Volcano."

"That's right," Dr. Smith said.

"I'm Ted Hunter, Stephen's brother-in-law. Stephen's been under Bristow's care for several weeks." Hunter glanced down at the body, then quickly lifted his eyes. "Could you come back to the house with us? I'm afraid he's already gone to pieces from the shock of this."

Dr. John Smith nodded. "Yes. I'll come," he said. But he didn't move for a moment. "Your brother-in law has a strange way of expressing himself, Mr. Hunter. Most men *know* if they've committed a murder."

Dr. Smith rode back to town in the police car with Captain Walsh. They rode in silence for most of the way. The State Trooper glanced from time to time at the doctor whose face was illuminated by the glow from the dash and wondered at his peculiar, anonymous quality. It was Walsh's business to notice people, but he had only learned tonight, when a doctor was needed, that Smith was in town and had been for more than a month.

"Who is Stephen Drake?" the doctor asked, breaking the silence. His voice was colorless, flat.

"Local boy who made good," Walsh said. "President of Drake Aircraft. The plant's about twenty miles down Route 9. You may have seen it." The doctor didn't indicate whether he'd seen it or not. "He employs about half the people in Woodfield."

"And the dead man?"

Walsh frowned, his eyes on the road ahead. "Dr. Bristow was one swell guy," he said. "Local boy, too. I guess he and Stephen Drake are the two people the folks here in Woodfield are proudest of. Bob Bristow had a brilliant career as a surgeon ahead of him. He chose to come back here and take care of his own. People loved him for that. He's a great loss to us, Dr. Smith."

"I could wish for such an epitaph," the doctor said. He stared at the instrument panel of the car as if it fascinated him. "What were they doing on that mountain trail at night if it's so dangerous?"

"You hadn't heard about the Conroy kid, Doctor?"

"What about him?"

"Frankie Conroy. He's seven. His father runs the local meat market. He's been lost all day. The whole town's been looking for him. The Drake family and Dr. Bristow were looking for him on the mountain."

"You mean the boy may still be up there?"

"No. He was found several hours ago." Walsh shook his head. "That's the ironic part of it. He was found quite a while before Doc Bristow fell. He got locked in a root celler at his own house."

"Why were the people looking for him on the mountain?"

"Somebody thought they'd seen a kid headed that way."

They rode in silence for a while. Then Dr. Smith said, "Why would Stephen Drake murder Bristow?"

Walsh laughed. "He wouldn't. Ted's right. Stephen's been sick and the accident's shocked him out of making sense. He probably thinks he could have saved the doc somehow. He and Bristow were the closest of friends."

Dr. Smith turned to look at Walsh. His eyes were gray and thoughtful. "Crime is your business, Captain Walsh, not mine. But I should think the instances of a man murdering a total stranger were rather rare. I would hardly classify friendship as an alibi."

Walsh laughed. "Don't go dreaming things up, Doctor."

They slowed and turned through a pair of iron gates. Ahead of them, up a graveled driveway, the doctor saw a big stone house. It seemed to be lighted from top to bottom. There were several cars pulled up in front of it.

"Drake place," Walsh said. "They'll be needing you for Stephen."

They got out of the car and walked to the front door. Walsh went in as if he were an old friend. They were in a large entrance hall. A wide stairway with a polished mahogany rail curved upward to the second floor. There was a fireplace at one end of the hall.

The whole place looked like a picture gallery. There were more than a dozen large oil paintings hung about the walls: landscapes, portraits, and two rather extraordinary abstractions. It wasn't necessary to be a connoisseur to recognize that they were all the work of one artist, a man with extraordinary vitality and color sense.

The doctor stood looking around at the paintings. He seemed so interested in them that it was an effort for him to turn his attention to the girl who came out of the room to the right of the front door. It was the same girl he had seen a little while before, clinging to Stephen Drake. The clear light here showed how delicate and sensitive her beauty was. She'd been crying but the evidence of it didn't leave an impression of weakness.

"Thank you, Captain, for bringing the Doctor," she said. She held out her hand to Dr. Smith. "I'm Marcia Drake. I tried to persuade Stephen to go to bed, but he's refused. He's in the study. He insists on talking to Captain Walsh, but he's not up to it. Really he's not. If you could only make him see, Doctor—"

"See what, Mrs. Drake?"

"That he's torturing himself with something quite unreal."

"Most of us do," the doctor said. "Will you take me in?"

"This way."

"I want to talk to Ted about what happened," Walsh said. "Where is he?"

"In the living room, Captain.

Maybe you'll need a drink as much as the rest of them do."

Dr. Smith followed Marcia Drake into the study. It was a dark, book-lined room. French windows opened onto a terrace beyond. The July night sent a warm breeze stirring through the room. It played tricks with the spiral of smoke from the cigarette in the ashtray on the desk.

Stephen Drake sat behind the desk, elbows resting on it, face in his hands. As Marcia and the doctor came in he looked up. His eyes looked haunted.

"This is Dr. Smith, Stephen."

"Hullo, Doctor," Stephen said. His voice was so weary it seemed impossible he could say anything else, but he did. "I'm past needing pills or sedatives, Doctor. I just need to tell my story to Walsh and get it over with."

"Please tell him he hasn't the strength for this, Dr. Smith," Marcia said. "He mustn't talk now."

"Perhaps he must," the doctor said. He moved out of the range of the cone of light thrown down on the desk by the student lamp. "I understand you've been sick, Mr. Drake."

"I—I had a crack-up," Stephen said. "Usual thing from overwork I guess. Low blood pressure, rapid pulse, overexcited reflexes, no sleep. We've been building planes, Dr. Smith—thousands of planes. I've been at it, fifteen—twenty hours a day. I didn't have what it took. I must say I didn't expect to fall apart at thirty-four."

"The treatment?" Dr. Smith asked.

"Rest, more rest. Sleeping pills. High protein diet. Injections of iron and liver. All that's unimportant, Doctor. All very, very unimportant."

"Is it?"

"Yes, Doctor. You see, what happened tonight has been coming for days and days. I've been on the verge of committing murder three times before tonight. I guess I've known all along that sooner or later I couldn't resist it. Something's snapped inside me, Doctor. I just want to tell my story and be taken some place where I can't do any harm."

"Stephen!" Marcia cried. "You mustn't talk that way."

The doctor's voice was unmoved. "So you resisted three impulses to kill Dr. Bristow and then finally gave in to a fourth one?"

Stephen shook his head. "That's the mad part, the insane part, Doctor. Bob Bristow was my only hope, my only refuge. The other three times when it came so close it wasn't Bob I wanted to kill."

He took a deep breath and seemed to drag his voice up from a well of horror. He looked at his wife. "It was you, darling. It was you I nearly murdered."

For a moment Marcia Drake stared at her husband, her eyes wide and frightened, the back of her

right hand pressed against her mouth. Then the tension broke. "Stephen, that's a joke—a horrible, bad joke!"

Stephen didn't answer. He had covered his face once more. A breath of wind sent a sheet of paper drifting slowly down from the desk. The doctor watched it as if he were vitally interested in just where it might land on the rug.

"Perhaps it's not a joke," he said. He might have been talking to himself.

Captain Walsh found three people in the living room. He knew them all well. Ted Hunter was mixing drinks at a small portable bar. Harriet Moore, Ted's maiden aunt, sat in a big wing chair by the fireplace. She was a dark, wiry woman in her early fifties. The tweed skirt, the high-collared, white shirtwaist, the short, military-cut jacket with padded shoulders gave an impression of smart severity. Steel knitting needles clicked in her fingers, an automatic process which apparently required no concentration. She glanced up at Walsh, who had taken a notebook from his pocket as he came into the room.

"Must you act like a policeman?" she asked.

"Sorry," Walsh said. 'I have to make a report, you know."

"Give the man a drink," Harriet said.

The third person in the room was Michael Cleghorn, a huge, shaggy, St. Bernardlike man, who was the Drakes' nearest neighbor. He was an artist. His hands looked big and clumsy, but they could work magic with a paint brush.

He, too, had been brought up in Woodfield. He, Bob Bristow, Ted, Stephen, and Marcia had been a cliquish gang of kids together. Walsh, who had been a town boy and moved in another social sphere, had thought them all rather snobbish in those days. But he had secretly admired them, and today he liked them.

"This is a hell of a thing to have happened," Walsh said.

Cleghorn was sprawled in a leather chair, his legs draped over one side, a rugged curve-stemmed pipe between his teeth. "I wish it could have been me," he said. "Bob was some use in this world."

Ted came over from the bar with a drink for Walsh. "Cleg is always so noble," he said. Walsh was used to the mocking note in his voice. "Nobody ever really wishes it was them. But it's a nice sentiment."

"I've got to know what happened," Walsh said.

Ted picked up a cigarette from an ashtray on the bar. "There's nothing very clear about it, Jim. It was dark. We were all in a group together. I think Bob stepped aside to let Marcia or Harriet pass him on the path. He didn't realize how close to the edge he was and lost his footing."

"God, I'll never forget the sound

of his voice as he fell," Cleghorn said. "He sounded like a child, screaming."

"There's no point in reliving it over and over, Mike," Harriet said.

"Damn it, Harriet, I loved that guy!" Cleghorn said.

"We all loved him," Harriet said. "But having loved him isn't going to help things."

"Will you tell me how you happened to go up the mountain—the whole thing from the beginning?" Walsh asked.

"That's simple enough," Ted said. He had perched himself on the edge of a table, his riding boots swinging rhythmically back and forth. "I'd been out on an all-day ride with Joe Davis. When I got back here I found Marcia, Stephen, Harriet, Cleg, and Bob out on the terrace. They were all talking about the Conroy kid being lost."

"Marcia had been to a meeting in in the village and heard the story there," Harriet said.

"Well, Joe and I had passed the foot of Lookout Trail on the way home. I saw a small kid fooling around the foot of the path. I didn't know about the Conroy boy then, so I didn't think anything of it. When I heard about him I wondered if it could have been him I saw. Of course it turns out it wasn't, but at the time I thought it might have been."

"You don't know who the boy was you saw?"

"I haven't any idea. At the time I didn't pay much attention. We passed maybe fifty or sixty yards from him. He was just a little boy. When I mentioned it, Stephen got steamed up about it. He thought we ought to go look for him."

"We used to play around the trail when we were kids," Cleg said. "Stephen knew it would be dangerous after dark, and it was getting late then. We all agreed to go take a look."

"Marcia and Harriet got flashlights and we all drove out in the car," Ted said. He tossed his cigarette into the empty fireplace. "At the time I didn't think Stephen was strong enough to make the climb, and I said so. Bob thought it was all right. I wish I'd been stubborn about it."

"Why?"

"For God's sake, Jim, you heard him out there! That wacky talk about murder!"

"It was a shock, naturally," Walsh said. "He probably thought there was something he could have done to save Bob. Well, go ahead."

"We left the car at the foot of the trail and started up," Ted said. "You've been up there, Jim. There are half a dozen paths that branch off the main trail. They all come out on the ledges eventually, and the Conroy kid could have taken any of them, we assumed. I guess I left the party first, didn't I?"

Cleg nodded confirmation. "I took the second branch-off," he said. "We were yelling for the kid

all the time, but of course he didn't answer."

"I left Stephen and Marcia at the next fork," Harriet said. "They went on up the main trail together with Bob."

"Bob must have taken the next cutoff," Ted said, "because when I got to the ledges he was there alone. Stephen and Marcia turned up next and Harriet and Cleg joined us at about the same time. There was no sign of the kid, so we figured there wasn't anything more we could do. We decided to take the short way down."

"You know that narrow path, right on the edge of the ledges," Cleg said.

Walsh nodded.

"You have to go single file," Ted said. "We were all standing at the head of the path. I think it was Bob who suggested the girls go first. We could help light the way from behind."

"Marcia led the way," Harriet said. "I was right behind her."

"It happened before we really got started," Cleg said.

Ted lit another cigarette. He was frowning. "That's the way it was, Jim. We were all in a sort of confused huddle there. Then Bob let out a yell and was gone. Maybe somebody jostled him going past. Maybe the ground gave way. It's all shale."

"We had to go down by the path," Cleg said. "It must have been nearly three quarters of an hour before we found Bob. Then Harriet went to the car and drove for help. Maybe if we could have gotten to Bob sooner—"

Walsh shook his head. "He was killed instantly." A startled look on Cleg's face made him turn.

Marcia stood in the doorway. Cleg hauled himself up out of his chair and went across to her.

"What is it, sweet?" he asked.

She looked past him at Walsh. "Who is this Dr. Smith?" she asked.

"I don't know much about him," Walsh said. "He rented the Parker cottage for the summer. Supposed to be on a holiday. Why?"

"We've got to do something," Marcia said. "Stephen persists in the crazy notion that he's responsible for Bob's falling. He's quite out of his head. He even talked about having tried to murder me."

"The doctor'll give him something to make him sleep," Walsh said.

"But he *isn't!*" Marcia protested. "He seems to be encouraging Stephen to talk this crazy way."

The doctor was somewhere in the shadow, out of the range of the light on the desk. Somehow it made it easier for Stephen to talk without seeing the doctor's face. He managed to light a fresh cigarette after wasting several matches. Then he began. The words came falteringly at first, and then in an increasing rush.

"It's hard to know where the

starting point is," he said. "I fainted one day as I was leaving my office. I'm president of Drake Aircraft. I put it down to the heat, or maybe a shrimp salad I'd had in the cafeteria for lunch. When I got home Marcia insisted I send for Bristow.

"He took a serious view of it. Said I'd stretched my endurance to the limit and if I didn't rest and follow orders I was going to be good and sick. I made arrangements at the plant and then I gave up. I didn't realize how all-in I was till I quit working.

"Everybody was swell to me. I had eggnogs, and sat around in the sun and really enjoyed myself. Marcia's aunt and her brother Ted live here with us. Bob came in to see me every day and I seemed to be getting along fine."

He paused to inhale on his cigarette. The doctor had taken a place near the window and was looking out over the moonlit garden, almost as if he weren't hearing. Stephen couldn't see him in the gloom. He knocked the ash from his cigarette and went on. His voice began to be unsteady.

"It was Sunday morning . . . two weeks ago. We usually have breakfast on the terrace if the weather's fine. People drop in—like Bob, or Mike Cleghorn, an artist who lives next door, or other friends. That day it was Mike. After breakfast Marcia and Ted had planned to take two of the horses down to the jumping ring in the lower field for a workout. Cleg and I walked to the stable with them.

"I don't know why, but I didn't feel as well as I had for the last few days. I had a funny, pounding sensation at my temples. When we got to the stable George Meadows, the stableboy, brought out the two horses Ted and Marcia were going to ride. I was standing by Marcia's horse. She and Cleg were behind me, laughing together about something. Instinctively I lifted the saddle flap to see if everything was all right."

Stephen stopped. It seemed to be getting harder for him to speak.

"Go on, Mr. Drake," the doctor said quietly.

"I—I had the strangest kind of detached feeling, Doctor. I was looking at the girth and the buckles yet I didn't seem to know *why* I was looking at them. You know the feeling when you go into a room to get something and then can't remember what it is you're after?"

"Yes."

"Suddenly it all seemed to come into clear focus. It was a folded, leather girth and the stitching near the buckles was ripped loose. It was just held together by a fragment of the stitching. At the first fence I knew it would give way. I stood there, with the saddle flap raised, staring at the girth. My hands were damp and cold—like they are now. That thumping was going on inside my head.

"'Is it all right, darling?' Marcia asked from behind me.

"My mouth was dry and cottony. Some powerful force urged me to lower the flap, to say that it *was* all right, to let her ride down to the ring. I could see her galloping toward the first fence; I could see the big, gray hunter take off for the jump; I could see the girth give way and Marcia fall. She was lying on the turf and the iron-shod hoofs of the horse were coming straight down on her." The recollection of that vision stopped Stephen again.

"What *did* you do, Mr. Drake?" the Doctor asked.

Stephen let out his breath in a long sigh. "I called George. I pointed to the girth. Then I stumblingly went back along the path to the house. It was incredible, Doctor, but for a few seconds there I had been coldly, calculatingly considering the possibility of a fatal accident to Marcia. To have let her ride out on that faulty saddle would have been murder. *And I actually thought of doing it!* Only for seconds—but in those seconds it had seemed like an attractive idea."

The doctor made no comment. He sat looking out at the garden. After a long time Stephen went on.

"You'd have to know Marcia and me better, Doctor, to know how monstrous that idea was to me. I love her. She's my whole life. When we had to be apart for any reason I was miserable. If she was ever late for an appointment I'd get in a dither."

"Under the wheels of trucks," Dr. Smith said.

"What?" Stephen sounded startled.

"I said 'Under the wheels of trucks.'"

"How did you know?" Stephen asked.

"It's a common thing, Mr. Drake. You have an appointment with someone you love; they're late; so you begin to imagine that something's happened. Usually you imagine it's an accident. Was that how you felt?"

"Yes," Stephen said. His voice was very low. "I'd imagine she'd been in a taxi smashup, or, as you said, run over by a truck, or that there'd been a train wreck, if she was coming by train."

"Go on, Mr. Drake."

"Is all this so very odd, Doctor? Don't other people worry about someone they love?"

"It's not odd," the doctor said. "People worry."

"Well, after that business with the girth I was pretty sunk for a few days. Somehow I couldn't tell anyone about it. Bristow saw I'd had a setback, but I couldn't tell him about it. I kept twisting it around in my mind, wondering if I'd really meant to do it. But I *hadn't* done it. I managed to convince myself that it was all a fantasy—the result of being overtired and nervously keyed up. Then it happened again."

Stephen twisted and turned in his chair, tried to light another cigarette, and failed completely this time.

"About a week later I drove into town. I was driving for the first time since I'd been sick. Suddenly I noticed Marcia on the road ahead. Her back was to me. She was walking in the same direction we were going. She has a distinctive sort of swinging gait. Yippee, her spaniel, was galloping along ahead of her.

"Suddenly I felt that curious throbbing sensation inside my head. The road, the countryside, the figure of Marcia, seemed to blend into a kind of mist. I realized I was gripping the wheel of the car hard. Without any very clear thought I began easing the car over toward the right-hand side of the road. My foot pressed down on the accelerator and the car gathered speed.

"Inch by inch I turned the car in Marcia's direction until it was headed straight for her. The little nickel-plated figure on the radiator cap was aimed straight at her shoulder blades. There was a strange roaring sound in my ears, like a wind rushing past. I was almost on top of her now—fifteen yards—ten yards—faster—faster—"

Stephen's voice broke and he dropped his head forward on his arms. His whole body shook.

"Go on, Mr. Drake." The doctor's voice was totally without emotion.

After a moment Stephen lifted his head and went on. "Well, suddenly the fog was gone; the picture was clear. I wrenched the wheel to the left. I got a glimpse of Marcia's startled face as I swept by her, spraying gravel. I jammed on the brake and brought the car to a stop.

"I just sat there, gripping the wheel, that pulse hammering in my head. I was drenched with sweat. Marcia came up beside the car, grinning.

" 'Is that what you call "once over lightly" when you go to the barber?' she asked. She opened the door of the car, whistled to Yippee, and they both got in. 'Home, James,' she said. She didn't dream of what had so nearly happened."

The room was silent. The doctor evidently meant to make no comment. Stephen leaned back in his chair and pressed the tips of his fingers against his temples.

"The next twenty-four hours were the worst I ever spent," he said. "The experience on the road kept rolling over and over in my mind like an endlessly revolving mill wheel. I kept trying to explain it away. I remembered that explanation for the feeling people sometimes have in a strange place or strange situation—the feeling that they've been there before. It's supposed to be a momentary blackout of consciousness. You see the place, there is a blackout for a fraction of a second, and then you see it again . . . and it seems as though you must have been there before. It wasn't

any good. That hadn't happened to me.

"I tried to explain it in terms of falling asleep for an instant. I'd done it driving at night and found myself over on the side of the road. But that hadn't happened either. There wasn't any escape from the truth. For a moment I'd meant to kill her."

"But didn't," the doctor said. "Go on."

"The worst part of it was that I suddenly felt separated from Marcia. I wanted to be with her, but I was afraid that something might go wrong again. I'd caught myself in the pattern twice. I kept staring at myself in the mirror to see if I looked the same. I thought I sensed a tension in the family's attitude toward me—as if they knew. It was just plain hell, Dr. Smith."

"But that wasn't the end of it?"

"No."

"You didn't tell Bristow?"

"Not then. You see I kept trying to explain it away to myself. After all I hadn't let her ride the horse, had I? I hadn't run her down in the car. It was all probably the result of being overtired, I kept telling myself.

"So, very slowly, like someone learning to walk again, after an injury to his legs, I began to feel my way back to normal." Stephen laughed. "God, that was certainly a fool's paradise."

The doctor remained silent.

"About four days ago, Doctor, Marcia wasn't feeling well. She had an upset stomach. She went to bed late in the afternoon. Cleg came over for dinner that night and he and Ted and Harriet and I had a pleasant evening. I went up to bed about ten. I was supposed to get plenty of sleep.

"When I got upstairs Marcia asked me if I'd go to the bathroom and get her some bicarbonate of soda. Of course I went. I opened the medicine cabinet. The soda is kept in a glass jar on the middle shelf. Marcia always empties it into the jar from its original package. I reached for the jar, took two teaspoons of the white powder, dumped them into a glass of water, and began stirring them. I put the jar back on the shelf. I turned and started for the bedroom."

Stephen's voice began to shake. "I'd only taken a couple of steps when I realized that it *wasn't* soda —that I'd seen clearly the large POISON label on the jar. That I'd gone right ahead as though—as though I hadn't seen it. I dropped the glass and it smashed into bits on the bathroom tiles. I'd caught myself again, Dr. Smith."

"What was poison doing in the soda jar?" Dr. Smith asked.

"It wasn't the soda jar. It was one just like it. Marcia had handled some poison parsnip while she was working in the garden. This stuff was used to make a skin lotion. Bristow warned us it was deadly if taken internally. Marcia put it in

a jar like the soda jar, but she marked it clearly, and it was kept on the top shelf, out of reach, where no one could get at it by accident."

"Who put it in the soda jar's place?"

"We've been having a general house cleaning, Dr. Smith. A woman from the village, a Mrs. Lilley, had been helping our own maids. She evidently cleaned the medicine cabinet. I suppose she didn't remember which bottle went where. But you see what it meant to me? I've been prepared to take advantage of any opportunity to do Marcia harm."

"That's open to argument," the doctor said. He got up and came over to the desk. His square, undistinguished fingers rested on the edge of the desk. "Did you finally tell Bristow?"

Stephen nodded. "The next day. He asked me the same question you did about the soda jar. He didn't seem to take it very seriously. God, if he only had, he might be alive now."

"Perhaps," Dr. Smith said. "Perhaps not. What happened tonight?"

Stephen fumbled with a match for a new cigarette. The doctor quietly lit one and held it for him.

"You know about the Conroy child?" Stephen asked.

"Yes."

"Well, Bob and Mike Cleghorn were here late this afternoon for a drink. Marcia came back from a meeting with the news about the boy. A little later Ted, who'd been on a long ride, turned up. When he heard about the boy he said he'd seen a kid over near Lookout Trail. He wasn't sure whether it was the Conroy kid or not. I know that trail, Doctor. We climbed it hundreds of times when we were kids. At the top of the trail are the ledges. They're dangerous, particularly at night. I thought we ought to go look for the boy. We all went in the car—the whole family plus Mike Cleghorn and Bob."

"Yes?"

"We left the car at the foot of the trail and started up, calling to the boy. There are several secondary paths and we split up, each taking different ways. Finally we all met on the ledges. There was no trace of the boy." He stopped, his hands clenched on the desk in front of him.

"What happened then, Mr. Drake?"

"Well, there was no point in staying there. We decided to take a short cut down. It's a narrow, steep path. You have to walk it single file. We were all gathered at the head of the path when it happened."

"What happened?"

"Bob went over."

"What did you have to do with it?"

"I must have pushed him."

"You *must* have pushed him!" The doctor's voice was suddenly sharp. "Don't you know?"

Stephen shook his head wearily.

"As he was falling he said, 'Stephen, what have you done?' "

"What! The man was falling and he said that to you?"

Stephen nodded.

"Didn't he cry out?"

"After that he screamed."

"But before he screamed, and while he was falling, he said to you, 'Stephen, what have you done?' "

"Yes."

The doctor turned and walked over to the French windows. He stood there a moment and then came back. The desk light showed a curious brightness in his eyes. "Did you have the same symptoms, Mr. Drake? Throbbing in the temples? Things fading into a mist?"

"I don't remember them."

"And why did you push him? What motive did you have?"

"None. But there was no motive to harm Marcia."

"And you're positive he spoke those words to you?"

"I'll go on hearing them as long as I live," Stephen said.

Again the doctor walked the length of the room and back. He stopped in front of the desk facing Stephen. "I don't believe a word of it, Mr. Drake," he said.

Stephen pulled himself up out of his chair. "But, Doctor, I tell you I—"

"I don't mean I think you're lying, Mr. Drake. I mean I don't think you pushed him. I don't think he said those words to you. And I don't think you would have harmed your wife."

A pathetically eager look came into Stephen's face. "Then you think it was an accident?" he asked.

"No." Dr. Smith said. "I think it was murder."

Stephen lowered himself back into his chair. He was staring at the doctor with a kind of hurt bewilderment, as if he thought the small gray man was playing games with him.

"There's a good deal of the story you haven't told, Stephen," the doctor said. He used the first name, simply, casually.

"But I've told you everything."

"Not really. But we're not going to go into it tonight. There are other things I have to know before we can make sense out of this. I'm going to give you a sedative so you can sleep. In the morning we'll see where we're at."

"There's no explanation for it except that something's given way in my mind, Doctor," Stephen said.

"I'm afraid I can't agree with you, Stephen. There are several other explanations. The problem is to find the right one."

The doctor had brought his bag from the car. It was on a chair by the door. He opened it and took a bottle of tablets from it. "Take two of these, Stephen. You'll sleep. Don't try talking to anyone tonight."

Stephen took the tablets, got to his feet once more, and moved

slowly to the door. "You're not making it easier by telling me that I'm all right, Dr. Smith. Because, you see, I know I'm not."

"I didn't say you weren't sick, Stephen," the doctor said. "I said I couldn't agree that there was anything wrong with your mind."

"I don't understand, Doctor."

"Get some sleep," the doctor said. "You're too tired to understand."

The doctor stayed in the study for some time by himself. He walked back to the window and stood there, looking out. Evidently he wasn't visible from the door, for when Walsh appeared he looked in and was about to turn away when the doctor spoke to him.

"I didn't see you there, Dr. Smith," Walsh said. He came across and sat down beside the doctor. He lit a cigarette and inhaled contentedly. "I guess you got Stephen talked out of his crazy notion?"

"What crazy notion?"

"That he pushed Dr. Bristow off the ledges."

"I tried to. I don't think I was too successful."

"Well, it's a closed case," Walsh said. "A damned unfortunate accident."

"I don't agree, Captain," the Doctor said.

"What do you mean?"

"Bristow was murdered."

"Doctor! You're off your nut!" Walsh said. "You don't mean Stephen sold you that bill of goods?"

"No."

"Then what do you mean, Bob was murdered?"

"It's a simple Anglo-Saxon word, Captain. I mean someone pushed him off the ledge. But not Stephen. Stephen was meant to *think* he had."

Walsh just sat there in amazed silence. "Do you feel all right, Doctor?" he asked finally. "Who do you think did push him?"

"I haven't the faintest idea. Not yet."

Walsh laughed. "I'm afraid I can't go along with you, Doctor. Where's your evidence?"

"Evidence?" the doctor turned his gray eyes out toward the garden. "If you mean physical clues, Captain, I haven't any. No cigar butts or fingerprints or blunt instruments. And Bristow's body won't tell you anything. It's broken to pieces."

"Then what is your evidence?"

"The unconscious testimony of a disturbed mind, Captain Walsh."

"For God's sake, Doctor!"

"Not in your line, is it, Captain? Well, it happens to be my profession, the study of disturbed minds. I want to tell you a story. Stephen Drake's story. See what you make of it."

The doctor began retelling the story he'd heard. Somehow his monotonous, lifeless voice actually added tension to the telling in the semidarkness. He told about the saddle girth, the car, the poison jar.

When he had finished this part of the story Walsh whistled.

"Boy, he's worse off than I thought! Maybe he *has* gone nuts!"

"I want to tell you his story of what happened tonight. It will be interesting to see if it checks against what the others told you."

He told Stephen's version of how they'd started out, how they'd climbed the trail, separating on the way, and finally joined on the ledges. He told how they'd decided on the short cut down, the gathering at the head of the path, and Bristow's fall.

"That's exactly what they told me," Walsh said.

"Is that all they told you?"

"What else is there?"

"Only that Stephen says Bristow spoke to him as he was falling. Did none of the rest of them hear him?"

"They didn't mention it," Walsh said. "Bob spoke to him?"

"He said 'Stephen, what have you done?'"

"Now wait a minute, Doctor! Bob said that to Stephen?"

"As he was falling," the Doctor said dryly. "Try to picture it, Captain. Stephen pushes Bristow. I can imagine the doctor saying 'Stephen, stop!' or 'Stephen, what are you doing?' I can't imagine his saying 'Stephen, what have you done?' as he fell. But that's just an oddity, Captain. It's not evidence. However, if someone wanted Stephen to think, in his disturbed and overwrought condition, that he *had* pushed Bristow, saying 'Stephen, what have you done?' would implant the idea in his mind, wouldn't it?"

"I suppose it might. But—"

"That's what happened, Captain. *Someone else* said it, and Stephen, in his confused state, thought it was Bristow."

"That's just guesswork, Doctor!"

"But accurate, I suspect."

"I'm afraid, Doctor, this whole thing is too fancy for me."

The doctor walked over to the desk. He picked up a round glass paperweight and showed it to Walsh. "What does this make you think of, Walsh?"

"Why, papers, bills, things that might blow around."

"Exactly. But suppose you were thinking of murdering me. Mightn't this heavy glass paperweight look to you like a weapon? You could crush my skull with it."

"Sure, I suppose I might think of it that way," Walsh said.

"What I'm getting at is this, Walsh. If you saw a ripped saddle girth you wouldn't think of it as a murder weapon, would you? Nor do you think of your car as a murder weapon. Nor would you think of skin lotion as a murder weapon. Not under ordinary conditions."

"Of course I wouldn't."

"But Stephen Drake *did!*" the doctor said. "That can only mean an impulse toward violence was there. He saw the girth, the car, the

poison bottle, as instruments for murder."

"God, he must really be batty!" Walsh said. "But if he is, then maybe he *did* push Bristow."

"I doubt it. I've got to know a lot more about him than I know now, but I doubt it. Captain, we all have certain associations or experiences that turn loose in us impulses toward violence—sometimes directed against persons we love. We usually conceal these impulses from ourselves or control them. It's like a volcano in the mind. Fortunately, these associations or experiences don't take place often enough to jeopardize our control. If they did, the volcano would erupt and blow us to kingdom come. I think that's what's been happening to Stephen."

"I don't get it," Walsh said.

"I think he's been subjected to some kind of pressure that's been driving him along the path toward murder," Dr. Smith said. "But I don't think this pressure is there by accident. Somewhere in his past are experiences that evoke violent and aggressive impulses toward his wife. I think someone has been calmly and deliberately playing on this neurotic weakness of his. That weakness has been accentuated by his physical breakdown. I think someone has been trying to drive him to murder Mrs. Drake."

"Dr. Smith! Do you realize what you're saying?"

"Perfectly, Captain. I'm saying that someone in his household, or some close friend who knows the whole past history of his association with his wife, has been using that knowledge to bring about a murder. I suspect that all Stephen's life one of these people has hated him and waited for a chance to destroy him.

"It's a clever person. It's a person who's had an opportunity to study his weak spots for years and who's been prepared to take advantage of that knowledge when the right moment came. His sickness provided that moment."

"But he *didn't* kill his wife!" Walsh protested.

"Precisely. That's why I say he isn't insane. He resisted the impulse three times! He finally went to his friend Bristow for help. Those are the actions of a sane man, Captain."

Walsh shook his head dazedly. "It's a fantastic theory, Doctor. You're saying that someone in this household is a vicious, scheming murderer who was trying to use Stephen as a kind puppet to do his dirty work!"

"That's exactly it," Dr. Smith said.

"But it didn't work!" Walsh said. "Nothing's happened to Marcia. She didn't get pushed over the ledge. It was Bristow!"

"Bristow, who knew the story," Dr. Smith said in his flat voice. "Bristow, who saw his patient falling apart in front of his eyes. Bristow, a brilliant doctor who undoubtedly came to the same expla-

nation for these experiences that I have.

"But he knew more than I do. He knew these people. He was able to check back. Again it's a guess, but I suspect he'd come on the answer and was on the verge of exposing the would-be murderer. So he got pushed off the ledge. That's the motive, Captain. Bristow had found the answer to Stephen's problem."

"No," Walsh said sharply. "I can't swallow it, Doctor. You're saying that Marcia or Ted or Harriet Moore or Mike Cleghorn is the biggest damn villain on earth! It's not so. I know them."

"Do you, Captain?"

"The whole thing is just a theory. There's no proof," Walsh said.

"Are you so ready to believe in coincidence, Captain?" the doctor asked. "I can't accept as coincidence the fact that whenever the impulse toward violence is roused in Stephen, the means for committing murder is always at hand. He has the impulse, and there is a broken saddle girth! He has the impulse, and there is Marcia walking ahead of his car! He has the impulse, and there is poison in his hand! One of these might be coincidence. All three of them I just can't accept."

Walsh just sat there, shaking his head from side to side.

"If a man is in an angry argument with his wife, Captain, and has the impulse to strike her, it's not very dangerous in a physical sense. She may get a black eye or a cut lip. But if he's fixing a fire and has an iron poker in his hand, then the impulse *is* dangerous. If he strikes her with the poker he may kill her. So he checks the impulse. But if every time thereafter he gets angry with his wife he finds he has a poker in his hands, the chances of his murdering her in the long run become very great, I'd say. That's what's been happening to Stephen. Every time the impulse toward violence arises he finds the poker in his hand! I say it's not by chance, and I think I can prove it."

"How?"

"If that girth stitching didn't break by accident, then we'd know he was meant to find it, wouldn't we? If the cleaning woman didn't misplace the poison jar, then we'd know it was misplaced on purpose, wouldn't we? Would that convince you, Captain?"

"Maybe," Walsh said.

"There are two parts to this murder mechanism," Dr. Smith said. "The first part is to prepare the booby trap—the saddle girth, the poison jar—the poker, in short. The second part is to apply pressure to Stephen's neurotic weakness. It's really a beautiful device. The impulse is stimulated in Stephen, and then he's brought face to face with the booby trap. It calls for artistry and perfect timing."

"But it didn't work," Walsh said stubbornly. "We can't hang anyone for something that didn't happen!"

"Bristow's in the morgue," Dr.

Smith said coldly. "That's real enough, isn't it, Captain?"

"Yes, that's real enough," Walsh conceded.

"His death proves my theory, Captain. We can follow it up or we can let it go. If we let it go, the murderer will bide his time and then I can almot promise you that you will find yourself investigating another fatal accident involving these charming people."

Walsh struck a match for a cigarette. The flame showed his face, drawn and tired. "Maybe *I'm* crazy, Doctor," he said, "but you've sold me. Where do we start?"

Ted Hunter was at the portable bar making another round of drinks when Walsh and the doctor came in from the study. Marcia was sitting on the couch, her head resting against the back, her eyes closed. She had just come downstairs from seeing if Stephen had everything he needed. She seemed to be suffering from an exhaustion almost as great as his.

Harriet was still at her sock. Mike Cleghorn was standing by Ted, ready to pass the drinks.

Walsh walked over and stood with his back to the fireplace. The doctor gravitated toward a bookcase in the corner and was apparently disinterested in the whole gathering.

"Drink, Jim?" Ted asked the Captain.

"No, thanks."

Ted's eyebrows rose in a mocking expression. "I think I detect an official pronouncement coming on."

"I've been talking with Dr. Smith," Walsh said. "He's convinced me that this thing isn't as simple as I thought. I'm afraid Bob didn't fall by accident."

The whole room seemed suddenly suspended in air. Harriet's knitting needles stopped abruptly. Ted stood, a bottle in one hand, a glass in the other. Mike Cleghorn had struck a match for his pipe and the flame burned slowly down till it scorched his fingers and he dropped it. Marcia's eyes were wide open, fixed on Walsh.

"Oh, rot!" Ted said. He tilted the bottle, and whiskey poured into the glass. Very slowly Harriet's needles began to move again. Cleg struck another kitchen match on the sole of his shoe and puffed steadily on his pipe to get it going. Only Marcia remained as she was, her tension unbroken.

"Dr. Smith believes Stephen's statement?" she asked in a low voice.

"No," Walsh said. "He thinks one of *you* pushed Bob off the ledge."

It was a second bombshell. This time everyone turned to look at the doctor. His back was to them. He seemed absorbed in the titles of the books on the shelves.

"That's not all," Walsh said.

"It's enough!" Harriet said sharply. "What kind of hysterical talk is this?"

Walsh went doggedly on. "Bob was murdered because he'd uncovered the plans for another murder."

Ted threw back his head and laughed. "Here we should have a forty-piece orchestra rushing into the *William Tell Overture!* Of all the hogwash!"

"You're serious, aren't you, Jim?" Cleghorn said.

"Dead serious, Cleg. Stephen has told the doctor a story that we just can't toss overboard and forget."

"Stephen!" Ted said. "Stephen's nuts!"

"If he is," Walsh said gravely, "someone here is directly responsible. Someone here has been working on Stephen. The object seems to have been to drive Stephen to kill Marcia."

"Oh, my God," Ted said disgustedly. He turned toward the small gray man. His mouth was drawn down in an ironic smile. "What are you, Dr. Smith, one of these fancy Viennese dream interpreters?"

The doctor turned. "There are no dreams involved, Mr. Hunter. There has been a very real, diabolical, and vicious scheme in operation, though. Bristow found out about it and one of you had to get rid of him before you were exposed."

"My dear Doctor—"

"One of you has been trying to destroy Stephen Drake," the doctor said. "To destroy his mind, to smash his life, and possibly to bring about the death of Mrs. Drake also. It's about as ugly a scheme as I've ever come across in my career. That man asleep upstairs has been slowly and deliberately driven to the brink of murder. One of you is responsible."

Ted turned to the others. "The man's crazy!" he said.

"He quite evidently believes what he's saying," Harriet said in her crisp, dry voice. "Let him finish, Ted."

"I won't be finished, Miss Moore," the doctor said, "till I've done the job Bristow set out to do. And I can promise you not to be as careless as he was."

"Let me get this straight," Cleghorn said. "You're accusing one of us of trying to drive Stephen crazy so that he would murder Marcia?"

"Something like that, Mr. Cleghorn."

"I think," Cleghorn said slowly, I'll go home. I don't know who you are, Dr. Smith. I don't know what brand of hashish you've been smoking. But I know I don't have to take this kind of wild accusation from you or anyone else. I advise the rest of you to follow the same course. And I suggest, urgently, Marcia, that you get another doctor for Stephen."

"Sit down, Cleg," Walsh said.

The big artist towered over the State Trooper. "Are you saying that as an officer of the law, Jim?"

"Yes."

"And on what grounds are you restricting my freedom?" There was slow menace in Cleghorn's voice.

"I'm investigating a possible murder, Cleg," Walsh said. "If necessary I can hold you as a material witness. You were present when Bob was pushed off the ledge."

Cleghorn exploded. "Who the hell says he was pushed? Are you letting yourself be mesmerized by this quack pill peddler? So Stephen's off his nut and made some crazy statement. Is that proof of murder?"

"There seems to be a simple answer to this," Ted said. "We find out from an authoritative source just where we stand." He crossed to a telephone on a small table in the corner. "Woodfield 60," he said to the operator. The others waited in silence, watching him. "Hello, Malcolm? Ted Hunter here. Look, Walsh has gone off his trolley. He's decided Bob's fall wasn't an accident. On the evidence of a jerk doctor who's spending a holiday here. What . . . oh . . . Well, you're the County Attorney here. I thought . . ."

There was a long pause and then Ted said in a drawling voice, "You all seem to be going in for voodoo! You can count on me to vote for your opponent at the next election. Be seeing you."

He put back the receiver. He walked slowly back to the portable bar and poured himself another drink. "It seems, my dear family and friends, that we are in what is known as a box. It seems that Jim and the doctor here have already talked to Malcolm, from the phone in the study. It seems Malcolm is sold too."

He turned his ironic smile on the doctor. "And finally it seems that we owe Dr. Smith an apology. He turns out to be an eminent psychiatrist. It seems he's worked on several murder cases with the New York police. He is, in short, a celebrity. Malcolm wouldn't dream of disputing any of his theories. However, you don't mind, Doctor, if I go on thinking you're completely cuckoo, do you?"

"I don't mind, Mr. Hunter."

"So you'd better sit down, Cleg, and I'll make you another drink," Ted said. "It seems the noble Captain is quite within his rights to hold us all."

The clock on the study desk showed 1:45 in the morning. A faint chill had crept into the night air, and the French windows were closed. Marcia Drake sat in the chair to the right of the desk. Walsh sat behind the desk. Dr. Smith again had evaporated into the shadow. Marcia's hands were locked tightly in her lap.

"I'm afraid I don't understand any of this, Jim," she said. "I've known that something was wrong with Stephen, particularly for the last two weeks. But when he says, and you seem to believe him, that he's wanted to—to do me some harm—"

"It's a tough spot, Marcia," Walsh said gently. "I think you've got to

remember that Stephen hasn't been himself. He was physically sick and when someone began to play games with him he didn't have the strength to fight back."

"But he had enough," Dr. Smith said. "He fought back and he finally went to Bristow for help. It takes more courage to fight what seems to be a fantasy than it does to fight a flesh-and-blood enemy."

Marcia was silent, staring down at her hands.

"Dr. Smith wants to know about Stephen. You seem to be the person to tell him, Marcia," Walsh said.

"What do you want to know?"

"Who is Stephen Drake?" the doctor asked in a dull voice. "What kind of person is he? What kind of life has he lived?"

"What I tell you will be biased," Marcia said. "You see, I happen to love him very much."

"I hope you do, Mrs. Drake," the doctor said. "He's going to need it."

"You want me to begin at the very beginning?"

"At the very beginning, Mrs. Drake."

She didn't speak for a moment. She seemed to be searching back in her mind for just the right starting point. "I think you have to know about my father," she said. "He was Nicholas Hunter—a very great artist. You may have noticed some of his paintings hanging in the entrance hall. This was his house. Ted and I were both born here. My mother died when I was only a year old and Aunt Harriet came to live with us—to run the house for Father and bring up the children. She was Mother's sister.

"Father was an extraordinary man. He was big, vital, and noisy. He had a bright-red beard. He used to barge through the village, pounding people on the back, arguing about local politics, and feeding candy to any stray kids who happened to be around. He had a gargantuan sense of humor, earthy and a little vulgar; but not like Ted who's inclined to needle you.

"Father was always shouting and stamping around the house. But he was a paradox. Rough and gentle; stormy and calm as a millpond. We called him Saint Nick. I think it came from his playing Santa Claus at the village tree one year. You have to know about Saint Nick to account for Stephen."

"I guess everyone loved your father, Marcia," Walsh said.

"Maybe Stephen loved him more than any of us. I sometimes think he did. You see, Dr. Smith, Stephen was a town boy. His father was the local handyman. His mother took in sewing. There was no money. Then Stephen's father went into the army in the first World War and was killed at Belleau Wood. His mother died a year later, and the local authorities dressed Stephen in his best Sunday suit, packed his belongings in a straw suitcase, and brought him to the depot where the

train would take him to the state orphanage.

"He was sitting on the straw suitcase crying—because he was afraid—when Saint Nick happened along. He saw Stephen and stopped to ask him what the matter was. Stephen says he knelt down and put one of his big hands on Stephen's shoulder. When Stephen got through telling his story, Saint Nick took him and the suitcase, chucked them both in his car, and brought Stephen home with him.

"I remember Ted and I were playing upstairs. Ted was eight. I was six. We heard Saint Nick come in and slam the door. We heard him bellow.

" 'Where the blue blasted blazes is everyone? We've got company!'

"Aunt Harriet appeared from somewhere and we heard Saint Nick say Stephen had come to stay. Aunt Harriet asked him if he'd adopted Stephen.

" 'Adopted him, kidnaped him, call it what you like!' Saint Nick said. 'A public institution's no place for a boy to grow up.'

"So Stephen came to live with us. He adored Saint Nick. He followed him around like a little spaniel puppy. I'm afraid Ted and I and the rest of the kids were a little snooty at first. Stephen was awed by the house, by the fact that there are six bathrooms, by the stables and the swimming pool. We took all those things for granted and thought he was a little queer." She glanced at Walsh, a little shyly. "We were a pretty snobbish lot, weren't we, Jim?"

He smiled. "I used to think so," he said.

"But Stephen grew up as one of us," Marcia said. "In addition to us there were other kids. Cleg and—and Bob." Her voice broke. "I just can't believe what's happened tonight. I can't believe it's real. Bob was so vital, so alive."

"Please go on, Mrs. Drake," the doctor said.

She looked over at the window but he was only one of the shadows. She went on slowly. "We lived that way for ten years, and then Father was killed. It was an airplane accident. A big commercial plane struck a mountainside in Pennsylvania. Ted and Stephen were eighteen when that happened. I was sixteen.

"Well, things happened. Unbelievable things to us. There was no money. Saint Nick had been living to the limit of his earnings. We had to sell this house, the cars, the horses. When that was done and the debts had been paid there was almost nothing. Enough to start me in college. The boys and Harriet insisted that I take the money for that. They were going to work their way through school. Harriet found herself a job in New York.

"It was harder for Ted and Harriet and me than it was for Stephen, I think. He'd always considered his being with us was some kind of miracle. When it ended he was per-

fectly willing and content to face the problem. We were bewildered and totally unprepared. It had never occurred to us our way of life would ever change. I guess it showed in the results.

"Ted never could quite make it. He flunked out of medical school. He flunked out of art school. He couldn't seem to get adjusted to the idea that he was on his own. I did a little better than that. I got through college and found myself a job modeling for a photographer. But Stephen—Stephen was miraculous.

"He earned a scholarship his second year in college. He'd gone in for mechanical engineering. He worked in an airplane plant in the summers. Maybe it's crazy, but I think he had a passion for making better airplanes—planes that wouldn't kill the Saint Nicks of the world so needlessly.

"After college he became a plant superintendent. All the time he'd been designing an engine of his own. He got someone to back him and formed his own company. Two years later he hit the jackpot—big contracts, money, success."

"He never quit for a minute," Walsh said.

"We were all proud of him—terribly proud," Marcia said. "He gave Ted a job in his plant, but Ted couldn't make it there either. I don't want to give the wrong impression of Ted. He was brought up to school horses, to run a big place like this, to live in leisure, gracefully. These things he does well. Isn't that so, Jim?"

"Best man on a horse I ever saw," Walsh said.

"Well, one day Harriet, who has a small apartment in town, asked all of us for Sunday breakfast. It was a beautiful Sunday. Stephen suggested we go for a ride in his car. We started out and presently I realized he was heading toward Woodfield. I didn't want to come back here. It was hard enough as it was. I didn't want to see all the places and things I'd grown up with.

"When he turned in the driveway of this house I—well, I remember I thought I couldn't take it. He drove up to the door, and there was Mrs. Crandall who'd been our housekeeper in the old days. That was too much for me. I remember Stephen put his hand over mine.

" 'Don't cry, angel,' he said. 'You see, it's ours again.' "

Marcia's voice broke as she told it. Neither of the men spoke and finally she took up the story.

"He'd bought it back," she said. "Big places were a drug on the market and the banks had it. He'd taken weeks to get things restored just the way they had been. There were even horses in the stable! I can't tell you what it was like. Stephen expected us all to settle down and live there. I think it was his way of paying us all back for what Saint Nick had done for him. Of course it didn't make sense—our living off him. But it was so clear he would be

deeply hurt if we refused—and we were so weak-minded—" She laughed. "And we wanted to stay here so much. . . ."

"It seems natural enough," Walsh said. "After all, it was your home."

"Stephen's home," she corrected him. "Well, about six months later he asked me to marry him. I'd begun to think he would never get around to it again."

"Again?" the doctor asked sharply.

"I—I don't know why I said that," Marcia said. "It wasn't real the first time. It was a long time before—when I was fifteen and he was seventeen. I'm afraid I laughed at him that time."

"Laughed at him?"

"It was all a mix-up," Marcia said. "Cleg had done his first picture—a mural over the bar at the country club. There was to be a big party for the unveiling. Cleg had asked me to go with him and I'd accepted. But somehow Stephen had the idea that I was going with him. I don't remember how the confusion came about, but I *do* remember Stephen's face when I told him I was going with Cleg. It turned out he'd planned to propose to me that night. He'd prepared a speech."

She smiled. "We were here, in the study, when I told him I wasn't going with him. I guess, since he'd memorized the speech, he decided to get it off his chest anyway. It—it was terribly stuffy, and pompous, and—and now that I recall it—sweet."

"But you laughed at him," the doctor said.

"You see, Dr. Smith, he was more like a brother then. I'd never thought of him romantically. Oh, I knew he felt different from the way I did, but it seemed funny at the time. It was pretty cruel, I guess."

"But it worked out all right," Walsh said.

"It worked out perfectly—until two weeks ago."

The doctor twisted round to look intently and directly at her. "I'm a little confused about time, Mrs. Drake. Stephen was eighteen when he went to college. Four years of that, a job as plant superintendent, then his own company. He must have been twenty-eight or -nine when you were married."

"Twenty-eight."

"And you were twenty-six."

"Yes."

"You're a very beautiful woman, Mrs. Drake. You must have had other beaus—other chances to marry."

Walsh laughed. "She had the whole town by the ears!"

"I had other chances," Marcia said seriously. "Cleg and Bob were my most persistent suitors. I think in those early days I thought I'd marry one of them. Then, when the collapse came, we got separated. Bob was at medical school. Cleg went abroad to study art. I—I think I was waiting for them when I became conscious of Stephen."

"Conscious of him?"

"As a man, Dr. Smith. I'd thought of him before as a brother, as part of the setup of my life. I began to feel different. I began to see his worth, his quality."

"It wasn't gratitude that made you marry him?"

"Gratitude?"

"For the house—the re-establishing of your life in its old terms?"

"No," she said quickly. "He had everything that could make a woman happy. Courage, vision, warmth . . . I loved him, Dr. Smith. I love him now with all my heart."

"You haven't felt it was a mistake?"

"No!"

"You haven't wished you had married Cleg or Bob?"

"I wouldn't change anything—except the mess we seem to be in now." She leaned forward. "Dr. Smith, what does it all mean? What is this talk about murder? What did Stephen mean when he said he'd been close to killing me?"

"Just that, Mrs. Drake. He has been close. Very close."

"I don't understand it! What have I done to make him feel this way? How have I failed him?"

The doctor ignored the question. He seemed to be lost again in the darkness.

"There are some questions about Stephen's trouble," Walsh said. His tone suggested it was difficult for him to be impersonal.

"Of course I'll tell you anything I can, Jim."

"There was a Sunday, two or three weeks ago," Walsh said. "Cleg was here for breakfast. You and Ted were going riding. You all went out to the stable together—you and Stephen and Cleg and Ted."

"You mean the day Stephen found my saddle girth was broken?"

"Yes."

"What about it?"

"Would you say, Marcia, that about marked the beginning of Stephen's behaving queerly?"

She sat there frowning. Walsh held out his pack of cigarettes and she took one. He flipped on his lighter for her.

"I hadn't connected the two things," she said. "But—yes. It *was* about then things started to go wrong."

"Do you remember the day you were walking to the village and Stephen caught up with you in the car?"

"Do I remember!" She laughed. "He nearly took off my hide. He—"

"We know about it," Walsh said. "How did he behave after that?"

"Jim!" she sounded startled. "You mean those things—?"

"Were the close shaves," Walsh said. "Those and one other."

"But of course! After that day in the car Stephen seemed to change completely. He avoided me. He's been sleeping in another room under the pretext that he was restless at night. He refused to go for walks with me. I—I thought I'd done

something to make him angry. He wouldn't talk about it."

"Did Dr. Bristow notice the change in him?" Dr. Smith interrupted.

"Yes. He was very concerned. He said the physiological tests he'd taken didn't account for it. He asked me a lot of questions about things that could have upset Stephen."

Walsh hesitated, then said, "Four or five days ago you were sick, Marcia. You went to bed sometime during the afternoon. I suppose people dropped into your room to see you?"

"Of course. You know Harriet. Stephen was in and out, naturally. Cleg came over for dinner and he and Ted came up to say 'Hello.'"

"Tell me, Marcia, what did you take for your upset stomach?"

"Bicarbonate."

"You took some when you went to bed in the afternoon?"

"Yes."

"I understand you keep it in a glass jar on the second shelf of your medicine cabinet."

"That's right," Marcia said. "This all sounds very clinical!"

"Was that jar in its proper place when you fixed the soda for yourself?"

"Why—why, yes."

"Did you take more soda later?"

"Really, Jim, I don't see what this is all about."

The doctor stirred near the window. "It's about murder, Mrs. Drake," he said.

The room was very still for a moment after that. Then Marcia said, "Yes, I took another dose. Stephen fixed it for me when he came up to bed."

"But he had an accident, didn't he? He dropped the glass?"

"Yes. Yes, he did. It slipped, I suppose. He had to get another glass."

"And he didn't say anything to you about why he'd dropped the first one?"

"No. He seemed very upset again. He muttered something about being clumsy."

Walsh glanced at the doctor.

"What he didn't tell you, Mrs. Drake," the doctor said, "was that someone had switched the jars in your medicine cabinet. The jar with the poison for your hand lotion had been put in place of the bicarbonate jar. Stephen had mixed you a dose of medicine that would have killed you. It was when he realized what he'd done that he dropped the glass."

"But who would have switched the jars?"

"We'd very much like to know that, Mrs. Drake. If we did, we'd know who's been trying to drive your husband out of his mind. Can you help us?"

She shook her head slowly. "No. The family were all in and out. Cleg was here before dinner. Besides, there's a door to the bathroom from the hall. I dozed during the after-

noon and evening. It could have happened—"

"Any time," the Doctor said wearily.

"I get a curiously mixed impression of Stephen from talking to him myself and from listening to Marcia," Dr. Smith said.

Walsh stared disconsolately at an empty package of cigarettes. The doctor walked slowly across the room and then back again, to stand by the desk.

"Here's a man of great confidence, ability, and drive when it comes to his work," the doctor said. "He's really the perfect picture of what we call a 'self-made man' in our society. He had a boost that helped him, but it was his own quality and character that carried him through. But somehow I have the notion that he wasn't so certain or sure of himself in his personal life. They must have raised the devil with him as a child. I don't think he was ever allowed to forget where he came from—and made to feel there was something a little shameful about it."

"His family were good people," Walsh said. "They were poor, but they were good people."

"To some people, Captain, poverty is a kind of sin. Did you get the impression from Marcia that she and Ted and Harriet were really a little ashamed when they found there was no money?"

Walsh crumpled the empty cigarette package and threw it into the wastebasket. "It's an interesting observation, Doctor, but has it anything to do with our problem?"

"It has *everything* to do with it," the doctor said. "Here we have a man—Stephen Drake—who loves his wife, is apparently blissfully happy in his home, and successful in business. This man suddenly discovers that he has a violent impulse to do his wife harm. Where does that impulse come from? From his life today? They don't quarrel. Everything has been perfect until this began. No, Captain, we have to go back into the past to discover the starting point of those impulses."

Walsh looked incredulous. "You mean something he was sore about when he was a kid would affect him now?"

"I do," the doctor said. "We hide our emotions of anger, of violence, because they don't seem worthy or decent. *But they're there!* Take Marcia's story about the first proposal. She laughed at him. She ditched him to go to a party with Cleghorn. How do you suppose he felt then?"

"His feelings were probably pretty badly hurt," Walsh said.

"Poppycock," the doctor said impatiently. "That's the way we explain those things to ourselves. He probably told himself his feelings were hurt—*because it would have frightened him to admit to himself he felt like beating her brains out!*"

Walsh just stared at the small gray man.

"Our conscious explanation on how we feel when somebody does us a wrong or an injury is always inclined to be noble, Captain. We say our feelings are hurt, or we feel disappointed. But down deep inside we have a good old-fashioned primitive urge to commit mayhem! And that anger smolders and smolders there, carefully hidden through the years. When we are reminded of the experience we dutifully remember that we felt hurt or disappointed, but actually the emotion of anger stirs again. That's what's been happening to Stephen."

"I'm not sure I get it," Walsh said.

"All these people—Marcia, Harriet, Ted, Cleghorn—know Stephen's life inside out. They know when he was hurt, when he was disappointed. *Somebody knows that on these occasions he was really angry.* Suppose he was casually reminded of that proposal—of Marcia's laughter, of her walking out on Cleghorn's arm. The same anger he felt then would stir inside him now. And suppose at that very moment—to use our example—he finds a poker in his hand. It would take a conscious effort to subdue the impulse to use it."

Walsh nodded slowly. "So our murderer revives these old angers—and then confronts Stephen with the saddle girth, the car, the poison jar. Stephen really has to make a decision, doesn't he? He really has to decide *not* to take advantage of them, doesn't he?"

"That's exactly it," the doctor said. "It's my job to find out what happened immediately preceding these experiences. What took place? Who was he talking with? How were these old angers stirred? Your job is more practical."

"That's a comfort."

"Check that saddle girth. I'm making a bet it was deliberately made unsafe. Try and piece together, if you can, the movements of these people in relation to the switching of the soda and the poison jars."

Walsh stood up and stretched. "There are really only three of them we have to check—Ted, Harriet, and Cleg. Marcia can't be involved in this. She was to be the victim."

"I'm afraid I can't agree to eliminate her as a possibility," the doctor said."

"What!"

"Look, Captain, Stephen's a good provider, isn't he? He's kind and generous. I suspect he's faithful to his wife. Do you think he'd let Marcia go to another man if she asked for her freedom?"

"No-o," Walsh said slowly. "No, he'd probably raise hell."

"I suspect Marcia knows that," the doctor said. "Suppose she would like to go to her first love, who seems to have been Cleghorn—or anyone else? She has no grounds for acquiring her freedom from Stephen. But if she could trick him into an

act of violence, *for which she was prepared,* she might avoid its consequences and have evidence on which any court in the land would set her free."

"But the danger to her?"

"What danger? Suppose that was *her* scheme. Suppose Stephen had followed his impulse to say nothing about the broken girth. She mounts the horse and starts down for the ring. She pretends uncertainty about something, dismounts, and discovers the girth herself. She doesn't have to take the fall. And Stephen is on the spot!"

"Good God!" Walsh said.

"Suppose Stephen *had* brought her the poison? She doesn't have to gulp it down. She smells it. There's something wrong with it. It's poison. Then she runs screaming to the nearest judge and announces that Stephen has twice tried to do away with her. It would be almost foolproof."

"What about the car?" Walsh asked. He was obviously grasping for some straw that would upset this distasteful idea.

"Do you know, Captain, or do I know whether she actually jumped clear at the last minute? She could have without Stephen's noticing it in his state of mind. The point is, if this *is* her scheme, it has only failed because Stephen has stubbornly resisted falling into the trap."

Walsh brought his fist down on the desk. "It's crazy, Doctor. Why wouldn't she just come out with it, say she was sorry but the marriage hasn't worked?"

The doctor was silent for a moment, then he said, "Hasn't it occurred to you, Captain, that this place—this house and all that goes with it—is a symbol of security to all these people? They grew up in it. It was their home, their base, the *safe* place to be. I don't think you could pry one of them loose from it—even Cleghorn. But it belongs to Stephen! Marcia couldn't leave Stephen and still have this house—this place of safety. And it means as much to all of them as it means to Marcia. You heard what she said. Ted belongs here. It's been Harriet's home for thirty years. Cleg is in and out like a member of the family."

"You mean the desire to possess this house is the motive behind all this?"

"In a way, Captain. What this house represents is the important thing—security and safety to someone who is desperately insecure and unsafe."

It was 6:30 in the morning. Walsh drove his car up to the door of the Parker cottage in the village. He was heavy-eyed and looked a little like a man with a bad hangover. Dr. Smith came out of the house and got into the car. He looked just as he always did.

"Three hours' sleep is worse than none," Walsh said. He started the car and headed for the Drake place.

"How well you sleep is what

counts," the doctor said. "Not that I recommend three hours as a standard ration."

"I had nightmares," Walsh said. "It's funny what a thing like this does to you. I had a kind of fixed notion about these people. You know—pleasant, charming, living the kind of life everybody would want to live. Suddenly they're all out of focus. One of them is a killer—a vicious killer."

"One of them is a very sick person." the doctor said. "Murder is a sickness, Captain."

"I keep hoping somewhere along the way something will happen to upset the whole theory," Walsh said. "It's not that you aren't convincing, Doctor. It's just that—damn it, I like them all!"

"Perhaps you'll be lucky," the doctor said. "Tell me something about this stableman we're going to see."

"George Meadows? He's a local man. Not overbright, but wonderful with horses and completely trustworthy."

"That last is an odd description for a man who would send out a horse with a faulty saddle. Unless I'm right, of course."

"Right about what?"

"Most grooms check their equipment when it comes *in* from a ride," the doctor said. "They saddle-soap it and get it ready for the next outing. They do their checking then. If he saw it was all right then, he'd have no reason to notice it particularly the next time it went out."

"That's probably what happened, because George is careful and reliable."

"In that case, you see, our murderer had plenty of time to tamper with the girth. Also, I guess that it was Stephen's habit to walk out to the barn with Marcia and to do his own checking. So the murderer could count on his finding it."

"George will clear things up," Walsh said.

They turned in the iron gates of the Drake place and swung off the main driveway down the road to the barn. The big sliding doors were open and they could hear the horses stamping and whinnying inside. They stopped and got out. There was no sign of George Meadows and the horses made a great clamor as they got closer.

"Sound as though they hadn't been fed," Walsh said, frowning. "George usually feeds them around six."

They stood in the doorway. The doctor could see the horses' heads looking out over the tops of the box-stall doors. But Walsh wasn't looking at horses.

"Holy Joe, what struck this place?" he said.

It certainly wasn't the picture of a well-kept stable. Blankets, coolers, pieces of harness were scattered all over the floor. Two tack trunks stood with their lids open and the

doctor saw that the lock on one of them had been forced.

Walsh went quickly into the barn. To the right of the entrance was the tack room. There was a half-glass door. The room itself was long and narrow, with saddle racks and bridle hooks lining one wall. The pleasant smell of saddle soap and tar greeted them. There was a pot-bellied stove at one end of the room. At the other was a cot, covered by a bright green-and-white-checked horse blanket. On the cot a man lay. The whole place was the same disordered mess as the main part of the barn.

Both Walsh and the doctor hurried to the cot.

"Dead drunk," Walsh said.

"If you can get drunk by being hit over the head with a tire iron, he's drunk," the doctor said. He pointed to a steel bar on the floor. Then his fingers explored the wound on the side of George Meadows' head. It was long and ugly-looking. George's hair was matted with blood.

"He's alive," the doctor said after a moment, "but that's about all. My guess is a bad fracture. It's an emergency case. Can you get an ambulance here at once?"

"There's a phone somewhere here in the stable," Walsh said. He located it out near the front doors. When he came back, the doctor was standing beside the cot, looking down at Meadows.

"This fellow slept here?"

"Sometimes. His family lives on the edge of town. If he didn't feel like going home, or was kept late, he bedded down here."

"He made an unlucky choice last night," the doctor said. He looked around him. "There was panic involved here—panic and great need for hurry."

"Somebody was certainly looking for something," Walsh said.

"They certainly were, Captain. They were looking for a saddle girth! I'm afraid they found it. Probably in that locked trunk."

"Why would it be there?"

"Maybe Meadows had ideas about it too," the doctor said. "Unfortunately he isn't going to be able to tell us about it soon—if ever."

"It's that bad?"

Dr. Smith nodded.

The ambulance arrived about half an hour later. The hospital was in the neighboring town of Kingsford, about twelve miles away. From the intern on the ambulance Dr. Smith got information about a staff surgeon. He called the surgeon on the phone and told him what to prepare for.

"Quite apart from the man himself," Dr. Smith said, "his survival is important for other reasons. If he regains consciousness, be sure to have someone get what he says, and if he can be questioned, try to find out exactly what happened."

As the doctor turned away from the phone he saw Ted Hunter coming on the run down the path from

the house. He'd apparently put on only a pair of pants and a shirt. He had bedroom slippers on his feet, and his blond hair was disheveled.

"What the hell's going on here?" he demanded. He stared at the mess of equipment on the barn floor. Then he turned toward the tack room. The intern and the driver were carrying George Meadows out on a stretcher. Walsh followed the stretcher out of the tack room and Ted grabbed his arm. "What's happened here?"

"Our murderer is getting a little less subtle," Walsh said

The Drake household had that strange look of being caught unaware. An unshaved, un-made-up kind of unawareness that makes for self-consciousness. Harriet had on some sort of gray thing that was best described as a wrapper. Her dark hair was drawn back severely from her face, revealing streaks of gray that were hidden by her normal coiffure. Marcia had on a pale-blue linen house coat. There was no color in her cheeks and her eyes were shadowed. She reminded Walsh of a very tired little girl. Ted had lost some of his usual mocking composure. He kept lighting one cigarette after another.

They were sitting around the big table in the dining room. A maid brought coffee and eggs and toast. Walsh had sent one of his men, who'd come out from the State Troopers' barracks, to fetch Mike Cleghorn. After the first breaking of the news no one had done much talking.

Stephen was still sleeping heavily as a result of Dr. Smith's tablets. The doctor had suggested letting him sleep.

"To me this whole business at the stable is entirely senseless," Harriet said. "Why should anyone attack George?"

"That part is simple enough," Ted said. "Whoever it was was looking for something. They turned the place upside down. But for what?"

"A saddle girth," Walsh said.

"A saddle girth!"

"A ripped saddle girth," Walsh said. "The one that was on Marcia's saddle two weeks ago. Dr. Smith and I went there to find it ourselves. Somebody beat us to it. George evidently interfered."

"I don't think he interfered," Dr. Smith said. His expressionless, gray eyes moved slowly from face to face. "I think he was asleep. I think the person who wanted the girth slipped quietly into the tack room and slugged him with the tire iron without giving him any chance at all. There were no signs of a struggle—only frantic haste in searching."

"Not a pleasant picture," Harriet said. "But will somebody please tell me what is so important about a broken saddle girth?"

"It's evidence in the case," Walsh said. "I hoped it might prove Dr.

Smith was wrong. Now I know he's right."

"And would you mind telling me what a broken saddle girth has to do with Dr. Smith's idiotic theory that someone's been trying to drive Stephen crazy?" Harriet asked.

"No, I don't mind," Walsh said. He put it to them flatly, baldly, without frills or supporting argument. He put it to them as fact. He needed no more convincing himself.

Marcia listened, as though hearing the words from him made them more believable than when she'd heard them from the doctor. Harriet sat rigidly in the armchair at the head of the table, her hands clamped tightly over the knobs of the chair arm. Her lips were drawn together. She looked like a person set firmly to take a blow. Ted, too, seemed to be absorbing punishment. His color had faded; his cigarette burned forgotten in the ashtray beside his coffee cup.

When Walsh finished nobody spoke for a moment. Then Harriet said, "You ask us to accept this as fact?"

"It is fact," Walsh said. "One of you tried to drive Stephen out of his mind. One of you pushed Bob Bristow off the ledge. One of you smashed in George Meadows' skull with a tire iron."

There was an angry exclamation from the doorway. Cleghorn stood there. His hands were doubled up at his sides. "A pretty damned incompetent summing up, if you ask me," he said. He walked around the table to an empty chair. As he passed behind Marcia he touched her shoulder with the tips of his fingers.

For the first time some of Ted's familiar mockery returned. "Perhaps it should be pointed out that nobody *did* ask you, Cleg," he said.

"I don't give a damn whether they ask me or not," Cleg said.

"Will you have some coffee, Cleg?" Harriet asked.

"The hell with coffee!" Cleg put his big hands down flat on the table. He fixed his eyes on Dr. Smith. "I would like to ask you one question, sir. Just where does Stephen fit into this picture?"

"I should call him one of the victims," the doctor said.

"It's a very convenient explanation, isn't it, Doctor? Only I don't go for it."

"No?"

"No! You set up a picture here of a completely unbalanced person at work. A person so unbalanced as to murder Bob and attack George Meadows. You sit there and blandly accuse the four of us, who show no signs of any mental unbalance, and pass over Stephen who has obviously been ill for weeks! You base your whole theory on a story Stephen has told you—Stephen, who is clearly way the hell off base!"

"Is it your idea, Mr. Cleghorn, that mentally unbalanced people always go around gibbering and plaiting daisies in their hair?" the doctor asked.

"Of course it isn't!" Cleghorn said impatiently. "I just don't understand why, when you're dealing with insanity of some kind, you calmly pass by the one person we know is out of whack."

"Stephen couldn't have attacked George down at the stables," Marcia said. "He's been asleep. The doctor gave him something to make him sleep."

"Sure. That's great," Cleg said. "Did anybody see him take the pills?"

"He obviously took them," the doctor said. "I've just come from examining him."

"Could you tell when he took them?" Cleg demanded. "Couldn't he have done this job at the barn first?"

"It's possible," the doctor conceded.

"Then for God's sake, let's approach this intelligently. You say someone was playing Svengali to Stephen's Trilby! And the object? To murder Marcia! We forget about Bob and George Meadows for a minute. They were afterthoughts, according to you. Bob had uncovered this fantastic business, you say. George was slugged, you say, because your villain knew you were going to look for a saddle girth that's evidence in the case. But your basic theory has to do with a fancy scheme for murdering Marcia. Right?"

"That's right, Mr. Cleghorn," the doctor said. The mildness of his manner seemed to increase Cleghorn's blood pressure.

"Well, let's look at that!" he said. "Let's say we're all nuts, just for the hell of it! What possible lunatic reason could I have for wanting Marcia dead?" He laughed harshly. "I guess it's not a secret from anybody that I've been in love with Marcia all my life."

"Cleg!" Marcia protested.

"This is getting really fascinating," Ted drawled.

"You're always so damned smartly smug, Ted," Cleghorn said. "I'm just stating facts. I love Marcia and always have. I lost out to Stephen and that was okay. She's been happy. But if I did go off my trolley I wouldn't be murdering Marcia. I'd be murdering Stephen."

"Perhaps you could call this oration a sort of murder by proxy," Ted said.

"Shut up, Ted. Let's take *you!*"

"By all means," Ted said, grinning. "I offer my beautiful body to the cause of science."

"Loopy as he might be, Ted wouldn't murder Marcia," Cleg said. "She's his direct route to three square meals a day, a comfortable home, and a life of leisure. You don't think Stephen supports Ted because he's in love with Ted, do you? Take Marcia out of the picture and Ted might actually have to rustle his own ham and eggs."

Ted's smile had frozen and his blue eyes were cold and angry. "Portraiture has never been your

forte, Cleg. You ought to stick to landscapes. Do you deliberately pass over the fact that Marcia is my sister and that I might be fond of her?"

"Have you ever been fond of anyone but yourself, Ted?" Cleg demanded.

"Why, you jerk!" Ted said. Then he laughed, his good humor apparently returning. "I can't wait for your thumbnail sketch of Harriet."

"Give me one reason why Harriet would want Marcia out of the way?" Cleg said. "Just one reason! You're not going to tell me she secretly loves Stephen, are you?"

"This is your party, Mr. Cleghorn," the doctor said.

Harriet's face was expressionless. "I suppose I have the normal amount of envy any homely woman feels for a beautiful woman," she said. "I suppose I secretly wish I might have lived a full rich life with the man I loved, as Marcia is. Perhaps that could be called a motive."

"Rot!" Cleghorn said. "The simple fact is there aren't any motives, sane or insane."

"Go on, Mr. Cleghorn," the doctor said.

"That about covers all of us," Cleghorn said.

"What about Mrs. Drake?" the doctor asked.

"Marcia?"

"Yes."

"But she's the one who was supposed to get killed."

"That's the way it's made to look, at any rate," the doctor said. He outlined briefly his case against Marcia. As he finished, Cleghorn half rose from his chair.

"I ought to knock in your foolish little face," he said.

"Sit down, Cleg," Walsh said.

"The whole thing is fantastic," Cleg said. He made an effort to keep down the anger in his voice. "I'm not pointing at Stephen because I don't like him. I do. Besides liking him I have a great admiration for him. But he's worked himself to death at his job and he's had a crack-up. It could happen to anyone. The point is, he's not responsible. What gets me is that you base this whole cockeyed theory on *his* story! And you treat the rest of us, who are all perfectly normal, as though *we* were irresponsible. It's crazy! It's upside down!"

The doctor looked up from a design he'd been drawing on the tablecloth with a fork. "I'm afraid, Mr. Cleghorn, your approach and mine to what is normal and what is not normal are quite different."

"I don't like any part of this, Jim," Harriet Moore said.

She was sitting in an armchair in the study. There had been time to dress, and with the knitting needles moving in and out of her fingers she seemed more herself.

Walsh sat behind the desk. Dr. Smith stood over by the French windows, hands in his pockets, looking out at the sunlit garden.

"We don't any of us like it, Har-

riet," Walsh said. "But Bob is dead, George Meadows may die, and Stephen's whole future may be at stake."

"It's somehow like talebearing," Harriet said. "Those four are my children." She smiled. "The nearest thing I ever had to children of my own. I know them inside out, Jim—their weaknesses, their strengths. I know things about them no one else knows, not even themselves. Take Cleg, for instance."

"Yes, Harriet."

"That outburst of his in the dining room. Surely it was clear to you what he was up to? His loyalty, Jim, is the very core of his existence. He listened to your explanation and he had to find an answer that would clear us all. It wasn't himself he was trying to defend. It was all of us."

"Not Stephen," Walsh said.

"Stephen too," Harriet said. "We've all been trying to tell ourselves that this was a wild theory. But there's no escaping the reality of the attack on George. So we have to admit *someone's* responsible! Stephen, in his condition at the moment, can't be held accountable. Cleg wasn't turning on Stephen. It was simply the least catastrophic explanation."

"I see."

"You and the doctor are being quite frightening," she said. She half turned her head but she couldn't see the small gray man without moving round in her chair. "It's like being in a room where the walls are slowly closing in on you. Cleg feels it, just as I do. He's trying to fight his way out, that's all. We all know that the answer to this thing is going to smash our comfortable little world. Naturally we resist the idea."

The doctor spoke from behind her. "But you accept the fact that it must be true, Miss Moore?"

"I have to accept it," she said quietly.

"Then help us," Walsh said. "You say you know these people. What goes on beneath the surface? How do they really feel about each other?"

Harriet bent over her knitting for a moment. "Marcia is the simplest of the lot to explain," she said. "She was a normal, healthy girl. As a child she had everything in the world she wanted, and it didn't seem to spoil her unduly. She was Saint Nick's favorite. When we went on picnics she always rode with him on the front seat. Being a girl she got extra presents. I think sometimes she got away with murder when there'd been mischief afoot. Saint Nick was always perfectly willing to believe her innocent. I know she loved her father deeply, but she wasn't above using her favored position with him to get special advantages."

Harriet looked up. "If I make her sound scheming and tricky I don't mean to. I'm trying to draw you a picture of a very understandable, human, usual child."

Walsh grinned. "I didn't think

she was average at the time! She was just about the most glamorous person I'd ever seen."

"I don't think she and Ted were ever conscious of the fact that the lavish setting in which they lived made them any different from anybody else. They took it for granted. Marcia had lots of beaus, but I think she explained this, quite properly, on the grounds that she was attractive—not that there were horses and swimming pools and parties. I don't think she ever thought about that phase of it until Saint Nick died and we were all confronted with actual poverty."

"How did she take that?" Walsh asked.

"She took it with her chin up," Harriet said. "I knew she was bewildered and frightened, but she never let on. She went through college, got herself a job. She weathered it." Harriet frowned down at the gray wool sock.

"And the boys?"

"Stephen was magnificent. You know that."

"And Ted?"

"You have to know Ted as I do to understand him," Harriet said. "I never agreed with Saint Nick's theories about how the boys should be brought up. He led them to expect that what they had as children they would always have. I think he believed it—and Ted, at least, believed *him*. It was almost as if Saint Nick had double-crossed him when he died and there was no money. I don't mean he was resentful. But it was as if he'd believed in something—almost like a religion—and then discovered that it wasn't true.

"He's never fully recovered from it. It accounts for his mocking, ironic approach to everything. He always makes fun of any real emotion, or any substantial qualities in other people. I think it's because he's afraid to believe in them—afraid he'll be double-crossed again. It's because he hasn't been able to get adjusted, to find anything to hang on to, that he failed in medical school, failed in art school, and you might say failed in the business of living. It isn't because he hasn't got it in him. It's simply that he's afraid to trust anyone or anything."

"You're very fond of Ted, aren't you, Harriet?"

"Aren't we always fondest of the ones who need us the most?"

"And Stephen?"

Harriet drew a long breath. "I never knew anyone who didn't like Stephen," she said. "I had doubts when Saint Nick brought him into the household as a child. He came from different stock, from a different stratum of society. I didn't think he could be set down in what to him was a sort of Arabian Nights dream and not be spoiled. I was wrong. Everybody who knows him knows I was wrong."

"How did Stephen get along with the others?" Walsh asked.

"He was a kind of curiosity at first," Harriet said. "They all knew

the dingy little house he'd lived in down by the railroad station. They suspected he was different. They laughed at his wonderment over this place. Sometimes they were carelessly cruel. But in the end they accepted him completely as one of them. I'm not talking only of Ted and Marcia, but of Cleg and Bob Bristow and the other children. I watched the thing closely in the beginning because I wondered if Ted and Marcia might not resent his sharing their life—the things they thought of as theirs."

"And did they?"

"I don't think so. I never saw a sign of it."

The doctor turned round from the window. "You were really in the position of a mother to these children, weren't you, Miss Moore?"

"Yes, I was."

"Did *you* resent Stephen's sharing their lives—and the things they thought of as theirs?"

She looked up at him sharply, hostilely. "Why should I?"

"It wouldn't have been unnatural," he said. His voice was gentle. "A mother usually wants everything she can possibly lay her hands on for her children. You might have felt that Stephen was an intruder."

She hesitated a long time. "I'd like to be honest," she said. "I don't think I did. I may have been doubtful about how it would work, but I don't think I resented him. Later I came to owe my whole life, my whole security to him."

"When did Marcia fall in love with Stephen?" the doctor asked.

"I don't know," Harriet said. "I always thought she would marry Cleg, or possibly Bob Bristow. I never thought of Stephen as a possibility. I knew how he felt about her. You had only to look at him when she was present to know how he felt."

"And you were surprised when she accepted him?"

"Yes. Frankly, I thought she'd made a mistake. Not that I didn't think Stephen was fine—but I didn't think she loved him. I thought—well, his buying back the place and setting us all up here—I thought she'd mistaken gratitude for love."

"And now?"

The needles stopped their clicking. Harriet kept her eyes fixed on the gray wool sock. "I think she loves him. I think she would die for him." She hesitated. "I've tried to be coldly rational about your murder theory, Doctor, but I simply can't accept the theory that Marcia may be back of it."

"Ted or Cleg, then?"

"No!"

"That leaves you, Miss Moore."

Her lips tightened. "That leaves Stephen," she said. She lifted her eyes. They were somehow tragic. "Cleg is right. It's the only answer, Doctor."

"I don't see that this is getting us anywhere," Walsh said, when Harriet had left the study.

"Don't you, Captain?" Dr. Smith took the chair Harriet had vacated, and sat there, making a bridge with the tips of his fingers. "This is an interesting case from a police point of view. No one saw Bristow being murdered, though five people were in touching distance of him. No physical clues there or in the slugging of George Meadows. But there's evidence, nonetheless, Captain."

"I wish I could see it," Walsh said.

"It's more a matter of *hearing* it, Captain. A murderer may leave no physical evidence, no material traces of his crime, but he can't erase the clues to murder that are in his mind. We've been listening to those clues, and when we have them all assembled, we'll have enough to point definitely to the killer."

"You mean you're making some sense out of all this?"

"Definite sense, Captain. There's only one thing that bothers me."

"You're lucky," Walsh said dryly. "Everything about the whole damned case bothers me."

"The thing that bothers me is the business of the stable," the doctor said. "The slugging of George and turning the place upside down doesn't fit in with the rest of the picture."

"How come?"

"You really said it yourself at the time, Captain. You said the murderer was getting less subtle. Remember?"

Walsh nodded.

"It was a shrewd observation," the doctor said. "Up to then we'd been dealing with a person who was playing delicately with the balances of a human mind. When murder became a necessity, in Bristow's case, it was still handled with finesse. No clues, no untidiness. But the thing at the stable is completely out of character. Here we have the reverse of everything shown in the earlier stages—open violence, panic, hysterical haste."

"The murderer didn't want us to find the girth," Walsh said. "When he realized we were after it he had to move fast."

"If the girth would have convicted our murderer, Captain, why was it left around until the last minute? There have been two weeks in which to get rid of it." The doctor leaned forward. "And remember this, Walsh. That girth wouldn't have convicted anyone; all it could have done was prove our theory for us. Why does this calm, resourceful, keen-minded killer suddenly lose his head and risk everything to find that girth?"

"They all make mistakes," Walsh said.

"But this mistake is out of character," the doctor repeated. He sat scowling at the toes of his shoes for a long time. Then he roused himself. "Let's have Ted Hunter in, Captain. He may tie up some loose ends for us."

Ted came lounging into the study from the entrance hall. He had

shaved and his blond hair was slicked down. He had on a blue polo shirt and a pair of beautifully cut, cavalry-twill fatigue britches

"All hell has certainly broken loose, hasn't it?" he said. "That was quite an exhibition Cleg put on in the dining room." He turned a straight-backed chair around and straddled it, his arms resting on the back. He flicked the ash from his cigarette on the carpet. Walsh slid an ashtray across the desk in his direction. Then he looked at the doctor.

"It's your show," he said.

"Really, Doctor, I'm quite frightened," Ted said. "You fellows who deal with psychiatry always scare the pants off me. I don't like to be seen through, Doctor."

"You're not alone in that feeling," the doctor said. "You know, it would be easier if we could be direct, Mr. Hunter. But I'm afraid indirection fascinates you."

"Why do you say that?" Ted asked.

"My observation of you, Mr. Hunter. Your humor is of the oblique kind. You slide the needle in from the side."

Ted laughed.

"You pretend to be casual and unaffected by anything," the doctor said, "but you betray the fact from time to time that things touch you quite deeply. For example, when Cleghorn suggested that you were a chiseler."

A muscle rippled along Ted's jaw. "Now take it easy, Doctor."

"Just proving my point," the doctor said.

Ted relaxed. "I guess anybody would get a little sore at that kind of suggestion."

"Especially if it's true," the doctor said in his colorless, unemphatic way.

"Now look!" Ted said, half rising from the chair. Then he laughed again and sank back. "You're pretty adept with the needle yourself, Doctor. Okay. Let's go ahead—as directly as you like. No holds barred."

"Very well, Mr. Hunter. Did you push Bob Bristow off the ledge?"

"No," Ted said, smiling.

"Did you slug George Meadows with that tire iron?"

Ted's smile broadened. "No. Ask me something hard, Doctor."

"Have you always hated Stephen Drake?" the Doctor asked, without altering his tone of voice.

"Hey, slow down!" Ted said. "Who says I ever hated Stephen?"

"I just asked," the doctor said.

The two men's eyes met in a steady look. "All right, Doctor, no holds barred," Ted said. "There were times I hated Stephen's guts." He said it without passion. "I hated him when he first came to live with us. I've always been selfish and greedy. I didn't want to share with anyone. I found out I couldn't eat the whole Thanksgiving dinner myself, so I stopped hating him."

He grinned. "But not for good,

Doctor. I hated him again later. I hated him for making good when I was pulling a colossal flop. But I got over it. Stephen never played the big shot. And that's the whole score on hating Stephen. Next question, please."

"You didn't object to Marcia's marrying him?"

"Object!" Ted laughed. "My dear Doctor, I was selling vacuum cleaners from door to door to a lot of disagreeable New York housewives at the time. Stephen offered me a salary to run this place, to school the horses. A salary plus board and keep! Cleg was right. Without the marriage that probably wouldn't have happened. Hell, I loved it when they got married."

"And you think they've been happy?"

"Being tied to one person forever seems to me to be a pretty dreary business. But if you like it, you like it. They seem to like it."

"No quarrels?"

"Cooing doves," Ted said. "Your little pipe dream about Marcia just won't wash, Doctor."

"Then you think, along with Cleg and your Aunt Harriet, that Stephen himself is responsible for all this?"

Ted shrugged. "What else *can* we think? It's tough. I wish it was the customary passing tramp—having it be Stephen may raise hell with my life! I'm comfortable here, Doctor. I don't want change."

"Why should it alter your life?"

"Well, if poor old Stephen goes off to the booby hatch—because that's where he'll go, they don't hang crazy people—I say, if he goes to the booby hatch, things might be upset here."

"Why?"

"Well, I mean—"

"Marcia would still keep the house, wouldn't she? There would still be money rolling in from the plant? Why should anything change? Do you think Marcia would kick you out if she were in charge?"

That muscle bulged along Ted's jaw again. He shook his head. "You certainly are fast on your feet, Dr. Smith. No. I don't think Marcia would kick me out."

"You're on good terms with her?"

"Perfect. Oh, from time to time she gets annoyed with me for being a louse. But not seriously annoyed."

"So it wouldn't make any difference in your life, would it, if Stephen were to hang for murder—or be sent away to an institution for the criminally insane?" The doctor's gray eyes were fixed unblinkingly on Ted.

"No, I guess you're right, Doctor. It wouldn't make much difference in my life," Ted said. "I suppose this is what you might call 'letting my hair down.'"

"You're not a man of very deep affections, are you, Mr. Hunter?"

"Not very deep."

"There are just two more ques-

tions I'd like to ask you," Dr. Smith said.

"Shoot, Doctor. Your questions fascinate me."

"Do you think I'm a fool, Mr. Hunter?"

Ted stared. "That one really has me off base, Doctor! My answer? I don't know you very well. You have a good press, apparently. Malcolm thinks you're a mind reader. Or isn't that a compliment, Doctor?"

The doctor ignored the crack. "I have a second and last question, Mr. Hunter."

"Go ahead."

"Will you confess now?" the doctor asked.

"Confess to what?" Ted asked. He seemed to be enjoying himself.

"Plotting to eliminate Marcia and Stephen; the murder of Dr. Bristow," the doctor said casually.

"No can do, Doc," Ted said. He grinned broadly.

"That's all, Mr. Hunter," the doctor said.

Ted stood up. "It's been a very instructive session, Doctor. I always wanted to see a great psychiatric mind at work. I'm afraid it was a little disappointing. No rabbits pulled out of the hat, nothing up the sleeve. Strictly a Grade B production."

The doctor's tone was good-humored. "The script is still in preparation, Mr. Hunter. Give us time."

Ted went out through the open French windows to the garden. Walsh looked at the doctor. "Do you really suspect Ted?" he asked.

"It could be," the doctor said. "I think we know as much about this as we're ever going to know."

"That's great," Walsh said sourly. "What next?"

"We sit here, Captain, and sweat it out."

(*Continued on page 99*)

first publication in the United States

a Christmas detective story by

JULIAN SYMONS

featuring Francis Quarles, criminologist

Do you like stories about Clubs? (We do.) Here, then, is a tale of the Santa Claus Club and its annual dinner. Do you like stories about "instant detection"? (We do; we once wrote a story in which Ellery deduced the identity of the murderer between the time the victim swallowed poison and one second later, when the victim fell dying to the floor.) Do you like stories in the grand 'tec tradition? (We do.) Well, add them all together, and you have this fascinating example of Francis Quarles, private investigator, plying his thrilling trade . . .

THE SANTA CLAUS CLUB

by JULIAN SYMONS

IT IS NOT OFTEN, IN REAL LIFE, THAT letters are written recording implacable hatred nursed over the years, or that private detectives are invited by peers to select dining clubs, or that murders occur at such dining clubs, or that they are solved on the spot by logical deduction.

The case of the Santa Claus Club provided an example of all these rarities.

The case began one day a week before Christmas, when Francis Quarles went to see Lord Acrise. He was a rich man, Lord Acrise, and an important one—the chairman of this big building concern and the director of that big insurance company and the consultant to the Government on many matters.

He had been a harsh, intolerant man in his prime, and was still hard enough in his early seventies, Quarles guessed, as he looked at the beaky nose, jutting chin, and stony blue eyes under thick brows. They sat in the study of Acrise's house just off the Brompton Road.

"Just tell me what you think of these."

These were three letters, badly typed on a machine with a worn ribbon. They were all signed with the name James Gliddon. The first two contained vague references to some wrong done to Gliddon by

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Acrise in the past. They were written in language that was wild, but unmistakably threatening.

"You have been a whited sepulchre for too long, but now your time has come . . . You don't know what I'm going to do, now I've come back, but you won't be able to help wondering and worrying . . . The mills of God grind slowly, but they're going to grind you into little bits for what you've done to me."

The third letter was more specific. "So the thief is going to play Santa Claus. That will be your last evening alive. *I shall be there,* Joe Acrise, and I shall watch with pleasure as you squirm in agony."

Quarles looked at the envelopes. They were plain and cheap. The address was typed, and the word *Personal* was on top of the envelope. "Who is James Gliddon?"

The stony eyes glared at him. "I'm told you're to be trusted. Gliddon was a school friend of mine. We grew up together in the slums of Nottingham. We started a building company together. It did well for a time, then went bust. There was a lot of money missing. Gliddon kept the books. He got five years for fraud."

"Have you heard from him since then? I see all these letters are recent."

"He's written half a dozen letters, I suppose, over the years. The last one came—oh, seven years ago, I should think. From the Argentine." Acrise stopped, then said abruptly, "Snowin tried to find him for me, but he'd disappeared."

"Snowin?"

"My secretary. Been with me twelve years."

He pressed a bell. An obsequious, fattish man, whose appearance somehow put Quarles in mind of an enormous mouse, scurried in.

"Snowin? Did we keep any of those old letters from Gliddon?"

"No, sir. You told me to destroy them."

"The last one came from the Argentine, right?"

"From Buenos Aires to be exact, sir."

Acrise nodded, and Snowin scurried out. Quarles said, "Who else knows this story about Gliddon?"

"Just my wife." Acrise bared yellow teeth in a grin. "Unless somebody's been digging into my past."

"And what does this mean, about you playing Santa Claus?"

"I'm this year's chairman of The Santa Claus Club. We hold our raffle and dinner next Monday."

Then Quarles remembered. The Santa Claus Club had been formed by ten rich men. Each year they met, every one of them dressed up as Santa Claus, and held a raffle. The members took turns to provide the prize that was raffled—it might be a case of Napoleon brandy, a modest cottage with some exclusive salmon fishing rights attached to it, a Constable painting.

Each Santa Claus bought one ticket for the raffle, at a cost of 1000

guineas. The total of 10,000 guineas was given to a Christmas charity. After the raffle the assembled Santa Clauses, each accompanied by one guest, ate a traditional Christmas dinner.

The whole thing was a combination of various English characteristics: enjoyment of dressing up, a wish to help charities, and the desire also that the help given should not go unrecorded. The dinners of The Santa Claus Club got a good deal of publicity, and there were those who said that it would have been perfectly easy for the members to give their money to charities in a less conspicuous manner.

"I want you to find Gliddon," Lord Acrise said. "Don't mistake me, Mr. Quarles. I don't want to take action against him, I want to help him. I wasn't to blame—don't think I admit that—but it was hard that Jimmy Gliddon should go to jail. I'm a hard man, have been all my life, but I don't think my worst enemies would call me mean. Those who've helped me know that when I die they'll find they're not forgotten. Jimmy Gliddon must be an old man now. I'd like to set him up for the rest of his life."

"To find him by next Monday is a tall order," Quarles said. "But I'll try."

He was at the door when Acrise said casually, "By the way, I'd like you to be my guest at The Santa Claus Club dinner on Monday night."

Did that mean, Quarles wondered, that he was to act as official poison taster if he did not find James Gliddon?

There were two ways of trying to find Gliddon—by investigation of his career after leaving prison, and through the typewritten letters. Quarles took the job of tracing the past, leaving the letters to his secretary, Molly Player.

From Scotland Yard, Quarles found out that Gliddon had spent nearly four years in prison, from 1913 to late in 1916. He had joined a Nottinghamshire Regiment when he came out, and the records of this Regiment showed that he had been demobilized in August 1919, with the rank of Sergeant. In 1923 he had been given a sentence of three years for an attempt to smuggle diamonds. Thereafter, all trace of him in Britain vanished.

Quarles made some expensive telephone calls to Buenos Aires, where a letter had come from seven years earlier. He learned that Gliddon had lived in the city from a time just after the war until 1955. He ran an import-export business, and was thought to have been living in other South American Republics during the war. His business was said to have been a cloak for smuggling, both of drugs and of suspected Nazis, whom he got out of Europe into the Argentine.

In 1955 a newspaper had accused Gliddon of arranging the entry into

the Argentine of a Nazi war criminal named Hermann Breit. Gliddon threatened to sue the paper, and then disappeared. A couple of weeks later a battered body was washed up just outside the city.

"It was identified as Gliddon," the liquid voice said over the telephone. "But you know, Senor Quarles, in such matters the police are sometimes happy to close their files."

"There was still some doubt?"

"Yes. Not very much, perhaps, but in these cases there is often a doubt."

Molly Player found out nothing useful about the paper and envelopes. They were of the sort that could be bought in a thousand stores and shops in London and elsewhere. She had more luck with the typewriter. Its key characteristics identified the machine as a Malward portable of a model which the company had ceased producing ten years ago. The type face had proved unsatisfactory, and only some 300 machines of this sort had been made.

The Malward Company was able to provide her with a list of the purchasers of these machines, and Molly started to check and trace them, but had to give it up as a bad job.

"If we had three weeks I might get somewhere. In three days it's impossible," she said to Quarles.

Lord Acrise made no comment on Quarles's recital of failure. "See you on Monday evening, seven thirty, black tie," he said, and barked with laughter. "Your host will be Santa Claus."

"I'd like to be there earlier."

"Good idea. Any time you like. You know where it is—Robert the Devil Restaurant."

The Robert the Devil Restaurant is situated inconspicuously in Mayfair. It is not a restaurant in the ordinary sense of the word, for there is no public dining room, but simply several private rooms, which can accommodate any number of guests from two to thirty. Perhaps the food is not quite the best in London, but it is certainly the most expensive.

It was here that Quarles arrived at half-past six, a big suave man, rather too conspicuously elegant perhaps in a midnight-blue dinner jacket. He talked to Albert, the *maître d'hotel*, whom he had known for some years, took unobtrusive looks at the waiters, went into and admired the kitchens. Albert observe his activities with tolerant amusement. "You are here on some sort of business, Mr. Quarles?"

"I am a guest, Albert. I am also a kind of bodyguard. Tell me, how many of your waiters have joined you in the past twelve months?"

"Perhaps half a dozen. They come, they go."

"Is there anybody at all on your staff—waiters, kitchen staff, anybody—who has joined you this year and is over sixty years old?"

Albert thought, then shook his head decisively. "No. There is no such one."

The first of the guests came just after seven. He was the brain surgeon, Sir James Erdington, with a guest whom Quarles recognized as the Arctic explorer, Norman Endell.

After that they came at intervals of a minute or two—a minister in the Government, one of the three most important men in the motor industry, a General promoted to the peerage to celebrate his retirement, a theatrical producer named Roddy Davis who had successfully combined commerce and culture. As they arrived, the hosts went into a special dressing room to put on their Santa Claus clothes, while the guests drank sherry.

At 7:25 Snowin scurried in, gasped, "Excuse me, place names, got to put them out," and went into the dining room. Through the open door Quarles glimpsed a large oval table, gleaming with silver and bright with roses.

After Snowin came Lord Acrise, jutting-nosed and fearsome-eyed. "Sorry to have kept you waiting," he barked, and asked conspiratorially, "Well?"

"No sign."

"False alarm. Lot of nonsense. Got to dress up now."

He went into the dressing room with his box—each of the hosts had a similar box, labeled *Santa Claus* —and came out again bewigged, bearded, and robed. "Better get the business over, and then we can enjoy ourselves. You can tell 'em to come in," he said to Albert.

This referred to the photographers who had been clustering outside and who now came into the room specially provided for holding the raffle. In the center of the room was a table and on this table stood this year's prize—two exquisite T'ang horses. On the other side of the table were ten chairs arranged in a semicircle, and on these sat the Santa Clauses. The guests stood inconspicuously at the side.

The raffle was conducted with the utmost seriousness. Each Santa Claus had a numbered slip. These slips were dropped into a bowl, mixed up, and then Acrise put in his hand and drew out one of them. Flash bulbs exploded.

"The number drawn is eight," Acrise announced, and Roddy Davis waved the counterfoil in his hand. "Isn't that *wonderful?* It's my ticket." He went over to the horses and picked up one. More flashes. "I'm bound to say that they couldn't have gone to *anybody* who'd have appreciated them more."

Quarles, standing near the General, whose face was as red as his robe, heard him mutter something uncomplimentary. Charity, he reflected, was not universal, even in a gathering of Santas. More flashes, the photographers disappeared, and Quarles's views about the nature of charity were reinforced when, as

they were about to go into the dining room, Erdington said, "Forgotten something, haven't you, Acrise?"

With what seemed dangerous quietness Acrise answered, "Have I? I don't think so."

"It's customary for the Club and guests to sing *Noel* before we go in to dinner."

"You didn't come to last year's dinner. It was agreed then that we should give it up. Carols after dinner, much better."

"I must say I thought that was *just* for last year, because we were late," Roddy Davis fluted. "I'm sure that's what was agreed. I think myself it's rather pleasant to sing *Noel* before we go in and start eating too much."

"Suggest we put it to the vote," Erdington said sharply.

Half a dozen of the Santas now stood looking at each other with subdued hostility. It was a situation that would have been totally ludicrous, if it had not been also embarrassing for the guests.

Then suddenly the Arctic explorer, Endell, began to sing *Noel,* *Noel* in a rich bass. There was the faintest flicker of hesitation, and then guests and Santas joined in. The situation was saved.

At dinner Quarles found himself with Acrise on one side of him and Roddy Davis on the other. Endell sat at Acrise's other side, and beyond him was Erdington.

Turtle soup was followed by grilled sole, and then three great turkeys were brought in. The helpings of turkey were enormous. With the soup they drank a light, dry sherry, with the sole Chassagne Montrachet, with the turkey an Alexe Corton, heavy and powerful.

"And who are *you*?" Roddy Davis peered at Quarles's card and said, with what seemed manifest untruth, "Of course I know your name."

"I am a criminologist." This sounded better, he thought, than private detective.

"I remember your monograph on criminal calligraphy. Quite fascinating."

So Davis did know who he was —it would be easy, Quarles thought, to underrate the intelligence of the round-faced man who beamed so innocently to him.

"These beards really do get in the way rather," Davis said. "But there, one must suffer for tradition. Have you known Acrise long?"

"Not very. I'm greatly privileged to be here." Quarles had been watching, as closely as he could, the pouring of the wine and the serving of the food. He had seen nothing suspicious. Now, to get away from Davis' questions, he turned to his host.

"Damned awkward business before dinner," Acrise said. "Might have been, at least. Can't let well alone, Erdington." He picked up his turkey leg, attacked it with Elizabethan gusto, then wiped his

mouth and fingers with a napkin. "Like this wine?"

"It's excellent."

"Chose it myself. They've got some good Burgundies here." Acrise's speech was slightly slurred, and it seemed to Quarles that he was rapidly getting drunk.

"Do you have any speeches?"

"What's that?"

"Are any speeches made after dinner?"

"No speeches. Just sing carols. But I've got a little surprise for 'em."

"What sort of surprise?"

"Very much in the spirit of Christmas, and a good joke too. But if I told you it wouldn't be a surprise now, would it?"

Acrise had almost said "shurprise." Quarles looked at him and then returned to the turkey.

There was a general cry of pleasure as Albert himself brought in the great plum pudding, topped with holly and blazing with brandy.

"That's the most wonderful pudding I've ever seen in my life," Endell said. "Are we really going to eat it?"

"Of course we're going to eat it," Acrise said irritably. He stood up, swaying a little, and picked up the knife beside the pudding.

"I don't like to be critical, but our Chairman is really *not* cutting the pudding very well," Roddy Davis whispered to Quarles.

And indeed, it was more of a stab than a cut that Acrise made at the pudding. Albert took over, and cut it quickly and efficiently. Bowls of brandy butter were circulated.

Quarles leaned toward Acrise. "Are you all right?"

"Of course I'm all right." The slurring was very noticeable now. Acrise ate no pudding, but he drank some more wine, and dabbed at his lips. When the pudding was finished he got slowly to his feet again, and toasted the Queen.

Cigars were lighted. Acrise was not smoking. He whispered something to the waiter, who nodded and left the room. Acrise got up again, leaning heavily on the table.

"A little surprise," he said. "In the spirit of Christmas."

Quarles had thought that he was beyond being surprised by the activities of The Santa Claus Club, but still he was astonished by sight of the three figures who entered the room. They were led by Snowin, somehow more mouselike than ever, wearing a long white smock and a red nightcap with a tassel.

He was followed by an older man dressed in a kind of gray sackcloth, with a face so white that it might have been covered in plaster of Paris. This man carried chains which he shook.

At the rear came a middle-aged lady, who sparkled so brightly that she seemed to be completely hung with tinsel.

"I am Scrooge," said Snowin.

"I am Marley," wailed gray sackcloth, clanking his chains.

"And I," said the middle-aged lady with abominable sprightliness, "am the ghost of Christmas past."

There was a murmur round the table, and slowly the murmur grew to a ripple of laughter.

"We have come," said Snowin in a thin mouse voice, "to perform for you our own interpretation of *A Christmas Carol*—oh, sir, what's the matter?"

Lord Acrise stood up in his robes, tore off his wig, pulled at his beard, tried to say something. Then he clutched at the side of his chair and fell sideways, so that he leaned heavily against Endell and slipped slowly to the floor.

There ensued a minute of confused activity. Endell made some sort of exclamation and rose from his chair, slightly obstructing Quarles. Erdington was first beside the body, holding the wrist in his hand, listening for the heart. Then they were all crowding round, the red-robed Santas, the guests, the actors in their ludicrous clothes. Snowin, at Quarles' left shoulder, was babbling something, and at his right were Roddy Davis and Endell.

"Stand back," Erdington snapped. He stayed on his knees for another few moments, looking curiously at Acrise's puffed, distorted face, blueish around the mouth. Then he stood up. "He's dead."

There was a murmur of surprise and horror, and now they all drew back, as men do instinctively from the presence of death.

"Heart attack?" somebody said. Erdington made a noncommittal noise. Quarles moved to his side.

"I'm a private detective, Sir James. Lord Acrise feared an attempt on his life and asked me to come along here."

"You seem to have done well so far," Erdington said dryly.

"May I look at the body?"

"If you wish."

As soon as Quarles bent down he caught the smell of bitter almonds. When he straightened up Erdington raised his eyebrows.

"He's been poisoned. There's a smell like prussic acid, but the way he died precludes cyanide I think. He seemed to become very drunk during dinner, and his speech was blurred. Does that suggest anything to you?"

"I'm a brain surgeon, not a physician." Erdington stared at the floor, then said, "Nitrobenzene?"

"That's what I thought. We shall have to notify the police." Quarles went to the door and spoke to a disturbed Albert. Then he returned to the room and clapped his hands.

"Gentlemen. My name is Francis Quarles, and I am a private detective. Lord Acrise asked me to come here tonight because he had received a threat that this would be his last evening alive. The threat said: 'I shall be there, and I shall watch with pleasure as you squirm in agony.' Lord Acrise has been

poisoned. It seems certain that the man who made the threat is in this room."

"Gliddon," a voice said. Snowin had divested himself of the white smock and red nightcap, and now appeared as his customary respectable self.

"Yes. This letter, and others he had received, were signed with the name of James Gliddon, a man who bore a grudge against Lord Acrise which went back nearly half a century. Gliddon became a professional smuggler and crook. He would now be in his late sixties."

"But dammit man, this Gliddon's not here." That was the General, who took off his wig and beard. "Lot of tomfoolery."

In a shamefaced way the other members of The Santa Claus Club removed their facial trappings. Marley took off his chains and the middle-aged lady discarded her cloak of tinsel.

"Isn't he here? But Lord Acrise is dead."

Snowin coughed. "Excuse me, sir, but would it be possible for my colleagues from our local dramatic society to retire? Of course, I can stay myself if you wish. It was Lord Acrise's idea that we should perform our skit on *A Christmas Carol* as a seasonable novelty, but—"

"Everybody must stay in this room until the police arrive. The problem, as you will all realize, is how the poison was administered. All of us ate the same food and drank the same wine. I sat next to Lord Acrise, and I watched as closely as possible to make sure of this. I watched the wine being poured, the turkey being carved and brought to the table, the pudding being cut and passed round. After dinner some of you smoked cigars or cigarettes, but not Acrise."

"Just a moment." It was Roddy Davis who spoke. "This sounds fantastic, but wasn't it Sherlock Holmes who said that when you'd eliminated all other possibilities, even a fantastic one must be right? Supposing that some poison in powder form had been put on to Acrise's food—through the saltcellars, say—"

Erdington was shaking his head, but Quarles unscrewed both the salt and pepper shakers and tasted their contents. "Salt and pepper. And in any case other people used these. Hello, what's this?"

Acrise's napkin lay crumpled on his chair, and Quarles had picked it up and was staring at it.

"It's Acrise's napkin," Endell said. "What's remarkable about that?"

"It's a napkin, but not the one Acrise used. He wiped his mouth half a dozen times on his napkin, and wiped his greasy fingers on it too, when he'd gnawed a turkey bone. He must certainly have left grease marks on it. But look at this napkin."

He held it up, and they saw that it was spotless. Quarles said softly, "The murderer's mistake."

"I'm quite baffled," Roddy Davis said. "What does it mean?"

Quarles turned to Erdington. "Sir James and I agreed that the poison used was probably nitrobenzene. This is deadly as a liquid, but it is also poisonous as a vapor, isn't that so?"

Erdington nodded. "You'll remember the case of the unfortunate young man who used shoe polish containing nitrobenzene on damp shoes, put them on and wore them, and was killed by the fumes."

"Yes. Somebody made sure that Lord Acrise had a napkin that had been soaked in nitrobenzene but was dry enough to use. The same person substituted the proper napkin, the one belonging to the restaurant, after Acrise was dead."

"Nobody's left the room," said Roddy Davis.

"No."

"That means the murder napkin must still be here."

"It does."

"Then what are we waiting for? I vote that we submit to a search."

There was a small hubbub of protest and approval. "That won't be necessary," Quarles said. "Only one person here fulfills all the qualifications of the murderer."

"James Gliddon?"

"No. Gliddon is almost certainly dead. But the murderer is somebody who knew about Acrise's relationship with Gliddon, and tried to be clever by writing the letters to lead us along a wrong track. Then the murderer is somebody who had the opportunity of coming in here before dinner and who knew exactly where Acrise would be sitting. There is only one person who fulfills all of these qualifications.

"He removed any possible suspicion from himself, as he thought, by being absent from the dinner table, but he arranged to come in afterwards to exchange the napkins. He probably put the poisoned napkin into the clothes he discarded. As for motive, long-standing hatred might be enough, but he is also somebody who knew that he would benefit handsomely when Acrise died—stop him, will you."

But the General, with a tackle reminiscent of the days when he had been the best wing three-quarter in the country, had already brought to the floor Lord Acrise's mouselike secretary, Snowin.

NEXT MONTH . . .

something *NEW* and "different"—

CHARLES H. GOREN *solves a bridge murder*

If you wanted a piece of the action in the Orleans Street District—gambling, narcotics, you name it—you had to have protection . . .

PROTECTION

by KENNETH MOORE

SHIPLEY HAD THE PROTECTION money—$50,000 in tens, twenties, and fifties—packed neatly in a battered brief case that he had purchased only four hours earlier in a skid-row pawnshop.

A big man in his fifties who seemed to perpetually sweat, he sat in a straight-backed chair too small for his bulk and stared at his hairy hands folded over the brief case. The money had a comfortable weight and gave him a glow of security; but from the hard looks of the three other men gathered in the small, almost airless cubicle of an office, Shipley had a feeling that the money, even $50,000, was not going to be enough.

One of the rungs in the back of the chair rubbed painfully against his spine and he shifted his weight uncomfortably to relieve the pressure.

Time dragged by, like the last few hours of a death watch, with the heavy silence of the office broken occasionally by a dry cough or by the scrape of shoe leather on the tile floor as someone else changed his position in a chair.

Finally Shipley summoned courage to clear his throat and asked, "When is Bogardus going to get here?"

The question brought an answer from Lou Fenner who controlled the narcotics trade in the Orleans Street District. "Just relax," he told Shipley. "You ain't going anywhere."

A flash of anger unmasked Shipley's face. He turned away from Fenner's brutal stare and squirmed in the chair in another futile attempt to relieve the pressure against his spine.

He had been sitting there for more than an hour, like a naughty schoolboy awaiting a principal's punishment. The hot August day had seemed to rob all oxygen from the air and breathing was difficult. Sweat stung the corners of his eyes and his clothing felt as though it had been tailored out of adhesive tape.

He drew air into his lungs with a hollow rasping sound—like the sound of paper tearing. He studied the others in the office. In addition to Fenner, who was a thin wire-like man now leaning against the window with all the substance of a pale

shadow, there were two others: Ben Riley, a stocky, red-faced Irishman whose clothes were filled with the stale smoke of cheap cigars; and Stanley Averson, a small man with dark sunglasses and a porcelain smile. Riley controlled gambling and Averson bossed other vices in the Orleans Street District.

The trio's attention was concentrated on the brief case and only occasionally they looked at Shipley, and then only with mild curiosity. Once he saw Averson's left cheek wrinkle under the sunglasses as he glanced at Riley. The Irishman returned the wink with a grin and Shipley knew what they were thinking. And he did not appreciate the irony of this meeting.

A door to his left burst open abruptly and Big John Bogardus strolled into the office, slamming the door behind him. He gave Shipley a quick, hard glance, then crossed the floor with brisk steps and dropped into a swivel chair behind a desk covered with the scars of a hundred cigarettes. He blew wearily through thick lips and his stale breath stirred up the cigarette ashes that lay on the desk like dandruff.

Bogardus was about forty, built strong but already flabby across the belt line. He'd grown a little soft with easy living, but he still gave the impression that he could handle himself in any situation. His suit, though new and expensive, fitted him badly and there was an irritating squeak in his new fifty-dollar shoes.

Shipley drew himself straight in the chair. "My name is Shipley, Bogardus. I represent—"

"I know who you are," Bogardus interrupted. "You're the banker, the advance man for Tony Orlando."

"Then you know why I'm here."

"I make it a point to always do my homework on guys like you," Bogardus said.

"Tony's very anxious to come to some agreement," Shipley said, then silently swore at himself for the tone of voice he had used. He sounded like a beggar.

Bogardus chuckled, but without humor. "So Tony's been tossed out of his eastern connections and now he wants to set up operations in our district."

Shipley nodded. "The word is that anyone who moves in here has to get your okay and pay you protection." He tapped the brief case. "Tony is willing to pay—very well, I might add."

Bogardus ignored the brief case. "What part of the action is Tony interested in?"

"All he can get—all you can give him."

Bogardus nodded slightly. "It might be arranged."

He glanced at the other three in the office. Averson removed his sunglasses and made a dramatic show of polishing them with the clean corner of a handkerchief. Finally he

replaced the glasses. "Okay with me."

Riley shrugged. "No objections."

Fenner stared at Shipley for a few seconds, then nodded. "If they've got the price for protection, then they can have a piece of the narcotics trade."

"Then it's settled," Bogardus announced, leaning his elbows on the desk. "You understand the terms of our protection contract?"

Shipley nodded. "We set up the operations and run them. You handle the protection and keep the authorities off our backs."

"We also tell you where and when you can open up," Bogardus added. "And if the heat comes from downtown or City Hall, we tell you when to close down and for how long."

Shipley nodded agreement, but his heart wasn't in it.

"We also settle any and all disputes, either with the authorities or other interests in the district," Bogardus continued. "This is the important and biggest part of our protection because we're in a position to handle it more efficiently than you are. That lone wolf stuff where the organizations handle their own enforcement doesn't go in this district. A shooting or disturbance at the wrong time can rouse public opinion which sometimes becomes allergic to loud noises."

"We accept the terms," Shipley said, but his heart still wasn't in it.

Bogardus stripped the wrapper from an expensive cigar. "I know what you're thinking, Shipley. A lot of the other boys think our controlling everything isn't the best way to cut up the pie. But believe me, it's the only way to keep the different interests in the district from cutting each other's throats and destroying a good setup. We run a tight little organization, Shipley, and don't worry about Tony losing any of the action. There's more than enough here to go around for everyone. And it'll stay that way as long as you play by our rules."

Bogardus put flame to the cigar and blew a stream of smoke across the desk. "Now, let's talk about the price for all this protection."

Shipley drew the palm of his hand across the top of the brief case. "I've got fifty thousand dollars here."

"Enough for a down payment," Bogardus said flatly. "But after you're in operation we'll expect five thousand each month plus five per cent of your net take."

Shipley's fingers went white as he gripped the edges of the brief case. "That's a little high, isn't it?"

"Take it or leave it," Bogardus said, the first flush of anger beginning to creep across his face. "If you want to operate in the Orleans Street District, you've got to have our protection. Without it, you'd be closed down in twenty-four hours. With it, everything is as wide open as Saturday night. The guarantee is what makes the price steep."

"We could try it without your

protection," Shipley suggested.

"I wouldn't," Bogardus warned. "You'd have to dive pretty deep in the lake to find any of the guys who tried it in the past."

Shipley knew he was beaten. "Okay, it's a deal."

He stood up and placed the brief case on the desk. "When can we open up?"

Bogardus gestured with his large hands. "Anytime you're ready. I'll pass the word around that you've bought your protection. You won't have any trouble."

Shipley hesitated for a second, taking one last look at the brief case. Then he tossed Bogardus the key to the lock and walked out of the office. Behind him he heard the snap of the lock, heard Bogardus say, "Okay, boys, come and get it."

As Shipley strolled down the front steps of the building, the black car eased over to the curb and braked to a stop. Tony Orlando's face appeared in the window. "Well, how did it go, Shipley?"

Shipley formed a circle with his thumb and forefinger. "We're in business, Tony."

Orlando gave him a victor's grin, then nodded toward the building Shipley had just left. "I hope you took a good look at the inside of that place," he said. "It's the last time you'll be seeing it—you or any of the boys. No sweat, no pinches—we got ourselves top protection."

Shipley turned back to stare at the Orleans Street Police Station which lay gray and antiquated against a sky turned almost chrome by the afternoon sun.

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION *(Act of October 23, 1962; Section 4369, Title 39, United States Code)*

1. Date of Filing: October 1, 1966. 2. Title of Publication: Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine. 3. Frequency of Issue: Monthly. 4. Location of Known Office of Publication: 505 Park Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022. 5. Location of the Headquarters or General Business Offices of the Publishers: 505 Park Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022.

6. Names and Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor: Publisher: B. G. Davis, 505 Park Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022. Editor: Ellery Queen, 505 Park Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022. Managing Editor, Clayton Rawson, 505 Park Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022.

7. Owner: Davis Publications, Inc., 505 Park Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022; B. G. Davis, 505 Park Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022; Joel Davis, 505 Park Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022.

8. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages or Other Securities: None.

9. Paragraphs 7 and 8 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner. Names and addresses of individuals who are stockholders of a corporation which itself is a stockholder or holder of bonds, mortgages or other securities of the publishing corporation have been included in paragraphs 7 and 8 when the interests of such individuals are equivalent to 1 percent or more of the total amount of the stock or securities of the publishing corporation.

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The Average Number of Copies of Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months Are: (A) Total Number of Copies Printed (Net Press run): 254,039; (B) Paid Circulation: (1) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors and Counter Sales: 73,927; (2) Mail Subscriptions: 92,787; (C) Total Paid Circulation: 166,714; (D) Free Distribution (Including Samples) by Mail, Carrier or Other Means: 412; (E) Total Distribution (Sum of C and D): 167,126; (F) Office Use, Left-over, Unaccounted, Spoiled After Printing: 86,913; (G) Total (Sum of E and F—Should Equal Net Press Run Shown in A): 254,039.

The Single Issue Nearest to Filing Date: (A) Total Number of Copies Printed (Net Press Run): 271,036; (B) Paid Circulation: (1) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors and Counter Sales: 76,100; (2) Mail Subscriptions: 104,513; (C) Total Paid Circulation: 180,613; (D) Free Distribution (Including Samples) By Mail, Carrier or Other Means: 439; (E) Total Distribution (Sum of C and D): 181,052; (F) Office Use, Left-over, Unaccounted, Spoiled After Printing): 89,984; (G) Total (Sum of E and F—Should Equal Net Press Run Shown in A: 271,036.

I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete. V. C. Stabile

Marika, a dark husky woman, was the last passenger on the bus headed for the suburban development. It was late at night, and no one was meeting her. And that last stop had been the end of the line in more ways than one—for other dark, husky women . . .

LAST RUN OF THE NIGHT

by TALMAGE POWELL

THE THIN, HUMP-SHOULDERED old man got off the bus at Trivet Street, and Marika was the sole remaining passenger.

The rear door closed with a hiss as the old man's shadow dissolved in the late-night darkness. The Diesel engine eased from an idling whisper to a sullen growl. An awkward sluggard, the bus lumbered from the curb-side stop.

As the lonely, deserted street crawled beneath the bus, the soft rattle of the empty seats jabbed at Marika. The night was warm, with a summer mist transforming the pale street lights into ornaments of silver; but a shudder built inside Marika and snaked through her.

"Anything wrong?" The driver's voice had the rough edges of an untutored man; but it was a strong baritone, a human sound intruding into the emptiness.

The bus was sighing past freight yards, a trailer park, the lights of a small manufacturing plant, and rumbling toward desolate tracts of undeveloped suburban land. Marika pulled her gaze from the forlorn scenery. The driver was looking at her reflection in the curved mirror that gave him full visual scope of his bus.

A small breath gusted from Marika. "No, I'm all right."

"You look mighty pale to me." The driver hesitated. He was a big powerful man, his beef competent to handle the bus as if it were a toy. He turned his head to flick a glance at her. She was sitting on the right, three seats from the front of the bus.

"If you're sick, lady, I can stop this heap for a minute." He had a reddish-golden coloration, a face that had been hacked from hard rock maple with a dull ax. "I got no real schedule to make. Last run of the night. To the end of the line, then on to the bus garage. Won't matter if I'm a couple of minutes late."

"Thanks, but I'm feeling better." Marika opened her large handbag, took out a wisp of handkerchief, touched it to her face. "For a minute there—being alone at this hour—I got a little jumpy, I guess."

The driver had again centered his attention on the suburban parkway, Sherman Boulevard. The creases in

the back of his neck yawned as he dipped his head in a nod. "Yeah, after what's happened, I guess some jumpiness is natural."

Marika studied his reflection in the windshield. It was erased by the flowing shadows of a stretch of tall trees. Marika gave a little laugh.

"I'm such a ninny sometimes."

"Ninny, my eye." A plaque over the windshield announced the driver's name: *Your Operator, G. G. Harbison.* "When a couple of girls get murdered out here, it's time for a—a beautiful young woman to let a ninny streak show."

His voice had softened when it fumbled for the descriptive adjective.

Marika slid her eyes from him. Beautiful? The word wasn't often used to describe her. She was of sturdy Slavic stock, and she was intelligent enough to know herself for what she was. Her figure wasn't bad, if judged by a big-woman standard. Neither was her face, its broad planes and high cheekbones softened by her mass of gleaming black hair. Attractive? Yes, definitely attractive. Young, healthy, robust, attractive. But hardly beautiful.

Outside, nothing bearing a light was any longer visible. Even traffic on Sherman Boulevard had disappeared. The indistinct shadows of a few shacks, a tumbledown garage, slipped past.

The soft hissing of the tires became the sibilant whisper of a creature lurking in the darkness. The Diesel, settling into a steady rhythm, began to chant. Dead—dead—dead—dead—

"Have you—" Marika started at the sound of her own voice—"been on this run long?"

"Couple of months," Harbison said.

"Do you like it?"

The shoulders that bulged the gray uniform jacket went up, down. "It's okay. It pays a buck. I guess I like it better than the company does. They lose money, running a city transit bus all the way out to the new shopping center and housing development. But they got to do it. Something about their franchise—I dunno the details. Anyhow, they should bellyache, the way they got the city bus business locked up."

The headlights of a short string of cars suddenly danced by.

Harbison glanced into the interior-view mirror. "You live in one of the new homes in Sherman Forest?"

"No," Marika said, "but I'm going all the way—to the end of the line."

For a full minute Harbison divided his attention between the road and mirror. Marika knew he was trying to figure her. She didn't live out there. She didn't have a suitcase, so she wasn't going for a visit. A visit—

Harbison lifted a muscle-corded hand from the steering wheel and raked it across his lips. A visit. Her

nervousness. Maybe some jerk in a fancy Sherman Forest home had a wife who wasn't home, had cozy music on the stereo and a bottle of champagne waiting on ice—

Marika slipped a small rat-tail comb from her handbag, touched it to the ends of her hair.

"You got somebody to meet you?" Harbison asked.

She shook her head.

"You be careful," he said, a rough note in his voice. "If you got far to walk from the end of the line, you be careful."

"I will," she promised.

"It's late, and you ought to have somebody to meet you."

"I'll be okay."

The Sherman Forest development formed a lazy curve around a large lake. Moonlight lay in a bank of silver to the farther shore.

"Did you know them?" Marika asked.

"Who?"

"The two girls."

"Oh, no," he said. "They rode my bus now and then—both of them worked out here. One was a maid, the other a nurse to an old invalid lady. I'd nod and say hello, but I didn't know their names or anything until I read about them in the papers."

"The papers sure made the most of it," Marika remarked.

"They always do."

She shivered. "They said that the man—before he strangled them—assaulted them."

"The dumb bulls will never catch the guy, either."

"Why do you say that?"

He met her glance briefly in the mirror. "Do they ever?"

"Sometimes," she said. "Sometimes they do. If they get suspicious, they have ways, I've heard."

The negative shake of the square-hewn reddish face was emphatic. "But not this time. This guy is too slick for them. He could be anybody. Right on this bus—if we had another passenger."

Marika folded her arms and hugged herself. Framed in the bus window, a palatial country estate swam in the moonlight, a Colonial-style mansion remote and austere.

"Do you—" Marika's teeth chattered. "Do you think the man is still around?"

"Who knows? Maybe he's a rich young guy sleeping peaceful in a Sherman Forest home right at this minute. Maybe he's a fiddle-footed character five states away. Maybe—"

The tires keened in the silence. A gleeful note crept into the insidious chanting of the Diesel.

"Yes?" Marika prompted.

"Forget it."

"But you—"

"Forget it, I said!"

"Well, okay! If you want to be that way about it, okay!"

His eyes sought hers in the mirror. "So if you insist," he said, a tight, thin laugh behind his voice. "The guy may may be somebody who likes to find a dark corner and

wait for the bus to arrive. Wait to see what's getting off the Route 109, Sherman Forest bus."

"I've made you angry," she said.

"Why should I be angry?"

"But you are."

"No," he barked. "I'm not sore. You're old enough to know what you're doing. You want to go around asking for it, that's your business!"

"I'm not asking for it. I have to go to Sherman Forest, that's all."

"At this hour?"

"Why not?"

"Nothing's open there at this hour, unless it's a house where somebody is expecting you."

Marika tossed her head in a flash of contrived haughtiness. "I'll admit I wanted some conversation, but you've got no right to pry into my personal affairs."

He looked at her in the mirror. His teeth snapped together. His voice dropped to such a low pitch that it was almost lost in the shrilling of the tires. "Like I told the dumb bulls, I haven't seen a thing. No suspicious guys riding my bus, none hanging around the shopping center stop. Like I'm telling you. The guy is too slick to get caught. And you're too dumb not to."

"Now look here! You've got a real nerve—"

"Dumb and no good."

"I won't listen to any further—"

"And just like the others," he said. "Husky just like them. And dark. Know what the cops said? Said maybe the guy had a thing about husky, dark women. Maybe his mother had been a dark, husky woman and she'd hated him and he'd hated her, or maybe there was a dark, husky woman later in his life who gave him the business real good."

Marika's eyes were fixed on him.

The thin, cold laugh scratched its way past his throat. His foot suddenly hit the brake. Marika was thrown forward. He wrestled the wheel. The bus tilted, swayed, then lurched onto a side road.

He killed the lights before the bus had stopped moving, and the vehicle was swallowed in the shadows flung by a canopy of trees.

Marika crouched in the far corner of the seat. Bits of leaf-filtered moonlight outlined his heavy silhouette. He was getting out of the driver's seat. Moving slowly. Taking his time. Savoring his madness, relishing this suspended moment.

Nearer and nearer the huge bulk of him came. His laugh was a rumble far more grim than the Diesel chanting had been.

"Go ahead, number three, and scream," he said. "Let me hear you scream one time. There's nobody but me to hear you—not a soul. Scream, I say!"

But Marika did not scream. Instead, her hand slid into her large handbag. The pin on her policewoman's badge pricked her knuckle slightly as her fingers slid past to curl around the butt of her service revolver.

Eddie Bates's murder of his wife Alice was in the classic tradition of "the perfect crime." What Eddie did was to create an illusion—and a most unusual one at that. But illusions are dangerous things to create . . .

DECEPTION DAY

by HAROLD R. DANIELS

THERE ARE TWO SCHOOLS OF thought on the subject of getting away with murder. Some magazine articles by both amateur and professional criminologists give the impression that droves of murderers are presently walking the earth as free men. Police Chiefs and other law enforcement officers, writing for later editions of the same magazines, assure us that murder will out, invariably. At least, in their particular jurisdictions.

The truth lies somewhere between the two points of view. It is by no means easy to commit a homicide and profit thereby. It is also by no means impossible. It takes ingenuity, courage, and luck. It takes patience. This applies to calculated murder, of course, not to the casual and pointless taking of human life out of sheer wanton brutality.

The murder of Alice Bates by her husband Edward was in the classic tradition of "the perfect crime." Eddie got away with it. Technically.

Eddie had more than ordinary provocation. By any number of standards Alice deserved killing. This made the murder more of a challenge than usual. When a married woman is murdered, the police extend only a tentative hand of sympathy to the husband. With the other hand they check to see that the handcuffs are available. They look at him with a sullen and suspicious eye, cynical in the knowledge that in such cases, the husband is more often than not the guilty party.

Eddie knew that the police would be suspicious. He knew that he would have to give them an illusion that would catch their eye and their fancy or they would overwhelm him. He created his illusion as deftly as a master magician.

Eddie was 40 years old at the time of the murder—a nondescript man beginning to show considerable scalp. Not a bad man, not a good man. A niggling, testy man, from whom most of the juice had been evaporated by exposure to the caustic that was Alice. If he had been the dominant partner in the marriage, if he had been stronger—but he wasn't. At 40 he could look back at 20

sere and empty years. He never looked ahead any more.

There are the lines with which to make a sketch of Eddie. He kept a fussily neat tool bench. He paid his bills promptly. His idea of luxury was to sit in the basement room he had fixed up and watch the ball game on TV with half a dozen cans of beer. One afternoon, parched for human companionship, he had asked a neighbor in to watch the ball game with him. Alice had made a point of coming downstairs to start the dryer. It was the first time she had used the dryer in a year. She almost never came down to the cellar.

The house wiring was inadequate. When the dryer cut in, the TV picture shrunk and dimmed. He knew better than to protest. She would flail him with words. She would tell him that if she had to sit at home while he watched his stupid ball game, she could at least be allowed to get her work done. She would tell him these and many other things. Since he was sure that the neighbor wouldn't care to hear them he said nothing. They spent a miserable, embarrassed afternoon together and he never asked anyone in to watch a ball game again.

Eddie watched TV in the evenings, too, but there was little enjoyment in it for him. Through some trick of resonance the TV sounded almost as loud in the upstairs bedroom as it did in the basement. No sooner would he settle down to watch, after Alice had gone to bed, than she would be nagging at him to turn the volume down. Only when he could scarcely hear it himself would she finally subside.

And Alice. She was a year older than Eddie. They had married when he was 20. His mother had died six months before and he had been lonely and miserable and an easy victim. She was then superficially pretty and could, with an effort, simulate a degree of kindness and warmth.

Over the years she had magnified the prettiness. "Oh, yes," she would tell some acquaintance—she had no friends—"I was named Class Beauty in our High School Year Book." (She had been named Untidiest Girl and had thought herself lucky to get a mention.) And she would giggle and say challengingly, "You'd never think it now, would you!" (At 40, with a face wizened and puckered by her own selfishness, she could say that!)

And again Alice. A parasite of a woman. Living well, by conventional standards, on Eddie's pay. Giving back nothing. A parasite because she had neither the wit nor the will to amuse herself and resented Eddie's interest in baseball and gardening and the neighbors.

Out of pure jealousy she intruded on every one of his pleasures. He liked to read in bed. Rather than fight about the TV volume he might have gone to bed with a good mystery story. She spoiled this, too.

They had twin beds. If he turned on the light at his own bed she would twitch and protest that she couldn't sleep. "How can I get any rest with that light in my eyes?" she would demand. (The light was a sickly 25-watt affair and something less than blinding.) But he would get up and pad down to the dreary living room to read in complete discomfort.

He fought back now and then, especially in the early years. And now and then, driven from the house by her sheer aura of viciousness, he could still feel sorry for himself and even for Alice. Once he had suggested a divorce. She had laughed in his face and said, with mock tenderness, "I'll never let you go, Eddie. You should know that." He did know that. Out of his weakness he accepted it.

They had a summer ritual that would have been a pleasant thing with a more congenial pair. Each Sunday they would pack sandwiches and beach gear and drive to Mussel Cove, a public beach a few miles from their home. Eddie would unload the car. He would spread a blanket and set up an umbrella at her back and she would sit facing the water. She would sit all day, not speaking except to ask for a sandwich or to tell him to fetch a soft drink from the refreshment stand.

Eddie despised the beach. He never tanned, so the sun was always a torment to him. He was an indifferent swimmer and the water hurt his ears. He would not have minded a few hours at the beach if it made Alice less hard to get along with, but their Sundays extended from noon until dark. The man at the refreshment stand had a radio. Eddie's only Sunday joy was to sneak up and listen to snatches of the ball game.

Mussel Cove was not a popular beach. There was a dangerous riptide at that point on the coast and most swimmers feared it. Often they had the beach to themselves. Alice piled ritual on ritual. There was a spot just visible from the refreshment stand. She always commanded Eddie to set the blanket at that particular spot. And precisely at dusk she always stood up and plodded down to the water for her dip before they went home.

Of these two rituals Eddie created his illusion.

And again, Alice. See her now as Eddie saw her each Sunday. See her from behind as she stares at the ocean. See her at 40; at 160 pounds, ridiculous in a frilly bathing suit. See her sitting at the edge of the water with a silhouette that the years and the pounds had thickened at the base so that she looked for all the world like Winnie the Pooh. Seen from behind.

It was not her interminable meanness or her eternal complaining or even her insistence on dragging him to the beach that finally drove Eddie to kill Alice. It was something that she said. Something that was foul and indecent; something that was unforgettable and unforgiveable

and that made him realize, finally, that he could not possibly tolerate going on with her. What she said does not belong on the written page, but it can be implied. A picture can be drawn.

There was, in their neighborhood, an eight-year-old girl with an exquisitely pretty face. She was not a very bright or clever little girl and the other children tended to bully her from time to time. Eddie noticed this. In his own misery he was drawn to her. The girl's own parents had little time for her so that when she was hurt or frightened and Eddie was puttering in his yard, she would come to him for comfort.

Eddie thought of her as a forlorn little waif, badly in need of affection, and this he could spare her. She thought of him as the man down the street who was kind to her when she was miserable or scared. Alice thought—who knows what a woman like Alice thinks?

One Saturday morning Eddie was working in his yard. The neighborhood children had gone skirling off in a covey on some wild errand, leaving Eddie's waif behind. He looked up at the sound of a cry of fright to see her running toward him with an arrogant little cocker spaniel barking at her heels.

Eddie reached down and snatched her up, at the same time giving the spaniel a kick that was both solid and satisfying. It went yipping up the street while Eddie soothed the little girl. "Shh—the dog is gone," he soothed her. "You don't have to be afraid of him any more."

And the child locked her small arms around his neck and sobbed. Her little dress, tiny to begin with, had slid under Eddie's arm. She wore ruffled blue pants and Eddie patted her round little bottom as he would have patted the bottom of his own daughter if he had had one.

After a time she stopped crying and he put her down and reached for a dime. In a conspirator's whisper he said, "Don't you tell those other kids where you got it. They'll be sorry they went off and left you."

She giggled and ran off up the street. Eddie went in the house to get a glass of water. If he and Alice had had a child, he thought— Maybe things would have been different. But she hadn't wanted one.

Alice had watched the incident from the front window with the black bile of jealousy rising in her throat. The fool, she thought. Trying to be the neighborhood Big Brother. She said viciously, "Aren't you the big hero. Putting on a show for the neighbors. Some show. You'll have the police after you before you're done."

And then she said what she said which need not be repeated, but which implied that Eddie, at best, was a child molester. A senseless, cruel implication, made out of sheer malice.

Eddie turned white, walked over to her, and slapped her across the

face as hard as he could. Then he walked out of the house. That day he counted up 20 years of frustration and meanness, little and big. And he finally admitted to himself that it was all her fault—so that it was right and proper that she should die. Die because she would never, while she lived, let him go. She had said as much, and Eddie knew that she meant it.

When he came back that evening she didn't mention the slap. She was, in fact, badly frightened, knowing that she had gone too far. Time would erode the fear and eventually she would have held the slap up to Eddie as a symbol of his treatment of her—if she had lived.

That same night he began his preparations. Long ago he had installed asphalt tile in the basement recreation room. Very carefully he took these up over an area measuring six feet by four, exposing the bare cement. Over a period of several weeks he broke through the cement and dug a hole four feet deep. He put the dirt and the broken shards of cement into some empty steel grease drums that he kept to hold waste from his tool bench.

When Alice asked him what he was doing that made so much noise —she didn't bother going down to look—he told her that he was putting in a drain and a sump pump to keep dampness out of the basement walls. She accepted this with the comment that it was better than wasting his time watching ball games.

Admittedly the grave in the cellar is an old device. The normal reflex of a policeman investigating the disappearance of a married woman is to head immediately for the cellar and look for signs of digging. But Eddie's variation on the theme was almost brilliant. He fully intended to put the tiles back in the same pattern in which they had been taken up. He was a skilled workman and he was certain that he could replace them so that it would not be possible to detect that they had been moved.

There was an element of psychology involved in digging the hole in the tiled section of the cellar rather than in a section where the cement was bare. The most sensitive of policemen, once given the notion that something is buried under a cement floor, will have no hesitation in calling for the jackhammer. A carefully polished tile floor is something else again. It takes a certain amount of callousness to deliberately deface it. Eddie took this into consideration, although he was positive that no policeman would have reason to dig up the cellar.

On the Sunday after the slapping incident Alice, for all her massive gall, hesitated to bring up the subject of the beach. Eddie had not spoken to her since the slapping and she was still a little afraid of him. She was grimly pleased when he

packed the picnic gear into the car just as if nothing had happened.

The spot on the beach where they always sat was just above the reach of the waves at high tide. An occasional bigger wave would rush at the spot in a frenzy of green water and white foam, only to sink into the hungry sand before it reached the blanket. Eddie idly pushed up a mound of sand with his feet and watched the water reduce it. After a time he walked over to the refreshment stand and said, "Hello, Al."

Al, a friend after all these years of Sunday picnics, looked up. "Hello, Eddie. First of the sixth. Three to nothing, Red Sox. How's things?"

"Pretty good."

"Root beer for Mrs. Bates?" Al nodded toward Eddie's beach umbrella.

"I guess so. Wait till after the next inning. Better give me a couple of hot dogs, too. She didn't pack too much lunch."

Eddie made several trips to the refreshment stand during the afternoon. By the time he made the last visit, the sun was just about to fall into the sea. Earlier, with a shift in the wind, he had moved the umbrella around to Alice's right as she sat facing the water. Looking back from the refreshment stand, he could see her silhouetted against the fading light. She and the umbrella and the beach gear were as clearly defined as a superb photograph, but in strong black without dimensions.

"Nice sunset," he said to Al.

Al looked toward the cove. "Sure is. Mrs. Bates looks comfortable. Want another soda or anything?"

"No, thanks."

"All right. Guess I'll close up. Hardly anybody left on the beach anyway."

"We'll be going too, soon as Alice takes her dip."

And Eddie went home and consulted an almanac.

He made some small preparations. From three hardware stores where he was not known he bought paper sacks of ready-mixed cement. He smuggled the broken shards from the cellar out of the back door and disposed of them one by one.

At last only one detail remained, and he took care of it on the Friday before the Sunday he had picked from the almanac. He killed Alice.

He executed her swiftly and painlessly and rather cleverly. Alice bathed every Friday evening. She made a ceremony of it, filling the tub almost to the top and sprinkling the water lavishly with bath salts. When she was finished she invariably reached her hand out to the chromium shower pipe and pulled herself to a standing position; this with many a grunt of effort. Eddie knew this because periodically he had to tighten the screws that held the pipe clamped to the wall.

When she was settled in her bath, Eddie quietly went down to the cellar. He connected the live side of the heavy main electrical service cable to the nearest water pipe, bypassing

the fuse box. He left the ground wire attached.

Then he went up to the hall outside the bathroom to wait. It didn't take long. He heard the suck of water as she pulled out the plug. He heard her gasp and then heard the surge of water as she slipped back into the tub.

Quickly he slipped down to the cellar and disconnected his temporary wiring. When he returned to the bathroom she was dead. She looked more pleasant than she had in 20 years.

He buried her in the grave he had made in the cellar with no sense of remorse, but with some pity. Pity for what she had been rather than for the fact that she was now dead. His final act that evening was to fill in the grave and cement it over with the ready-mix cement.

In the morning the cement was dry. Since it was Saturday and he didn't have to go to work, he spent the entire forenoon replacing the asphalt tile with the patient skill of the born craftsman. He had mixed the cement in a wheelbarrow. He hosed the wheelbarrow clean in the back yard and scattered the leftover dirt among the rosebushes.

By the time he finished and went in the house to get his lunch, he had the strange sensation that Alice had never existed at all. The feeling grew stronger when he went to her bedroom and rummaged in her closet for the bathing suit, the light robe, and the floppy straw hat that she usually wore to the beach. He left the robe and the hat in the kitchen. With a pair of scissors he cut the bathing suit into rags. These he mixed with other rags kept in a blue denim laundry in the cellar.

Now he was ready for D Day. Deception Day.

Deception began at noon on Sunday when he packed the picnic gear in the car, just as he had done on a hundred Sundays. He piled the gear on the back seat and set the hat on the ledge behind it. From the distance of the nearest neighbor's house it would undoubtedly look as if Alice was sitting there. He helped the illusion by turning his head toward the back, as he drove away, as if he were talking to Alice in the rear seat.

Once at the beach he arranged the umbrella and the blanket with extra care. There were only two couples there at the time and they were youngsters, far too interested in each other to be concerned with one nondescript middle-aged man. He placed the umbrella directly in line with the refreshment stand, and, after a time, he walked up.

Al smiled at him. "Top of the second inning," he said. "No score."

"Thanks, Al. Let me have a couple of bottles of root beer."

"Sure. Stick around and hear the next inning first?"

"Maybe later. Alice says she's thirsty."

He walked back and sat on the blanket and drank one of the root beers. He emptied the other one sur-

reptitiously into the sand. It would have been a nice touch, he reflected, to have saved a bottle with Alice's fingerprints on it. No need of it, of course. If the police ever got suspicious enough to look that far they would certainly look in the cellar.

The afternoon wore away. He had packed enough sandwiches only for himself. He left most of the crusts so that it could have been the debris of two people. After a time he strolled back and listened to part of the game with Al. When he went back to the umbrella he took two more root beers and a hamburger. Ordering the hamburger he made the comment, "Extra well done, Al. The old lady can't stand it rare."

"Sure, Eddie."

Toward sundown he noted with satisfaction that the other two couples on the beach were getting ready to leave. He studied the water. The tide was almost full now, and the sun was just above the water. Ten more minutes, he estimated.

The moment the other couples left he got busy. Masked from the refreshment stand by the umbrella, he heaped sand into a pile that had the shape of Winnie the Pooh. Hastily he rummaged in the picnic hamper for Alice's straw hat and robe. He threw the robe carelessly on the sand. He set the hat on top of Winnie the Pooh. Only then did he move the umbrella to one side.

The water was already licking at the feet of the sand dummy when he got to his feet. Four minutes until high tide. He strolled casually up to the refreshment stand.

Al said, "Ready to call it a day, Eddie?"

"Yeah. I guess." He glanced at the beach. Silhouetted against the sky the dummy sat staring at the sea. The straw hat was the crowning touch. It was Alice from head to dumpy hips. "Alice will want to take her dip before we leave."

He had planned to call Al's attention to Alice in some manner—perhaps by ordering another sandwich and making some comment about the consequences to her figure. Al saved him the bother.

"She's still sitting there," Al said, glancing at Winnie the Pooh. "Must be waiting till you get back."

"Not her. She knows I won't be going in again." Eddie paused. "How did the Sox make out?"

"It's a double header. They lost the first game eight to nothing. Want I should turn it on again?"

Eddie said, "Please, I want to know how the second game's going." Al went into the back room to turn on the radio.

A wave came and another and another and finally a seventh wave, bigger than all the others. It licked at the feet of the sand statue. A grain and a dozen grains and a thousand grains slid into the water. The next wave was bigger still and it had more of the strong urging of the moon behind it. It washed completely around the statue, caressing it, and when it reluctantly receded there

was very little left of Winnie the Pooh, with its hat askew. The next wave, like a fussy housewife, swept the sand flat, leaving only the floppy straw hat.

Al came back to the counter. "Guess your wife went in for her swim," he said, glancing toward the spot where the statue had been.

Eddie took his time. He said finally, "I guess I'll go round up Alice," and set off for the beach. "See you next Sunday," he called over his shoulder. He had no intention of ever returning, of course.

After a minute Al heard him call, "Alice! Hey, Alice!" There was such a note of panic in his voice that Al raced down to the beach.

Eddie was running up and down the shore, calling frantically for his wife. Al went to him, casting a shaken glance at the pathetic huddle of clothing on the blanket.

"Easy, Eddie," he said. "Easy. Get a grip on yourself while I go up and call the Rescue Squad."

Afterward Eddie let himself be consoled. He heard the snatches of conversation from the crowd that quickly gathered.

"There's a hell of a riptide out there. Probably knocked her down and she panicked."

And: "Probably never will find her. There's a mean cross current out there that sets out right across the sound. Two guys drowned here, couple years ago. Never found 'em."

And from a stranger in a bathing suit: "I saw it happen, officer. We were down the beach a way. Saw her walk out into the surf and disappear just like that." Importantly. This stranger shows up at every tragedy. Doubtless during the afternoon he had seen a woman walk out into the water.

And from Al, not to be outdone by a stranger: "Sure, poor Eddie and me were listening to the ball game. Alice—I knew her real well—well, anyway, one minute I was watching her sitting there. Then she got up to take a dip before she went home like she always did. First thing we knew she was gone."

And, from the law, not a handcuff or a suspicious glance but the warm arm of sympathy on his shoulder and the friendly, "You take it easy, Mr. Bates. We've notified the Coast Guard. They'll alert all the boats in the area. They'll probably find her bo —Even if they don't, you know what I mean, if it'll help, she probably didn't feel any pain at all."

At that point Eddie had to make a conscious effort to keep from nodding his head in agreement.

The position was taken at the beginning of this study in crime that murder can be got away with—with the right combination of courage, wit, and patience. And technically Eddie Bates had got away with it.

For a few days he thought he was happy. Actually, what he felt was not happiness but Alice-release. Basically Eddie was a good man, a man with a conscience. That conscience and the fact that illusion and hallu-

cination are close cousins destroyed him.

When General Sherman set out on his march from Atlanta to the sea he carried no provisions. His soldiers lived off the land on succulent ham and smoked turkey, on sweet yams and fresh beef. They were happy for a day or two. Then their bellies ached for the iron biscuit and rancid salt pork that was their common fare. Eddie, used to Alice, found his sweet solitude cloying.

He made gestures. He stopped at a hardware store and bought a 100-watt bulb which he put in his bedside lamp. That night he went early to bed to satiate himself with reading. He read a few pages and became uneasy. Where was the querulous, nagging voice that had dinned at him for 20 years?

He did not look consciously at Alice's bed, but he was aware of it out of the corner of his eye. It was different, somehow. But not as different as it should be.

Wasn't there a lumpy form in it? Eddie laughed at his own foolish notion, but he could not make himself look directly at the bed.

The strong light, so much more powerful than the sickly bulb that Alice had allowed him, cast the shadow of his book onto her bed. He lay there in growing fright. When shame overcame his fear and he put down his book and turned his head, the shadow fled ahead of his movement.

Nothing there. Nothing. But the memory of fear remained and he slept uneasily, waking often to stare at her bed in the dark.

Once he stabbed out to turn on the light, waking from his fitful dozing. The light came on, revealing nothing, but so violent had been his gesture that he tore the chain from the fixture. When he tried to sleep again he had to unscrew the bulb with his fingers. It was hot and he burned his fingers on the glass by the time he had unscrewed it enough to break contact.

In the morning he felt only slightly better. The long sweet rays of the sun showed that Alice's bed was pristine in its emptiness. Certainly she was not there. She was down in the cellar. The wholesome daylight made him ashamed of his fear, but it did not exorcise it.

He could not stand the house. He went out for his breakfast and spent a long day in idleness, coming home after dark.

One of his favorite shows was on TV that night. He told himself with bravado that this time he could watch it with the volume turned all the way up if he wanted it that loud. So he went downstairs. Unconsciously he avoided stepping on those tiles under which Alice lay buried. He turned the set on and settled back to wait for his show.

There was that freak of resonance that had made the set audible to Alice in the upstairs bedroom. Resonance is a function of vibration. Resonance—vibration—jiggled the

bulb in the upstairs lamp that Eddie had loosened. It flicked on and off, on and off. As it did, it drained the current from the inadequate wiring so that the picture on the TV tube shrunk in on itself.

Eddie didn't pause to reason this out. He crouched in his chair with his mouth dry, watching the TV screen. He tried to cry out, "Alice!" But he could not make himself say the name because to do so would give reality to his terror.

Only after a long minute did he force himself to get up and cross the cellar to the dryer. He felt it. It was cold.

Eddie spent a night of horror, sitting up in the living room. He could not endure the cellar. The screaming thought came at him that the police knew all about what he had done and were using his own fear to make him confess. Far more terrifying was the thought that they didn't know about Alice—in which case, what had he seen in Alice's bed?

He went to work the next day. He was worn and haggard and his appearance was mistaken for visible signs of his great loss.

Then there was the little girl up the street whose bottom he had patted. A sweet little girl. An affectionate little girl whose parents had told her that Mr. Bates was very sad and that she should not bother him just now. Her pretty eyes filled at the thought that Mr. Bates was so sad. She would, she decided, show him her newest treasure, a bright-red patent purse. So she climbed out of the sand box in which she was playing, and clutching her purse, gravely marched down the street to Mr. Bates's house.

He was not in the yard, so she sat on the front steps to wait for him, hoping that Mrs. Bates wouldn't come out to yell at her. Her shoes were uncomfortable, so she took them off and emptied out the sand and then put the shoes back on. When her mother called to her, there was still no sign of Mr. Bates. So she got up and dutifully started homeward, promising herself that she would come back the next day.

Eddie Bates, returning home just before dark, saw the little mound of sand. He was no longer horrified or frightened. Only despairing. Alice had said so often that she would never let him go. She had been here; it was Alice—he was sure of it—who had left the little mound of sand to show him she knew all about his illusion.

Illusion. Didn't the mound of sand look like a tiny Winnie the Pooh? Tiny? Eddie sat in his chair, in the dark basement, and the little mound grew and grew . . .

Illusion. Some part of Alice wasn't under the tiles, never would be. There would always be a mound of sand that grew and grew . . .

Illusion. Eddie knew what he had to do. He went upstairs, took his shotgun from the closet, and he did it.

FAMOUS OPENERS

AUTHOR'S PREFACE: *Many classic novels of detection and suspense are memorable for their opening lines or paragraphs—a striking line of dialogue, a provocative statement of fact or opinion, a chilling description of mood or setting or conflict that immediately grips the reader's interest . . .*

The following 12 passages are the beginnings of a dozen acknowledged highspots in the detective-crime-mystery field.

If you can recognize as many as 6, you have a good knowledge of the genre; if you can identify as many as 8 book titles and authors' names, your score is Very Good; and if 10 or more are familiar to you, give yourself an E for Excellent.

Happy recollecting!

ATTENTION GETTERS: *An Unusual Quiz*

by JON L. BREEN

1. On a memorable morning of early December, London opened its eyes on a frigid grey mist. There are mornings when King Fog masses his molecules of carbon in serried squadrons in the city, while he scatters them tenuously in the suburbs; so that your morning train may bear you from twilight to darkness.

2. Some women give birth to murderers, some go to bed with them, and some marry them. Lina Aysgarth had lived with her husband for nearly eight years before she realized that she was married to a murderer.

3. In the offices of the Homicide Bureau of the Detective Division of the New York Police Department, on the third floor of the Police Headquarters building in Center Street, there is a large steel filing cabinet . . .

4. Between what matters and what seems to matter, how should the world we know judge wisely?

5. The dramatic season of 192- began in a disconcerting manner. Eugene O'Neill had neglected to write a new play in time to secure the financial encouragement of the *intelligentzia;* and as for the "low-brows," having attended play after play without enthusiasm, they had deserted the legitimate theatre for the more ingenuous delights of the motion picture palaces.

6. Grant lay on his high white cot and stared at the ceiling. Stared at it with loathing. He knew by heart every last minute crack on its nice clean surface.

7. Mrs. Ferrars died on the night of the 16th-17th September—a Thursday.

8. This is the story of how a middle-aged spinster lost her mind, deserted her domestic gods in the city, took a furnished house for the summer out of town, and found herself involved in one of those mysterious crimes that keep our newspapers and detective agencies happy and prosperous.

9. Green dice rolled across the green table, struck the rim together, and bounced back. One stopped short holding six white spots in two equal rows uppermost. The other tumbled out to the center of the table and came to rest with a single spot on top.

10. It was the same old rigmarole. Sometimes I found it amusing; sometimes it only bored me; sometimes it gave me a pronounced pain . . .

11. "There was a man lived by a churchyard—" is an intriguing beginning for a story left unfinished. Edward Stevens also lived by a churchyard, in more senses than one: which is the soberest possible statement of the fact.

12. The drugged girl lay on the couch, her left arm extended. The man who stood over her held the microphone of a tape recorder.

Answers on page 122.

"Q"

POETIC LICENSE

Did Poe invent the "dying message"? Why not? He invented nearly every other major principle of detective-story technique . . . In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841)—the world's first detective story, in a modern sense — Poe gave us for all time the basic and classic pattern: the eccentric amateur sleuth and his hero-worshipping confidant; the crime that baffles the police; the wrongly suspected person; the hermetically sealed room; and the surprise solution.

In "The Purloined Letter" (1844), Poe originated psychological deduction and double-bluff surprise (the obvious as the true solution rather than the unexpected).

In "Thou Art the Man" (1844), Poe rounded out and completed the now immutable canons of the genre he himself conceived and executed so nobly; he added the least-likely-person solution, the laying of a false trail by the real criminal, the use of psychological third-degree to extort a confession, the device of an anonymous detective, and (a really magnificent anticipation) the idea of ballistics as evidence of guilt.

So why not the "dying message"? You doubt it? Well, see for yourself. Here is a new "Poe" tale in which "Dupin" is faced with nothing less than the problem of a dying man who uttered one last message, apparently identifying and accusing his murderer. But beware, dear reader, beware . . .

THE MYSTERY OF THE GILDED CHEVAL-GLASS

another "hitherto unpublished" tale of C. Auguste Dupin

by MICHAEL HARRISON

TO THIS ACCOUNT OF AN ADVENTURE OF MY FRIEND, THE CHEVALIER C. Auguste Dupin, I have thought fit to give the above title, since no *inanimate* object ever played a more decisive *rôle* in effecting the revelation of the truth—after first obscuring and confounding the facts.

In the record, too, of my eminent friend's long career as a solver of those mysteries which have their origin in crime, this case is noteworthy in that it refutes what, perhaps, my own auctorial bias may have suggested—namely that Dupin's exceptional services were utilized only by the Eminent, the Wealthy, and the Powerful.

If, inadvertently, I have contributed toward this misapprehension, I apologize, not only to the Reader, but also to my friend. When I affirm, on my honor, that he was as eager to help persons of the lower social ranks, and to exert himself as strenuously in their behalf, I do not, it may be, go sufficiently far in his defense. Here I shall merely state that the Chevalier undertook the solution of those crimes involving what the English call "The Upper Ten" mostly in order to repair his shattered fortunes; whereas he undertook to prosecute the truth in the interests of the humble and poor out of a sympathy that he had acquired in the days when his own poverty cut him off from all but the sneers of his own social order.

Indeed, as the half-grudged testimonials of G——, the Prefect of the Parisian Police, bruited my friend's capabilities abroad, and as Dupin's "practice" (if I may borrow a word from the learned professions) expanded on the solid base of work well done and handsomely recompensed, the Chevalier was able to devote more time to those cases in which monetary reward was the least consideration.

Such a case was that of *The Gilded Cheval-Glass* which first came to our notice, according to my common-place book, in March of 183- . . .

The March of that year, I recall, lived fully up to its proverbial description, coming in like a lion and going out like a lamb. It was coming in—to the accompaniment of an angry wind which howled about the walls and

windows of our comfortable little back library, or book-closet, *au troisième*, No. 33, Rue Dunôt, Faubourg St. Germain, and blew the smoke back down the chimney—when Hyacinthe, our domestic, announced a visitor.

"It is a young married woman, sir, who—"

"Enough, Hyacinthe! Show her up at once, and then bring in some coffee and hot spiced wine."

As our man-servant, with a bow, hurried off to do my friend's bidding, I could not help exclaiming, "But, Dupin, you know nothing about this caller save that she is young and married."

"That tells me a great deal. For instance, how did Hyacinthe know that she was married? Because he has seen her wedding-ring. Why should he see her wedding-ring? Because, even on this bitterly cold March day, she obviously wears no gloves. She is, then, either a young person of the working class or a lady of higher rank reduced through poverty to being without gloves.

"We can deduce more: her distress is so great that it communicated itself to Hyacinthe to the point—were you not listening?—that he took the first-floor stairs at something approaching a run, the next floor at a quick trot, and completed his ascent at a speed still far in excess of his usual dignified rate of progress. All things considered, I feel that the young lady whose steps I now hear is deservedly in need of our assistance. Ah, here she is."

We rose hastily as the door opened, and Hyacinthe, whose manners had certainly not deteriorated through his service with Dupin, bowed and announced our visitor, as she preceded the domestic into the room.

"Madame Timoléon Delacraye, Messieurs."

"Pray be seated by this fire, Madame," said Dupin; "hot coffee or hot wine will be here presently. Permit me to introduce myself: I am the Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin; and I have the honor to present my friend, Mr. Carter Randolph, of Richmond, Virginia. Madame, let us come to the point—I perceive that you are in great distress and I realize that it concerns your husband. Yes, Madame, do not look so astonished—men in our profession recognize the difference between the manner of one who calls for help on his own behalf, and one who comes as suppliant for another. Take your time, Madame—ah, Hyacinthe, bring the tray to this small table, and leave it to us."

Dupin busied himself in pouring out a cup of hot wine while the door closed silently behind our indispensable domestic. "Take your time, Madame. Sip a little of this hot wine—we have the whole day before us, and I assure you that we shall help you. Ah, you weep! It is no bad thing, Madame, pray do not apologize. The heart needs its solace, more so, even, than the reason. We have seen many tears in this little book-closet, and it has been

our great good fortune to ease many of the hurts which caused those tears. May I gently counsel you, Madame, to trust us and to take hold again of your courage."

"You are very good, Messieurs," said the young woman, drying red-rimmed eyes on a mended but spotlessly clean handkerchief. Her clothes, though they bore the mark of careful and extensive repair, were still elegant. On me, her courageous resistance to poverty made a most favorable impression, and I perceived that Dupin was equally predisposed in her behalf. As she sipped the hot wine, the effects of the chill day became less noticeable; but her more relaxed manner I could attribute only to that confidence with which Dupin inspired all who came to seek his assistance.

"Gentlemen," said the young woman, "I am recovered sufficiently now to tell you my story. But, oh, Monsieur Dupin, I have no money to settle your fees! Indeed, I have no excuse for my visit, save that I am in profound distress, that I have no one else on whom I may call, and that you have a reputation, Monsieur le Chevalier, of helping those who need help."

"There, there!" said Dupin gruffly, much moved by this direct appeal to his sensibilities. "Not another word on the subject, Madame, I beg of you. Now, of what is your husband accused, Madame?"

"Murder, sir," said Madame Delacraye. "Murder committed while robbing with violence."

"Whom is your husband supposed to have robbed and killed?"

"Maurice Rémusat, moneylender, Rue Vieille du Temple, Number 53."

"You give your evidence succinctly, Madame."

"I have learned from the police, Monsieur," said Madame Delacraye, with her first manifestation of bitterness. "They are very direct."

"It will serve us no ill purpose, Madame," said Dupin diplomatically, "if we endeavor to emulate them in this respect. What connected your husband with this dead moneylender? Did your husband borrow sums of money from this man?"

"Yes, and Rémusat was pressing him. He had given my husband until yesterday to find the money. If my husband could not produce at least the money for the interest, Rémusat threatened to call in the police and seize what little we have left, before demanding my husband's committal to a debtor's prison. So you see, Messieurs, one must not blame the police too much for suggesting that my husband had a good reason for killing Rémusat."

"Did he conduct a flourishing business, this Rémusat?"

"They say so."

"Then," said Dupin more cheerfully, "there were other clients—and other threats to his life. A threat is to a moneylender as a horse is to a cavalry-

man. We shall do well to find out how many others have threatened this dead man. Did your husband call on him? Ah, he did, I see. And who was the witness on whose testimony the police-officers acted in charging your husband?"

"The dead man himself, Monsieur le Chevalier!"

The facts, as we learned them from Madame Delacraye, were these.

Her husband, a young artist just out of the *Beaux Arts*, had achieved a small success with his paintings when his agent summoned him to meet Mr. Osbert Ancaster, the well-known English *entrepreneur*, who, having made a large fortune in promoting railroads that connected the principal British cities, had come to the French capital to bring to the French people those benefits of speedy transport now being enjoyed by the subjects of His Britannic Majesty.

This English millionaire had ordered, from the finest French architects, a splendid palace in the Avenue de Friedland, and on its completion he had sought out the best artists in France to decorate its walls and ceilings with *frescoes* in the manner of those discovered, during the last century, in the buried cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum. Monsieur Timoléon Delacraye was one of the artists who considered himself fortunate to have been commissioned by this British Croesus to adorn his mansion.

At first all went well. A satisfactory fee was arranged through Monsieur Delacraye's agent, and the young artist began work on the rich Englishman's house.

Even better, a tactful invitation from the Englishman himself to apply to his steward for an advance payment enabled Monsieur Delacraye to make the agreeable transition from artistic indigence in the Rue Crèvecoeur (where he had a garret *au sixième*) to the near-bourgeois comfort of a little cottage near the Observatory, with a garden, dovecot, and a *studio* in a shed under the lilac trees for which that pleasant part of Paris is famous.

Perhaps it goes without saying that the young artist celebrated his sudden access to modest wealth by marrying the serious but handsome young woman now sitting in our book-closet—Mademoiselle Françoise Maubert, the daughter of a small dealer in artist's materials who had his shop in the Rue du Dragon Rouge.

"No matter what they say, Monsieur le Chevalier," said Madam Delacraye, "this English *milord* did not deceive my husband, and did not cheat him. What happened I cannot explain, for I know nothing of what goes on at the Bourse; but—well, one day, this Mr. Ancaster found himself penniless, with the bailiffs in possession, and creditors roaming disconsolately

through the splendid rooms of his mansion. My husband was not paid—but, then, neither was anyone else."

"I am acquainted with the details of Mr. Ancaster's failure, Madame. I, too, believe him to have been the victim of misfortune. He is not a rogue."

"Thank you, Monsieur—not so much for defending him, as for defending my defense of Mr. Ancaster. He was always good to my husband, advancing him quite large sums whenever Timoléon—Monsieur Delacraye—required them. He liked Mr. Ancaster, and Mr. Ancaster liked my husband's work. We were both exceedingly sad when so good a patron met with undeserved disaster."

"Madame, what links your husband with this Rémusat, the moneylender of the Rue Vieille du Temple?"

"The fact, Monsieur le Chevalier, that Mr. Ancaster returned to England without having given his steward the necessary authority to advance further sums to my husband. Unfortunately, my husband's agent, who is in a very modest way of business, could not advance the money against Mr. Ancaster's return from his own country. However, Monsieur Reinach—that is the name of the agent, Monsieur—suggested that my husband apply for a loan to this Monsieur Rémusat. This Timoléon did, and—well, now we are faced with this horrible business of Rémusat's death, and my husband is facing the guillotine."

"I now have all the facts in your possession? Excellent! *Now* we must proceed carefully. Tell me, Madame, did your husband already know this Rémusat?"

"Not personally, Monsieur le Chevalier. Though, as I myself have seen Rémusat's advertisements in the journals, offering to lend money on note of hand only—no security required—I cannot believe that his name was unknown to my husband. But until he called at Rémusat's office, I am sure that he had never met this man."

"Rémusat advanced the money without demur?"

"Indeed, he was as satisfied that Mr. Ancaster was good for the payment of any amount as was my husband. Not until after it had become clear that Mr. Ancaster was ruined did Monsieur Rémusat begin to threaten."

"I see. And this devoting all his time to the execution of Mr. Ancaster's commission caused your husband to neglect—quite justifiably, of course—other markets for his art? Just so! And now, Madame, let us compose ourselves to hearing from you just how it was that the police charged your husband—and not any one of a hundred other defaulting debtors."

"Monsieur le Chevalier," said our young visitor, with a timid smile, "forgive my seeming forwardness, but I have observed that there is a meerschaum pipe and a tobacco-jar on that table, towards which you—

quite inadvertently, I am sure—are constantly looking. If it would help you to reflect better on our tragedy, I can assure you that I have no objection to the odor of tobacco."

"Why, thank you, Madame! We smokers are often at a loss when deprived of our favorite Latakia. With your permission, then, Madame—" And Dupin filled his pipe. Soon the fragrant fumes of the Turkish tobacco scented our little book-closet in a familiar fashion.

"Now," Dupin proceeded. "Describe, if it does not too gravely distress you, Madame, the circumstances in which your husband came to be charged with this crime."

"You have given me renewed confidence, Monsieur le Chevalier, and you, too, Mr. Randolph. I am no longer so obsessed with terror. I shall tell you all that I know—but, I fear, it is not much.

"The police-officers came for my husband at about ten o'clock last night. They said that this Monsieur Rémusat had been found in his inner chamber by his confidential clerk, when the man came to deliver the day's accounts. The clerk found the body of his employer underneath a large gilded cheval-glass which, apparently, had been overturned by the dying man in his last struggles.

"The clerk—Barreaux—lifted the glass from the body, recognized the blood-stained corpse as that of his employer, summoned the concierge to witness that he himself had not done it, I suppose—"

"It seems reasonable to suppose so. Pray proceed."

"—and together, the men summoned the police. An *agent-de-ville* accompanied Barreaux and the concierge back to the office in the Rue Vieille du Temple, and saw what was to be seen—"

"Which was—?" Dupin asked, craning forward in his eagerness. "Try to recall, Madame, just what it was that you heard."

"I shall try, Monsieur. The charge against my husband seems to rest partly on the testimony of the confidential clerk and partly on the visible evidence of crime."

"Be so good as to explain, Madame Delacraye."

"Well, Monsieur, the clerk had, among other matters, a list of those who had been sent final warnings. Of them, only my husband's warning expired on that day—yesterday.

"The *agent-de-ville* found this significant. Naturally, I must admit. But the evidence presented by the crime itself was even more damning. A police-surgeon had accompanied the *agent-de-ville* to the scene of the crime, and when this surgeon bent down to examine Monsieur Rémusat, he started up in great excitement. 'This man is still alive,' he shouted. The mortally wounded man—did I tell you, Monsieur le Chevalier, that he had been

savagely stabbed, many times?—was carefully lifted onto a sofa which stood within the office, and the surgeon applied himself to bringing the wounded man to consciousness."

"Did he succeed?"

"Partially. But not, alas, as much as one would have desired. The three men bent down to catch what the dying Monsieur Rémusat was saying. There was an indistinct muttering in which not one word could be plainly discerned. Then, almost with his dying breath—but so clearly that all the witnesses swear they could not have been mistaken—Monsieur Rémusat started up, shouted the name, 'Delacraye!'—and fell back lifeless. Just my husband's name—Delacraye. Just one word—"

"Odd, that message from a dying man," said Dupin reflectively. "Pray continue, Madame."

"So much was evident from the questioning which went on in our house, before my husband was taken over in a *panier-à-salade* to the office of the *juge d'instruction*."

"You did not go with him?"

"Not immediately. I had had an idea. I ran out of the house the moment that the police wagon had left, knowing that the arrival of such a vehicle would have brought out all the neighbors. I asked three of the most inquisitive to enter the house with me. They came willingly enough, I assure you. They were Mesdames Lafourcadiere, Burenne, and Vailly. As it happened, no fewer than twenty people followed them and forced their way into our little parlor.

"This did not offend me. As soon as they were all in I called for silence, and said, 'Good neighbors, my poor husband has been arrested on a charge of which he is innocent—that of stabbing Monsieur Rémusat, the moneylender—'

"Monsieur Lafourcadière yelled out, 'Stabbing a moneylender isn't a crime even in the Code Napoléon!'—and everybody laughed. I didn't object, as it meant that I should have sympathetic helpers. I continued, 'My husband is wearing the same clothes that he dressed in this morning. But if he stabbed the old man many times, he should have blood on him. If there is no blood on the clothes that he is wearing now, then he must have taken them off. I mean, he must have taken off the blood-stained clothes that he was wearing when he came home.

"'So, good neighbors, do this for me; go throughout our house, opening everything. Search the closets, the drawers, the pantry cupboards—everything. Look in the garden and on the roof; search the garret and the cellar. If you find the blood-stained clothes, act like good citizens and take them

to the police. If you do not, testify for my husband that no such clothes were found here.'

"They went to work with a will—it is not every day that one is invited to turn over a neighbor's possessions!—but nothing was found. I have twenty-three witnesses to that effect."

"Bravo!" said Dupin. "Madame, had I ever entertained any doubt as to the propriety of assisting your husband, your courageous presence of mind has banished all misgiving. Then you went, with your evidence, to the *uge d'instruction?*"

"Yes."

"Who told you that the clothes might have been disposed of by your husband on his way home? Exactly! Nevertheless, you have introduced an element of doubt. The police will now be forced to look for the blood-stained clothes. If they are not found—or if the police will not search for them—an advocate for the defense could make much of the fact.

"But now, I think, Madame, that I had better visit the money lender's office in the Rue Vieille du Temple and see for myself what the police have found—or not found. No, Madame, I do not wish you to accompany us. We shall, with your permission, do ourselves the honor to take you to your house in a *fiacre*—I have, I regret to say, no carriage of my own—and then we shall go on to the office of the late Monsieur Rémusat."

G—— looked his astonishment and indignation when Dupin, received with something very near *empressement* by the Prefect of the Parisian Police, suggested to him that Monsieur G. might like to accompany us to the scene of the crime.

"Are you *serious*, my dear Chevalier?"

"Never more so, my dear Prefect," Dupin replied imperturbably.

"But a sordid little affair of stabbing—for a mere 2,000 francs—a mere hundred louis! Really, my dear Dupin, there are times when I am convinced you wish to show your disrespect for the agents of Law and Order! And who is involved? Eh? Tell me that? Some blue-bloused canvas dauber from the slums of *your* Faubourg, living on absinthe and penny loaves, and with a *grisette* in the attic whom he does not bother to dignify with the title of wife! And you have the impudence to ask me to stir out for *that!*"

"No, indeed," said Dupin coldly. "I ask you to stir out for a poor but honest artist, happily married to a most admirable young woman. One of these days, if this young artist escapes the guillotine, you will bask in the glory of having saved for France one of her finest artists. When he receives the Cross of the Legion of Honour, you may say, justly, 'Something of this he owes to *me!*' "

"Pah!" said G——. Nevertheless, he signalled to a minion to bring his coat and hat, and we all went out to where his comfortable English carriage awaited in the courtyard.

When we arrived at the office of the late Monsieur Rémusat, we found things pretty much as Madame Delacraye had described them. An *agent-de-ville* had been left on guard; we had collected the local Inspector of Police and the surgeon on the way to the Rue Vieille du Temple, and, as soon as we arrived, G—— sent the guard to fetch the confidential clerk.

One additional fact—a fact that Madame Delacraye had either not known or had omitted because she had felt it to be of no importance—came to light. When found, the late Monsieur Rémusat was clutching in his right hand a piece of chalk, such as is used for writing on blackboards in class-rooms. And, indeed, there was such a blackboard in the outer office—not the room to which clients were admitted, but a small room which lay between the public office and Monsieur Rémusat's inner sanctum.

Interrogated by G——, the confidential clerk, Barreaux, explained that each morning he ruled a table, using a piece of chalk, on the blackboard, and Monsieur Rémusat or the clerk would mark, in the appropriate spaces, the results of the day's work—the names of persons who had met their obligations and the names of those who had failed to do so.

"Yet," said Dupin, approaching the blackboard and peering at it through his single eyeglass, "there is no mark against the name of Delacraye—one way or the other."

"I suggest, Monsieur," said the clerk obsequiously, "that Monsieur Rémusat had not had time to mark the board before he was struck down."

"You heard nothing?" G—— asked sternly. "Not a cry?"

"I work in my office at the other side of the landing. These baize-lined doors are thick. Confidential matters demand such sound-proof doors. No one—not even the concierge—heard a sound out of the ordinary."

"Though Monsieur Delacraye failed to settle his account," said Dupin, "he was not the only one to default yesterday?"

"He was the only client, Monsieur, who had been given until yesterday evening to settle."

"And how many," said Dupin, fixing the man with his piercing regard, "have until *this evening* to settle? You don't know—exactly? Very well then, go and find out at once."

As soon as the clerk had hurried away, Dupin asked G——, "What does the chalk in the dead man's hand suggest to you? A singular clew, is it not? One might even say *outré*."

"A rebus," said G—— confidently. "Rémusat did not know that he would have the opportunity to name his murderer—it was, you recollect,

only by chance that the police-surgeon revived him sufficiently to enable him to breathe that last name."

Dupin murmured, "Odd—excessively odd."

"So," the Prefect went on, "searching desperately for some means to tell the name of his murderer to those who would find his body, he caught up the piece of chalk—mute evidence that '*delacraye*'—de-la-craye*—had killed him. Then, by chance, Rémusat was revived and he confirmed the mute message of the piece of chalk by clearly stating the man's name. We have three witnesses to testify to the fact that Rémusat said 'Delacraye' with his dying breath, even if we have to count the confidential clerk—here he is, by the way—as a prejudiced witness. Have you the list of debtors whose payments must be made today? Good! Put them down there, on the desk, and leave."

"No," said Dupin. "Do not leave just yet. I am interested in this gilded cheval-glass that Monsieur Rémusat appears to have pulled down with him in his dying struggles.

"For a gentleman of such simple—not to say austere—tastes, I find this large looking-glass a little out of character, shall we say. Tell me, Monsieur, was the late Monsieur Rémusat a vain man? Did he like to comb his hair or twirl his whiskers in front of the glass?"

The clerk looked faintly astonished at what he evidently considered ill-timed levity on my friend's part.

"Why, no, sir. Monsieur Rémusat cared nothing for his appearance. Why, often, the urchins of the neighborhood used to dance after him, mocking him for his shabby clothes, when it was known how rich he was—or had the reputation of being."

"In that case, can you suggest why your employer should have had this cheval-glass, more suitable to a lady's boudoir, in this inner office?"

"I was told that he had taken it, years ago, as part payment of a debt that he would otherwise have had to write off, as a loss. Frankly, gentlemen, I cannot see Monsieur Rémusat admiring himself in the glass."

Dupin dismissed the clerk, and turned to G——.

"Yet look in the glass Rémusat did! If he was not concerned with his own appearance, with *what* was he concerned? Here, pray assist me to move this cheval-glass into the corner. Pray bring that light near, Monsieur l'Agent!"

Dupin dropped to his knees, and lay his head on the carpet, looking *along* the thickness of the pile. "Yes, see here! Observe these indentations—where the glass has stood on its four feet for many years. Those feet have made four deep marks in the carpet. Now let us replace the cheval-glass so that it stands *exactly* where Monsieur Rémusat kept it and—so!—if I sit

* *de la craie* (French) means "some chalk, a piece of chalk"

where Monsieur Rémusat sat, in his chair at his desk, I may see in this glass what he wished to see. Ah, yes! Monsieur G——, take my place and tell me what you see?"

G—— did as he had been bidden, looked into the glass, and gave an exclamation.

"*Diable!* One can see in the glass right through the middle office, and so one commands a perfect view of the door leading from the landing to the outer office. Was Monsieur Rémusat, then, frightened of being visited by someone without an appointment?"

"Yes," said Dupin quietly. "And that being the case, he was not frightened when Monsieur Delacraye called on him—because Monsieur Delacraye *had* an appointment. It was somebody else whose stealthy approach—unheard, but visible in the cheval-glass—caused Monsieur Rémusat to spring out of his chair—"

"How do you know that?"

"Because the desk has been pushed back so violently on the left-hand side that the corner of the wood has marked the wall. Also, I see ink spilt. Yes, he sprang hastily out of his chair—"

"It was a known enemy?"

"Well, suspected, but not quite known as such. Had Monsieur Rémusat been *certain*, he would have closed the door, secured it with that heavy bolt, and rung for assistance. Because he was not *quite* sure, he did not take the necessary precautions—and died."

"But what made him think that his caller had evil intent?"

"Because he called without an appointment, and called without having disclosed his presence to the concierge or to the clerk. It is no difficult thing to do when the habits of the concierge and clerk are known."

"Why did he call?"

"To settle his debt in a particularly final way. He had no money. But he did have a knife."

"He must have been desperate."

"He was. He had only until this evening to settle or be hounded through the debtors' courts."

"Then—" said G——, starting up.

"Precisely. To establish his *alibi* and to show his innocence he must call before this evening. We know therefore that his name must be among those of the debtors given until this evening. There was no robbery—so robbery was not the motive. The murderer *must* have been a debtor."

"But there are dozens of names on this list!"

"You could examine them all. It is not beyond your powers. But, fortunately for you, you do not have to go to so much trouble. Monsieur Rémusat

neglected his precautions until too late. He paid for the neglect with his life. But, after the murderer left by the way he had come, Rémusat summoned up all his strength for a final revenge. *He left us the name of the murderer—*"

"Delacraye—"

"Have I not explained that Delacraye—though he could have *murdered* Monsieur Rémusat—could not have *surprised* him. No, it was patently a man whom Rémusat did not expect *at that particular time.*

"But let us advance to the period after the man had stabbed and departed. Rémusat staggered to the cheval-glass, picking up a piece of the chalk which was always lying on his desk. See, here is the mark of his bloody hand, where he grasped the left side of the cheval-glass to steady himself, while he wrote quickly with the chalk—"

"Wrote? Where? I see no writing!" said G——. We all gathered about the glass and stared at its smooth, vacant surface.

For answer, Dupin approached the surface of the glass and began to breathe on it vehemently. As his breath condensed on the mirror, letters began to appear—hastily scrawled and badly written, but clear enough to be read.

Dupin continued to breathe on the glass, and the letters now stood out bold and clear. It was a name—unfamiliar to us, it is true, but, as G—— eagerly scanned the list that the clerk had given to us, he cried out in satisfaction.

"Here it is!" he said, pointing to the same name with a quivering forefinger. "So *that's* what Rémusat meant by his dying message—'chalk'—'de la craie'—look for chalk writing. But what on earth put you on to finding this name hidden on the surface of the mirror, Dupin?"

"It was not exactly hidden, my dear Prefect. I remembered how, as boys, we used to leave 'secret messages' for each other on the looking-glasses of my school. We would write a message in chalk, then carefully dust it off so that no mark could be seen. A boy who knew that a chalk-message had been written on the glass had only to breathe on the letters to make them visible. Did you not do this at school, Monsieur le Préfect? No? Ah, well, *we* did."

"But what made you so certain that Rémusat was not leaving a clue to the artist Delacraye?"

"He might have said Delacraye's name, had Delacraye been the murderer. But he would never have relied on the rebus of a piece of chalk to indicate 'De la craie.' "

"Why not?"

"Because, my dear G——," said Dupin, with some impatience, "he was

dying. He had just enough strength of body and mind to attempt to write the name *en clair*—allusive games such as showing a piece of 'craie' to mean Monsieur Delacraye would simply be beyond him at that time."

"But you say he did remember the trick from childhood—of writing on the glass—and he had the strength to dust it off! And, by the way, how did he know that those who found him would know of that chalk-writing trick?"

G—— could not conceal the satisfaction that he felt at having caught Dupin in a trap of his own making.

"He did not know. There was no question of anyone's having to know that trick from childhood. Rémusat was not leaving a subtle clew or playing a trick. He simply grasped the chalk—no feat of strength in that—found the first clear surface to hand—the surface of the cheval-glass—and wrote his murderer's name, for all the world to see."

"But the name was rubbed out. If Rémusat didn't rub it out, who did?"

"No one did—or, at least, no one did purposely. As Rémusat finished writing the name of his murderer, he fell back, pulling the cheval-glass down on top of him. If you take a magnifying glass and examine his cravat and the front of his coat and waistcoat, you will find the chalk that he rubbed off while falling with the cheval-glass clutched to his bosom."

"I know that I shall," said G—— resignedly. "So if you hadn't been called in, no one would have breathed on the glass, and no one would have known the name of the true murderer. Perhaps, even, poor young Delacraye might have taken that dawn stroll to a *rendezvous* with Madame Guillotine?"

"It is not at all unlikely," said Dupin, with a smile. "But why these dismal hypotheses? I *was* called in."

You are all familiar with the phrase, The Theater of the Absurd. In the same sense (which is not the usual sense of absurd at all), is there a Mystery of the Absurd? Is the story you are about to read—Robert McNear's "The Salad Maker"—a Crime Story of the Absurd?

It is not an easy question to answer. But one thing is sure: "The Salad Maker" is a story of today—*not of* yesterday *or of the* day before yesterday; *perhaps it is even more accurate to say that it is a story of* today and tomorrow. *And to realize fully its ultramodern quality, its* now *quality, we suggest that you compare "The Salad Maker" with other stories in this issue—bearing in mind, of course, that a literary genre, to be fully developed and vital, needs subgenres, species, subspecies—every variety known to writers, including the subvarieties to* become *known . . .*

THE SALAD MAKER

by ROBERT McNEAR

SONNY, THE DIAPER SERVICE CAME today."

"Good. I was almost out," he said.

"And a package from Alaska. Label says eggs."

"The Pacific Golden Plover winters in Hawaii and breeds in Alaska. I use the eggs for salads."

"That's nice." She was arranging nasturtiums. "Garden Club's coming for lunch tomorrow. Care to join us?"

"No, thanks, Mother."

"They always ask about you."

"Have to transplant sweet basil. They should get more shade. That's why the stems have been brownish."

"I see." His mother held a nasturtium up to the light and examined the petals. "In a way you're a perfect son. So many go away and leave. You stay but you take so little interest in my life, our family life. So little . . . Sonny, you haven't!"

She went to the sewing basket and returned with the magnifying glass. "You have!"

"Mother . . ."

"Snipped off the ends of my nasturtiums. And with the Garden Club coming tomorrow."

"Only the tippy-tips. Can't see it without a magnifying glass."

"And with the Garden Club coming tomorrow. You promised last time, you swore to God." And hiking up her hostess gown she ran out of the room and clattered upstairs.

Sonny slipped on his rubber surgical gloves and went outside to his garden. The sun had gone down

over Monterey Bay leaving a red bar on the horizon, and at his feet the neat rows of salad greens stretched off into the dusk. He tightened the gloves for better feeling of touch, stepped over the iceberg, Boston, romaine, sorrel, blanched chicory, rampion, water cress, lovage, and stopped at the Batavian endive.

He inserted his right third finger into the soil behind one of the green and white flat heads, and applied gentle upward pressure. It came loose from the soft earth. Then crossing to the succulent purslane he followed the same procedure, and cradling the leafy plants he carried them into that part of the garage where he had his salad kitchen. Beyond the partition was his father's thirty-year-old Pierce Arrow, seldom used.

"Sonny," his father called from the house.

He placed the lettuce on the drain board, peeled off his gloves, and took the dried but unwashed teakwood bowl from the shelf. Opening the refrigerator, he removed a dish of freshly chopped chives and a cup of onion juice pressed that morning. With thumb and forefinger he pinched a scattering of chives into the bowl and with an eye dropper he squeezed in two drops of onion juice. Then from a felt-lined jeweler's box he added three dozen nasturtium petal tips cut the night before from his mother's garden.

"Sonny, forget the salad and get in here!"

His father's hairless head sprouted from the red smoking jacket like a dirty mushroom. "Messing around with the flowers again, boy?"

"I only snipped off the petal tippy-tips. Can't see it without a magnifying glass."

His mother had been crying. "And you swore to God last time that you'd never do it again. Sonny, you're part of our family."

"Part of the family. I can't even eat with you. You make me eat at the little table in the kitchen."

"Because of those horrid smelling salads. Your father laid down the law and he's absolutely right." She blew her nose. "Sonny, you don't lead a normal life. Except for us you have no friends."

He looked down at the rug. "I had a friend once."

Senor Pasqual was a corpulent Portuguese gentleman who owned a grocery store in Watsonville. One day Sonny was buying garlic—this was before he grew his own—and their conversation had turned to the best way to introduce garlic into the salad. They both agreed that the salad was overpowered by garlic when the bowl was rubbed with it, and that the common practice of taking a dry heel of garlic-rubbed bread, the chapon, and tossing it with the salad made for lack of precision and poor garlic control.

Senor Pasqual had a solution and he invited Sonny to dinner. The solution was to chew a garlic clove and breathe on the salad. Sonny ap-

proved, although he had unvoiced doubts about the hygienic aspects of this method, and he reciprocated by asking his host to dinner.

They had eaten at the little table in the kitchen, and Sonny showed him his invention—a small fireplace bellows from which pulverized garlic was blown on the salad. Senor Pasqual had been visibly impressed and with a flourish had pulled a bottle of Madeira out of his pocket . . .

He looked up at his mother. "I had a friend but you threw his wine away. He'll never come back here again."

"I will not have spirits in this house."

"No boozing around here, boy. You know that. Mother, I've been thinking. Stop his allowance."

"My allowance. How about yours?"

"Don't get smart-alecky." He buttoned the smoking jacket. "I'm a newspaper columnist. A well-known newspaper columnist."

Sonny sneered. "The domino columnist of the *San Francisco Globe*. A hundred dollars a month. If mother didn't give you an allowance, you old failure—"

"Why, you creep!"

"Failure!"

"Creep!"

"Boys, boys," she said, stepping between them. "Stop it this minute. You are my men, my precious men. I will not have this fighting."

Sonny spun around and rushed out of the room. The insults had been more than he could stand. He was still shaking with rage when he reached the garage. He closed his eyes and breathed deeply in front of the sink for a moment. Now was no time to become flustered; the next five minutes were crucial.

He broke up the Batavian endive and the purslane, washed them in lukewarm water, and fanned the leaves out on a dry towel. Then he took a fresh diaper and stroked, rubbed, patted, gently patted the greens until the diaper had absorbed the water. Laborious, time-consuming—nevertheless, it was the best way to dry without bruising.

He dropped the greens into the bowl and poured in the homemade olive oil from the earthenware jug. Now he felt a surge of exhilaration. The first tossing. What the French call *fatigue de salade*, and this reminded him of the words of Jean Jacques Rousseau: Salad plants are so fragile that they should be touched only by the delicate fingers of a young girl.

And as his hands dangled over the salad bowl he dreamed of a young girl, standing at the sink, moving the salad around like featherdown caressed by a breeze, and how later they would stand among the lettuce and herbal gardens and plan the next day's adventures; and he would bend down and kiss her young fingers.

He examined his own fingers, which were always protected in

the garden by the rubber surgical gloves. No, he couldn't introduce a girl into the poisoned atmosphere of this house—and with twin tear streaks running down his cheeks he dropped his hands into the salad and tossed.

In the refrigerator there was a tomato, two radishes, an artichoke bottom. Neatly sliced, they joined the lettuce and oil. Salt, pepper, powdered sprigs of anise and fennel were added, as was a twentieth of a cup of lemon juice. Then he reached for the caper jar. Half used, four months in the refrigerator, the capers could be too old and overly piquant, but with a devil-may-care shrug he included six.

Next, he dotted the salad with drops of tarragon wine vinegar bottled to his specifications by cloistered monks in the Valley of the Moon. He tossed the salad again. He was finished.

Then he smelled the gasoline. The fifty-gallon drum was near the door. His father must have put it there that afternoon while Sonny was hoeing around the leeks. Obviously the gasoline odor impaired his sense of smell so vital to his work. In a fury he ran into the house.

He found his parents playing dominoes in the library. "Father, get that gasoline out of there. It belongs in your part of the garage."

"Boy, your mother and I've been talking."

"Get it out of there!"

"Talking about you getting a job."

His mother was eating an hors d'oeuvres tacos. "The best thing in the world for you, Sonny. You'll make friends."

"And not only that, boy, but I'm getting a tractor and plowing up that damn garden of yours."

"You wouldn't dare!"

"Yes siree. Plow up the damn thing."

She reached for another tacos. "That language isn't necessary, Father. We'll see about the garden later . . . Why, he'll make scads of friends!"

"Yessiree. And no more allowance. Frankly, boy, in recent years you've turned into some sort of—uh —nutty creep."

"Sonny is not a nutty creep. He just needs friends."

"And you'll go out and get a job like any other forty-year-old man," his father shouted.

"I demand an answer! Why did you put it there?"

"Because I felt like it. What do you say to that, boy?"

"Father, the gasoline's leaking."

His mother wiped tacos from her chin. "Dangerous. We can't have that. Come."

The three left the house and went to the garage. His parents bent over the gasoline drum and regarded the puddle at their feet. Sonny took the salad bowl with one hand and with the other he struck a wooden match on the garage wall.

"Sonny, don't light matches around gasoline."

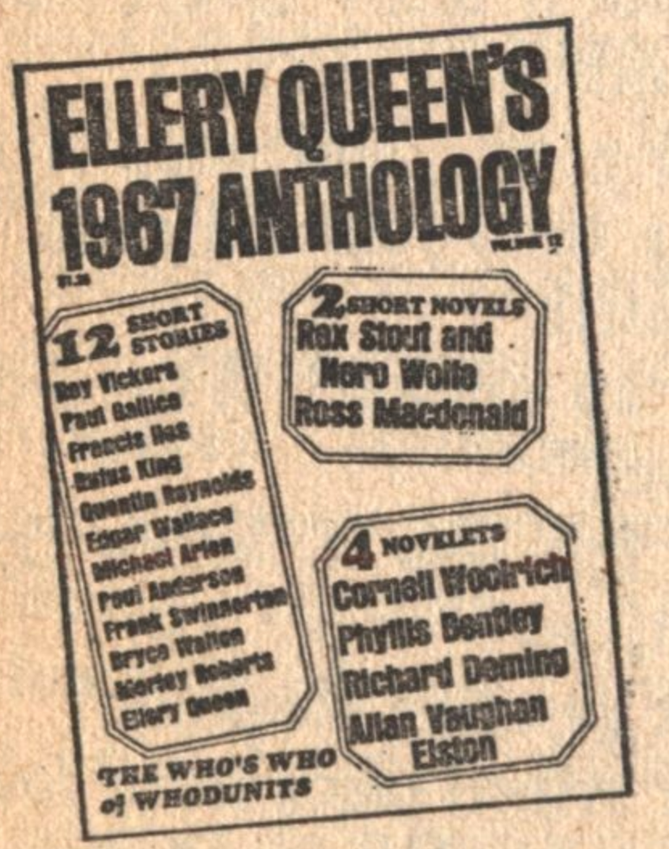
"No matches here, you nutty creep."

He tossed the match at the puddle and ran. Feet pounding, salad bowl now clutched with both hands, he ran away from the garage, but still the blast's concussion almost sent him sprawling.

He steadied himself, ran on. Inside the house his movements were quick. He took the little table in the kitchen and threw it out the back door. He carried the salad bowl into the dining room and sat down at his father's place at the head of the table. He thought of lighting the candles, but the glow from the garage was adequate for dining.

Sonny was savoring his first mouthful, which he always masticated slowly, when there was another explosion from the garage, and he glanced through the rattling windows at his parents flying through the air. Side by side, spread-eagled, aflame, they landed at the base of the marble bird bath with twin showers of sparks. He swallowed. The capers *were* past their prime, and suppressing a shudder he ate around the rest of the capers.

"O"



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VOLCANO IN THE MIND

by HUGH PENTECOST

(*Continued from page 48*)

An hour went by. The Drake household made no pretense of going about its normal routine. There was a subdued quietness about the place, as if they were all conscious of Stephen lying upstairs in his heavy, drugged sleep.

"I envy him those pills," Cleg said. He and Marcia were sitting on the open terrace at the east side of the house. The morning sun was hot, and there was a humid haze in the air suggestive of possible thunderstorms later in the day. Marcia had on a pair of black glasses to shield her eyes from the sun. She was stretched full length in a deck chair. Cleg sat beside her on the little stone parapet of the terrace.

"I'll never forget how he looked last night, Cleg," Marcia said. "It was as if he'd died inside."

"How long are the pills supposed to keep him under?" Cleg asked.

"The doctor said he should sleep around the clock. He went to bed at two. He should be awake soon, I guess."

"Damn him!" Cleg said. Marcia turned her head. "I mean the doctor," Cleg said.

"He's only doing what he thinks is right, Cleg."

Cleg fished in his pocket for his pipe and pouch. "I guess I'm not a moralist when it comes to a thing like this. Bob's gone. Nothing we can do will bring him back. In a way Stephen's gone, too. But he *can* be brought back with proper care and treatment. If the doctor had kept his mouth shut about this murder theory, Walsh and Malcolm would have passed the whole thing off as an accident. In the long run it would have been better that way."

"But if it wasn't Stephen, Cleg?"

"Darling, let's not kid ourselves," Cleg said. He scowled down at the bowl of his pipe, prodding at the tobacco in it with his forefinger. "I'm sorry about this morning. I'm sorry I said what I did—about how I—about loving you." He didn't look up. "You've always known it, haven't you?"

"Yes, Cleg."

"I've never pushed it, have I? We've been alone together a thousand times—when you've posed for me, riding together, walks. Have I ever pleaded my case, or tried to drive any kind of a wedge between you and Stephen?"

"No."

He looked directly at her, but the black sunglasses kept him from seeing anything she might be feeling. "I'm not pleading for myself now. I want Stephen to get well, to get

back to normal. I want it because I know you love him and because it would make you happy."

"Yes," she said in a lifeless voice. "That would make me happy."

He stared at her, the pipe arrested halfway to his mouth. "Good God, Marcia, is it possible that *wouldn't* make you happy! The way you said it, I—"

"Cleg, stop it. Don't you see, unless this thing is completely cleared up, Stephen and I haven't got a chance? We'll always wonder if the smash could happen again; we'll always wonder if he *did* do it. That terrible reserve that's been between us since this began won't just melt away."

He ran a hand through his thick, brown hair. "Marcia, if there's anything in the world I could do to help, if there's any part of this you haven't told me and that you need help with, if talking would help to clarify it—"

"There's nothing, Cleg."

Harriet came out onto the terrace with a sewing basket. Cleg sighed and struck a match for his pipe. Harriet sat down in a wicker chair.

"What are they doing—Walsh and the doctor?" she asked.

"They're in the study," Cleg said. "Trying to figure things out, I guess."

"Yesterday at this time this was such a lovely world," Harriet said.

Ted came around the corner of the house, whistling an off-key tune. "Hullo, characters," he said. He sat down next to Cleg on the parapet. "Got to find somebody to fill in for George. It's a hell of a lot of work taking care of five horses. Any report on how he is?

No one said anything.

"Don't let our mastermind get you down, chums. He doesn't know where he's at right now." He looked past them to the side door of the house. "Hold onto your hats, kids. It looks like the convention is about to reconvene."

Walsh came out of the house and stood looking back at the French doors. Just behind him was Dr. Smith—and leaning on the doctor's arm was Stephen.

Marcia got quickly to her feet and went to Stephen. He looked down at her with a small twisted smile. He seemed tired, almost beyond endurance.

"It looks as if this were the payoff," he said in a voice that was almost a whisper.

"Come over to the big chair, darling. You mustn't stand," Marcia said.

"Darling . . ." He checked her, his hand on her arm. His voice was so low that only the doctor could hear him. "Whatever happens—whatever happens please believe I love you with all my heart."

"I know, Stephen," she said.

She and the doctor led him to the big chair and he sat down. A kind of embarrassment seemed to have fallen over the others. They murmured greetings.

"You're looking better, Stephen," Harriet said. "But should you be up? Isn't this asking too much of him, Doctor?"

Dr. Smith's face was, as usual, expressionless. "The best possible therapy for all of you is to settle this matter, once and for all," he said.

"You've pulled a rabbit out of your hat, Doctor?" Ted drawled.

The doctor turned away without answering, walked over to the far corner of the terrace away from the group, and sat down on the parapet. He bent forward, looking down at the irregular pattern of the stone terrace. Walsh stood in the center of the gathering, thumbing through the pages of a small notebook.

"Hear yez! Hear yez!" Ted said. "This court is now in session."

Walsh ignored him. "There are one or two points we can only clear up with all of you together," he said. "I want to try to recall something that happened two weeks ago —the day Stephen discovered Marcia's saddle girth had been tampered with."

"May I ask a question?" Ted said. There was a mischievous light in his eyes. "Has tampering been established, your Honor?"

"It doesn't matter," Walsh said. "You all had breakfast here on the terrace, I believe. What did you talk about?"

The question was completely unexpected. No one answered for a moment. Then Ted laughed outright. "I'm afraid the family conversation isn't so scintillating that we can remember it two weeks later, Jim."

"It's important to remember," Walsh said. "You were here, Cleg. Do you remember?"

"I remember something we talked about," Cleg said. "Me."

"Absorbing topic," Ted said.

"I'd just gotten word from New York," Cleg said, "that a gallery there was going to give me a one-man show. I came over to tell the family. That's how I remember. I was excited about it. I think I pretty well monopolized the conversation. It's to be my first show, you see."

"And that talk led to what?" Walsh asked.

"When an artist talks about himself," Ted said, "it never leads to anything but more talk about himself."

Marcia turned the dark sunglasses toward Walsh. "I remember we talked about Cleg's first public showing," she said. "I spoke about it when I was talking to you earlier —the mural at the country club."

"Lord!" Cleg said. "That was fifteen, sixteen years ago. We did talk about it, didn't we?"

"Who brought it up?" Walsh asked.

"It came naturally out of talking about this new show of mine—also a first." He glanced at Ted. "I think it was you, Ted, who asked if we remembered that unveiling at the country club when we were kids. God, I was eighteen and I thought

I was a second El Greco in those days. I remember Saint Nick took my hide off for it. He thought it stank. He never kidded around about his opinions on art."

"I always liked that mural, Cleg," Harriet said, looking up from her sewing.

"You and the bartender at the club were the only ones."

"About that Sunday morning," Walsh said.

"It's funny," Marcia said, "but I remember it all quite well now. We had different reasons for remembering that unveiling. Cleg, of course, remembered it because he was making his first public appearance as an artist. I remembered it because I got mixed up on my dates, and because Stephen—because Stephen proposed to me."

"And you had laughed at him," Dr. Smith said unexpectedly.

"Yes."

"I remembered it," Ted said, "because I was in love with three girls and having a hell of a time keeping them all going at once."

"I remembered it," Harriet said dryly, "because Saint Nick couldn't find his dress studs and I thought he was going to take the house apart stone by stone."

Walsh waited. "And how about you, Mr. Drake," he said, turning to Stephen. "Didn't you take part in the conversation?"

Stephen had been sitting with one hand shading his eyes. He lowered the hand and looked at Walsh. "Yes, I took part in it," he said, his voice very low. "I remembered being laughed at."

"Stephen!" Marcia said, as if he'd hurt her.

Cleg broke in quickly. "I remember I said something about wishing he'd given up then."

"You all went out to the stable after that?"

"Yes." It was Stephen who answered the question.

Ted flipped his cigarette away onto the grass. He looked across at Dr. Smith with an ironical smile. "I think I see where this is leading," he said. "You asked me a question a while back, Dr. Smith. You asked me if I thought you were a fool."

"Well?"

"I might ask you the same question. You're trying to indicate by this line of talk that *I* started the conversation that drove Stephen haywire. Is that supposed to be evidence?"

"It's a fact, at any rate," the doctor said. "That conversation definitely reminded Stephen of a very bad moment in his life—a moment when he was laughed at, made a fool of. A moment when the anger he'd felt in the past was recollected and revived. Just beyond that conversation the saddle girth waited for him."

Ted smiled blandly. "You mean that's how I'm supposed to have planned it?"

"That's how somebody planned it," the doctor said.

"Why, it's magic!" Ted said dryly. "Only I'm afraid that's all it is—magic. About the saddle girth, Doctor."

"What about the saddle girth, Mr. Hunter?"

"You see, I didn't slug George, Dr. Smith. If I was your man, I'd have known better. That girth is in the stable right now. I've had it in my hands this morning. Whoever was looking for it didn't know that George had it repaired the day after it was discovered. Call the shoe maker in town. You'll find he sewed it up for George." He shook his head. "If somebody was looking for the girth, they just didn't know their onions. It had long since ceased to be evidence."

Stephen raised his head. "It's no use, Dr. Smith," he said, in a harsh voice. "It's just another of the things I did without remembering—like pushing Bob."

"You remember everything that really happened, Stephen," the doctor said. "You're rattled now. If you stop to think you'll remember that *you* ordered George to have that girth repaired, that *you* checked with the shoemaker yourself."

Stephen's eyes widened. "I did. I remember that. . . but . . ."

"What you remember, happened," the doctor said. "What you don't remember, didn't happen." He shifted his glance to Harriet. "Wouldn't it save time and trouble, Miss Moore, if you told us about your search for the saddle girth?"

Harriet was a motionless statue in the wicker chair. Everyone was looking at her. There was blank astonishment in Ted's blue eyes.

"Harriet!" he said.

She didn't look at him. "I don't know how you know, Dr. Smith," she said, "but it's true."

"Harriet!" Ted said again.

Her voice was almost inaudible. "I—I didn't mean to hurt George," she said. "I—I couldn't risk his waking up. I—I never struck anyone before in my life. I—" She stopped.

"But Harriet, *why?*" Ted said.

"Last night, when Marcia came up to bed she told me the doctor's theory. I—I understood from what she said that the saddle girth was—was evidence. I had to find it—to destroy it."

"Harriet!" Stephen said in a shocked voice. "You did this to protect *me?*"

"To protect this household," Harriet said without looking up.

"It's no use, Miss Moore," Dr. Smith said. "You did it to protect the murderer—because he was the person you loved most in the whole world."

"Please!" Harriet whispered.

"She did it to protect you, Mr. Hunter," Dr. Smith said. His voice suddenly held the deep anger of a sentencing judge. "She knew it was you who had been working on Stephen. She knew it was you who'd pushed Dr. Bristow off the ledge."

"That's crazy," Ted said impatiently.

"She was willing to protect you at any cost," the doctor said. "You were her son. None of the others mattered to her. I think she deeply resented the success and happiness that had come to Stephen and Marcia. She wanted the world for you; she wanted to be proud of you. You made it hard for her, Mr. Hunter."

There was no color in Ted's face. There was an unbelieving, dazed expression as he stared at Harriet.

"You have been going through life, Mr. Hunter, distrusting everyone, hating everyone because you felt there was no one on whom you could depend. All the time this woman, who was more mother to you than a mother might have been, was prepared to back you in anything. I think she has prayed for the day to come when she could be openly proud, openly happy. When she knew what you'd done she was still willing to go to the very limit for you. She misunderstood the significance of the saddle girth. She thought you'd slipped up. She tried to cover up for you."

Ted ignored the doctor. "Harriet, why did you think it was me?"

She shook her head. She couldn't answer.

"I'll tell you how she knew, Mr. Hunter," the doctor said. "She had seen it going on. She had watched you slyly, cleverly probing at Stephen. She didn't know then that the object in this was murder, but she knew you were trying to undermine his security, to make him doubt Marcia, to make him feel that he was an intruder in his own home. Because you never thought of this as his home, Mr. Hunter. You thought of it as yours! You felt that somehow Stephen had stolen it from you and that Marcia had helped him to do it."

"Ted!" Harriet said. "Oh, Ted!" She lifted her hands to her face.

Ted had turned toward the doctor. There was an odd, fascinated look in his eyes. The doctor continued in his monotonous voice.

"Your two years in medical school, Mr. Hunter, hadn't been a total loss. They'd given you some understanding of how the human mind works. You experimented, I suspect, at first. You found a way to make Stephen miserable. It was just a game. Then, when he became ill, it occurred to you that you could carry it further. You could get rid of him *and* Marcia and be completely clear of any kind of legal guilt.

"But you underestimated Stephen. He didn't know what was happening to him, but he fought. He fought the whole thing, stubbornly, fiercely. Finally, when he doubted his own strength, he went to Bristow. Bristow had probably seen the needling process in action, and now he could see where it really led. I suspect the first time he spoke to you about it was last night on the mountain. Am I right?"

Ted didn't answer.

"You and he got to the ledges first. He probably told you he knew what

was up and that he was going to expose you. You had to do something then or never, so you did it. Even then you saw a way to implicate Stephen. At the same time that you pushed Bristow you said in Stephen's ear, 'Stephen, what have you done?'

"And poor Stephen, who thought no one but Bristow knew his secret, who still thought it was some kind of madness, believed it was Bristow who had spoken. If it had been anyone else, they'd have said more about it later, wouldn't they? So—he was convinced he had done it."

Sweat trickled down Ted's face. No one else seemed capable of movement. When the doctor hesitated, it was as if the whole world were suspended in space.

"And why did you have to get rid of Bristow?" the doctor asked. "He couldn't make a criminal charge against you. But he could tell Marcia and Stephen. You couldn't risk that, Mr. Hunter. You couldn't risk it *because it would have meant you couldn't live here any more.* That was the one thing in the world you couldn't face. Not to live here in this place that spelled safety and security for you would be to die.

"You were already committed to murder because you couldn't bear to share it. People meant nothing to you; people were to be distrusted. You had to have this place to be safe, have it all to yourself, shut everyone else out of it. Your plan to get it was a crazy, twisted scheme, but it nearly worked. Stephen would kill Marcia, and then Stephen would be hanged or sent away for life. They have no children. You are obviously an heir—you and Harriet. Perhaps if it had worked you'd have turned your attention to Harriet."

"No!" Ted said sharply. "Harriet! I meant it for both of us. I swear it. I meant for us both to be here forever. I knew you loved me and trusted me and believed in me. You were the only one."

"But she didn't trust you," the doctor said grimly. "She didn't believe in you. That's why she made the futile, hysterical attempt to find the saddle girth she thought was so important." He paused a moment. "That's the picture in broad terms. Shall I go on, Mr. Hunter?"

Ted didn't answer, but he got up, went quickly to Harriet's chair, dropped on his knees, and buried his face in her lap. Her thin, bony fingers stroked his hair.

"He never really had a chance," she said to them all urgently. "He never really had a chance."

Stephen and Marcia were left alone with the doctor on the terrace. Marcia sat on the arm of her husband's chair and their hands were tightly locked together. Some of the grayness had left Stephen's face. His anxiety now seemed to be for Marcia. She kept glancing up to a second-floor window to the room where Walsh was waiting for Ted

and Harriet to get ready for the trip to the County Attorney's office.

"How did you know about Harriet and the business at the stable?" Marcia finally asked the doctor.

"The whole business at the stable bothered me," the doctor said. "It didn't fit the rest of the pattern. I kept trying to force it to fit. That was a mistake. When I gave up trying that, I saw the answer quite clearly. If it wasn't the murderer who had searched the barn and slugged George Meadows, then it had to be someone who was trying mistakenly to shield the murderer. There was one person in this house who felt that kind of protectiveness for Ted—Harriet."

"You always thought it was Ted?" Stephen asked.

"I had my choice narrowed down from the start. I had just two choices, it seemed to me. Ted and Cleghorn."

"Cleg!"

The doctor nodded. "He was the one who thought I was being—I think the word was 'incompetent'—in accepting Stephen's story in full. I've had a good deal of experience with neurotics and psychotics. I knew Stephen was telling me what he believed had happened. The facts didn't jibe with what he believed. I had to find facts that would fit—that would account for what Stephen believed had happened.

"The first thing that tended to narrow my choice was your account of Bristow's fall, Stephen. It seemed absurd to me that Bristow would have said 'Stephen, what have you done?' as he fell. But someone had said it, with the intention of planting the idea in your mind."

Marcia nodded. "I can see that."

"Well, it seemed to me just about certain that it must have been a *man* who said it," the doctor said. "If Marcia or Harriet had said it, I think even Stephen's confused mind would have been conscious that a *woman* had spoken. Instead of thinking Bristow had accused him, he would have thought Marcia or Harriet had accused him. The idea that it was Bristow wouldn't have taken root in his mind. So I told myself that it was Cleghorn or Ted."

"What tipped the scales toward Ted?" Stephen asked.

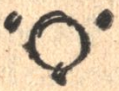
"The man's character and background," the doctor said. "Anyone might have had a knowledge of psychiatry sufficient to put this scheme in operation. But Ted's medical school background was suggestive. When a man fails to make a go of his life he usually imagines other people are responsible. This can develop into a first-class neurosis—a motive, in this case. His delight in stabbing at everyone's little weakness and foibles—all suggestive.

"I did consider Marcia and Harriet. Marcia might have been in love with Cleg, but I got the feeling she would be loyal to Stephen if it killed her. Harriet might have ma-

neuvered the whole thing to get what she wanted for her precious Ted. But I had the feeling that an older person would not have known the way to strike at Stephen. It seemed to me it must be one of the children he grew up with, who would have been aware of intimate little things an older person would never have known about at all."

He stopped and took a large silver watch out of his pocket. He looked at Marcia with a tired smile.

"I'm going to leave you two together now. You've got a job to do —fitting the pieces of your lives into a new framework. But you can do it, because the danger is all over for both of you. There's nothing to be afraid of any longer."



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AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Eberhart, Mignon	THE CHIFFON SCARF	Popular Library	$ .60	12/6
MacDonald, John D.	CRY HARD, CRY FAST	Gold Medal (Orig.)	.50	11/29

Titles and Data Supplied by the Publishers.

Our favorite mystery writing team (fictional), still aboard the Valhalla on their round-the-world cruise with their lovely wives, versus an insoluble problem filled with unanswerable questions . . . but are the Great Men daunted? Perish forbid! Off they go, not to the wild blue yonder, but on a deductive flight that will make your eyes pop in sheer admiration and amazement . . . Leroy King rides again!

THE NEW ZEALAND BIRD MYSTERY

by JAMES HOLDING

AN HOUR AFTER THE CRUISE SHIP *Valhalla* HAD LEFT HER BERTH AT QUEEN'S Pier in Hobart, Tasmania, and was nosing bravely into a choppy Tasman Sea en route to Wellington, New Zealand, everybody aboard knew that something terrible had happened to Homer Rice.

At first nobody knew exactly what, but shipboard gossip being what it is, everybody felt sure it was something terrible. For as the *Valhalla* pointed her trim bow eastward, and her passengers, wearied by a day and a half of strenuous sightseeing in Tasmania, settled down for their before-luncheon drinks, Homer Rice was nowhere to be found.

His friends, of whom there were many, sought him in his expensive cabin on the sundeck and then through the bars, public rooms, and various decks of the Norwegian liner, but with notable lack of success. Soon it developed that nobody had seen hide or hair of Homer Rice since he went ashore with the other passengers the previous morning, ostensibly to do the Hobart city tour, ascend Mt. Wellington by car, and visit briefly the apple orchards of the Huon River Valley.

Immediately rumors and counter-rumors began to fly through the ship as thick as fireflies in a summer dusk: Homer Rice was desperately ill in the ship's hospital, felled by a Tasmanian virus of unbelievable virulence; Homer Rice had left the cruise to fly home to California because his wife had suffered a stroke; Homer Rice had been jailed by Hobart police as a dangerous sex deviate because he had been seen buying a bag of caramel kisses for a small girl in a sweet shop.

The most distressing rumor originated from a busboy in the Chief Steward's department whose bunk was near the forward freezer in the bowels of the ship. From this lad came the shocking word that Homer Rice was not sick, had not departed for home by air, was not in jail, but was, in fact, dead. Otherwise, why had one of the empty caskets (which were discreetly

carried below decks by the *Valhalla* on every extended cruise to accommodate passengers who failed to survive three months at sea)—why had one of these caskets, asked the busboy, been removed from the hold last night and stowed instead, with its lid decently closed, in the forward freezer room where he, personally, had seen it this morning?

This was a good question, as the Danforths and Leroys, sipping gimlets in the Horseshoe Bar, readily admitted. And Helen Leroy, who was always an exponent of direct action, reached up and caught the arm of the ship's doctor who happened to be passing their table, and turned her seraphic, irresistible smile on him.

"Doctor Hagen," she said, "everybody is saying that something awful's happened to Mr. Rice. Do you know anything about it?"

Dr. Hagen, tall, blond, and smoking a cigarette in a long black holder stuffed with filters, nodded courteously. "I am sorry to say it is true, Mrs. Leroy. The Captain will be making the announcement in a few minutes when he comes down from the bridge for luncheon. Mr. Rice is dead."

Carol Danforth put down her drink. "Oh, dear!" she said. "How terrible! Was he taken suddenly ill, Doctor?"

"No," said the doctor gravely. He knew the special interest of these four passengers in criminous matters. "Mr. Rice was not taken ill. He was killed."

"What!" King Danforth and Martin Leroy, better known as Leroy King, the collaborating team that had authored scores of mystery novels, straightened in their chairs as though jerked by a single string. "Killed?" asked Danforth incredulously. "You mean murdered?"

The doctor leaned down closer to the table and lowered his voice. "Actually, a Hobart boatman stumbled over Mr. Rice about midnight last night, lying in the shadow of an apple warehouse along Constitution Dock. The boatman called the police. And the police, when they learned from his passport that Mr. Rice was a *Valhalla* passenger, notified Captain Thorsen, who called me when they brought Mr. Rice's body aboard in the middle of the night. He was already dead, unfortunately—there was nothing I could do for him."

"How was he killed?" Leroy asked.

"A blow on the head. His skull was smashed in."

Helen and Carol stared at the doctor, horror-stricken.

Danforth spoke up. "Was he robbed?"

The doctor nodded. "His wallet was missing. The Hobart police are looking at this moment for the robber. But please, say nothing of this to the other passengers, eh? It is not nice for a cruise to have a passenger killed.

The Captain will announce merely that Mr. Rice died suddenly. He was not in good health, you know."

The doctor moved on. Danforth stared out of the window beside him at the blowing whitecaps that topped the uneasy sea through which the *Valhalla* labored, and he muttered under his breath, "Murdered! Poor Homer!"

Leroy glanced at his watch. "Drink up, girls," he said in a preoccupied way, "It's time for lunch."

Helen pushed away her half-empty glass. "I don't feel like drinking," she said. "I *liked* Homer Rice!"

Everybody had liked Homer Rice—the quiet, intelligent, unassuming timber company executive who had been traveling around the world on the *Valhalla* for his health. So when Captain Thorsen made his brief announcement of Rice's death at luncheon, a pall of sincere regret, if not genuine grief, settled on Rice's former fellow passengers. And a renewed murmur of speculation burst forth at once over the luncheon tables.

Carol Danforth said indignantly, "I'll bet that ridiculous publicity we got in Tasmania yesterday was responsible for Homer Rice's death!"

"What publicity?" asked her husband.

"You didn't see it? The article in the Hobart newspaper yesterday morning? With the headline *Shipload of American Millionaires Visits City?* Whoever killed Homer Rice probably thought he'd be carrying *his* million in his wallet."

Danforth said, "I don't agree. Surely everybody in the world, including Tasmanians, must know that all Americans—and especially traveling Americans—live strictly on credit cards and travelers checks. Why, cash is positively indecent today."

"You know what I mean," said Carol indignantly. "That newspaper story could have misled some dumb thug into thinking we all carry oodles of cash with us—and poor Homer Rice was killed as a result. Isn't that possible?"

"Sure," said Leroy. "And selecting Homer as the victim could also have been purely accidental."

Helen put up a hand to her blonde hair. "Do we have to discuss it? It's ghoulish to hash it over like one of your mystery plots, Martin."

Her husband patted her hand. "You must admit that Carol has raised an interesting point, Helen." He looked a trifle guiltily at his partner.

Danforth took the cue. "I could stand to know how much cash Homer actually was carrying in his wallet when he was killed," he said.

"Now King!" said Carol. "Stop it!"

Danforth grinned at his dark-haired vivacious wife. "Only way to prove conclusively that Homer *was* just an accidental victim," he murmured with

a deprecatory air. "No large amount of cash on him, no reason for anybody to rob *him* in particular. And vice versa, if you see what I mean."

Carol cut into her strawberry torte dessert. "You boys would look for plot material in the natural death by old age of your own grandmothers!" she said. "Why don't we just forget it?"

So they finished their luncheon in silence. When they rose from the table and started out of the dining room, Danforth nudged Leroy, then said blandly, "We'll meet you in ten minutes at our deck chairs, girls."

"Where are you going?" asked Carol suspiciously.

"Little errand, my dear girl. It's indelicate of you to ask."

Carol sniffed, raising her dark brows at Helen as they entered the elevator together. Danforth and Leroy got off at A-deck. Their wives continued upward.

Within the promised ten minutes Danforth and Leroy rejoined the ladies in their secluded deck chairs on the sundeck. Homer Rice's chair, which had been only a few yards along the deck from theirs, was empty now. It looked forlorn.

Seeing the glint in her husband's eyes, Helen sighed and said, "Well, come on, out with it. Obviously you've got something to tell us."

Leroy said, "Homer Rice was probably carrying eight thousand five hundred dollars in cash when he was killed last night. What do you think of that?"

The girls stared. "How do you know?" asked Helen.

"The Purser told us just now," Danforth informed them. "He said he cashed eighty-five hundred dollars worth of travelers checks for Homer between Sidney and Hobart, and Homer had never before cashed more than a hundred dollars at any one time. And there was no sign of the eighty-five hundred in Homer's cabin when the Hobart Police came aboard last night, the Purser says. So the chances are ten to one that Homer had the cash on him when he was killed."

In a small voice Carol said, "I suppose you've deduced something of great significance from that, haven't you?"

"Why, yes," said Leroy, "we think we have."

"What?"

"That maybe Homer wasn't just a chance victim."

"But that would mean somebody knew beforehand he'd have all that cash on him," Helen objected.

"Exactly," her husband agreed. "The question is who."

"You're the experts," said Carol. "Who?"

Danforth shrugged. "The boys in the Purser's office who saw him cash his travelers checks? The Purser himself? A passenger Homer confided

in? Somebody who happened to note his bulging wallet, perhaps? There are a hundred possibilities."

"Rubbish!" declared Helen with spirit. "No passenger on this cruise, and none of those darling Norwegian boys in the Purser's office could be a thief and a murderer—not by any stretch of the imagination! And don't tell me they could!"

"Watch your grammar, sweetheart," said Leroy placidly. "We're not accusing anyone. But understandably, we can't resist speculating a little."

"Go ahead and speculate then," Carol smiled at Helen. "It's what we get for marrying a mystery writing team, Helen. Bear up, that's all we can do."

"And all *we* can do is speculate," said Danforth, "because as far as I can see, there's no possibility of getting a firm answer to the really important question."

"All right," Carol said, "I'll bite. What is the really important question?"

Danforth rubbed a hand over his crewcut head with a pleased look at his wife. "Viz," he answered, "to wit, i.e., e.g.: Why would Homer Rice, a legitimate millionaire whose credit is impeccable, suddenly need to get eighty-five hundred bucks worth of travelers checks cashed between Sidney, Australia, and Hobart, Tasmania?"

Broodingly Leroy said, "How about this, King? Homer was a West Coast lumber tycoon, right? And Tasmania, I happen to know in my wisdom, is very big in timber. So maybe Homer had a big timber deal to settle in Hobart."

"If so, why not use the travelers checks themselves to seal the bargain? Or a cashier's check? Or a personal check, if it comes to that? Why cash?"

"M-m-m. And even more puzzling," said Leroy, lighting a cigarette, "is the latter half of your unanswerable question, King: why wait to get the cash until the last day before we arrived in Hobart? Homer was darned lucky the Purser's office had that much cash they could spare him, the Purser says."

Helen winked at Carol. "Perhaps," she suggested wickedly, "Leroy King isn't the world's best mystery team after all, Carol. Perhaps we've been overrating these boys of ours. 'Unanswerable' questions, indeed!"

Her husband pretended deep hurt. "You will have to know this sometime," he said portentously, "so it may as well be now, girls. To be brutally frank, King and I married you for your beauty only, don't you realize that? Not for your brains. So do us a favor, will you? Just sit there in golden silence and look beautiful. And keep your sweet little traps shut when brilliant and mature men are discussing serious matters."

"Oh," said Helen, "you don't want me to answer your unanswerable question for you, is that it?"

Danforth and Leroy gazed somberly at her. "You *can* answer that question?"

"I can try."

"I withdraw my remark about your beauty," said Leroy, "and I apologize. You aren't beautiful at all. You're smart. So what's the answer?"

"It's perfectly obvious to ordinary, non-genius-type people like me," said Helen softly, "why Homer cashed all those travelers checks when he did. It was because he'd just learned he had to."

"That's a deceptively simple-sounding statement," said Danforth. "But why the cash? And for what purpose? There's the rub."

Leroy looked thoughtful. "If Homer learned in Sidney that he'd need the cash for something in Hobart, and if the Sidney banks were closed when he learned it—"

Danforth growled, "That explains the timing, maybe. But that's all. Sure, Homer could have got a telephone call or a cable in Sidney telling him he'd need cash for some deal in Hobart—"

Leroy made an abrupt movement. "Or," he said, with sudden excitement in his voice, "a letter. A letter received in Sidney. Of course. I'll bet I saw him reading the very one!"

"You saw him? Where? When?" The others flung questions at him.

"Right there at the rail," Leroy pointed. "In front of his deck chair. He was standing with his back to me, reading a letter, a few minutes after we sailed from Sidney. He'd just got back aboard after a shore trip and had collected his mail in his cabin, I suppose."

Leroy closed his eyes, trying to recall details. "You three had collapsed in your bunks from weariness. I was sitting up here in my deck chair to see us sail out of Sidney Harbor, which, I might interject here, is commonly thought to be the most beautiful in the entire world. Homer was standing there at the rail, reading a letter. When he finished, he crumpled up letter and envelope together, I remember, and threw them over the rail. Then he turned around with a big happy grin on his face."

Leroy opened his eyes. "Wait," he said. Slowly he got to his feet and went a few yards along the deck toward Homer Rice's empty deck chair. He bent over the wooden grid that covered the shallow trough of the scuppers there at the foot of the rail. They saw him lift a yard-long section of scupper cover, pick something out of the dry trough below, then replace the grid.

He came back and sat down again. "Here it is," he said.

Helen gave him a worried look. "Here's *what?* Darling, let me see."

"The letter," Leroy said, "that Homer was reading." He opened his hand and showed them a crumpled ball of paper. "When he threw them over-

board, I remember, the envelope and the letter separated, and the wind blew the letter back through the rail and into the scuppers. Homer didn't notice it, I guess. The envelope went on overboard."

In amazement Danforth said, "Total recall! Open the letter, Mart, and let's see what it says."

"Don't you dare," said Helen Leroy at once. "We have no right to read Homer's private correspondence, even if he's dead."

"This may tell us *why* he's dead," replied Leroy. He smoothed out the crumpled letter carefully.

It was an odd-looking letter—merely a scrap of heavy white paper, roughly triangular in shape, about four inches wide at the top, and with uneven edges indicating that it had been torn from a larger sheet. It was blank on one side; on the other side they saw both printing and calligraphy.

Two words in rather large type were printed in the upper left corner, parallel to the triangle's widest side: *logical jerk*. And ten lines of spidery handwriting were underneath, necessarily compressed into shorter and shorter lines as the paper came to a point at the bottom.

logical jerk.

At last. More than rumor this time.
si. Confirmed Maori photo. Immed-
iate need three ready for ex-
pedition and live proof.
Hobart, Aug. 12. Hon-
orary degrees for
both of us, I
should think.
Meanwhile,
mum.

There was no signature.

Carol began to laugh.

"What's so funny?" demanded her husband.

"Poetic justice, that's what. Exactly what you deserve for reading other people's mail." Carol appealed to Helen. "How about that for a graphic two-word description of Leroy King, the deductive machine we married? 'Logical jerk'! It's perfect!"

She went off into fresh gales of merriment in which Helen now joined.

"We are not amused," Leroy said. Belying his words, he grinned broadly at his lanky partner who, surprisingly, was not smiling but gazing ab-

stractedly at the ocean. Leroy recognized that far-off look. Danforth, it seemed, was in what Carol impishly referred to as "an old abandoned quandary."

Striving to penetrate Danforth's pre-occupation, Leroy continued, "This letter, children, is pure gibberish—except for one thing."

Danforth failed to rise to the bait. Helen, however, ventured, "The 'Hobart, August twelfth' bit, you mean? That was yesterday, the day the *Valhalla* arrived in Tasmania, the day Homer Rice was killed and robbed."

"Good thinking," Leroy said. "So this crazy letter *could* have something to do with setting up Homer's rendezvous with death in Hobart. But if so, where's any mention of the cash Homer was supposed to bring ashore with him?" He glanced inquiringly at Danforth. "What do you think, King?"

Danforth roused himself from his reverie. "What? Think about what?"

"The fact there's no reference in this message to the eighty-five hundred in cash?"

Danforth rubbed his cropped head, then leaned over and reread the triangular letter in Leroy's hand. "Three," he said musingly. "Three. And mention of a Maori, which brings New Zealand to mind at once, since that's where Maori natives live." He snapped his fingers. "Hey! What's the unit of money in New Zealand?"

"The pound," said Leroy.

"Worth how many dollars?"

"About the same as the English pound, I think. Two dollars and eighty cents, or thereabouts. Why?" Then Leroy got it. "Oh! Three thousand New Zealand pounds would come to about eighty-five hundred U.S. dollars, is that it?"

"Near enough," said Leroy. "It could be, especially if taken with the word 'ready' that follows the word 'three' in the message."

"By Jove!" said Leroy. " 'Three ready.' Meaning three thousand pounds in ready cash?"

"Why not?" Danforth turned gloomy. "But the rest of this jazz about rumors and photos and honorary degrees is absolute Greek to me."

Leroy fixed his partner with a level look. "Why the brown study act just now?" he asked.

Danforth shrugged. "A nagger. A sneaky feeling I had that those two printed words, 'logical jerk,' rang a bell somehow. Somewhere recently I seem to have heard or seen those words. Or words very like them. But I can't think where."

Leroy looked at the two printed words at the top of the scrap of paper. "The word 'logical' is smack up against the left-hand margin of the

paper," he said. "Maybe 'logical' isn't the complete word. Maybe the front part of the word was ripped off when the paper was torn out of wherever it came from."

Carol nodded. "Of course!" she said eagerly. "How about a physiological jerk, for instance? Or even a biological, zoological, ichthyological jerk?"

"What big words you use, Grandma," Leroy began when Danforth straightened up with one of Carol's physiological jerks. "Hold it!" he cried. "That's it, by heaven! Carol, you're an intuitive catalyst!"

"Watch your language there, sailor," said Carol.

"The phrase I almost remembered," said Danforth slowly, "was 'ornithological jerk.' And now I know where we heard it."

"*W*e heard it?" asked Helen doubtfully.

"Sure. We all did. It was in a verse that Campbell La Rue, our cruise lecturer, quoted several days ago in his informative talk to the passengers about New Zealand!"

"Talk about total recall," said Leroy, "you don't do badly yourself, old buddy. Now that you mention it, I remember it, too. A verse about a kiwi bird or some such, wasn't it?"

Helen chimed in, "A moa bird. I remember it now. Mr. La Rue said it came from a children's book of verses about Australian and New Zealand birds. It was cute."

Danforth stood up. "Pardon me," he said, "while I find Mr. La Rue."

"And Mr. La Rue's clue," added Helen. "Hurry back."

When Danforth returned to his deck chair a few minutes later, he brought with him a large square picture book whose title in yellow letters on a bright green cover could easily be deciphered while Danforth was still fifteen feet away. *Your Feathered Friends Down Under.*

"La Rue lent it to me," said Danforth, sitting down. Rapidly he leafed through pages of verses and colored illustrations dealing with emus, kiwis, cassowaries, kookaburras, keas, bellbirds, and many others. Only when he came to the last page in the book did he exclaim with satisfaction, "Ah! Here we are."

The page was headed *The Biggest Bird of All* and displayed a realistic drawing of an enormous ostrich-like moa bird. The accompanying text consisted of two stanzas in limerick form. Danforth read them aloud to his rapt audience.

New Zealand, by some silly quirk
Such as only Dame Nature can work,
  Gave birth, I have heard,
  To a bird so absurd
'Twas an ornithological jerk.

For the moa, in New Zealand loa,
Often grew to eleven foot foa.
It was wingless and tame
And it's really a shame
That there aren't any moa any moa.

Leroy took the picture book from Danforth and examined the back of the last page. It was blank. The limericks were set in the same type and same size as the two printed words at the top of the letter. And between the first and second verses, below the words 'ornithological jerk,' there were several inches of white space.

Leroy superimposed Homer Rice's mysterious triangular letter on the book page, matching exactly the position of the two printed words, and it was immediately evident that whoever had written the odd note to the murdered man had cavalierly torn his writing paper out of the last page of a copy of *Your Feathered Friends Down Under.*

"But where does that get us?" asked Danforth at length. "Thousands of copies of this book must be kicking around. If only our lazy letter writer had thought to sign his name the way respectable people—"

"Excuse me," said Leroy suddenly, "for interrupting. But look at the name of the guy who wrote this bird book!"

"Eric Rhome," murmured Helen, puzzled.

Danforth crowed, "Well, how about that? Nothing escapes the X-ray eyes of Leroy King!"

"What's so special about the name Eric Rhome?" asked Carol plaintively. "Do you know him?"

"I think we did," said Danforth evenly. "Look. Just as Leroy King is the pseudonym of the best mystery writers in the business, so Eric Rhome must have been the pseudonym of the man who wrote these children's verses about birds. For the name 'Eric,' with its letters arranged differently, spells 'Rice.' And the name 'Rhome,' ditto, spells 'Homer.' Do you see?"

"For heaven's sake!" exclaimed Helen. "Eric Rhome—Homer Rice! Then maybe it does mean something that this funny letter Homer got in Sidney was written on a scrap of paper torn from his own book?"

"Indubitably," said Leroy, his eyes shining now with the fervor of the incorrigible solver of puzzles. "Think of it. A timber tycoon in the eyes of the world, but a modest author of children's books in secret! And books about birds, yet!"

"Maybe he was a birdwatcher," Helen suggested. "Lots of men are."

"Birdwatcher or not, Homer was interested in birds and knew enough about them to write a book on the subject," interpolated Danforth, "if, as

we think, he wrote this book. Australian and New Zealand birds, anyway. Can't we reasonably assume, therefore, that Homer had been to New Zealand and Australia before this trip?"

Leroy nodded vigorously. "Also that whoever wrote him this letter deliberately wrote it on a page fragment of Homer's book."

"Why?" asked Helen.

"To identify himself, perhaps. Remember the letter isn't signed. Maybe he was saying, 'This letter is from the guy who knows you wrote this book, Homer Rice.'"

"Why not sign his name?" This was Carol being irreverent again. "It would have been so much simpler."

"The letter says 'meanwhile, mum'," Leroy pointed out. "Everything very hush-hush. No names. Nothing but obscure hints."

Danforth said, "I've got another idea about identification."

"What?"

"Those two words in type—'logical jerk.' They might have been deliberately included for identification purposes, too."

"To identify that particular verse in the book, you mean?"

"Yes. And therefore, it follows, to identify a specific bird."

Leroy stared. So did Helen and Carol.

"A moa bird? The bird that was an ornithological jerk?"

"Why not?"

"I'll tell you why not," said Helen severely. "I happen to have a little of that total recall you're so proud of myself. And I remember that Mr. La Rue said in his lecture that the moa bird has been extinct for merely five hundred years, that's all. Just as the poem says, 'there aen't any moa any moa.' So why would anybody want to identify one in this letter?"

Leroy ignored her. "Do you mean, King," he asked with something approaching awe, "that you think the letter writer is *writing* about a moa bird?"

Danforth shrugged. "It sounds screwy. But why else would those two words in type be included in the letter? If you read the letter with a moa bird in mind, it begins to make sense, doesn't it? An impossible, incredible kind of sense, I'll admit, but sense anyway. Go on. Read the message again."

The three did so in silence. Then Carol said, "Do you seriously expect us to believe that whoever wrote this letter to Homer expected *him* to believe that somebody had discovered a *live* moa bird and actually taken a picture of it?"

"I don't know," said Danforth stubbornly. "But if you could come up with a live moa bird after they've been supposedly extinct for five hundred

years, you'd be a pretty big man in birdwatching circles, wouldn't you? And in ornithological circles, too. And some university might even hand out honorary degrees to the men who were responsible for such an amazing scientific find, I should think."

"But—but—but—" stammered Helen. She sank back in her deck chair, stunned. "You're *serious,* aren't you, King?"

Danforth smiled at her. "Never more so, sweet."

"In that case," said Leroy, "this letter means that whoever wrote it is assuring Homer Rice that a Maori has actually seen and photographed a live moa bird, believed extinct, and needs three thousand pounds pronto to set up an expedition to go out and capture the live moa? That Rice was to meet him at Hobart yesterday with the money in cash? And if successful in proving that live moa birds still exist, both the letter writer and Homer Rice, who will finance the expedition, will probably win honorary degrees for their discovery?"

"Very succinctly put," said Danforth. "Don't you agree that it's a possibility?"

Carol challenged him. "Let me ask one small question. What's the Spanish word for 'yes' doing in this New Zealand letter? That little word 'si'? I suppose you deduce from that that the live moa birds have been discovered in Spain?" She sniffed in disdain.

Danforth looked sadly at his partner. Leroy said, "All women are notoriously skeptical of scientific truth." He turned to Carol. "Suppose," he said, "just for the sake of argument, that the word 'si,' instead of meaning 'yes' in Spanish, were interpreted as the initial letters of two very relevant New Zealand words?"

"What words?"

"South Island," returned Leroy. "The southernmost and largest island of the New Zealand group. The part of New Zealand where even recent maps still display the word 'Unexplored' over certain interior areas? What then?"

"I give up," said Helen. "Go ahead and dream."

Danforth obliged. "Let's say that Homer Rice is a birdwatcher or an amateur ornithologist. Somehow he's got the bee in his bonnet that moa birds are not extinct. On a previous trip or trips to New Zealand, he's been in touch with some local authorities about his theory. He's let it be known there that he's willing and eager to finance a search for live moa birds if there seems any chance they exist. But for Pete's sake, says Homer, keep the whole thing quiet until something definite can be proved, inasmuch as he doesn't want to become widely known as an insane birdwatcher. And evidently he's been in touch with the writer of this odd letter before, because

the letter says 'more than rumor *this* time'—implying previous communication. How's that strike you?"

Leroy nodded. "And suppose our unknown New Zealand letter writer, a devious and dishonest birdwatcher if ever there was one, knew Homer Rice was taking this cruise for his health? And that the *Valhalla* would visit Hobart, Tasmania, on August twelfth? He writes to Homer in Sidney, dangling the carrot of a live moa before Homer's nose, and asks for the financing, as promised. Then, when Homer naively goes ashore with eighty-five hundred bucks in his jeans, this character is lurking on Constitution Dock, meets Homer, kills him, and calmly lifts the cash. Is that the picture you have?"

"Wait a minute," said Carol. "Why wouldn't the letter writer just have innocently met Homer in Hobart as proposed, and let him *give* him the money for the expedition as planned? That way, he'd get the money without violence or murder, and who's to blame him if the expedition never finds a moa bird?"

Leroy shook his head. "You're forgetting the photo mentioned in the letter. Homer was naive, maybe, but not a complete sucker. He'd want to see evidence—say, a photograph of a live moa bird—before he'd fork over the cash for an expedition."

"Then why did the letter writer mention the photo in the first place?"

"To convince Homer that this time it wasn't just a rumor, that he had proof of Homer's theory."

Danforth said, "He'd run almost no risk of being caught. His letter warns Homer to keep mum. He hasn't signed the letter. He sets up the murder rendezvous in Tasmania instead of in New Zealand where he lives. Just another rich American tourist robbed abroad, only unfortunately killed in the process. That's how he planned it."

"Whereas the truth is," said Leroy, "that a certain unscrupulous birdwatcher needed eighty-five hundred bucks and took the easiest way to get it—by playing on the credulity of an amateur American colleague who happened to be rich."

Danforth began to count on his fingers. "So what have we got? One, the murderer is somebody who lives in New Zealand. Two, he's probably somebody who is connected with ornithology or birdwatching. Three, the talk of honorary degrees suggests an academic orientation."

"Four," supplemented Leroy solemnly, "he's probably someone who is pressed for money. Five, he's somebody who has been in touch with Homer Rice before and knew the itinerary of this cruise and that Homer would be on it."

"Six," continued Danforth, "he's somebody who was absent from his

usual haunts yesterday and probably part of today—flying to Tasmania from New Zealand, robbing Homer, and flying home again." He paused. "Anything else?"

Unexpectedly Carol Danforth said, "Let it never be said that I can't deduce along with the best. This letter written to Homer is triangular—shaped like a V. Could that mean the murderer's name begins with a V?"

"It could," said Danforth, "if more than one person in New Zealand knew that Homer wrote this bird book and some identification besides the page fragment were required."

"One thing is sure," offered Leroy. "Whoever wrote this letter to Homer and killed him may still have in his possession a copy of *Our Feathered Friends Down Under* with a triangular piece torn out of the last page."

"True," said Danforth. He stood up. "And now we know everything about Homer's murderer except his name, don't we?" He was half serious, half flippant.

Leroy said, "I think we ought to have a talk with the police when we get to New Zealand tomorrow."

"Okay," said Danforth. "But meanwhile, how about a short nap before cocktails?"

A week later the *Valhalla* majestically steamed northward toward Suva in the Fiji Islands, her next port of call. It was dinnertime; the Viking Room was a cheerful hubbub of conversation, laughter, and dining sounds.

The Danforths and Leroys had ordered dessert when a radiogram was delivered to their table by the radio officer. It was addressed to Martin Leroy.

Leroy tore it open. "It's from Detective Inspector Johnson in Wellington," he said, and proceeded to read its contents aloud:

"Happy to report murderer of *Valhalla* passenger Homer Rice arrested today. Positive evidence at hand that Milnor Van Allen, Associate Professor Zoology, local university, was in Tasmania at critical time for unexplained purpose; has recently settled sizable gambling debts with American currency; has corresponded Homer Rice for seven years and knew from recent letter Rice would be on *Valhalla* cruise calling Hobart Aug. 12. Also possesses copy *Our Feathered Friends Down Under* with mutilated last page into which triangular letter fits exactly. Van Allen's conviction for muder beyond doubt. Again, sincere thanks for your assistance.—Johnson, Det. Insp., Wellington"

They were silent for a few moments after he finished reading. Then Danforth said, "I don't suppose it makes any difference to Homer that they've caught his killer. But it makes *me* feel a lot better, I must say."

Leroy nodded. "I'll second that."

"So will I," chimed in Carol, "especially since I'm responsible for finding Homer's killer."

"*You're* responsible!" cried Danforth and Leroy together.

"Certainly," said Carol complacently. "I gave you the most important clue. I told you the murderer's name began with V."

Helen said, "I keep wondering and wondering about one thing. *Could* it be possible there still are some moa birds alive in those unexplored parts of New Zealand?"

Leroy and Danforth grinned at each other.

"Of course it's possible," said Danforth at length. "But if you ask me—"

Leroy finished for him: " 'There aren't any moa any moa'."

'Q'

ANSWERS to *Attention Getters*

1. Israel Zangwill's THE BIG BOW MYSTERY.
2. Francis Iles's BEFORE THE FACT.
3. S. S. Van Dine's THE "CANARY" MURDER CASE.
4. E. C. Bentley's TRENT'S LAST CASE.
5. Ellery Queen's THE ROMAN HAT MYSTERY.
6. Josephine Tey's THE DAUGHTER OF TIME.
7. Agatha Christie's THE MURDER OF ROGER ACKROYD.
8. Mary Roberts Rinehart's THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE.
9. Dashiell Hammett's THE GLASS KEY.
10. Rex Stout's TOO MANY WOMEN.
11. John Dickson Carr's THE BURNING COURT.
12. Erle Stanley Gardner's THE CASE OF THE DEMURE DEFENDANT.

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 303rd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . A brand-new way to bilk a bank? Is it possible? And if possible, is it foolproof, undetectable, flawless? Well . . .

The author, Bertrend J. Curran, is a native westerner, born in Spokane, Washington. He is in his fifties, married, and has four children. He has been the Washington correspondent for several eastern trade magazines, and was an executive editor with the U.S. News in Washington, D. C. Now he is free-lancing, and EQMM is happy to publish his first fiction.

We hope that Mr. Curran comes up with some more "dangerous" ideas—why, he could wreck the entire national economy!

THE MYSTERIOUS MR. ZORN

by BERTREND J. CURRAN

"HOW ARE YOU TODAY, MR. ZORN?"

"Fine, just fine," he replied, smiling at the young teller as he handed him the check and the savings book.

"The usual way, Mr. Zorn, in hundreds?" asked the teller.

He was pleased to deal with a friendly and prosperous customer like Mr. Zorn, who had visited his cage every month for the past three months. He usually cashed a large check, depositing at least half of it in the savings account.

"Hundreds will do nicely, young man," Mr. Zorn answered heartily.

His round, pleasant face was somewhat florid, with eyes hidden behind heavy glasses. Looking around the suburban Hamilton National Bank, he noted everything with a shrewd eye. Although not as large as his own place of employment—the main branch downtown of the Chicago Second National—this one suited his purpose ideally.

"Thank you," he said, reaching for the handful of banknotes. "I'll see you next month."

Mr. Zorn stepped aside and carefully put the bills in an elegant morocco wallet. Studying his bankbook as he sauntered toward the front entrance, he was impressed by the cash figure in the right-hand margin. A pent-up sigh escaped him as he mentally checked off another milestone in his great coup.

He walked the few blocks to the Beverly station in the soft rain. From experience he knew that a Rock Island train would be along at exactly 12:50. It would take him to within a few blocks of the

LaSalle Street entrance of the Second National. When he got aboard the car he noticed that it was nearly empty. It was the lull between the early shoppers and the afternoon going-home crowd.

Seating himself comfortably, he looked out the window at the back yards of those forced by economic reasons to live near the tracks. He felt himself on a different plane. For the great mass of people, undaring and conformity-ridden, he felt only a benign distaste. His mind, as it often did recently, jumped back to that day nearly a year ago—his own red-letter day—when he had been called into the office of J. Harvey Stricker, vice-president of the Second National.

"I have been going over your file, Lane," Stricker began. "You have been with us for nearly four years. Let's see, you are unmarried, and a graduate in accounting. Hmm, very good. Are you happy here?"

"Very much so, sir. Chicago Second National is a wonderful place to work," he replied.

"Good. I have been asked to choose one of our bright young men for special training. For our new Computer Department. Would that interest you?" It was really a rhetorical question the way the thin, reedy-voiced official put it.

"It sounds very interesting," Lane answered.

"Here is the plan. You will study at this I.B.M. school one afternoon and three nights a week. The bank will assume all the tuition charges and of course will continue your regular salary. It is a real chance for betterment."

"You mean it would lead to my advancement here?" the younger man asked, aware of the virtue of putting it on a man-to-man, clearly understood basis.

"Yes, indeed, Lane. Within ten months you should have the course completed. You would then be a programmer, in charge of all our data work."

"It sounds very good. With my background it should be a real opportunity to improve myself."

"Then it's settled. Take this form along, fill it out, and we will set the hours and schedule. The bank wants to get started immediately. This should be the beginning of better things for you, my boy." The official rose, offering a speckled hand and a limp handshake.

Now sitting in the train, the memory of that "opportunity" made him laugh inwardly. "The beginning of better things" was the understatement of the year. Here he was, at 33, Data Manager of the Computer Department. No one else fully understood his job—indeed, he was the only qualified manipulator of Old 4392, and the other quick, brainy machines that made up his world—his world of mechanical clerks who couldn't spy on him or talk back. His stringy-haired assistant, Miss Fuller, who

looked at him with her fawn eyes, didn't know an abacus from an aborigine.

He chuckled as he viewed the months ahead. He was going to be the richest bank employee on LaSalle Street.

As the train rumbled on, clanking sharply now and then, he recalled that it was just after the holidays when he had come up with his wonderful idea. He had been lord of all the data machines for two months, and still was astonished at their obedience and swiftness.

Setting the programmer one day and idly looking over a yellow statement sheet, he realized that no one ever paid much attention to monthly bank-statement charges, or even understood them. Why was the service charge for an individual's checking account $2.67 when it could just as easily be $2.77 or even $2.87? No one ever complained; it would be too picayunish.

The idea began to excite him. He examined it with a neutral mind. He knew he was on to something—that is, something for him.

It was more than a week, after he had explored all the in-and-out possibilities, before he was ready. He picked a fictitious name, choosing an "Edward and Thelma Zorn" as his guinea pigs. If all went well at the end of the first month's statement run he knew he was in. It was foolproof, because it was literally undetectable. If anything *did* go wrong on the trial run, he could blame the computer and jettison the idea.

But nothing did go wrong. It was a "piece of cake."

In the sanctity of his small office he reviewed the plan again and again, painstakingly searching for every possible loophole or flaw. He had opened a joint checking account for the fictitious Zorns, giving as their address an apartment he had rented the previous day. The account was so marked that the customer would pick up the statement monthly at the bank. He had hired Western Union for that chore.

From his knowledge of programming he inserted a program calling for the machine to add a mere ten cents extra to each of the monthly bank charges on the 94,600 checking accounts. This sum in aggregate was then added to the monthly statement of the Zorns. Each month now for the past three months the Zorns were enriched by $9,460. Their statement alphabetically was the last one on the list.

At first the amount had stunned him. He had to plan carefully to siphon off from this total and keep it where no one could trace it to him. It was a problem worthy of his agile mind.

As the train passed the industrial South Side, he recalled the care he had taken to establish the Zorns as "real people." Deciding against any drastic change in appearance as artificial, he had simply added eye-

glasses and deepened his voice to create the fictitious depositor. The rented quarters, on the outskirts of Beverly, was a small ground-floor apartment where he had established himself as a traveling salesman whose wife happened to be visiting relatives in Montana the past few months.

"I am sure you will be very comfortable here, Mr. Zorn," said the apartment-house manager.

"It is convenient for me with the side door opening out on Culver Avenue. I often get in on a late train. This way I won't bother anyone," he said in a tone quite different from his normally high, fast-speaking voice.

With an actual identity and an actual address, it did not take him long to set up two savings accounts and a brokerage account downtown. He did as much as possible by mail and phone. The careful left-handed signature he had placed on an account card sufficed for Mrs. Zorn and her separate savings account on the near North Side. Mr. Zorn's signature was an elaborate, tilted backhand that Lane recalled from high school days.

With the expansive, confident air of a man with a steady monthly income in excess of $9,000, he walked into the bank.

There was a note on his desk: *See Mr. Stricker immediately.* He had a moment of misgiving but doused it in the certainty of his own cleverness and his absolute control of the situation. No one knew or could ever discover the secret between him and Old 4392.

He walked rather briskly into the mezzanine office of the vice-president.

"Ah, Lane, back from lunch? Good. You are ready, I am sure, for our 75th anniversary banquet tonight." Stricker's voice was urbane.

"Oh, yes, I will be on deck," he answered. He had nearly forgotten the annual dull dinner held each anniversary.

"Good, good. As you know, you will be called upon to introduce Miss Fuller and say a few words. That part is settled, but we have a problem. You are acquainted with our president, Mr. Donley?" Stricker inquired.

"Of course, a fine man."

"Last night he came up with a tremendous idea. Exceedingly valuable as a publicity item. The daily papers will undoubtedly send photographers as soon as I call them. But as I say, a problem has arisen."

"Anything I can do?" Lane asked.

He appeared eager. All was well with the world. He felt that he could handle any problem that Mr. Stricker might raise.

"In a nutshell, here is Mr. Donley's idea. It is our 75th anniversary and he wants to mark it with something beyond our usual staff dinner. He has arranged for two imposing piles of silver dollars, 75 in each pile, to be stacked in front of the two places of honor."

"Places of honor?" asked Lane blankly.

"Yes, to honor two of our bank customers. About a week ago one of my secretaries went over the list of checking accounts and pulled out the first and last names, alphabetically. Mr. Herbert Aabard is our Number One client. He has been located and will be on hand for you to introduce. The last name on our list is Zorn, a Mr. and Mrs. Edward Zorn, but we can't seem to locate them. Where is Mr. Zorn? That is our problem."

"Mr. and Mrs. Zo-Zorn, sir?"

Lane's voice broke. Suddenly the world had slipped out of orbit.

"Our security people went to the address given on the statement, but no one was at home." Mr. Stricker's face oozed in and out.

"Our investigator just called." The vice-president's voice became stern. "After several days of close inquiry we discovered where Mr. Zorn keeps his savings account. It was on his cancelled checks. The young teller from the Hamilton National Bank is coming in to describe him to us. I thought you might want to meet him. Perhaps we can figure out how and where to find the mysterious Mr. Zorn. The teller will be here in a few minutes. Why, Lane, you look pale."

Lane did indeed look pale. He looked nearly moribund.

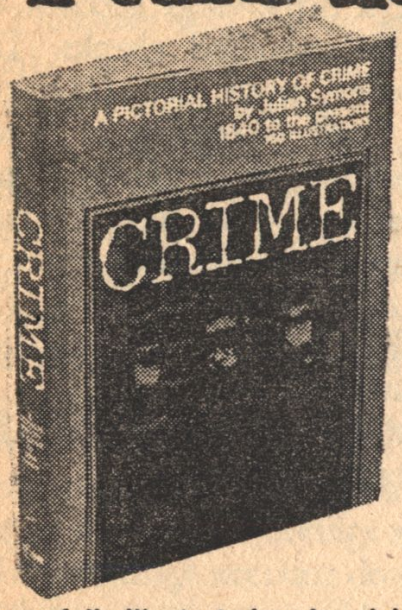
'Q'

NEXT MONTH . . .

a *BRAND-NEW* detective *SHORT NOVEL*—

STANLEY ELLIN'S *The Twelfth Statue*

A PICTORIAL HISTORY OF CRIME



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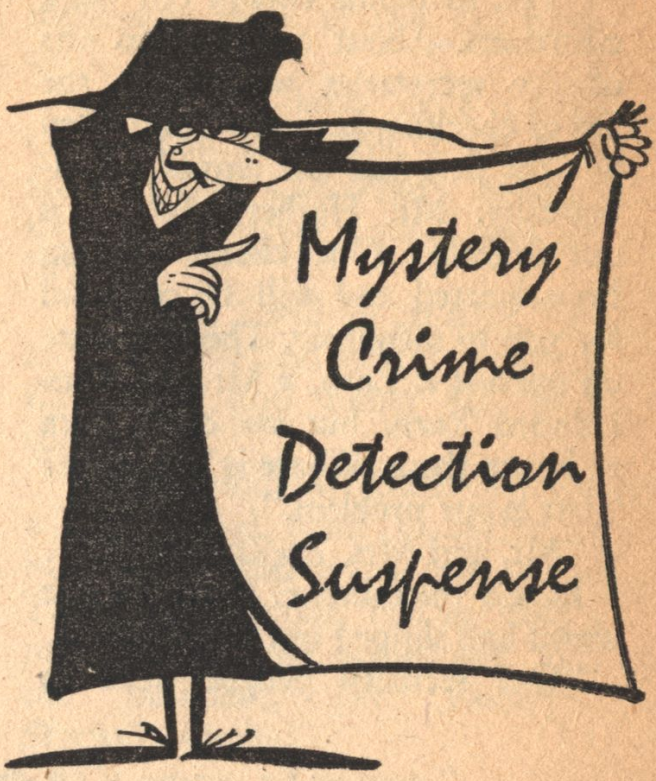

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BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

If (as is probable) you are brooding about Christmas presents for the young, let me call your attention to a noble new trend in juvenile books: anthologies of mystery stories originally written and published for adults and now revived to feed our youth stronger meat than it gets in the run of "juvenile mysteries." ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S SINISTER SPIES (Random, $3.95), SUSPENSE . . . A TREASURY FOR YOUNG ADULTS, edited by Seon Manley and Gogo Lewis (Funk & Wagnalls, $4.95), and MY FAVORITE MYSTERY STORIES, edited by Maureen Daly (Dodd, Mead, $3.50) are all admirable collections, beautifully calculated to turn that favorite niece or nephew into a lifelong devotee of crime fiction. And be sure to read them yourself before passing them on; along with standard anthology favorites, each book contains delightful surprises.

★★★★ **THE SPY IN THE OINTMENT, *by Donald E. Westlake*** (Random, $3.95)

Superb comic spy story, warmly humorous as well as all-out funny, on the problems of an ethical pacifist as a government agent.

★★★★ **DEATH *SHALL OVERCOME*, by Emma Lathen** (Macmillan, $3.95)

Best yet in the distinguished casebook of banker-detective John Putnam Thatcher, with a deftly satiric and acutely meaningful approach to the problems of Civil Rights.

★★★★ **MYSTERY AND MORE MYSTERY, *by Robert Arthur*** (Random, $2.95)

Published for teenagers (like the anthologies above), but urgently commended to adults as the long-overdue first collection by one of the most ingenious plot-and-gimmick minds in the business.

★★★ **BUTTON, BUTTON, *by Holly Roth*** (Harcourt, Brace & World, $4.50)

Adroit plotting and a nice offbeat humorous attitude toward her hero mark Miss Roth's last (God rest her) novel.

★★★ **I START COUNTING, *by Audrey Erskine Lindop*** (Doubleday, $4.95)

A strange one: a chilling story of mass strangulation blended with hilarious domestic comedy—and coming off astonishingly well.

★★★ **DUSTY DEATH, *by Osmington Mills*** (Roy, $3.25)
Well-sketched people, intelligent police, shrewd plotting and neat borderline fairness, from a badly underrated English writer.

Along with its other and possibly more eye-catching virtues (if that is quite the word), *Playboy* has, since its beginnings, featured unusually good fiction, particularly in the field of suspense. THE PLAYBOY BOOK OF CRIME AND SUSPENSE (Playboy, $5.95) rounds up 28 stories, 1955-64, almost all of them both unconventional and distinguished.

★★★ **ONE FALSE MOVE, *by Kelley Roos*** (Dodd, Mead, $3.50)
Jeff and Haila Troy return, as bright and gay as they were 20 years ago, in a cleverly clued puzzle about a Texas historical pageant.

★★★ **THE VENUS TRAP, *by James Michael Ullman*** (Simon & Schuster, $3.95)
At last Ullman uses in a novel the intricacy of financial shenanigans that has marked his EQMM stories, and with fascinating results.

★★★ **THE KUBLA KHAN CAPER, *by Richard S. Prather*** (Trident, $3.95)
Shell Scott at his cheerfully zany best, as he unravels murder in the midst of a beauty contest.

★★★ **THE MASTER OF BLACKTOWER, *by Barbara Michaels*** (Appleton, $4.95)
Agreeable first novel: conventional "gothic" material, markedly freshened by blithe tone and good storytelling.

★★★ **DEAD ERNEST, *by Alice Tilton*** (Norton, $3.95)
First revival (from 1944) of the wondrous farce-adventures of Leonidas Witherall, to delight all the devotees of Miss Tilton's other person, Phoebe Atwood Taylor—whose own latest revival, starring Asey Mayo, is GOING, GOING, GONE! (1943; Norton, $3.95).

★★★ **THE WINDOW OVER THE WAY, *by Georges Simenon*** (Penguin C2363, 75¢)
Moody novel of brooding terror in the early days of the USSR, dating from 1933, now newly and ably translated by Robert Baldick.

In this season heavy with anthologies, the one you must by no means overlook is ELLERY QUEEN's 1967 ANTHOLOGY (Davis, $1.25): 18 stories from the backfiles of EQMM, many new to book form and all absorbing—especially a Michael Arlen which suggests the need for a revival of this author of the 1920's, now as seriously neglected as he was once overrated.

Q. B. I.: QUEEN'S BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

. . . in which Ellery battles with an old adversary—Time

INHERITANCE DEPT.: *Last Man To Die*

by ELLERY QUEEN

FOR WELL OVER ONCE AROUND THE clock Ellery tried to breathe life into The Butler who was lying in the way of the new Queen novel's progress.

In the fourteenth futile hour Ellery detected the difficulty: it was so long since he had seen a real live butler that it was like trying to bring a brontosaurus to life.

The situation obviously called for research; and making a haggard mental note to start looking for a specimen—assuming the breed was not extinct—Ellery collapsed.

He had no sooner closed his eyes, it seemed, than the alarm clock brought him up with a leap, groping. Noting blearily that the time was 8:07 A.M. and the alarm was off, he concluded: It's the doorbell ringing. And he staggered to the apartment door to find himself blinking out at a girl, 38-23-36, with eyes of blue, and red hair, too. Oh, brother!

"Mr. Queen?" asked a voice like temple bells, eying the Queen dishevelment doubtfully. "Am I inconvenient?"

"Not even after only two hours and eleven minutes' sleep," said Mr. Queen, quickly showing her in. "With whom do I have the pleasure?"

"Edie Burroughs," said the belle with the bell voice, turning pink and pleased, "and I have a problem."

"Haven't we all? Mine concerns a butler."

"Well, isn't that weird!" she cried. "So does mine. In fact, two of them. Did you ever hear of The Butlers Club?"

"May we make haste slowly, Miss Burroughs?" begged Ellery, dragging over a chair. "*Two* butlers? The Butlers *Club?* Where? When? In short, what?"

The goddess graciously explained. Aphrodite-like, The Butlers Club had risen out of the golden foam of the '20s. Hoity-toitier than even the Union, Century, or Metropole Clubs, its membership had been restricted to the thirty noblest butlers of them all, who pooled their considerable resources and leased a haughty brownstone in the

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Sixties, just off Fifth Avenue, for their clubrooms.

By 1939 the depression and natural causes had lopped the membership to a butler's dozen. But the club treasury took on a hideous life of its own, for the survivors—privy to the financial secrets of their multimillionaire employers—invested in common stocks for $5 and less a share, and by 1963 the club owned the brownstone and $3,000,000 worth of blue-chip securities besides.

Today a mere two members, long since retired from butling, survived. Both were in their 80s—William Jarvis (who had, it appeared, a repulsive grandson named Benzell Jarvis), and Peter Burroughs, Edie's grandfather, both of whom lived at the club.

"Ben Jarvis and I lead lives of our own elsewhere and," Miss Burroughs added grimly, "apart, thank goodness. But under the bylaws the members must live at the club or forfeit their rights of survivorship."

"Rights of *survivorship?*" Mr. Q was sniffing like an enchanted hound dog. "Do you mean to say this association of majordomos created a tontine? That wonderful old stupidity in which everything goes to the last beneficiary left alive?"

"Yes, Mr. Queen."

"I'm amazed. Butlers are supposed to be the most conservative group on earth."

"You evidently don't know much about butlers," chimed Miss Burroughs. "They're all born gamblers. Anyway, by now those two old ninnies have only one thought—to outlive the other and so fall heir to the club treasury. It's all pretty silly, and it would be amusing if not for the fact . . ." She hesitated.

"If not for what fact?"

"Well, that's really why I'm here, Mr. Queen. Last evening I dropped by for my weekly visit to Grandfather . . ."

The Night Before, 7 P.M.: Edie found the pair of octogenarians in the oak-and-leather "silence room," engaged in making a great deal of what, in any but butlers, would have been unseemly noise.

"And you, Jarvis," Edie heard her grandfather shout in an undertone, "have a narsty mind!" Peter Burroughs was a long withered root of a man, all crooked with age, and he was vibrating as in a high wind.

"Really, Burroughs?" chortled William Jarvis. Jarvis was little and bald and livid, and the chortle sounded remarkably evil. "Can you deny trying to put me out of the way in order to be able to leave the club fortune to your granddaughter?"

"I can, Jarvis, and I do!"

"*Mr.* Jarvis, really," said Edie, shocked. "Nobody's trying to put you out of the way."

"No, indeed, you doddering scullion," said old Burroughs to old Jarvis in a refined shriek. "The boot

is quite on the other foot! It is *you* who are planning to kill *me* for the tontine, to pass it over to that playboy grandson of yours!"

And the two old men tottered toward each other's throats, claws at the ready.

At that moment, fortunately, Benzell Jarvis arrived on *his* weekly visit, which always seemed to coincide with Edie's, and stepped between the bristling gaffers. For once Edie was glad to see him (young Jarvis, who was an exemplary Dr. Jekyll in company, became an instant Mr. Hyde when he could catch Edie alone).

"Here, Edie," said Ben Jarvis, who was as little and bald as his grandfather, "you take your old fool, and I'll take my old fool, and we'll put 'em away—I wish there were locks on their bedroom doors—and then . . . you and me. . . ?"

". . . but I'm worried half to death, Mr. Queen," Edie concluded, not mentioning the judo chop she had had to resort to in escaping from young Mr. Jarvis. "Each thinks the other is out to murder him, and they might do each other real harm in imagined self-defense. It seems ridiculous to go to the police, and yet—what shall I do?"

"Don't they employ anyone to take care of them?"

"The houseman and the cook work afternoons only; they sleep out. Nobody's there at night if one of them should get a senile notion."

"Then what is required in this emergency," said Ellery with gravity, "is an unofficial show of authority. My father is a police inspector, Miss Burroughs, and this is just the kind of crime-prevention work he dotes on. Excuse me while I telephone him."

Later: For a man who doted on crime prevention, Inspector Queen seemed extraordinarily unenamored of this particular opportunity. The Inspector glared at his son as they waited with Edie Burroughs on the sidewalk in front of The Butlers Club for Ben Jarvis (the Inspector had insisted on phoning him to join them); he glowered at Jarvis as that young man, clearly suffering from hangover, crawled out of a cab; and as they all mounted the brownstone steps he muttered to Ellery, "What in the so-and-so is the goldang idea?"

But he pressed the bell. And again. And again, and again. "Are they deaf as well as mush-headed?" the Inspector growled.

"It's a very loud bell," said Edie Burroughs nervously. "Oh, do you suppose—?"

"Allow me," said Ellery, whipping out his trusty picklock gun. He unlocked the door and they stepped through a time machine into a living past of dark woods, altitudinous ceilings, vast stained-glass chandeliers, brassy firedogs,

and many many oil paintings of—incredibly—butlers.

And, oddly, a continuous trilling sound.

"That's Grandfather's alarm clock," Edie exclaimed, "in his bedroom. Why doesn't he turn it off?"

She bounded like Artemis toward the rear of the main floor, explaining on the fly that her grandfather could no longer climb stairs. And as she burst into the old butler's bedroom the girl wailed, and stopped, and turned away; and just as the Queens sprang to the big brass bed to stoop over Peter Burroughs, the old-fashioned single-alarm clock on the nightstand uttered a last peevish screek and went as dead as its owner.

Old Burroughs, fully dressed, was sprawled across the bed. There were several ugly scratches on his barklike cheeks, but no other signs of violence.

"From the condition of the body, he's been dead since last night," said Inspector Queen after a while. "Did he have those face scratches when you two left here?"

"No," said Ben Jarvis, absently embracing Edie. "Tough luck, sugar. My condolences."

"Thank you, Ben," said Edie, "but no hands? Please?"

"I think, Jarvis," said Ellery, eying Ben coldly, "we had better look in on your grandfather, too. Where is his bedroom? Upstairs? No, Miss Burroughs, you'd better wait for us down here."

So they found little old William Jarvis crumpled on his bedroom floor, fully clothed also; and *his* cheeks were badly scratched; and he was just as dead as his fellow-butler below.

"When," asked young Jarvis wildly, "did *he* die?"

And the Inspector rose and said, "Last night, too."

"At 7:46," Ellery nodded, pointing to the bedside electric clock. In falling, the old man's body had jerked the cord out of the wall socket, stopping the clock. "What time did you and Miss Burroughs leave here last night, Jarvis?"

"Not quite 7:30."

They found Edie in the big clubroom downstairs, weeping quietly. She looked up and said, "Dear God, what happened?"

"I'd say they waited until you two left," Inspector Queen said, "and then headed for each other again. The only damage they were able to do was scratch each other's faces, but the exertion and excitement must have been too much for both of them. They managed to get back to their bedrooms, collapsed, and died. I'm betting the post-mortems show simple heart failure in both cases."

"There, there," Ellery was crooning to the flooded blue eyes. "They were very old, Edie."

"Thus endeth The Butlers Club, and high time, too," said Benzell Jarvis. "All I want to know is,

which one died first? Or rather, second?"

"No autopsy can determine the exact moment of death," the Inspector said, regarding him as if he were a strange bug, "although I'm positive they died around the same time. You know, Ellery, it makes an interesting problem at that."

"What, dad?" said Ellery. "Oh! Yes. It does, indeed."

"You're damned right it does!" snarled Jarvis. "If old Burroughs died first, my grandfather inherited the tontine and I get the jackpot. If it was the other way around, Edie gets it. There's got to be some way of telling which survived the other, even if it was only for ten seconds!"

"Oh, said Ellery, "there is, Jarvis, there is."

CHALLENGE TO THE READER
In what order did the two ex-butlers die, and how did Ellery know?

As Ellery explained it: "We know what time William Jarvis fell dead last night. The electric clock he stopped in falling says it was 7:46.

"The question, then, is how to determine what time Peter Burroughs died. His alarm clock provides the answer.

"If you want an alarm clock to ring at, say, 8 o'clock in the morning, you must set the alarm *after* 8 o'clock the night before. Because if you set the alarm before 8, it will obviously ring at 8 the same night, not at 8 the next morning.

"It was a few minutes past 8 A.M. when Edie Burroughs came to me for help this morning. I had to call you, dad; you called Ben Jarvis; we all had to meet on 60th Street—it was therefore long past 8 A.M. when we entered The Butlers Club. And what did we hear when we entered? The ringing of Peter Burroughs' alarm clock, which ran down just as we got into his bedroom.

"Therefore Peter Burroughs must have set his alarm long past 8 o'clock last night. To have been able to do that, he had to have been alive long past 8 P.M.

"But your grandfather, Jarvis, died at 7:46 P.M.

"Miss Burroughs, may I shake the hand of the loveliest multimillionaire of my acquaintance?"

the *NEWEST* spy-and-counterspy story by

MICHAEL GILBERT

All the threads came together in Bonn, Germany, on Christmas Eve, and they wove a fascinating pattern of international intrigue. The stakes were incredibly high—indeed, it could be the most important Intelligence breakthrough since World War II . . .

So once again the game's afoot. Once again follow agents Calder and Behrens in one of their most intricate secret operations—a tangled web of mishaps and miscalculations, a complex network of strokes and counterstrokes, of ploys that failed and coups that succeeded . . .

A GATHERING OF THE EAGLES

by MICHAEL GILBERT

SQUADRON LEADER LEOPOLD, LATE of the R.A.F., but now attached to the Foreign Office, took the early morning flight from London Airport to Frankfurt on December 24th. This Christmas Eve flight had been totally booked for several weeks, and Leopold had to use his priority rating to get a passage. Technically, this meant that he occupied the spare seat, kept for such emergencies and usually the perquisite of the off-duty air hostess. Actually, he spent most of his time on the flight deck talking to the pilot, an old friend of his.

Leopold was carrying his operational passport, which was made out in the name of James Bellingham, and described him as an insurance broker. His complete luggage was a canvas flight bag into which he had thrust a few overnight necessities when he received the emergency call at eleven o'clock the night before.

At Frankfurt he transferred himself and his bag into the small two-seater craft which was waiting for him, and which landed him, in a heavy shower of sleet, at an old army airfield, seven miles outside Bonn, at eleven thirty. Here he was met by Captain Massey, the Military Attaché at the Embassy. Massey hurried Squadron Leader Leopold straight out to the car, which he was driving himself, and started off with him down the little-used secondary road which joins the airfield to the city of Bonn.

These facts were all established,

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beyond reasonable doubt and on the evidence of reliable witnesses, in the inquiry which followed. What was less certain is exactly what happened next.

The car was spotted by a farm worker, at mid-day, upside down in a drainage culvert. There were long greasy skidmarks on the surface of the road and a gap had been torn in the fence guarding the vertical drop over the culvert. Mr. Fortescue, a naturally suspicious man, was inclined, in the end, to accept the simple verdict that the car had attempted to turn a corner too fast on a bad surface, had been unable to straighten out, had hit the fence and gone through it, overturning in the process. The drop of fifteen feet had been quite sufficient to account for the fact that the necks of both men were broken.

The Sergeant of Police, on the scene within ten minutes, was an intelligent man. He spotted the diplomatic badge on the car and telephoned the Embassy.

The First Secretary himself took the call. Martin Seccombe was a diplomat of the old school. He was not fond of the Military Attaché, nor had he approved of the undercover activities which seemed to be part of his job. Nevertheless, he had categorical instructions which came from too high up to be flouted, and he knew precisely what steps had to be taken.

He therefore personally encoded and dispatched a message which was received in London at one o'clock, and which was passed immediately to D.I.6, with a copy to Mr. Fortescue.

At mid-day on that same day Josef Bartz, a clerk in the Dispatch Section of the Bonn office of the Great Polish Electrical Combine—which was known through Eastern Europe simply as "P.D." and was a world pioneer of electronic computers—closed his ledgers and locked them in his desk. The firm stopped work at mid-day on Christmas Eve, and it was customary, at this point, for the annual bonus to be handed out, with a personal good-will message to all his employees from the head of the firm in Warsaw. It was gestures of this sort which inspired P.D. to describe themselves as "a happy family."

On this occasion the bonus was a large one, and the happy family atmosphere was particularly marked. Executives who had bought Christmas presents for their secretaries took this opportunity of presenting them personally; people called on friends in other Departments; a sprig of mistletoe appeared over the door of the ladies' lavatory; and the whole interior of the P.D. building, which normally presented an appearance of smooth and decorous efficiency, bubbled over for the space of a single hour with life and high spirits.

Josef seemed to have a great many friends. He visited almost every Department in the building.

One of these was in the basement and the notice on the door said, *Head of Messengers.* A riotous party was going on here, and Josef was invite to join it. He was only in the room for five minutes, but during this time he managed to reach out with his foot and kick over, unnoticed in the gaiety and bustle, a switch under the Head Messenger's desk.

When he left, Josef took an elevator straight up to the managerial floor and made for the office of the Communications Manager. He knocked on the door and when he received no answer, looked into the room and found it empty. This can hardly have been a surprise to him, since he had watched the Communications Manager, a quarter of an hour before, going into the Board Room.

Josef walked across quickly to the desk under the big turret window. It was a massive affair of steel, bolted to the floor, with a nest of small drawers on each side of the kneehole. Josef said quietly to himself, like a child memorizing a lesson, "Fourth drawer from the top on the right-hand side."

The drawer was, as he had been told it would be, locked.

He felt in his jacket pocket and pulled out a curious set of keys. Some had triangular shafts, some had a series of small wards no larger than pin heads, some had hollow shafts with no visible wards at all.

Josef was sweating now. A prickle of perspiration stood out on his forehead and the palms of his hands were wet. In his haste he dropped the ring of keys and scrabbled for them on the carpet. It seemed to his strained senses to be an eternity before he knew that he had found the right one. It went easily into the tiny aparture and engaged the matrix of the lock with a reassuring click. Josef turned the key, and the drawer slid open.

This was the crucial moment.

If anyone had discovered that the switch in the Messengers Room was off and had switched it on again, an alarm would sound, emergency doors would close the staircases, the power in the elevators would be disconnected, and the street doors would be locked. Everyone would be not only a prisoner in the building, but immobilized on the floor on which they happened to be when the alarm went off.

Josef ran to the door, opened it, and listened. Life seemed to be continuing normally. He could hear the hum of the elevators going up and down, and shouts of laughter from a room on the floor below. No alarm.

He ran back to the drawer, extracted from it a flat gray metal box, about the size of a book but much heavier. This box went into his brief case, which was already bulging with papers. He slammed the drawer shut, wiped the front of it with his handkerchief, and also remembered to wipe the front edge of the

desk, where his left hand had rested.

A moment later he was out of the room and descending the staircase to the floor below. He was calmer now. The worst was over.

Controlling his impatience, he joined a party in the Dispatch Department, and spent five minutes with them. Then he made his excuses, strolled to the cloakroom to pick up hat, coat, and overshoes from his locker, wished the giant doorman a "Happy Christmas," and walked out into the street.

It was a quarter to one, and the sleet which had been falling earlier in the day had turned to snow.

At five minutes past one, Mr. Fortescue in London was talking on a private line to Mr. Calder's cottage in Kent. He said, "Get your car and drive straight to London Airport. You'll be away for two or three days. I'll meet you in the departure lounge."

At ten past one Mr. Calder's car was rolling out of its garage.

"Fortunately," said Mr. Fortescue, "there's an extra mid-afternoon flight for Dusseldorf. I've booked you onto it. It's about the only fortunate feature of the whole business. Behrens should be down here by this evening. I had to get him back from Leamington. I'll put him on the evening plane to Cologne."

The loudspeakers were announcing the departure of the Dusseldorf flight, but Mr. Fortescue ignored them. There were things he had to tell Mr. Calder, even if the telling of them held up the flight.

When he had finished, Mr. Calder said, "Do you think that the car crash *was* an accident?"

"I've no grounds yet for supposing anything else," said Mr. Fortescue. "We sent Leopold by a roundabout route via Frankfurt and private charter. I don't see how the opposition could possibly have anticipated this, or how they could have made effective arrangements in time."

"I think you're right," said Mr. Calder. "Unfortunate that it should have happened when it did."

"You have a gift for understatement," said Mr. Fortescue. "I've arranged for Corrie to meet you. He'll give you the local picture. It isn't an entirely happy one, I'm afraid."

The loudspeaker made a third plaintive announcement of the departure of the Dusseldorf flight and Mr. Calder walked out onto the runway, a thick nondescript figure in a belted mackintosh, carrying a worn airplane flight satchel strapped to one shoulder and the lives of a number of people in his hands.

Josef Bartz reached the Embassy at ten past one. It would have been quicker if he had taken some form of transportation, but despite the weight of the brief case he was carrying he preferred to walk. He suffered his first shock when he found that the public offices of the

Embassy, the entrance to which was conveniently tucked away in a side street, were locked.

After a moment of indecision he walked round to the main door of the Embassy. This was open, but guarded by a commissionaire who looked doubtfully at Josef.

"I have to see Captain Massey," said Josef. He spoke fair English.

The commissionaire said reluctantly, "In here, sir," and showed Josef into a waiting room furnished with four hard chairs, a table, and a portrait of the Queen. Josef put the brief case down along the front of the chair and sat with his legs over it. Twenty minutes passed. Outside, the snow fell softly.

The commissionaire returned, bringing with him a young man with a long, sad, horselike face who introduced himself as Mr. Ware. Mr. Ware was, it appeared, a Third Secretary. He had come to Bonn almost directly from Oxford and his recruitment to the Foreign Service was one of those things which sometimes happens, even in the best organizations.

Mr. Ware explained to Josef that Captain Massey had had an accident. Well, yes, quite a serious accident. His deputy was, unfortunately, in Greece. If Herr Bartz would come back, after the holiday was over, a temporary replacement for Captain Massey would, no doubt, have been found, and he could deal with whatever business it was that Herr Bartz might wish to discuss.

Josef, his face suddenly pinched and white, said, "Impossible. I *must* see someone. It is of the highest importance. It cannot conceivably wait."

When he had said this three times, Mr. Ware sighed, rose to his feet, and said that he would have a word with the First Secretary. As he went out he said to the commissionaire, "There's a loony in the waiting room. Better keep a careful eye on him, Forbes."

Martin Seccombe, disturbed at his lunch, listened briefly to what his junior had to report, and said, "Sounds like one of Massey's shady friends. He can wait till Monday," and returned to a consideration of the ginger pudding which was one of the specialties of the Embassy chef.

Five minutes later Josef was out in the snow, still clutching his brief case.

John Corrie met Mr. Calder at Dusseldorf, and during the forty-mile drive Mr. Calder was happy to let Corrie do the talking. He knew of him as an agent of the modern school, better at languages than at judo, more adept with a cipher machine and a computer than with a gun or a knife; but a thoroughly reliable operator.

Corrie said, "It's not an easy set-up here at the moment. I'm all right, personally. The office looks after me and backs me up. It's people like Massey I'm sorry for. The Embas-

sy's got one of its holier-than-thou fits on. It's not the Ambassador's fault. He has his hands full doing his diplomatic work. I think the root of the trouble is the First Secretary, and some of the junior officials. Their policy is entirely negative. *Don't stir up trouble, don't give any cause for provocation. Suppose there is a microphone in the Ambassador's drawing room, what does it matter?* We're so bloody discreet that anything we say can safely be relayed to Moscow or Peking.

"It would be all right if the other side would play the same game, but the East German Government has a very strong and active organization right here in Bonn. It's not just an information-gathering outfit. It's equipped for strongarm stuff as well. If ever there was a showdown, one of their first objectives would be to paralyze the government machinery in Bonn. The authorities here know it. They're not happy about it, and they'd like to take a strong line, but they don't know where to start. I've been getting a lot of cooperation from them lately. Lammerman, who's head of the Security Police here, has been particularly helpful. He put me onto Josef Bartz, and we worked this ploy together. Damn this snow. If it gets any thicker, the roads will be blocked before morning."

"Tell me about the ploy," said Mr. Calder.

"We've had our eyes on the P.D. outfit for some time. Headquarters in Warsaw, a very elaborate communications set-up with senior operatives all from the Eastern Zone. But we could never crack it. Its security was too good for us. Then Lammerman managed to get at Bartz, who was actually in the Dispatch Section. He handled him in the usual way—paid him money for general information and copies of messages which were of no use to us because we couldn't decode them.

"Then he put the pressure on—offered him a very large sum for the coding machine itself. Bartz said that if we could supply him with the right keys, he could lift the machine during the jollifications which go on before closing time on Christmas Eve. But he insisted that we give him political sanctuary in England. Reasonable enough, really—he'd be a dead duck in Bonn.

"That's where Massey came in. He got the keys—it meant squaring the people who'd made the desk, but he did it—and when everything was set, he arranged for Leopold to come over to escort Bartz back to England. He had a private plan laid out for this evening, but now it won't be able to get off the ground."

"Where's Bartz now?" said Mr. Calder.

"Right now," said Corrie, "he's safe and sound in our Embassy, waiting for *you* to chaperone him on his journey to England."

Josef came cautiously round the corner of the road in which he lived.

A man was standing in the doorway opposite his apartment house; and there were two more in a parked car twenty yards along the street.

Josef turned in his tracks and stole back the way he had come. But that way was blocked too. The Director must have checked on the coding machine before leaving. He could imagine the flurry of orders. Any member of the Dispatch Department would be automatically suspect—particularly, those who had left the building early. If they had searched his desk, they would have found that the office carbons of all the messages he had sent in the past twelve months were gone too. That would have clinched the matter.

The brief case weighed a ton. It was dragging his arm out of its socket. His first impulse was to throw it into someone's front garden. His second was that something might yet be salvaged from the mess.

There were two things he had to do: he had to deposit the brief case in safety and he had to find somewhere to spend the night.

The first, he thought, might be managed; there were private luggage lockers at all the rail and bus terminals. The second might not be so easy.

Mr. Calder said to Martin Seccombe, "You did *what?*"

"We had no instructions about him. The best we could do was to ask him to come back after the holiday when someone, presumably, would have put us in the picture about him."

"And that was the best you could do, was it?" said Mr. Calder. "What was the worst? Shoot him out of hand?"

The First Secretary flushed. He did not like Mr. Calder. He disliked his appearance—and his tone of voice. Above all, he disliked his lack of respect for the acting Head of Her Brittanic Majesty's Embassy.

Before he could say anything, Mr. Calder added, "I suppose you realize that Bartz was bringing us not only the coding machine, but copies of all messages which had gone to Warsaw in the last year. When we'd decoded them we should have been able to identify the whole East German machine, and the police would have cleaned it up, so that it would have stayed that way for a considerable time at least."

Martin Seccombe had got his breath back.

He said, in what he hoped was an icily diplomatic voice, "I have no connection with Intelligence matters and no desire to know any details of them."

"Odd," said Mr. Calder. "Most people like to know *why* they've been sacked."

Martin Seccombe stared at him.

"When I report personally to the Head of the Foreign Office, as I shall when I get back, that you and this young man—" he swiveled

round for a moment to look at Ware, who shifted uncomfortably under that baleful glare, "have, by your pompous stupidity, jeopardized one of the finest Intelligence breakthroughs since the war—and probably cost the defector his life—you'll both be out of jobs." He paused at the door and added, "Or maybe he'll move you to Saigon."

"What now?" said Corrie, as they climbed back into the car.

"We'll call on Lammerman," said Mr. Calder, "and see if he's got any ideas."

Colonel Lammerman, who was tall and thin and effected an eyeglass, said, "We originally got onto Josef Bartz through Mulbach. You know him, I expect."

"I've heard of him, of course," said Mr. Calder. "I've never had the pleasure of meeting him."

Franz Mulbach had been one of the heroes of the German anti-Hitler movement, had saved his own life by luck and good judgment after the July plot, and was now Deputy Speaker in the Bundeshaus. His name was respected in English Intelligence circles.

"If he has gone to anyone for help, he will have gone to Franz," said the Colonel.

"Is there any reason why he shouldn't simply have booked in at a hotel?—under another name, of course."

"On any other night in the year, perhaps. Not on Christmas Eve. The hotels will all be full. Families come in from the country to finish their shopping and look at the lights. The restaurants and beer cellars stay open until all hours. He might get a room in one of the not very reputable hotels in the Red Light district north of the river, but that would have its own perils."

"If he doesn't go to a hotel, what do you suppose he will do?"

"Walk the streets. Keep out of sight. And if he does that," said Colonel Lammerman, "he will be lucky to stay alive. Our Eastern friends are very strong among the taxi drivers, and news vendors. They buy their allegiance, of course."

He turned to his second-in-command, a stocky Prussian of half his height and twice his girth, and said, "You will alert all forces—Civil Police, Military Police, and our own Special Patrols—to the possibilities of the situation. Our Patrols should be doubled and the necessary extra arms issued."

"I've got a feeling," said Corrie, "that this might be a lively night. I see that it's stopped snowing."

At six o'clock Ernst Dorfinger, who specialized in daylight hotel robbery, stepped cautiously out of one of the little streets leading to the main line station, and started to cross the Square diagonally toward the station entrance. He had had an excellent afternoon and the bulging brief case grasped in his right hand contained an assortment of transis-

tors, cameras, and personal jewelry.

When he was three-quarters of the way across the Square, a parked car flicked its spotlight full onto him. Ernst hesitated, turned, and ran. The car started up. It caught him before he could reach the shelter of the back streets. Three men jumped out. One hit Ernst in the stomach. As he doubled up, the others caught him and hauled him into the car. The brief case was thrown in on top of him, the car reversed and it roared back across the Square.

So quickly was it done that the policeman standing on the far pavement could hardly believe it had happened. As the car came toward him he jumped into the roadway and drew his revolver.

The car struck the policeman squarely with its left-front fender, skidded on the frozen snow, recovered, and raced off down the Kaiser Allee toward the river.

Franz Mulbach lived in an old house on the Furstenberg Allee. He received Corrie and Mr. Calder in his first-floor living room, overlooking the river. Mr. Calder noticed that although the house was old, the fittings were not. The original fireplace, which must have been big enough for the traditional yule log, had been filled in and a monstrous imitation electric log fire twinkled in front of it. There was concealed lighting in the old plaster cornices, and a large television set filled one corner of the room.

Franz Mulbach himself was a large man—huge shoulders, topping a barrel chest which rested shamelessly on a Falstaff of a stomach. Dressed in traditional white shirt, lederhosen, and shoulder harness, he looked like an enormously inflated schoolboy.

He welcomed Corrie as a friend, pressed glasses of Schnapps into their hands, and said to Mr. Calder, "I know an old friend of yours—Mr. Behrens. We were together at one time during the war. A remarkable man."

"He should be here before midnight, unless all flights are grounded."

"So? A gathering of the eagles. Is there trouble expected?"

"We are in trouble," said Mr. Calder, and told him about it.

When he had finished there was a short silence. Then Mulbach said, "Poor Josef. I have known him for nearly fifty years. We were at school together."

It seemed such an inadequate comment that Mr. Calder looked up in surprise. There was a hint of embarrassment in Mulbach's voice. But there was more than that. There was a note of reserve, and something else, almost the last thing he had expected to find in this stout phlegmatic man: the sidetones of fear.

He sensed that a direct question at this point might lead to a rebuff. Instead, he said, "Who are these people hunting Bartz?"

"Scum," said Mulbach. "Profes-

sional criminals. Out of work bullies. In the days of Hitler they wore brown shirts and drew their pay for doing his dirty work. The State no longer pays for services of this nature. Therefore, they are at the disposal of the Eastern Machine, who will pay them to hunt down anti-communists."

"Mercenaries?"

"The trade of the mercenary was an honorable one," said Mulbach. "They insult it. They'd sell one employer to another for a few extra pfennings. They mix private vendettas with business. They—they make me sick."

"But they frighten you, too," thought Mr. Calder.

There was nothing more to be gained. As they rose to go, Mulbach said, in the manner of someone picking his words very carefully, "*If* Josef had come to me for advice, I think I should have told him that his best chance of safety was in the Red Light district. The women there are rapacious, but they are an independent breed, and not dishonorable."

As they drove back to Police Headquarters, Mr. Calder said to Corrie, "I think Josef did come to our friend for asylum. And I think he turned him away. Rather surprising for someone with his record."

"Mulbach is getting old," said Corrie. "Too old to tangle with hooligans. He doesn't want a bomb in his car the next time he drives to the Bundeshaus."

A telephone rang in the penthouse flat of one of the leading dental surgeons in Bonn and a voice said, "I am afraid that the subject will not now return to his flat. It has been watched continuously since two o'clock this afternoon."

"Keep one man there. Just in case."

"Very well. You heard, perhaps, that we had a little trouble earlier in the evening?"

"I heard about it."

"It was unfortunate. We got hold of the wrong man."

"He is none the worse for it, I hope."

"Not a bit. I'm afraid we hurt the policeman, though. He should not have got in the way. I think it will mean trouble."

"If they want trouble," said the dentist, "we can give them trouble. Call out all our reserves. Their first job will be to comb through the brothel area. Is that understood?"

"Bed by bed," said the voice at the other end of the telephone.

Since the war a new Bonn has arisen from the ashes of the old. It lies to the south of the river and contains the Parliament House, the government buildings, and the respectable homes of the functionaries who work in them. But north of the river the remains of the old town still cluster round the Electoral Palace and the shell of the Minster. This is a place of small cobbled

streets, ending in flights of steps, dark courts and blind alleys.

The least respectable part of this disreputable quarter lies between the Stefanienstrasse and the Lichtentalerstrasse. The Hotel Wagram stands exactly halfway along the road joining these thoroughfares.

Red Maria was so called on account of her hair, not her politics. She dispensed her favors from a room on the first floor at the back of this hotel, and was a woman of undoubted attractions, but uncertain temper. When she heard the knocking she climbed out of bed, padded across the floor in bare feet, opened the door six inches, and said, "Go to hell, stinking little monkey. I am busy."

It was the proprietor of the hotel who had knocked. He said apologetically, "There are men downstairs, Maria. They insist on coming up."

"Am I an octopus? Can I attend to more than one man at once?" said Maria. She slammed the door and bolted it.

Five minutes later came a renewed knocking, this time heavier and more urgent. Maria ignored it. A body crashed into the door. This was too much. Maria got up, seized a bottle from the top of the chest of drawers, and unbolted the door. As she did so, the man outside charged again. This time the door gave way and he came in with it. Maria hit him with her bottle.

There was a scream from upstairs of "Police!"—followed by a crash of broken china and a series of bumps, as though a heavy body were being thrown down the stairs.

The man on the bedroom floor groaned and got up onto his knees. Maria, her flaming hair a red aureole around her bare shoulders, raised her bottle again. The man fumbled in his pocket, jerked out a gun, and pulled the trigger.

The shot missed Maria and hit a looking glass over the mantelpiece. Maria threw her bottle at the man and ran out onto the landing.

Outside, in the street, the shot had been heard. Two men jumped from a waiting car and ran into the hotel. At that moment a police car turned the corner of the Stefanienstrasse and came rocketing down the street, its spotlight playing on the front of the hotel. Three of the Feldengendarmerie tumbled out. A fusillade of bullets from the first story stopped them in their tracks. One man was hit, and rolled back behind the car. The other two dove for shelter.

This was the beginning of the Battle of the Hotel Wagram, which ultimately involved five carloads of the irregular forces and more than forty policemen.

Mr. Calder, back at Police Headquarters, listened to the reports coming in. Colonel Lammerman, who was directing the police side of the battle by telephone from his desk, seemed unperturbed at the damage and casualties.

"Tonight," he said, "they show their hand. Good. They are forced out into the open. Better still." He spoke to the Commandant of Military Police, and ordered another installment of reinforcements to rush to the scene of the battle.

At one o'clock, when the shooting had died down and the casualties were being counted and the first batch of prisoners were being rounded up, the door opened, and Mr. Behrens walked in. Considering that he had been lifted from the ninth tee on the Leamington Spa Golf Course by a military helicopter, transported to London Airport, put on the night flight to Cologne, and driven by fast car to Bonn, he looked remarkably cheerful and unruffled.

Mr. Calder greeted him with relief. Mr. Behrens' knowledge of Germany and things German was a great deal more extensive than his own.

You seem to be having quite a party," said Mr. Behrens.

"More like Walpurgis Night than Christmas Eve," agreed Mr. Calder. He sketched an outline of the proceedings so far.

At the end of it Mr. Behrens said, "Do I understand that when you visited Franz Mulbach you got the impression that Bartz had asked him for asylum, and been refused?"

"He didn't actually say so, but that was the clear implication."

"And you thought that he had turned him away because he was afraid of retaliation?"

"That's the general idea," said Mr. Calder, looking curiously at his old friend. "Could I have been wrong?"

"I've heard a lot of odd stories tonight, but that tops the lot. Franz Mulbach afraid! He hasn't a nerve in his big fat body. He's been a fighter all his life. Do you remember what Schiller made old Wallenstein say?—*'Ein ruheloser Marsch war unser Leben.'*—'our life was a restless march.' People like that don't change, you know."

"If he wasn't afraid, he was putting on a good act."

"Maybe," said Mr. Behrens. "And I wonder why. Do you think we could venture out into the streets without getting shot?"

"The police could lend us a car."

"I'd rather walk," said Mr. Behrens. "I've spent the last twelve hours being driven by other people. I'd like to stretch my legs."

The snow underfoot had frozen and it squeaked as they walked on it. They avoided the main roads and went by quiet residential streets. There were still lights in a few of the windows, and the sound of singing and music as families sat together to welcome once again the dawn of the Christ child's birthday. In the half mile between the Police Station and Franz Mulbach's house they met not a single soul.

There were lights in the Mulbach house, too, and it was Franz him-

self who opened the door. He had changed out of his lederhosen, and looked a great deal more business-like in a turtle neck sweater and short leather coat. He had one hand under the flap of the coat, and Mr. Calder noticed that he only half opened the heavy front door, in such a manner that it shielded him but left him a free field of fire.

He peered at them for a moment, then swung the door wide open, jumped out, and started to pump-handle Mr. Behrens' right arm.

"All right, Franz, all right," said Mr. Behrens. "I'm glad to see you, but you don't need to break my arm."

"What a Christmas present!" said Mulbach. "My old friend! What a wonderful surprise!"

"It surprised me, too," said Mr. Behrens.

"Come in, come in." He led the way to the first-floor living room and switched on the lights. Mr. Calder saw that the windows were now shuttered. "The occasion calls for the best brandy."

While their host was pouring out the drinks, Mr. Behrens peered curiously around the room, as if weighing its possibilities. Then he accepted the bulbous glass from Franz Mulbach, sniffed the contents with appreciation, and said, "Where have you put Josef Bartz?"

Mulbach did not even blink. He sniffed at his brandy and said, "This came from Strohe at Klagenfurt. Poor Josef. Yes, he was very upset."

"I can understand that."

"I wonder if you can? He was frightened for his own skin. That was natural. He was also bewildered. When the emissaries of a country that has a reputation for keeping its word say to a man, 'Steal this for us, then come straight to our Embassy and we will guarantee your safety.' When they say this and then turn him away from the doors of the Embassy—"

"It was partly our fault, said Mr. Calder. "And partly our misfortune. If Captain Massey had not been killed—."

"Killed? I heard nothing of that."

"An accident, we think."

Mr. Calder told him, and when he had finished, Mulbach swiveled round to look directly at Mr. Behrens. "When I heard Josef's story I concluded that there had been a change of plan—that it now suited your purpose, for some deep reason, that he should be caught."

"It's one of the occupational hazards of Intelligence work," said Mr. Behrens, "that when you do something simple and straightforward everyone suspects a double motive and a triple bluff. It happened just as Calder said."

"So. But there is one thing I do not yet see. Why should you suppose that I would have Josef here?"

"Ein ruheloser Marsch—" said Mr. Behrens.

"You remember that," said Mulbach, delighted. "Schiller is a great poet, yes?" He repeated the words

under his breath, savoring them. Then he said, "I will give you back another quotation. From Goethe, this time. You know what he said was the greatest ordeal? *'Sich zu beschranken and zu isolieren*—'to be small and alone.' Allow me to present you—"

As he spoke he must have pressed some sort of spring, for the side wall of the old fireplace pivoted back on itself, revealing a narrow opening —just large enough to accommodate a man. Out of it stepped a still apprehensive Josef Bartz.

At six o'clock that morning Colonel Lammerman said to Mr. Calder, "A highly satisfactory night's work. I do not think that the Sturm-gruppen of our Eastern friends will function properly again for many months. We have lost one man—the first, the one who was run down by the car. He died an hour ago. And we have six wounded, two quite severely. They have three dead, sixteen wounded, and we have thirty-three prisoners in our hands."

"Will this enable you to break them for good?" said Mr. Calder.

"That would be too much to hope. The central organization—the men at the very top—are still out of our reach. I doubt if any of the hired bullies who took part in tonight's maneuvers even know the names of the top men."

Mr. Behrens scribbled something on a piece of paper and passed it to the Colonel.

"Does this name mean anything to you?" he said.

The Colonel looked at what was written, then said sharply, "Where did you get that information?"

"From a very old friend," said Mr. Behrens. "I don't think he'd like to be quoted."

"I imagine not," said the Colonel. He tore the paper into small pieces, then dropped them into the fire. "You will appreciate that in his legitimate business this man has many powerful friends and allies. If I, myself, suggested anything against him, and could not prove it to the hilt, I should be in more danger than he."

Mr. Behrens walked over to the window. The first gray light of morning was beginning to steal back into the sky.

He said, "I imagine it should be quite possible for a light plane to take off from the Airport."

"I would think so," said the Colonel. "Why?"

"A thought has occurred to me. There will be no regular service. But suppose we asked the Air Line —suppose, in fact, we appealed personally to the Chairman, as a favor to the State—to arrange for a transport craft to be available—to fly, shall we say, a *valuable cargo* back to London?"

The Colonel stared at Mr. Behrens for a long moment in complete silence. Then, for the first time that night, a smile creased his face, broke, and dissolved into a harsh

bellow of laughter. He rose to his feet and stamped across the floor. *"Wunderbar!"* he said. *"Kolossal!"* Then he stopped laughing, swung round, and said, "But dangerous."

"Oh, I don't know about that," said Behrens. "There's some risk, certainly. They mightn't rise to the bait at all. But give them plenty of time. We don't want the plane before nine o'clock."

It was an Army Transport Command medium-sized personnel carrier, with removable seats, one of a number which had been sold to the Air Line in the late fifties when it was replaced in service by the D.C. all-purpose model. The Air Line used them for transporting staff.

Mr. Calder, as he climbed on board at ten o'clock that morning, noticed that four seats had been installed on each side of the gangway. He surmised that they were to have an escort.

Josef Bartz climbed in behind Mr. Calder. Bartz had had an uneasy two hours of sleep in a cell at the Police Station and the white glare off the snow accentuated the grayness of his face. Behind him came Mr. Behrens, carrying Josef's brief case.

Christmas, and the snow, had combined to empty the airstrip and its approaches. Mr. Calder was glad to see this. They were going to need plenty of room to maneuver.

Two Volkswagens suddenly appeared from the crew quarters. They carried, between them, six passengers. Two were clearly the pilot and co-pilot. The other four were less easy to place. Their overalls suggested airline mechanics; their build, professional wrestlers; their faces, policemen.

"They're doing us proud," said Mr. Behrens. "I think I recognize that pilot. Isn't it Merker?"

"The Luftwaffe ace?"

"I think so. His co-pilot looks like an ex-Luftwaffe man too."

"Agreed," said Mr. Calder. "You can't mistake them. Any more than you can mistake an English naval officer in mufti."

The cabin crew were climbing on board. Smiles and greetings were exchanged. The largest of the four large men introduced himself as Major Osler.

"We have had special instructions," he said, "to see personally to the safety of you—and your cargo."

He glanced round at Josef who had sunk back into his seat, and was staring glumly out at the snow-covered expanse of the airfield.

"I'm only sorry," said Mr. Calder, "that you should have been forced to work on Christmas Day."

"In an affair of national importance," said Major Osler, showing his strong teeth in a smile, "the loss of a Christmas holiday is of minor importance."

The Major closed the door and fastened the safety catches. The pilot had switched on now. They could hear the four motors starting their

warm-up. Josef was fiddling with his seat belt.

"No need to fasten yourself in yet," said Major Osler. He explained. "We have to taxi out to the far runway. We shall be ten minutes or more—"

He stopped, as the pilot called out, revved up his engines, and then, unexpectedly, switched them off.

The nose of an armored car had appeared from behind the Administration Building. It came slowly onto the runway. Behind it came three more. They fanned out, one coming to a halt immediately in front of the airplane, two of them flanking it, and one behind it. Once in position, they too switched off their engines.

Mr. Calder stood up. He ignored the gun which had appeared in Major Osler's hand, and the ugly look on the Major's face. In the silence which had fallen, Calder's voice was loud enough for everyone in the airplane to hear.

"It's no use, Major," he said. "You're outgunned." As if to underline his words, the turret of the nearest armored car swung directly toward them and they looked into the barrels of the twin Vickers. "You can't move the plane while those cars are there, and any one of them could blow your tail off with a single burst. Relax, Major."

"In case," added Mr. Behrens mildly, "you should think it worth some desperate move, let me assure you that the property you were instructed to fly to Eastern Germany is *not* in this brief case. It is in a safe in the Airport, under armed guard. All I have here—" he opened the brief case—"is two bottles of Schnapps and a Christmas present for my aunt."

For a moment Mr. Calder thought that Major Osler was going to use his gun anyway. Then the bright light died in his eyes, and his face resumed its look of stony indifference. The faint beginning of a smile lifted the corner of the thin mouth. The Major said, in the tones of a fencer whose guard has been penetrated, *"In Ordnung, mein Herr."*

"We had bad luck and good," said Mr. Calder to Mr. Fortescue. "Bad luck about Massey and that idiot Martin Seccombe. I hope something *will* be done about him and Ware, by the way. But good luck with Franz Mulbach, and the best of luck—the very best—at the end. I was quite sure that if we applied to the Air Line to help us, they would seize the God-sent opportunity to hijack the three of us, and the coding machine, and fly us straight to the Eastern Zone."

"It was a very feasible counterstroke," agreed Mr. Fortescue. "But how could you be sure?"

"The head of their organization," said Mr. Calder, "whose name Mulbach gave us happens to be Chairman of the Air Line."

HIS AND HERS

by RICHARD M. GORDON

High on the top of a dangerous hill
Lived (unhappily) Jack and Jill.
Jack had money, and Jill had furs,
And they had two cars marked "His" and "Hers."

Jack drank too much, and that is why
Jill decided he had to die
For Love won't live where drinking is,
And they had two cars marked "Hers" and "His."

The road wound down round the brink of a cliff,
And Jack would drink till he was stiff,
And they fought all day like cats and curs,
And they had two cars marked "His" and "Hers."

So she loosened the brakes of his Go-Go Seven
And told him to go—perhaps to Heaven,
Wherever the place for drunkards is,
And they had two cars marked "Hers" and "His."

And she loosened the brakes on her own Model J;
Jill wanted a sure thing, or she wouldn't play—
A feminine foible which sometimes occurs,
And they had two cars marked "His" and "Hers."

Jack looked at Jill and had a suspicion
That maybe his car was out of commission.
How subtle and deadly the female is!
And they had two cars marked "Hers" and "His."

So when Jack set out for the local bar
He left his "His" and took "Her" car.
He made his choice for better or worse,
And they had two cars which were both marked "Hearse."

the *NEWEST* detective short story by

CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG

Meet Mrs. Finney—75 years old, but young enough in heart and mind, and courageous enough in her will to keep alive, to be excited and delighted by an adventure that would have scared the daylights out of a person one-third her age . . . One of the most appealing (the real detective is a teen-ager) and one of the cleverest short stories that Charlotte Armstrong has ever written for EQMM . . .

THE COOL ONES

by CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG

AT 11:30 ON SATURDAY MORNING, when she came out of the Art Museum, old Mrs. Finney was kidnaped.

A cab pulled up, the driver sitting there like a lump. A strange woman on the sidewalk said, "Let me," and reached to do what the driver was not doing. Mrs. Finney, accepting the opening of the cab door as a kindness toward an old woman, got in. But the strange woman got in, too, and the cab took off, uninstructed, with surprising suddenness.

Then Mrs. Finney saw the gun shaking in the woman's hand.

Mrs. Finney, at 75 years of age, considered herself more or less expendable—but not as expendable as all this. So she pretended to be in somewhat more terror of death than she actually was, and cowered down into the seat as if stricken dumb and overcome by fear. This relaxed her captors and enabled shrewd Mrs. Finney to watch the street signs.

She soon concluded that the strange woman was timid and dominated, and that the man who drove the cab was operating under high tension, with the boldness that is next to desperation.

The kidnapers took her to a place down near the river, a flat of some sort, poorly furnished, but furnished. It had a telephone.

So she lay on a hard bed in an inner room from which there was no escape, since, even had the window not been nailed shut, the drop from it was sheer and too far for her old bones to challenge.

She could hear the man asking for Mrs. Pierce on the telephone. Poor Ruth, she thought, meanwhile breathing with careful control in order to steady her heart, mean-

while enjoining her muscles to relax while they could, meanwhile discovering in her being a tiny glow of perverse delight in such an adventure—and at her age!

"You better believe it," she heard the man saying savagely. "We've got her, all right. You want to see your Mama again, you get together ten thousand dollars in small bills, and you get it fast."

Ruth must have said something.

"So she went to the Museum," he jeered. "So when she don't come home from the Museum, then I guess you'll believe it. That's enough, now. Get the dough. I'll call and tell you what to do. Don't try tracing the call. And no cops—or the old lady's had it."

The man hung up and Mrs. Finney could hear the strange woman's nervous giggle, out there in the other room. She heard the man swear viciously, and could sense his dangerous restlessness.

Old Mrs. Finney's thoughts began to flit about erratically. Was she worth $10,000 to her daughter and her son-in-law? On the other hand, wasn't that really very little? Well, no matter. The situation was classic: they would kill her, anyhow. Unless—supposing—if only . . .

Her wits steadied. They began to nibble and work at a plan, just in case. She wasn't dead yet . . .

Warren Pierce rushed home from the Country Club and counseled his wife, Ruth, to call the police, although of course discreetly. An officer named Parkins came at once, in an unmarked automobile, wearing plain clothes. He carried a tape recorder.

The detective listened gravely and was reassuringly calm. He hooked up the recorder so that the exact words of any phone call would be preserved for study. He told Ruth that she must try to hold the man in conversation, when the kidnaper called again. The more they heard him say, Parkins told them, the better chance they would have to pick up a clue to Mrs. Finney's whereabouts.

So, in the spacious suburban house where the old lady had her own quarters—so nice!—on the ground floor of the south wing, her daughter waited with wailings and wringings of her hands, and her son-in-law busily collected the ransom money from various sources.

Ruth and Warren Pierce were solid, prosperous middle-class people, cautious souls, who had always played it safe and had always supposed themselves to be safe, if anything in this world could be safe. In this bewildering and threatening situation they clung to experts for all kinds of support, including the emotional.

Parkins bore up under it, but Parkins did not tell all he was thinking. Much depended, he warned them, in what the collection method turned out to be. It was very difficult, he soothed, for a criminal

to devise a method that was perfectly safe for the criminal.

What Parkins did not tell them was the impossibility of devising a way to return, with perfect safety to the criminal, an adult kidnapee, alive and well. "Ask for some proof that she's all right," he advised. "That will hold him on the phone."

So two tense hours went by . . .

Old Mrs. Finney, during the same two hours, had been left alone in that cold, bare room, where she lay on the hard bed and thought and listened and remembered and schemed and checked and memorized and altogether, felt very much alive.

But now the strange woman put her head in at the door. "You're so quiet. Thought maybe you'd passed out," she said in her jittery voice.

The man stuck his head in too. "Hey, Milly, I told you it don't matter." He was high on some drug. Mrs. Finney vaguely knew that much.

But the old lady said to him crisply, "It matters whether my daughter believes you've got me. If not, why would she pay? Now I'll tell you something. I'd like very much to go home and I can get you the money. I don't suppose you'd let me mail it to you, or something of that sort?"

The man bared his teeth in a scornful grimace.

"Then you'd better let me talk to Ruth," said Mrs. Finney. "In the first place, that'll convince her you've got me, won't it? In the second place, *I* know where to get the money, *today,* which happens to be a Saturday when the banks aren't open."

The kidnapers were listening sourly.

"I am an old woman," said Mrs. Finney, "and I can't be bothered kicking and screaming. The point is, you want ten thousand dollars and I want to go home. All right. As far as I'm concerned, it's a deal."

The old lady sat up and put her feet to the floor. "Have you decided how you are going to collect the money?" She knew they had been wrangling over this for the whole two hours.

"We know how," the man said sullenly.

"Well, then," said Mrs. Finney, "for pity's sake, let's get on with it." She had so much more force than the other woman, Milly, that suddenly it seemed as if Mrs. Finney and the man were the conspirators.

"Yeah. Okay," he said. "I want the money and I want it fast."

"What time are you setting for the meeting?"

"What's it to you?" His tone was deliberately rude, and he was naturally suspicious.

"You want it fast and I want it fast," snapped Mrs. Finney, "but it will take a little time for them to get that much money. Also, you'll want the theater crowded."

"Yeah," he said. "Right. Say,

eight o'clock." And his voice held the faintest query, as if he wanted her approval.

Mrs. Finney sighed artfully. "I suppose it really isn't safe any earlier. Well?"

"Well?"

He led her into the other room, which was as miserable as the first, and he let her sit down in front of the telephone. She looked at it with great interest. This was her chance.

He had to put on a show of ferocity, so he said, "Okay. You can talk and you can tell her just how to get the money. But if you start to say one word—just one word—out of line, I got my hands right around your skinny old neck. Understand?"

"Certainly," said Mrs. Finney. "We've got a deal. You get the money and I get home."

"Sure, sure," he said. "You got a deal, old lady."

But he was lying, and Mrs. Finney knew it. Well, so was she.

So the world wagged, in these circles. Mrs. Finney braced herself as the man dialed the number . . .

When the phone rang at the Pierce house, Ruth stiffened and turned white. Warren leaped toward the receiver. Parkins lifted a hand to slow him down. He had the tape recorder going. He said, on the third ring, "Okay—now. Better let Mrs. Pierce answer this time."

"Ruth?" said her mother's voice.

"Oh, Mother!"

"They want ten thousand dollars."

"Oh, Mother, are you all right?" Ruth must, in the name of devotion, wail.

"Listen carefully," said her mother crisply and distinctly. "They want ten thousand. Tell Binky to get on the telephone. He can get one from Celia, one from Esther, one from Vida, three from Opal." She slowed down. "Two from Odette, two from Simone, three from Estelle—"

"Hurry up," the man said in her ear.

"And one more from Vida, and that's it. It's all in your hand now," said Mrs. Finney loudly.

"Oh, Mother, where are you?" wailed Ruth, whose brains were limp in her head, her mother thought.

"I've told you—"

The man's hand pinched her shoulder; she leaned back, immediately obedient, and surrendered the phone.

Her breath came a little short. Had she got it right? Exactly right? Just as she had rehearsed it in her head so many times?

Yes. Yes, she believed she had.

The man said into the mouthpiece, "Okay, Mrs. Pierce, now you know. So put the money in a brown paper bag. At eight o'clock tonight you be at the Rialto Theater, on South Quincy. And you be there alone—no cops. Or else. You stand in line, you buy a ticket, you go into

the show, and that's all you have to do. So do it."

Ruth was still wailing when the kidnaper cut her off.

The woman, Milly, whimpered in a corner from sheer ineptitude.

"All we got to do is wait a while," the man said. "And then we'll go. I grab the bag from her, pass it to you. You stash the money on you, in the Ladies' Room. So if they got cops with 'em, let them search *me*. It'll work. Won't it? Hey, won't it?" He seemed to be asking old Mrs. Finney.

"I surely hope so," she sighed. "I surely do hope so. I wonder—is that a pot of tea you have there?" Her mouth was very dry.

"So give the old lady a cup of tea," the man said. "She's not such a bad sport, at that. Go ahead. I'm going out and walk around a couple of minutes."

He was on taut wires. He went out, locking the door behind him. Mrs. Finney did not think that Milly would be the one to attack her, finally. So time could work. And time would tell . . .

At the Pierce house Ruth was still wailing. "But she doesn't know anybody by those names! She doesn't know anybody named Celia. She doesn't know anybody named Esther. Or Vida. Or Opal, either. It doesn't make any sense at all, what she said. Oh, my poor mother, so terrified. She must be out of her mind!"

"The numbers don't add up, either," said Warren Pierce, whose faith was in mathematics. "Doesn't come to ten thousand, no matter how you add it. What was the point of all that? I've got the money ready. What will we do, Mr. Parkins? Go through with it, tonight?"

Parkins said, "Who is Binky?"

"Oh, that's our son."

"Where is he?"

"Why, er, playing tennis over at the Shaws, isn't he, Ruth?"

"Better get him," said Parkins.

"But Binky is only sixteen. He's just—I don't want to—what could *he* . . ."

"Better get hold of him," Parkins said. "And quickly."

Binky Pierce was a long lean lad with straight blond hair, lank and much bleached by the sun. He was in a state of complete alienation from his parents. He came in slouching hiplessly, and when he was told what had happened to old Mrs. Finney, he showed no emotion whatsoever.

"But she said, 'Tell Binky'," his mother bleated. "So we thought—oh, this is so terrible. I'm sorry, dear."

Warren Pierce said, "It may be some kind of code, Bink. But I can't figure out what the devil she meant. Take the first letters of those names —you get C E V O O S E V. And what's that? Or you take the first and third and so on according to the

numbers. You get C E V A D I T V."

Binky leaned languidly over the paper in his father's hands.

"You and your grandmother have some code between you?" asked Parkins. "One you both understand?"

"No. Well, we were kicking the subject around the other day." His parents stared at him, astonished. "We talk about a lot of stuff," said Binky uncomfortably. "Say, could I hear the tape?"

"Sure can," Parkins played it back. When it stopped, Binky said, "Grandma's telling us where she is. She said so. My gosh, that's plain enough. Mom said, 'Where are you?' And Grandma said, 'I've told you.'"

"That's what I think," said Parkins. "But where is she?"

"Let me have that, Dad?" The boy whisked the paper out of his father's hand. On it were written down the names and the numbers from the telephone conversation. But before he studied them, Binky gazed thoughtfully across the room for a long moment.

"How could it be a code?" wailed Ruth, all nerves and emotion, "She must have been just babbling. She must be so upset. My poor mother is seventy-five, you know."

"Oh, I don't know," said Binky. "Grandma is a pretty cool cat sometimes." Disdainfully, he used outmoded slang in order to communicate with a backward tribe.

He sat down beside the recorder and the telephone and reached for a pencil. Binky Pierce was scared by the responsibility put on him, but he was going to cool it . . .

Old Mrs. Finney, lying on the hard bed again, knew now that she was going to be killed, probably strangled, before the two kidnapers left for their rendezvous with the money. Milly had given the plan away several times without realizing that she had. Well, if it had to be . . .

Binky wrote down a series of letters, punctuated with question marks. Then he struck them all out with a black stroke of rejection . .

Mrs. Finney thought that the kidnapers would probably wait until the last minute, because the living don't like sitting around with a corpse in the next room. So there might be time. She sighed and waited . . .

Binky put down A D T O N R F T.

As he studied this series, his hand working on the pencil betrayed his deep worry. But he tossed his head doggedly. His long hair bounced, his lean face became still with concentration. His parents were like two fat pincushions, stabbed uselessly with anxiety. But he had to cool it, he had to.

"Let me hear it again," he said.

Mrs. Finney heard the man come back. Then they were whispering out there. Not yet, surely? Well, if it had to be . . .

When the tape stopped this time, Binky pounced with the pencil and made three alterations. He said to Parkins, in a cool and faintly trembling voice, "If you knew where she was, what could you do about it?"

"Do our best to get her away from them in time," said the detective.

"Can you do that?"

"No guarantee," said Parkins, putting the hard truth on the line, because what else does a cool cat ask for? "But I'll tell you this. Be a much better chance than she's got right now."

"Okay," said Binky. "I guess I'd better tell you where my Grandma is."

It was a street down by the river, and only three blocks long. It was lined almost entirely with warehouses, but there were two old frame dwellings that had survived progress. One was now a cheap boarding house. The other was divided into flats. The downstairs flat was obviously empty, but somebody was up on the second floor.

Three men, armed, but in plain clothes, went silently up the old stairs; two made themselves invisible. The third one, who was Parkins, knocked on the door.

When a man answered, Parkins said, "Say buddy, if you got a vehicle parked down below, some clown just backed into your headlights."

"What!" The voice was outraged. The door opened. Police took over. The man fought, but to no avail. The woman merely whimpered.

Then Parkins called out, "Mrs. Finney?"

"I'm here," she answered cheerfully. "Come in, come in, whoever you are."

Later on old Mrs. Finney was eating raisin cake with gusto and drinking her third cup of coffee. She was spoiling her dinner and she would have to take pills to get to sleep this night. But who cared?

"So you read me loud and clear, eh, Binky?" she said to her grandson, relishing everything.

"Why, sure, Grandma," The lean boy pretended to be casual and nonchalant.

"It was so wonderful," gushed Ruth. "Oh, Binky, I'm proud of you!"

"Listen, it took me too long." Binky combed his hair vigorously, and fended off praise.

"Obsolete," mused his Grandmother, "pretty soon, that is. But for today, it served."

"All right. You're smart, you two, I admit it," said Warren Pierce. "May I ask *what* will be obsolete pretty soon?"

"Pretty soon, with the all-digit dialing," said Binky, "there won't *be* any letters on the telephone. The phone. My gosh, couldn't you hear

that? She said, 'It's all in your hand.' She didn't say, 'hands.' 'Hand,' she said. So what was in Mom's hand at the time? The phone, wasn't it? And Grandma also said that I should get on the telephone. So, natch, I look at the phone, and there it was."

"What took you too long?" asked his Grandmother gently.

"Well, I got it a little bit wrong at first. I thought you meant one letter *away* from C, and then one letter *away* from E."

"E!"

"Uh, huh, so it came out B D U and nuthin'."

"Oh, oh," said his Grandmother. "I didn't think of that!"

"Oh, well," Binky forgave her. "Then I figured, no, you must mean the first letter in each group of three, and so on. But I was still using the E."

"Instead of the S, eh?"

"But then I saw—I mean, then I *heard—"*

"The S sound in Esther and the C sound in Simone and the S in Estelle," said his Grandmother. "Those were the only names I could think of that *sounded* right."

Warren was staring at the telephone dial. "One from Celia. All right, first letter in the group ending with C. That's an A. One from Esther. S, did you say? That's a P. Come on, tell me the message."

"A P T O N B S T," Binky spelled it out coolly, and his Grandmother's lips moved with his.

"I still don't understand," said Ruth, wringing her middle-aged hands.

"Oh, Mom," said her son. "Look at what it says. Don't you see? It says *Apartment on B St."*

"Pretty cute, all right," said Warren.

"How clever!" raved Ruth. "Oh, how clever!"

"Had to be short,"said Mrs. Finney reminiscently, "I knew they wouldn't let me talk very long. Had to seem to make *some* sense to them. They didn't know I'd seen the street signs."

"Pretty lucky," said Warren, "that there were so many names in which the letters sounded right."

"Oh, I don't know," said Mrs. Finney. She reeled off some other names. "F in Effie, I in Ida or Iris. L in Ella or Elinor. O in Ophelia."

"And who else?" teased Binky.

"And Zena," said his Grandmother, "which is obsolete. But I didn't need it." She couldn't help showing off. "On the other side—the first letters in each group—there's Amy, Delia, Jean, Jane, Emma, Peony, Tina—"

"And W?" Binky chortled.

"Oh, I'd have thought of something."

"You bet," the boy mumbled, and he wasn't jeering.

"But how could you think all that out?" cried Ruth, "when they might have—at any minute—Mother, you weren't *safe!* I'd have been too terrified to think."

"No point in me being terrified," said Mrs. Finney. "And thinking passed the time." The old lady reflected. "I just couldn't think of another girl's name beginning with the sound of V. But I could always have put in boys' names—C in Seymour, I in Isaiah, L in Elmer, V in Vito—"

"Aw, Grandma's too chintzy to let them get away with the money," teased her grandson.

"Oh, Binky, as if the money mattered! As if we wouldn't want her safe, no matter what it cost," Ruth wailed.

But the cool ones—the old lady who now no more, and the young boy who not yet—the cool ones cared very much about safety-in-itself, and besides, the really cool ones knew that money-in-itself could never buy it.

Grandmother and grandson glanced at each other in a close and merry understanding.

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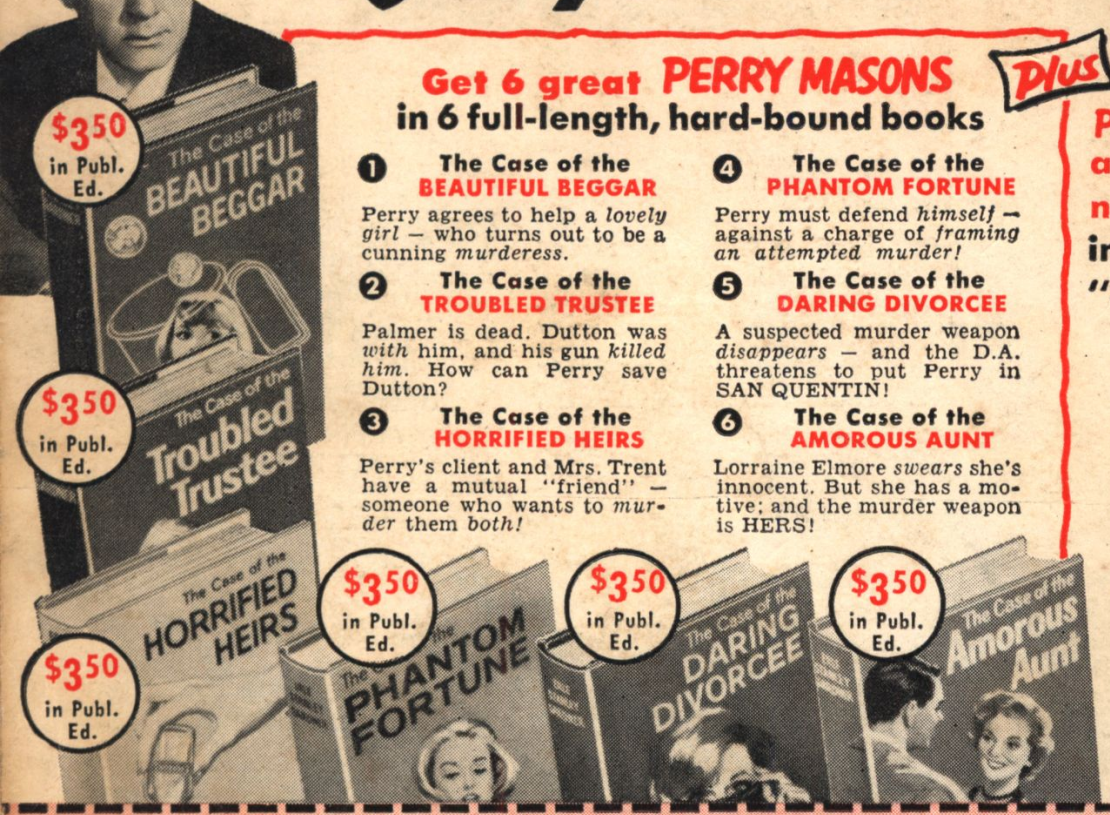

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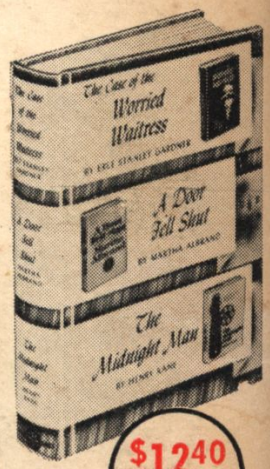

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