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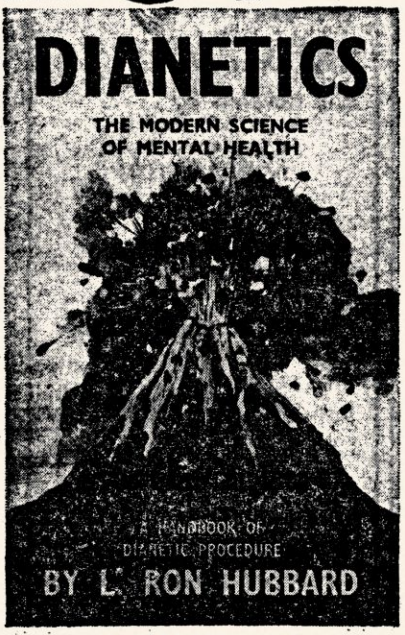

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a *new* kind of *NEW* story by
LAWRENCE TREAT

introducing The Forensic Club

This is the first tale of The Forensic Club, but we would be enormously surprised if it proves to be the last. Surely we'll do all we possibly can to persuade Lawrence Treat to write others.

Here is "the inside story" (the only kind you'll hear at The Forensic Club) of the Giant and the Runt, a sort of contemporary "Goliath and David," a pair of ruthless adversaries whose deep enmity was widely publicized in the mass media—nearly every reader of newspapers, listener of radio, watcher of TV knew of their bitter feud. The Hatfields and the McCoys were no deadlier, and only a fraction as sophisticated . . .

THE INSIDE STORY

by LAWRENCE TREAT

IT WAS CERTAINLY NOT THE JUDGE'S story, but he told it nevertheless. By virtue of his rank. By right, so to speak, of eminent domain. And by pure power of lung.

He told it in an upstairs lounge of The Forensic Club. Present, besides myself, were a couple of attorneys high in politics, a police official, a prison administrator, and the judge. And there was a reason for his telling the story. He would let it appear presently, and it concerned me.

We had just come back from the cemetery and we were in a somber, nostalgic mood, and yet we were realists enough to be honest about the late Frederick G. Maybank, scholar and charlatan moralist and cheat. Although he'd started out as a practising psychiatrist, his real work and certainly his fame and major talents were as a forensic expert. There were few important murder trials in the last twenty years in which his testimony hadn't been crucial.

We felt, I think, that this was the end of an era, and specifically, the era of Frederick G. Maybank. For Fred, with his great leonine head,

his granite jaw and his stentorian voice that vibrated with sincerity, would never again mesmerize juries and deliver himself of truths —or reasonable facsimile thereof. For hundreds of jurors had listened to that voice, felt themselves transported to the proximity of greatness, and believed every word he uttered. It was always a letdown to see Jerome Britt follow him to the witness chair and dare to give a contrary opinion.

Jerry Britt was the opposite of Fred Maybank in every conceivable way—for Britt was a small, stringy, incisive man with a tongue like a knife. He answered questions in a dry, clipped tone, and he slashed out at Maybank and cut him to ribbons, whenever he could. Maybank, the roaring Giant, always explained his examining techniques and made his points in polysyllable detail, expanding on every element so that the jurors would know, with certainty and beyond reasonable doubt. He rocked them into a feeling that they *must* understand, and so they understood. Then Britt, the Runt, would take the stand, give the jury a pitying look, and comment on the Giant's testimony.

"Bunch of nonsense," Britt would say.

"Would you explain to the jury?"

"Don't have to. They never understood in the first place. Me, neither."

Some juries would remain loyally under the spell of the elaborate rodomontade they had been subjected to, others would side with the pithy common sense of little Britt. He was so obviously a New Englander, a salty throwback to the rigid virtues of our ancestors. Few people knew that he'd been born in Bulgaria, the fourth son of a warm, sprawling, overloving family. Maybe Britt just couldn't stand all that love, inasmuch as he had no room for such poppycock. In any case, he came to America and eventually faced Maybank, the Giant. They were enemies, and their feud was bitter and merciless, and all this was public knowledge.

"Fred Maybank," the police official said, shaking his head and speaking with the conviction that is one of the marks of policedom. "He was a living legend. Pompous, maybe, but—*de mortuis nisi bonum*. We'll be talking about him for the rest of our lives, and in time we'll come to venerate his very memory."

The judge took exception to the remark. "We'll hardly venerate him," he said. "Call him vain, venal, vengeful—but venerable, positively not."

"Nevertheless," one of the lawyers said, and got no further. The judge had decided to take over.

"He overreached himself," the judge said, "and he died of an oversecretion of the hate glands.

Nothing else." He glanced around the circle and fastened his eyes on the prison official. "You were out of the country," the judge said. "You didn't have a chance to follow the case, and the details are important. Luckily I didn't have to sit for the trial. If I had I might have disqualified myself, although not for the same reason that Jerry Britt did. I am not her father."

Being a judge he liked to talk in riddles. He often confused verbosity with erudition, which is a common fault of members of the bar, and of psychiatrists and government officials and social workers, and many other people, too.

"I didn't even see her," the prison official said. It was the last observation the judge permitted anyone until he'd finished his story.

"Norma Britt Tyler was a charmer. She had dark hair, black eyes, and the grace of a swan swimming. She had the gift of fluidity, and of quietude. Noise did not exist around her, but she wasn't static, either. She just had a soothing effect on people, calming them down, creating a sort of pleasant stillness wherever she went. In a word, she was dangerous.

"I said once that when a woman shoots her husband she does it because she wants to, and I stick to my statement, Norma Britt Tyler to the contrary notwithstanding. Being Jerry Britt's daughter must have been tough, and I grant that she must have had parental problems; but she surmounted them and eventually secured herself a seat in society—orchestra, first row center.

"The man she married was a polo player, a clothes horse, and the heir to a fortune, and they lived together unhappily until the night she picked up a gun and shot him, and she never lied about either fact.

"I pass over the circumstance that he was drunk when he entered her room around two a.m. that moonless morning. He was drunk every night, and she was used to it. And it's a moot point whether she could have or should have known that the man entering her room was her unbeloved husband. She claimed she was so fuzzy that she mistook him for a black-bearded stranger. The description is classic. I've never gone into the mythology of it—the beard, the hour of night, the dark stranger—but the description seldom varies.

"More important, I believe, is her free admission that she hated her husband and that she shot him. She insisted that neither item was her fault, and that she should not be punished therefor. In other words, she'd been mad when she married him and mad when she'd killed him, which is what every beautiful young woman says after expunging her husband's name from the list of the living.

"And if the beautiful young woman stands to inherit a nice portfolio of stocks and bonds and

then pleads temporary insanity—meaning that at the moment of committing the alleged crime she was incapable of telling the difference between right and wrong, or realizing the quality and nature of her act—depending on the jurisdiction in which she is to be tried—well, let me inform you that Mrs. Tyler is now in full possession both of her faculties and of those stocks and bonds. Diamonds, as you know, are out of fashion. They attract mugs, and muggers."

The judge licked his lips over the last phrase, then resumed the thread of his story. "Joe Gibbons," he said, "handled the case for her, and he made a mess of it. In the first place, he should have turned the reporters loose on her and let them grind out all the sob publicity they wished. She photographs beautifully, she could look sad enough to wring tears out of the Internal Revenue Service, and get a refund on the spot. She could have touched every heart in this city and state, so that there wouldn't have been a single voice lifted against her.

"Change of venue? There wouldn't have been a venue in the entire country that was immune from her spell. The papers will do that for you, and will do it for free, if you handle them right. But Joe Gibbons? Not him. He got Norma out on bail and locked her up in her house, presumably because this fine sensitive soul who had just shot her huband said she couldn't bear to face reporters."

The judge blew his nose, which was rather large. He looked around at us, obviously wanting us to grasp the picture of Norma Britt Tyler as he conceived of it. Well, maybe the others did, but not me.

"The next mistake Joe Gibbons made," the judge continued, "and one of his worst, was to think that Fred Maybank had a heart. Or a conscience or a sense of humanity.

"He hadn't. Not a dram of it. I happen to have private information that Joe Gibbons paid Fred five thousand dollars to examine Norma, and Fred and Joe were both old enough to know that nobody who goes to a forensic psychiatrist has to specify what the results of the examination are going to be. There's no need to, because the rules of the game are well known, and they're simple. For a *quid pro quo* you deliver.

"Well, the first thing Fred did was to pocket his five-thousand-dollar fee, which was his normal retainer, and the next thing he did was to ask for an additional fifty thousand, to testify. Pure blackmail, and he ran rings around Joe Gibbons. Fred said Norma could well afford to pay and that, with Jerry Britt tantamount to being disqualified, there wasn't another psychiatrist in the country with the prestige to cast doubt on Fred's testimony. It would be overwhelming, and he was right about that.

But he never said which way he was going to testify. He left that open, so that he'd have plenty of bargaining power. By the time he committed himself, it was too late for another psychiatrist to examine and work up his testimony. So when Fred walked into court he was almost in a position to swing the case whichever way he chose to.

"That, then, is the first part of it, and it's revealing. Fred Maybank and Jerry Britt had long been court adversaries, same as some of you right here. But you always stood ready to help each other out; if you're enemies, you're friendly enemies. Whereas Fred hated Jerry personally, he was glad Britt was suffering and he wanted Britt's daughter to be convicted. Not because she was guilty or because he had anything against *her*—but because she was the means whereby he could hurt Jerry.

"Meanwhile Norma was out on bail, and as the time for the trial rolled around and it became apparent that Fred was the key witness, Jerry panicked and did a stupid thing. He kidnaped Fred.

"Afterwards, Fred came to me in my chambers and told me about it. He had affidavits from two men who stated they'd been paid five hundred dollars each to escort Fred to—

"Maybe I'd better tell it to you just the way it happened, according to Fred and those affidavits. It seems he was spending the weekend at his place on Round Lake. He doesn't drive, so he'd taken a taxi from the station and had asked the cabbie to pick him up at seven that evening. Fred wanted to go see a movie in the village.

"A car came at seven, and he got in. There were two men in it, but that wasn't unusual. The local taximen will often pick up an extra passenger, or even give some friend a lift. Fred said he got in the rear. He was a little surprised that the two men weren't more talkative. Everybody knew Fred and he was something of a character. Locally they called him Doc and I suppose they were proud of having a celebrity around, particularly one as articulate as he was. So he was surprised at their silence, but he didn't realize what was happening until they turned onto the state road instead of going straight into the village.

"He asked what was what, and one of them turned around and said, 'Doc, you're not going to any movie tonight. You want to come with us, don't you?' Fred asked if this was a snatch. They didn't answer. Then he asked them how much they expected to get, how much they thought he was worth, and they said they didn't know anything about that, they were just obeying orders, and one of those orders was to make him shut up. He said their tone was threatening, so he obliged.

"They drove most of the night.

From the stars he knew they were heading south, and that's a nice touch for you. Here was a modern man sitting in the back of a car and traversing paved roads, but having no idea where he was going. So he looked up at the stars.

"They brought him to some kind of fishing camp and told him to stay put. The place was empty at that season, and he was taken care of well enough. Somebody brought him food during the night and left it for him. He had a gas stove and he heated the stuff up. There was a road, of course, and he started to walk out, but somebody warned him to get back. He didn't like the tone of voice, so again he obeyed.

"He was there for almost a week. Then one day he found a boat—I think he said it was a canoe—hidden in the nearby bushes. He left it there, but he sneaked out at night and paddled across the lake to where he saw a light. He found a house with an old man living in it, a kind of caretaker for some hunting lodges in the neighborhood, and the old man brought Fred to the nearest town where Fred hired a taxi to drive him back home.

"He was in an exhausted state when he arrived, and after the series of press conferences he was forced to hold in order to give the details of his dramatic escape, he collapsed and was taken to a hospital. The experience left him a sick man and was unquestionably a major causal factor contributing to his death. To give his testimony he was brought into court in a wheel chair. Everybody was amazed at the energy and robustness of his voice when he spoke, but that's a medical matter and I'm no expert in the field.

"Let me review the account of the kidnaping—if that's what it was, under the statute. I purposely related it in the words of the affidavits so that you can appreciate the fine, careful, and exact planning of Jerry Britt, who knew he'd be accused as soon as Fred was free.

"Think back to the words Fred remembered, the words in the affidavit: 'You want to come with us, don't you?' Not only was there no violence, there was no overt threat of it. Furthermore, Fred wasn't taken across a state line, since both his summer place and the fishing camp were in the same state. Nothing he could really do about it, and there's some doubt as to whether a Federal charge would hold.

"Amazing, isn't it? Everybody knew Fred had been kidnaped and that Jerry Britt had engineered it to keep Fred away from the trial. But the scheme had failed, and it seemed that all the prosecution needed to do was to put Fred on the stand, let him state his opinion, and ask him some question that would permit him to mention the kidnaping, or at least to hint at it. The question would be objected to and the objection would be sustained, but it was good tactics to

ask it, at least. And it was asked.

"I said earlier that Joe Gibbons handled the case badly. Well, the damn fool went ahead and started to cross-examine Fred about the kidnaping, and then Joe realized he was pulling a boner and he stayed away from it. But worse than that, after Fred's evidence of Norma's sanity was in—that's what he testified to—Joe went and put Norma on the stand.

"I understand she was anxious to testify and that she'd decided to forget about an insanity plea and simply gamble on the jury swallowing her story. She must have realized how weak it was, and she sat there on the stand, pale and scared. I think she must have known she was digging her own grave with every word she uttered, but she went through with it anyhow.

"She said she'd been completely sane, that she knew what she was doing and recalled every detail. She said somebody, she didn't know who, had phoned her earlier in the evening and warned her there was a prowler in the neighborhood and she'd better be careful. She said that since the Tyler house was rather isolated, the news had disturbed her, so she took a sleeping tablet.

"She admitted having a gun that she'd bought some time ago—to protect herself, she said. It was loaded, and she put it at her bedside, which was the right thing to do. And since all the beautiful women who ever shot their husbands by mistake have always bought their guns sometime ago—and always to protect themselves—Norma Tyler was simply behaving in the great tradition. A woman of her caliber couldn't do otherwise."

The judge snorted. He fancied that last remark of his and wanted to give his audience time to absorb and appreciate it. Then he went on.

"She said she woke up and saw somebody in her room. She was dazed, only half awake, and partially under the influence of the sedative. She was quite certain that she called out and there was no answer, and then this bearded man came towards her, and she panicked. She aimed at the ceiling, with the intention of merely scaring him, but she hit him in the head and the man turned out to be her husband. After she realized that, she ran from the room and her memory went blank.

"How naive can you be? After twenty years on the bench I think I know juries, and I was pretty sure that no jury in the world was going to swallow that!

"The prosecution didn't cross-examine her, and—well, you all know what happened. She was acquitted, and the interesting point is—why? What saved her? And the answer is that, of all the wild, impossible, unforeseeable turn of events, Fred saved her. Her unrebutted story helped, of course, but it was Fred who swung it. His

obvious vindictiveness and malevolence, his attempt to hurt Britt by convicting his adversary's daughter of murder—the jury refused to be party to that hatred, so they let her get away with murder. They did it deliberately, and I'm not guessing, either. I know whereof I speak, because one of the jurors admitted it to me later.

"They freed her to spite Frederick G. Maybank, and did you ever hear of a case decided for such a reason? And now that we've got him safely underground, a few truths can come out, and one of them is what killed Fred. In my opinion it was sheer perverseness. He couldn't stand losing. The medical certificate states that he died as the result of a cardiac occlusion, but the real reason was that he was frustrated to death. He made his big play, and when he lost, it broke his heart. The acquittal killed him. As I said earlier—vain, venal, vengeful—but venerable, positively not."

The judge stopped talking. He'd told the story with due credit to the majesty of the law and to the august bench on which he sat. Now he'd finished, and he looked at me.

In a way his whole account was a personal attack on me, and it was the reason why, on the way back from the funeral, the judge had been so insistent that I come up here, to this private room where he and a few friends were going to talk over old times.

Old times! They believed, every one of them here, that I'd thrown the case, and they were anxious to hear my side of it. Not, however, for the sake of justice, but rather, so that they could tear me apart. They'd made up their minds that I had betrayed my office and my profession, and they were here to pronounce punishment. The judge was their spokesman and he'd kept emphasizing the fact that Joe Gibbons had messed up the case, and maybe he had. Maybe Fred had browbeaten him into it. But Joe had won and I had lost. Because I'd been the D.A. on the case.

A mere defeat wouldn't have bothered me too much. I'd been under attack plenty of times—and everybody in public life must expect it; you reach a state of mind and attain a self-confidence in which wild, unsubstantiated attacks no longer bother you. But this was different. These were my peers, my colleagues, my friends. They thought I'd thrown the case, and the truth is—I had.

So, when the judge stared at me and I stared back, we understood each other and realized that the issue had been finally joined. I had to speak up, or this sanctimonious little clique would ruin me, as they longed to do.

I had already resigned as D.A. and gone into private practice, but I'd given no reason for my action. A D.A. can lose a case, even an important one, and can ride out

the wave of criticism. But I wouldn't have a chance, because my very explanation would condemn me.

Now my whole career was at stake, right here in this room. If I could convince this group of the essential rightness of my conduct, I could look forward to a profitable law practice, secure because of my contacts with the men in this room and their influential associates. But if they refused to believe and accept my motives, I could say goodbye to my legal career. Rumors would circulate. They might or might not get as far as the Ethics Committee of the Bar Association. Probably not—but I'd be finished nevertheless.

"Suppose," I said slowly, "that Norma told the truth. Not impossible, is it?"

"Worse than impossible," the judge said sharply. "It's unnatural. It would turn a myth into a fact."

"Let's at least examine her story," I said. "The jury believed it, and what the jury believes is fact, isn't it?"

"Juries!" the judge said contemptuously.

"Nevertheless," I said, "let's examine it, and then see how it fits in with Fred's character as you described it. Vain, venal, and vengeful. Right?"

All of them here, the judge and the police official and the prison administrator and the pair of attorneys, leaned forward attentively, as if getting ready for the kill.

"Did you know that Fred was in love with Norma and that she turned him down for Tom Tyler?" I asked. That got them, and I followed up fast. "There's Fred's motive. As you said, vain and vengeful. They say hell hath no fury like that of a woman scorned, but what about that of a vain man scorned?

"He had a lot more than vengeance to motivate him, although he got his revenge, too. But he also got money. He was venal and he was brilliant, and this was his stroke of genius. It was a complicated, roundabout, deeply thought-out plan, conceived in hate and carried out cold-bloodedly and efficiently. Let me show you how he managed it.

"She kept a gun at her bedside. Lots of women who are often alone and live in unprotected country houses have guns. Nothing unusual about that. The unusual thing was somebody calling her up at night and telling her there was a prowler loose.

"Does that make sense to you? If a neighbor thought there was a prowler at large, he might have called Norma, but he'd have told her who he was, and he'd probably have called the police, too. But the person who called Norma was Fred, and he disguised his voice, which is why she didn't know who warned her. And how Fred got Tyler to barge into Norma's room we'll never know, because Fred

and Tom Tyler are both dead.

"But it was Fred who set it up, who got Tyler drunk and persuaded him to put on a false beard and sneak into his wife's bedroom at two a.m., probably as some sort of practical joke. Fred couldn't be absolutely sure how that joke would end up, but there was a pretty good chance it would cause havoc, even if it didn't have the result he hoped for. And I think Fred must have been right there in the house, waiting and hoping for a shot, and then waiting to sneak upstairs to remove that false beard and leave with it.

"That's exactly the way it happened, too. Norma, half awake and half drugged, was unlucky enough to kill her husband, and look at what Fred Maybank built that up into. He made headlines in nearly every paper in the country. He made the cover of *Time* and even an article in *Life*. His feud with Jerry Britt was written up, reviewed, and analyzed, and you all know that kind of publicity is what makes the money pour in. And on top of that he'd been kidnaped and taken to some mysterious hideout, and he'd had an adventurous, if not a hair's-breadth, escape.

"Judge, did you ever hear of a pair of kidnapers voluntarily giving their victim affidavits stating what had happened? Fred hired them to kidnap him and hired them to make out the affidavits, and that's why no charges are possible—because there was no kidnaping.

"So there you are. Fred had the triumph of testifying in court and almost sending this woman who had jilted him to the electric chair. He just missed out, but he never forgot his main role, and he played it to the hilt—hiding himself in a hospital and coming to court in a wheel chair, where he was photographed, televised, and interviewed. He planned it all, and his objects were revenge and money. But his basic motivation was a personal one."

I figured that would hold them, and for a few seconds it did. But they were hard-bitten realists trained in the law, and the judge took up the battle.

"You have a nice imagination," he said, "but what you just told us is all theory and no facts."

"Not theory," I said. "I saw Fred and he told me exactly what I just told you. Because, when a man pulls off a coup as beautiful and as successful as that one, he has to share it with somebody."

"I saw him, too," the judge said. "I saw him a few hours before he died, and I asked him if he'd seen you. He said no."

"Naturally," I said. I was pretty sure that the judge was lying, and of course I knew that I was. Which made us even. "Naturally Fred denied it," I said. "He had to. Because, supposing he'd lived, could

he ever admit what he'd told me? He had to deny seeing me. And the thing we can all be sure of is that Fred always lied with a much more impressive air of sincerity than when he told the truth. Because telling the truth—he wasn't used to it."

They laughed, and I glanced at my watch. It was almost time, but not quite. I had one more particular, one more piece of evidence, to throw at them, and I had to make that one count.

"Well," the judge said, "I suppose we'll never know. Some people will think one thing, and others will think another. There will be rumors, perhaps, but nobody can stop those."

So that was his verdict. There would be rumors. They'd heard me out, and they weren't convinced. I could see they were resolved to wreck me.

"Yes, there will be rumors," I said quietly. "But not about me. Did any of you ever go up to that fishing camp where Fred was supposedly held a prisoner?" No one answered, and I went on. "Because I did, shortly after the trial. It's a nice enough place—a retired couple by the name of Duval run it. He used to be a court reporter and she used to be a clerk in the Bureau of Records."

"That figures," the judge said. "That's how Jerry Britt knew them and came to select the place. He must have been there before."

"He sure had been," I said, "and so had Fred."

"What are you getting at?" the judge asked uneasily.

"Just this: I went through the guest register up at the fishing camp and found out that Jerry Britt and Fred Maybank had been spending their vacations at that place for the last ten years, in secret. They had occupied the same cabin, hired the same guide, and had even gone on a couple of overnight camping trips together. Just the pair of them and a guide. The truth is, Fred and Jerry were the best of friends; they maintained that feud of theirs only for the public—because it paid off, handsomely. And the Duval records give away the whole conspiracy.

"Fred wasn't kidnaped. He went up to the camp voluntarily, and he met Jerry there by prearrangement and they spent those few days together. If you find it hard to believe that Jerry Britt would go along with this plot against his own daughter, remember that he never did get along with her, and furthermore, he needed Fred in order to survive. They were the hammer and the anvil, the bell and the clapper. Essentially Jerry was a counterpuncher and his whole existence depended on Fred. And who else besides Jerry could possibly have been up at that camp? Because somebody was. The idea of Fred being there all alone with nobody to talk to—preposterous!

Without an audience he'd have committed suicide."

They laughed. Funny. Sure. But they still were not convinced. They were too objective. All their training, their education, and their professional conditioning made them demand facts. Not ideas, not theories or insights or deeper truths, but facts.

So I was compelled to make a final effort. "Everything Fred did," I said, "from the time he picked up a telephone and warned a half-awake woman of a prowler until he got himself wheeled into the courtroom—everything he did was cynical, hypocritical, and vindictive. Don't fall for it."

Nobody said anything, and I played my trump card. I gave the signal. I coughed.

She opened the door hesitantly, and I saw them turn and look at her in surprise. I shoved back my chair, got up, and walked over to her.

"Norma," I said, "you've seen some of these people in court. I've worked with most of them, but now I'd like you to meet them personally."

She smiled, and then spoke in exactly the right tone of voice. "I hope we'll be friends," she said. "I want to so much, because—"

I put my arm around her. "We're getting married next week," I said quietly.

I glanced at her. Her eyes were gleaming, and I felt serene and relaxed and sure of myself. Then I glanced at the group, and I could almost hear the wheels go round in their heads. Norma was the reason I'd resigned as D.A. From the moment I had first seen her sitting in the court, my whole world had changed. Watching her there day after day, seeing the play of emotion on her face, I'd not only fallen in love with her, I'd come to believe in her and I'd decided to do my best to have her go free.

But now they could ruin me and they would love to; but they were waiting for the judge to give them their cue. They'd follow wherever he led.

He stood up, and he was polite and courteous. "Fred's hate has gone far enough," he said. "I don't want you or anyone else to suffer from it any more, and so—I wish both of you all the luck and happiness in the world." And he extended his hand and smiled warmly.

A story with a heart as big as a small boy's dream, as big as a small boy's fear, as big as a small boy's conscience . . . a story filled with the sour milk of human cruelty and the sweet milk of human kindness . . . a new story by Jane Speed, who is as observant as ever, perceptive as ever, understanding as ever . . .

THE UNHAPPENING

by JANE SPEED

BY NINE O'CLOCK THE SUN'S GLOW had given way to neon, but its heat still held the city in a stifling midday grip. The sidewalks overflowed with people talking, laughing, bickering—anything to put off going up to their stuffy apartments. And clustered in front of the supermarket was the usual concentration of women, with innumerable children weaving in and out among them.

This neighborhood supermarket was not the only or even the best place in the area to shop. It couldn't hold a candle, for instance, to the infinitely glassier, classier Gourmet-O-Rama up in the next block.

That magnificent establishment had opened its doors less than a year ago to accommodate the new and presumably more discriminating clientele from the recently erected Skyvista Towers, a thirty-story middle-income co-op that shot up like four raw, clean fingers from the grimy fist of the surrounding neighborhood.

The Gourmet-O-Rama, with its spacious aisles, smooth-rolling self-service carts, supervised Kiddie Korner, and piped-in music, was a veritable Disneyland of the grocery world. Still, after availing themselves liberally of its Gala Opening gifts and specials, almost all the old guard had drifted back to do the bulk of their shopping in the unprepossessing confines of the supermarket.

One could speculate endlessly on the general reasons for this contrariness; but in the evenings, especially these long summer evenings, the one specific advantage the older store offered over its dazzling competitor emerged clear and indisputable.

The supermarket was what you might call strategically located—flanked on one side by Zapata's Café and Solly's Hebrew National, and on the other by The Rose of Killarney Bar and Grill. Thus, after their shopping was done, the women could gather on the side-

walk for a pleasant exchange of gossip and at the same time keep a sharp eye out against any inclination their men might have to make too late or lively a night of it.

So engrossed were they in their respective conversations that they did not immediately notice the emergence of Luz Delgado from the apartment building just beyond The Rose.

Luz Delgado was 23 years old. Some of the women on the sidewalk ahead of her were no older; yet, pulled about and dragged down by the grubby hands of their children, they were already beginning to sag and fade. As Luz paused there watching them, she unconsciously ran her hands down the firm lines of her own vivid body.

"Born wise," her grandmother had said of her. It was true; also born pretty, she had needed no one to tell her how to use her good looks to get where she wanted to go.

What did she care what this bunch of cackling *gallinas* said about her? They were jealous, that was all—jealous of the attention their men paid her, jealous that she always had money to spend on pretty clothes. Her lip curled faintly as she moved out of the entranceway.

The first defiant click of her heels alerted the women to her presence. A hush fell over them and they seemed almost palpably to close their ranks firmly against her.

Kate Noonan's thoughts skittered nervously to her husband, Barney, inside The Rose. She hoped to God the big lug wouldn't choose this moment to stumble out. He never left off ragging her about her "yid" friends and her "spic" friends; all the same, she'd noticed he couldn't keep his eyes off that one.

Carmen Reyes, who up till a second ago had been wishing that her brother, Jaime Ortiz, might come home, prayed fervently now that wherever he had gone he would stay there just a few minutes longer. She hugged the placid infant on her arm a little closer and sighed. Jaime was almost 20 but he was like a baby in some ways—so good, so religious he couldn't see bad in anyone, not even that damn Luz. He followed her around like a puppy. Well—Carmen took a little cheer from the thought—at least he wasn't anywhere around now and that was something. Maybe that talking-to Juan had given him at suppertime had done some good.

Little Nito Reyes, curious at the abrupt silence, wormed his way to the front of the women and stared bright-eyed at the approaching Luz.

She sauntered toward them, enjoying the effect she was creating. Then she spied the child standing there. On a sudden mischievous impulse she stopped, fished in her glossy purse for a quarter, and placed it in Nito's upturned palm.

"No!" Eyes flashing, Carmen struck the coin from her child's hand and sent it bouncing into the gutter.

"You leave my kid alone!" Carmen said dangerously. "You leave all my family alone. We don't want nothing from you."

Luz returned their hostile stares coolly. Then she shrugged and went unhurriedly on her way, walking with that slightly swaying rhythmic gait of hers, as though she moved in time to music that only she could hear.

She had just turned the corner and passed out of sight when Shirlee Einhorn trudged up the last steps of the subway exit and sighed. All the way from 34th Street she had sustained herself with the thought of what a relief it was going to be to get out into the night air. So now she was out who could tell the difference?

Her attention was diverted then from her personal discomfort to the sight of the "girls" gathered in front of the market. More out of habit than deep conviction Shirlee's eyebrows lifted slightly in the working woman's disdain for the simple pursuits of mere housewives; once she'd switched her shopping bag to her other hand she moved toward them eagerly, quickening her pace as much as her aching feet would permit.

As she bore down on the assemblage, Kate Noonan raised an arm in greeting.

"Shirl, honey! What did you get?"

"Wait'll you see." Shirlee leaned her shopping bag against the store front and flung herself down gratefully on an upturned empty melon crate. "Boy, am I bushed." She slipped off her shoes and tenderly rubbed her swollen feet.

"Saks Fifth Avenue no less!" Admiringly, Kate rubbed a bare toe protruding from her tacky sandal against the smartly lettered shopping bag.

"I made a special trip up on my lunch hour; they're not open nights." Shirlee began pulling her purchases, mostly from Ohrbach's, out of the bag. Then, from the bottom, she drew forth an elegantly gift-wrapped box with the words *Saks Fifth Avenue* imprinted on it in letters tastefully small but inarguably *there*.

Shirlee grinned and shrugged helplessly. "It's for Nat's cousin Esther. They're like brother and sister; his Uncle Morris and Aunt Zelda practically raised him. And just before I left this morning Nat says to me, 'Remember, Shirl, from us should come only first class.' So what could I do?"

She bent to the task of untying the ribbon, taking meticulous care not to wrinkle it so as to be able to re-tie it later. Then at last she lifted the lid and laid aside the tissue.

The two of them gazed reverently for a minute at the gossamer contents.

"Holy Mother!" Kate breathed. "Ain't that something!"

"A set," Shirlee explained with pardonable pride. "Gown and peignoir to match. Floor length."

Kate hugged herself dreamily. "When's the shower?"

"Wednesday night, and Sunday's the wedding. That's gonna be some wedding, with afterwards a sit-down affair for fifty people. *And* —you know what Uncle Morris is giving them for a wedding present? An apartment. No kidding. He bought over here in the Sky-vista; three rooms with a terrace—everything built in—gorgeous!" But somehow Shirlee's enthusiasm seemed to run out of steam as she spoke. "All of which," she concluded drily, "does not in my opinion make up for the fact that the bridegroom is Hyman Gold."

"Aw now, Shirl, he's not so bad as all that, is he?"

"He's no prize, Katie, take it from me, I know him since grade school." She paused, frowning. "I can't help thinking—if only her mother hadn't kept after her and kept after her to get married. So all right, Esther's twenty-eight, is that a crime? . . . Well." Shirlee dismissed the matter. "It's done now. Good luck to her."

"And you know," Kate pointed out sagely, "it may work out better than you think. It's a funny thing with them wild ones; they mostly turn into lambs once they're married and settled down."

"Well, that's what Nat says," Shirlee conceded, brightening a little. "Uncle Morris is taking Hymie into his business, you know, which unless I'm very much mistaken will make the first legitimate job he's had since he left school. So the way Nat looks at it is, with so much at stake Hymie'll watch his step, turn into a regular reformed character." She began smoothing the tissue back down in the box. "For Esther's sake I hope so. She's a very sweet girl."

Suddenly Kate put a hand on her arm. "Wait a minute, Shirl. Don't put it away yet." She turned and called, "Hey, Carmen!"

The plump, dark young woman paused in an animated conversation and looked up.

"Come see what Shirlee got for the bride."

Carmen shifted the baby a little higher on her hip and came toward them, calling back over her shoulder, "Nito! Watch your sister. Don't let her play in the gutter no more, you hear?"

"Take a look at that, would you," Kate said.

"Oh-h-h . . . Shirlee-ee . . . it's beautiful!" Baby and all, Carmen executed a couple of dance steps ecstatically. "Juano should see me in that, huh?" Then she came to a stop with a wry little grimace. "Better he shouldn't. I got enough kids."

With abstracted patience Nito

Reyes hauled his sister, Maria, up onto the curb. His mind was almost wholly engaged in the sweet torture of speculation on what he might have done with the small fortune that had rested so briefly in his grasp.

Even in his preoccupation, however, he did not forget to inspect Maria's grimy hands to see what treasures she had collected; if she had picked up a piece of glass she might cut herself and he would get the blame.

Her left hand revealed only a candy wrapper and a frayed cigar butt which he deemed harmless enough, but between the fingers of her right fist something glinted suspiciously. Nito pried open the tightly clenched fingers—and caught his breath. On his sister's tiny palm lay a quarter—the forbidden quarter surely—*his* quarter.

He hesitated. His mother did not want him to have his quarter. It had something to do with her dislike of Luz Delgado. He sighed. That in itself was a puzzle. Nito thought Luz very pretty and very friendly. And his Uncle Jaime, who was his idol, spoke of her with great tenderness. Still—in the face of his mother's strong feeling Nito would not have dared actually to search for the quarter himself.

Yet here it was, as though presented to him again. A temptation of the devil? Or a sign that he was truly meant to have it? Well, it *was* his. He had not stolen it—the quarter had been given to him. And quickly, quickly before any further doubts could rise to plague him, he grabbed the coin and slipped it into his pocket.

Maria's face wrinkled ominously in protest and he hastily forestalled the impending wail by placing a shiny bottle cap in her empty hand. Then he led her, contentedly examining her new possession, to where their mother stood talking.

"Mama, please . . ." Nito pulled at Carmen's skirt and raised a face piteous with urgency. "I got to go to the toilet."

It was a request he shrewdly reckoned she would not deny him, especially in the presence of these ladies. Since she had been attending lectures at the local Health Department Station, on the advice of her friend Shirlee, Carmen's husband was always teasing her about how "respectable" she was becoming. Nito was not entirely certain what that word meant, but it seemed to have something to do with the fact that she now felt obliged to give him a smack every time she caught him relieving himself in the street.

Carmen shrugged her permission, shifted the baby once more, and with her free hand took a firm grip on Maria's arm. Nito moved off quickly in the direction of their apartment building. Then, darting artfully behind the cover of the women standing near the curb, he began to double back, past his

mother's group, past Zapata's, the delicatessen, and the shoe repair shop till he came at last to the subway exit and rounded the corner.

Once out of sight of all the women he slowed down. His destination was the candy store just beyond the middle of the block and he had an important decision to make before he arrived there.

Should he spend the whole quarter on the *Fantastic Four Annual* which just this morning he had been gazing at with hopeless longing? It was wonderfully thick, more than twice the size of two regular comic books. Still . . . with a quarter he could buy *five packs* of bubble gum.

Nito sighed. It was a difficult choice and he would truly have liked to give it long and serious thought. But he was filled with an uneasy certainty that he must get rid of the quarter in his pocket as quickly as possible. This was not an ordinary quarter. At every step it tapped against his skinny thigh as though to remind him that there was something not quite right about it.

Spurred on by its warning, Nito hurriedly decided in favor of the bubble gum. Each pack, after all, contained a precious bonus of baseball cards; and besides, he had always wanted to see if he could get five pieces of bubble gum in his mouth at once. Three he had done, but never five.

His mind made up, he broke into a businesslike trot and almost immediately came up short against two pairs of dark-blue clad legs. Nito froze like a pointer—every muscle, every nerve alert. Then, slowly, in an agony of apprehension that the ill-gotten quarter might be shining through the cloth of his pocket with some telltale glow of its own, he raised his eyes to face The Enemy.

One of the policemen, Sergeant Gunderson, was well-known in the neighborhood, but the other one Nito had never seen before.

"Whoa, there," said the new one. "Where you going in such a hurry?"

A friendly grin lit up his homely young face, but it was not enough to offset Nito's ingrained distrust of the uniform. He took prompt refuge in the one defense he knew, *"Yo no comprendo."*

Sergeant Gunderson gave a sour laugh. "Like hell you don't," he said and moved toward the patrol car at the curb. "Come on, Abrams," he called back. "You're wasting your time." With a little shrug of defeat the younger one followed his partner.

Nito melted at once into the dark mouth of an alleyway between the buildings. He waited a minute, then cautiously peered out. But the two policemen were still there, standing at the curb talking. The one who was called Abrams glanced in Nito's direction and Nito pulled quickly out of sight

again and retreated deeper into the alley. In his haste he caught his foot on something and fell backward with a sharp cry of surprise.

Nito lay sprawled over something bulky—he was not really hurt but in a state of near-panic. He flailed about wildly in the blackness of the alley trying to raise himself. Suddenly, to his horror, whatever he was lying on moved slightly underneath him. Then it made a terrible moaning sound.

At almost the same instant a light flashed in his face, blinding him. Nito stared helplessly into it, too paralyzed by fear even to turn his head.

"Good God!" It was Sergeant Gunderson's voice. After the single exclamation he began tersely snapping out orders. "Get the kid off her. Get a statement from her if you can. I'll put in the call."

The other policeman, not smiling now, lifted Nito up carefully and stood him against the wall. Only then did Nito see what it was he had stumbled over.

Lying on the ground was Luz Delgado. She looked very different now, very sick. Nito wanted to take his eyes away from her but he could not. She turned toward him slightly, putting a hand out to support herself, and Nito caught his breath as he saw a knife sticking out of her back.

"Don't try to move," Abrams said, easing her onto her side. "Can you tell me who did this to you?"

Luz nodded slightly. "Jaime—" she gasped, then again, "Jaime."

As Abrams wrote it down he asked, "You know his last name?"

Again Luz barely nodded and her lips worked with the effort to go on, but no more sound came out. Instead, from the side of her mouth there began to bubble a horrid reddish froth. Suddenly her eyes widened, then froze in one last beseeching look.

Abrams bent quickly close to her and Nito, trembling, seized the chance to inch his way silently along the wall.

When he emerged from the alley he saw Sergeant Gunderson talking to two more policemen who were getting out of a second patrol car. An ambulance, its siren going full blast, was just bearing down on the scene as Nito ducked behind the people gathered on the sidewalk and began to run.

But no matter how fast he ran the stricken face of Luz loomed always before him. And most terrible of all, her lips seemed to repeat endlessly to the rhythm of his pounding feet that name he knew so well—Jaime—Jaime—Jaime. By the time Nito rounded the corner onto his own block his breath was coming in short harsh sobs.

As he sped past the women he thought he heard his mother call to him, but he did not stop. With scarcely a break in stride he turned into his own building and pelted up the four flights of stairs. Once

inside the dark, empty apartment he groped his way across the kitchen and into the living room. And there, at last, he flung himself down on the couch which was also his bed.

After what seemed like many hours his parents came into the kitchen and turned on the light. Nito turned his head to the wall, and when his mother looked into the living room to make sure he was there he pretended to be asleep. She pulled the curtain across the door and went quietly away and soon he heard her putting his sisters to bed in the next room. Then she came back out to the kitchen and sat down with his father.

They began talking in low voices about the murder. Nito strained to hear what they were saying, his stomach tightening at every mention of his Uncle Jaime's name. But it soon became clear that they did not know what Nito knew; they seemed to be concerned only with how they were going to break the news to Jaime.

Bit by bit Nito relaxed, not so much in relief as in despair that the burden of that knowledge still rested solely on his shoulders. He dug his fist into the pillow and nearly groaned aloud. He would not, he could not be the one to tell them.

Suddenly the outer door opened and closed and Nito knew by the way his parents had abruptly stopped talking that his Uncle Jaime had come in. A chair scraped back and Nito's father began talking slowly, explaining to Jaime as gently as he could what had happened to Luz. When he had finished Nito waited tensely for his uncle's reply, dreading, yet hoping to hear the words that would make his secret no longer a secret.

But there was only silence. It was his father who finally broke it.

"Look, Jaime—"he began awkwardly. "I am sorry. The things I told you tonight about Luz—well, they were true, but perhaps I should not have said them. She was a mortal—a poor, weak mortal like all of us—and who am I to judge her?"

"It does not matter." For a second Nito did not realize it was his Uncle Jaime who had spoken. That voice—always so quick to laugh, so full of music—sounded flat and spent. "She is with God now."

No more was said after that. Nito heard a slight creak of the springs as Jaime sank down on his cot in the corner of the kitchen, then his parents turned out the light and went into the bedroom. Soon there was no sound at all.

But Nito did not sleep. He did not think he would ever sleep again. He stared into the dark, waiting, listening for a sound he knew must come—the sound of the police climbing the stairs to take his Uncle Jaime away. The thought was so painful that Nito closed his eyes for a moment against it . . .

When he opened them he was astonished to see light at the windows. It was only dim, gray light, for a steady rain was falling outside, but it was morning light. And someone was moving about in the kitchen.

"Should I wake Jaime?" he heard his mother ask softly.

"Let him alone," came his father's reply. "I will tell them he is sick. Give him a day to get over this. It will be better, I think." Then the door opened and closed as his father left to go to work.

Nito let out his breath on a long sigh. His Uncle Jaime was still here then; the police had not yet come. Nito did not understand the delay but he could not take much comfort from it. He knew the policeman had heard Luz say his uncle's name; Nito had even seen him write it down in his book. So, very soon now—at any moment, perhaps—

"Hey, Nito," His mother pushed aside the curtain and came in, "What you gonna do—lie here all day?" She gave him a playful shake and sat down on the couch beside him.

He smiled sheepishly and sat up.

"Look, Nito—" Her face grew serious. "I got to take the little ones to the clinic for their shots. But your Uncle Jaime is home from work today—he's not feeling so good. So I want you to stay with him, all right?"

Nito stiffened in panic at the thought of being left alone with Jaime to face the police who would be here any minute now. He opened his mouth to protest but the words stuck in his throat.

His mother gave him an encouraging smile. "Maybe you can cheer him up—sing some songs with him. He likes to sing with you."

Numbly he nodded.

"You're a good boy." She kissed him lightly and rose. "Come on now. Your breakfast is on the table."

Nito slid off the couch and followed her into the kitchen. He sat down at the table and kept his eyes fixed on the food in front of him. But he did not see it; he was listening, in a daze of disbelief, to the busy sounds around him of his mother getting his sisters ready to leave. Then at last he heard the door close behind them. They were really gone.

Cautiously, almost fearfully, Nito lifted his eyes and looked across at his Uncle Jaime. It was like looking at a stranger. Jaime was not asleep, but there was a terrible quietness about him. He lay staring at the ceiling, his body motionless, his face blank as a mask. Whatever place of grief or remorse Jaime had retreated into, Nito realized that he could not follow him.

Nito fought back the tears and dug his fists savagely into his pockets. The knuckles of his right hand struck something hard and he

gasped. The quarter! He had forgotten about the quarter.

Slowly his fingers closed around the coin and he drew it out of his pocket. It seemed to grow increasingly heavy in his hand as the frightening scope of its powers came home to him at last. For, of course—it was this coin that had brought misfortune upon his family.

If he had not taken this quarter which he was not meant to have, he would not have gone down the street toward the candy store, he would not have run into the policemen, he would not have hidden in the alley, he would not have stumbled over Luz—and he would not have heard her say that name. And if he had not heard it, then—yes, yes, he was certain of it—the whole nightmare simply could not, would not *be*.

Punishing tears scalded his eyes and spilled over his cheeks. If only, oh, if only he had struck the cursed quarter from his sister's hand as his mother had struck it from his; if only he had sent it back to the gutter where such evil things belonged.

Through the blur of his tears the coin shimmered wickedly, growing now larger, now smaller, taunting him with its powers, menacing, beckoning.

Nito stared at it hypnotized. Slowly he stood up. Never taking his eyes off the coin, he moved, trancelike, out the door of the apartment and down the four flights of stairs.

The rain was coming down harder now, but Nito did not even feel it. As if by instinct he walked to the spot, a few feet below the fire hydrant, where he had taken the coin from his sister the night before.

He stood at the curb, a small drenched priest celebrating some primal sacrament. In a gesture of ritual grace he tilted his hand and made the offering. The coin perched briefly on the crushed fragment of a milk carton, then a rush of water sent it along the gutter and out of sight.

Nito turned. Stiffly he walked back, up the stairs, into the apartment. And there, holding his thoughts as rigidly in check as his body, he sat down to wait for the police.

The rain stopped just in time for a sunset so blistering that it caused steam to rise from the damp sidewalks, and once more the dark closed in like the walls of an oven.

Inside the delicatessen the two policemen gulped their cold drinks thirstily.

"One corned beef on a roll, one pastrami on rye to go," Solly intoned as he pushed the bag across the counter.

Sergeant Gunderson pulled out his wallet but Solly waved it away.

"Not tonight," he said. "This time's on me. So how often do I

get celebrities in my store? Oh, yes," he tapped the newspaper lying beside the cutting board. "I been reading all about it. A girl gets herself killed *in my own neighborhood*—such a thing—and inside a few hours the police got signed, sealed, and delivered the no-goodnik who did it, and a confession even. And all the quick work of my two friends who they mention by name. You should get a medal."

Gunderson snorted. "That'll be the day."

"A little snack then," Solly insisted. "That, at least."

Gunderson inclined his head in thanks and accepted the sandwiches. "Actually," he flicked an eye at Solly, "I think most of the credit should go to my partner here. It was his first homicide, you know. He's a comer, Solly, you mark my word."

Solly looked Abrams up and down gravely. "I believe you."

Abrams blushed, pleased but flustered. "What'd I do?" he protested. "I just took her statement, that's all. If Sergeant Gunderson hadn't known the neighborhood, known who she was talking about, it wouldn't have meant anything to me."

"Such modest policemen," Solly clucked, apparently addressing a slab of smoked salmon. "They push credit on each other like blame."

"What I mean is," Abrams burbled on, "she was almost done for when we found her. She didn't even have the strength to say the guy's last name. All she said was 'Hymie.' I mean, there must be a million Hymies in New York."

In the Reyes apartment Carmen moved back and forth between stove and table listening intently and nodding from time to time while Juan read aloud the newspaper account of the murder and the subsequent arrest of one Hyman Gold.

Nito was also listening, and as he drank in his father's words his face opened like a flower.

"You see?" Carmen brought over the last dish and sat down, gesturing at her husband with a serving spoon. "My frien' Shirlee was right. She *said* that guy was no good. Mother of God!" she exclaimed suddenly, clasping her hand to her bosom. "What a lucky thing that Esther din' marry him!"

"Your frien' Shirlee." Juan wagged his head, mimicking her. "Can't I have one meal in my house without hearing about your frien' Shirlee?"

Carmen snapped at the bait and they fell to arguing with gusto.

But Nito was no longer paying attention to them. Fascinated, he was watching his Uncle Jaime.

In a kind of slow motion, as if waking from a spell, Jaime had got up off the cot. He came now, hesitantly, toward the table.

Save for a brief glance between them, Nito's mother and father accepted Jaime's return without a

sign. As he slipped into his chair he looked across at Nito—really *looked* at him—for the first time today. And at the corners of his mouth, and in his eyes, there flickered the beginnings of a smile.

With a joyous swoop Nito shoveled a great mountain of rice onto his plate.

"Hey, Nito!" His father's eyes went big in mock alarm. "You gonna leave nothing for the rest of us! What you been doing today makes you so hungry?"

Nito smiled, but his mouth was already too full to reply. Which was just as well. For how could he explain to his father what he had been doing today? He was not sure he understood it himself.

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RHONA PETRIE

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PEOPLE KEEP DYING ROUND HERE

by RHONA PETRIE

"AH," SAID INSPECTOR HALLIDAY with appreciation, and slowly considering withdrawal from the dining table, "you're a lucky young fellow. As bonny a lass as ever trotted up the High Street with a shopping basket on her arm. Knows what to do with the groceries too. My, that was good pie! I only knew one woman could make a short-crust pastry like that."

"And you let her get away?" asked Constable Morris with a grin, presuming somewhat on the meal's success.

"Well, I won't say I never fancied her," admitted the old Inspector. "I'd been widowed a couple of years by then. Only thing was, rumor had it the lady was someone else's intended. Our Superintendent's, no less. That put me clean out of the running."

Lucy deftly whipped the tablecloth from under the men's elbows, took it away, and returned with the coffee percolator. Ears alerted, she recognized the tone of voice as Halliday lowered himself into an armchair and stretched his bony, black-socked ankles toward the fire.

"Elinor Barnett her name was, and she wasn't a local product. Fuddy-duddy old Prof Barnett had brought her back from one of those Hellenic cruises. An instant wife, you might say. Shuddered the specs off the whole university, it did. A

dried-up old beanpole like him and this—this soft little brown-eyed woman with a bent for domesticity."

Done, Lucy's eyes signaled to her husband. (Just get him reminiscing on a full stomach and it's in the bag, Jim had said. If he starts telling stories after dinner, promotion is as good as mine. He may be a moralizing old bore, but his recommendation carries weight.)

"But if she was married to the old professor . . . ?" the young policeman prompted.

"Oh, he died. Had a whale of a time before he went, though. Kicked over the traces completely. Changed overnight, you might say. Even wrote himself new lectures. Bought a big Queen Anne house out by the common, furnished it, and filled it with parties. Good food and good conversation—you know the sort of thing the university crowd goes in for. And there was Elinor, mothering all the lads, making sure they all had a balanced diet and got their laundry back and kept in touch with their parents—a real home away from home it was. Many's the meal I had there myself as some student's guest when I took a short course at the university. Great days they were, but they didn't last all that long.

"The sudden speed-up in his whole way of living must have overtaxed the old chap because Professor Barnett got himself virus pneumonia from a faculty moor-hiking weekend two winters later and promptly died. Everyone thought he'd have left Elinor well off, with a good-sized insurance policy and all; but it turned out she could just about make things pay if she partitioned off some of the larger rooms and crammed in a lot of student boarders. She insisted on keeping the house—said it was the only real home she'd ever had. And she seemed content enough to go on working hard to pay for its upkeep. Of course, nobody imagined she'd be on her own long. It was a good setup: professor's widow, good house in a nice neighborhood, all mod. cons. laid on, so to speak. Ideal background for a middle-aged chap of good professional standing, you might say."

"Which is where your Superintendent came in," supposed Jim, pressing the cream jug into Halliday's not unwilling hand.

"Ah," confided the old Inspector, "and so he might have, if it hadn't been for young Tommy Prescott's accident. Which is what brought me back on the scene, as it happened. And I ought to warn you, young Lucy, that the rest of the tale's not pretty at all."

"What sort of accident was it?" she asked, absently receiving back the coffee crystals from her guest and prodding at his story as though it were a reluctant log smoldering in the hearth.

"A toss off his motorbike. Nothing special, they thought at Casu-

alty. Put a plaster over one cheek and bandaged his hands, sent him home to take life easy for a day or two. Home, of course, was his room at Mrs. Barnett's. Tommy was a second-year classicist, an orphan raised by an uncle in London. He had various aunts and uncles in the midlands but no one of his own generation. He'd been across to Northampton to visit an old aunt that very afternoon and had this spill on the way back. Elinor Barnett, of course, was mother, sister, and guardian angel to the injured lad."

"Ooh," said Lucy with delight, scenting at last a story to her own taste. "Was there a scandal then?"

Halliday stopped in his narrative, mouth still open, and rolled on his hostess the blank, brown, doglike eyes that he had reproachfully rolled on so many generations of suspects in the C.I.C. Interrogation Room. "You misunderstand me," he rebuked her soberly, "this was a *murder* case."

At once the atmosphere in the comfortable little living room changed. Constable Jim Morris, on temporary loan to C.I.D., snapped mentally to attention. Can't be so, he told himself. A *local murder* within recent memory, and I've never even heard of it? The old buzzard's making it up as he goes along. Setting a test case, that's it. Thinks he'll baffle my wits. Well, I'll show him!

Stirring stolidly away at his oversweetened coffee, Halliday noted with satisfaction how the young couple edged forward in their chairs, eyes wide with impatient curiosity. He chuckled inside himself to see the constable's mind racing ahead into all the possible alleys and byways of the narrative, sniffing at the story, doubting that it was genuine, scenting in it an ulterior motive. Switched on, he looked: registering intelligence at full power, cocking his eager-examinee's head with jaunty confidence.

Halliday ponderously examined his spoon. (I've fooled better men than you, young 'un, and shall do it again.)

Reassured now that his listeners' suspicions were well engaged in the wrong direction, he launched on the sudden death of Tommy Prescott.

"She did all that anyone could," he said sadly. "Perhaps if she'd looked in on him during the night there would have been time to save him. But why should she? They hadn't said anything at the hospital about checking on him for twenty-four hours. When Elinor saw him next morning she realized at once. He'd been vomiting; only spoke a few words—about his Aunt Pat. He seemed very anxious about the old lady—then his breathing changed. The pupils of his eyes were fully dilated. He went rapidly into a coma."

"Cerebral pressure," Jim Morris pronounced, managing to sound

both smug and slightly shocked. "Unsuspected concussion. They ought to have been more careful at the hospital."

"No," insisted Lucy, bouncing in her chair, *"she* did it, didn't she?"

As Halliday slowly shook his head she sank back, disappointed. "But you did say it was a murder case, Inspector."

"Never jump to conclusions," her husband warned severely. "What did the post-mortem examination show, sir?"

"A vee of fine cracks in the skull —too fine apparently to show on the x-ray—damage to the soft tissue at that point and a corresponding bruise on the opposite side of the brain. Precisely what one would expect, according to an eyewitness's description of the accident. There was never any question about it: Tommy Prescott died as a result of injuries received when he was tossed off his motorbike. It was his own fault too—took a left turn too wide and met a lamppost on the wrong side of the road."

Inspector Halliday serenely emptied his coffee cup and considered the fine grounds that remained. He waited for Lucy to offer a refill, provide it, and add the accessories to his taste. Seeing that things were going so well, Jim Morris tiptoed over to the sideboard for the bottle of brandy he'd hoarded since Christmas. Top him up, he told himself. Let the lonely old boy remember this evening as a gold and rosy glow. An investment, after all.

"Poor Elinor. She took it badly, blamed herself for negligence. As if it could have been foreseen from the little she knew of his condition." Halliday sighed into the fire, then held up the small liqueur glass to center the logs' red glow in the heart of the translucent amber spirit, sighed again, this time more happily, and bent a forbidding aspect on Lucy.

"Not," he said severely, "that you should misunderstand that either. Elinor Barnett was a respectable woman. Her grief was genuine concern, real sorrow at such a hopeful young life cut short. She told me—for I was at the lad's bedside at the end—she told me she was determined to go and see this old Aunt Pat the boy had had so much on his mind. Perhaps she was in need, or unwell. There was certainly something about the aunt that had upset young Tommy.

"I told Elinor not to be in too great a hurry. It so happened I had a trip to Northampton in the offing myself, to do with an inquiry into the theft of a collection of foreign postage stamps. If I worked it in right I'd have pleasant company on the way. And if rumor was right about Elinor and Superintendent Ellis, it could do me no harm to have her speak well of me."

"Ellis!" almost shouted Jim Morris, sitting suddenly erect so that brandy slopped over the chair.

"Recognize the name, do you?"

grunted Halliday. "Retired a good ten years back, but not entirely gone from memory, it seems. Well, as I was saying"—and he turned a blank stare on the couple—"an ambitious young policeman sometimes imagines he can get a long way on a broad smile and a smart salute, not that Ellis was any more easy to fool than we would be today."

He lowered his gaze and allowed Jim's eyes to meet Lucy's briefly in a mixture of guilt and accusation.

"—so I jollied her along, hoping to get dividends out of it in one way or another."

Halliday paused and gazed into the fire again. "I was still a youngish man then, newly made sergeant, had a little car of my own, and could claim for mileage on a duty run. It was a perfect spring day and Elinor looked good enough to eat, in a little brown squirrel jacket and a mustard-colored dress. I'll never forget how she looked. Little did we dream she had only a matter of days to live. If she hadn't been feeling a little anxious about the dead boy's aunt I would have said she hadn't a care in the world."

"Was it Elinor who got murdered?" cried Lucy.

Halliday didn't speak for a full half minute and Jim Morris, watching the leathery old face harden under the firelight into an implacable, Neanderthal mask, knew that the real story would be coming now. The crime was not a local one at all and that was why he'd never heard of it before.

"She'd written to the old aunt to warn her we were coming," Halliday went on, "and when we peeped through the mail slot, having had no reply to our knocking, her letter was the first thing we saw in the hall, lying where the postman had slipped it through. We went next door and inquired about Miss Prescott. They told us she was in the local hospital. Just after Tommy left her, it seems, she'd suffered a stroke and was partially paralyzed."

Lucy opened her mouth to demand, "Did she die?"—still eager for corpses; but her husband quickly hushed her.

"I was due at Northampton Central Police Station," said Halliday in a heavy voice, "but I dropped Elinor at the hospital on my way, promising to phone her when I'd pick her up.

"Northampton police had the postage stamp theft well in hand. It remained just to take a statement and get it properly signed. I gave the local sergeant a lift out to the witness's house and on the way back, because it was on our route, we dropped in at the hospital."

In a single movement Halliday drained the brandy, as though the memory required some obliterating. "I was appalled when I saw Elinor again. You wouldn't have thought it was the same woman."

"What had happened?" asked Lucy hoarsely.

"That's what I asked her, of course. She told me. It was queer enough, but even Elinor admitted there could have been a reasonable explanation.

"She'd been shown to the old lady's bed, in a curtained-off corner of a small ward. The nurse warned her the old lady couldn't move or talk, but, being Elinor, she decided to wade in and cheer the old soul up. She mentioned that she was Tommy's landlady and the boy wanted her to visit his aunt. He was anxious about her, she said. She didn't mention Tommy's accident, of course, and certainly not that he was dead.

"Well, it didn't take long to exhaust the general topics and the old lady was certainly listening because she followed every movement of Elinor's lips with her eyes. Then, unthinkingly, Elinor asked if she was comfortable in this hospital.

"Quite deliberately old Miss Prescott moved her head to stare straight at Elinor. 'It's all right,' she said distinctly, 'but people keep dying round here.' The voice was thin and petulant, but in no way distorted.

"Elinor positively shot off for the nurse and they both hurried back to hear more. Guess what?—old Miss Prescott had gone dumb on them again.

"It had upset Elinor, feeling that the nurse might decide she'd imagined it or had some reason to lie to them; but the nurse laughed and said that old folks were funny sometimes. They liked to make their illnesses stretch out to insure extra attention. Let her go on pretending until tomorrow—if she could keep it up. In the morning they could test precisely how far the paralysis was letting up. As for 'people keep dying round here,' it was true the woman in the next bed had passed away the previous night. She hadn't realized that Miss Prescott was conscious of them moving out the body. There was another patient in that bed today, a middle-aged woman with a broken leg. The nurse nodded across to her. Mrs. Barnett had been good enough to go over and pour a tumbler of water for her as she couldn't reach it herself.

"I thought that should have reassured Elinor, but it didn't entirely, and then Rogers, the police sergeant, had to stir things up again.

" 'Had you met Miss Prescott before, ma'am?' " he asked Elinor.

"She shook her head. 'I only knew that she existed. I found her address among Tommy's things.'

" 'Good enough,' he said cockily. 'That proves she did speak to you. It's exactly what she would say—she used to say it all the time, before her stroke. She was really quite gaga, you know, and thought she had special powers. Anyone who crossed her, or who didn't particularly please her, came to a sticky end. Peculiarly enough, there *had* been one or two sudden deaths in

her neighborhood. That's probably the reason she got such a fantastic notion. We first heard about it from her neighbors, and then she started turning up at Central Police Station, wanting to sign confessions. Completely dotty, poor old soul. If this stroke hadn't happened, I guess she'd have been admitted to a Home in any case. That's why young Tommy was so worried about her, you may be sure.'

"It horrified Elinor, and the rest of the evening was hardly a success. She wouldn't go out for a meal with me, just wanted to get back and rest. She sat in a sort of glazed black despair all the way home in the car and nothing I could say would relieve it. Of course, old age *is* a very sad thing, but what, after all, can you do to cure it?

"Next morning, when I'd heard the shocking news, I persuaded myself she had felt some presentiment of evil."

"What news?"

"About the murder. At the Northampton hospital. Someone had put a pillow on a patient's face as she slept and leaned on it until the woman was dead."

"Tommy's Aunt Pat?"

"No. The woman next to her—the one with the broken leg. And nothing at all to show who had done it. The night nurse was heating up milk in the kitchen and when she got back in the ward, it was done."

"And Miss Prescott?" demanded Jim Morris. "Didn't they make those tests to prove the paralysis had receded?"

"Pointless," answered the old Inspector heavily. "You see, that night she'd had her second stroke, a more serious one this time. They discovered her like that, straight after the murder. Her bed was in confusion, blankets on the floor. A real mess."

"You mean . . . ?" faltered Lucy. "She'd killed the woman next to her, tried to get back in her own bed, and then— How horrible!"

"I had a phone call later that morning from Elinor. She wanted me to come and see something she'd found.

"I went, of course, and it rocked me back on my heels. It was Tommy's motorbike, which had been dumped in her garage since his accident. She said she'd begun to wonder about this strange old Aunt Pat and her fatal effect on those who displeased her. So she'd taken a closer look at the connection to the brake pedal which had come off in the smashup. Under magnification she found file marks. Someone had almost severed the connection. Small wonder Tommy went off the track at a sharp turn. His second or two of unconsciousness would be enough to cut off any precise memory of the sequence of events. Like everyone else, Tommy could have assumed the pedal came off at the moment of impact."

Constable Morris shook his head

in wonder. "Killing her own nephew too. Unfit to plead, of course. I guess that's why I never heard of the case. They must have simply locked her away somewhere until she died."

"What a shocking old woman," breathed Lucy, hunched in her chair.

"She died two days later," said Halliday briefly. "Predeceased Elinor by some nine or ten hours."

"Oh, no! Not Elinor too? How did the aunt do it?"

"Mrs. Barnett was poisoned, Lucy."

"Slipped it to her at the hospital," suggested Jim Morris. "It looked like aspirin, so the next time Mrs. B. had a headache—"

"Ingenious," the old Inspector agreed, "but incorrect. The poison was a barbiturate. And Elinor took an overdose when she knew she'd been found out."

"*Elinor?* Elinor *found out?* Doing what?"

"Committing murder. First her husband, then the woman with the broken leg. Not Tommy, though. His death, like his aunt's, just happened. Though the aunt's was really Elinor's fault. Miss Prescott must have watched Elinor kill the woman in the next bed."

"And Tommy's sawed-off brake pedal? What about those file marks?" demanded Morris, jabbing a stiff forefinger into the padding of Halliday's armchair.

"I told you it rocked me back on my heels when I saw it. That was because I'd already gone over the motorbike minutely myself. What's more, I'd retained the pedal—which showed a clean break. Now, with the file marks added, the joint didn't mate. No, Elinor did that herself—to make us sure that Miss Prescott was a real killer. And this was necessary to Elinor's plan because the woman in the next bed *had* to die at once."

"Now who's jumping to conclusions?" snorted Lucy.

"Oh, I didn't jump," the old Inspector assured her. "I shied off it as long as I could—until, in fact, I had a full story of that unknown woman's life. And then the connecting link could no longer be ignored. Miss Mavis Garner—registered nurse Garner—had once been in private attendance on Professor Barnett. It was during his last illness. She recognized Elinor at once when she came visiting the next patient. She couldn't have failed to, having lived for more than a fortnight under Elinor's roof, some seventeen months before."

"But why *kill* her?" Lucy demanded, almost in tears now. "How can you *know* what there was between them?"

"Blackmail," said her husband, scowling and kneading his knuckles. "She had something on Mrs. Barnett, had proof maybe that she'd been the cause of her husband's death—"

"Pneumonia he died of," Halliday reminded them. "So what do you think?"

"She could hardly infect him."

"But once infected—and in February too."

"Exposure, of course! She waited until the nurse's back was turned, then stripped the bed and opened all the windows. When Nurse Garner came back he was very much worse, in a coma perhaps, and maybe she felt the room much too cold—"

"She had found it at barely thirty-eight, when she'd kept it for days at a steady seventy-four."

Halliday had aged visibly in the last ten minutes, reliving the crimes of the woman he had admired.

"She left us the details in her confession. She'd given five thousand pounds to Nurse Garner to insure her silence. Small wonder she wasn't left as well provided for as we'd expected. Anway, Garner took the money and not being a professional blackmailer, but even, it seems, capable of a sense of guilt, she had never come back for more. But now, suddenly confronted by Elinor again, she was ashamed of her own part in the arrangement and ready to confess openly how she'd permitted murder to go unsuspected."

"Accessory," said Jim Morris, gnawing at his underlip, "after the fact."

"So Mrs. Barnett took out her car after dark," went on Halliday, not hearing the interruption, "and drove back to Northampton. She hung about there until the coast was clear. Hospitals, after all, are wide-open all the time. When the nurse was not in the ward and all but the luckless Miss Prescott asleep, she murdered the one woman and mussed up the bed of the other. Then she drove home and put in some work with a file on Tommy's motorbike.

"You remember her name was being linked with that of our Superintendent? She couldn't afford any accusations then, however improbable or unprovable. Some mud would have stuck to her, even if Nurse Garner was laughed out of town. So you see, like many another cornered criminal"—Halliday's mouth set in an ugly grin—"this one killed again to cover a murder already committed. A double murderess—that soft little brown-eyed woman with a bent for domesticity. She'd be here today if she hadn't felt sorry for a lad whose dotty old aunt kept complaining, 'People keep dying round here!' So *more* had to."

They were all silent a while. The coffee was finished, the charred logs fell in on an empty cave of embers. The evening was over.

"I warned you it wasn't a pretty tale," the old Inspector growled, heaving himself to his feet, and the young couple made no move to prevent his leaving.

"She was as bonny a lass," he

echoed, "as ever trotted up the High Street with a shopping basket on her arm. And what a cook she was! But ambitious, and ambition's a dangerous thing in women. It made her too ready to plan others' lives for her own use. Or deaths, for that matter. But there's no easy road, you know—no honest short cuts to getting on in the world. Just work. Bloody hard work, if you'll excuse the word, m'dear.

"Well, thank you again, young Jim and Lucy. It was a wonderful meal you gave me. I'll not forget it; and don't you either. Like I said, I only knew one woman who could make short-crust pastry as good as yours!"

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THE AFFAIR AT 7, RUE DE M———

by JOHN STEINBECK

I HAD HOPED TO WITHHOLD FROM public scrutiny those rather curious events which have given me some concern for the past month. I knew of course that there was talk in the neighborhood. I have even heard some of the distortions current in my district—stories, I hasten to add, in which there is no particle of truth. However, my desire for privacy was shattered yesterday by a visit of two members of the fourth estate who assured me that the story, or rather *a* story, had escaped the boundaries of my *arrondissement.*

In the light of impending publicity I think it only fair to issue the true details of those happenings which have come to be known as The Affair at 7, rue de M———, in order that nonsense may not be added to a set of circumstances which are not without their bizarrerie. I shall set down the events as they happened without comment, thereby allowing the public to judge of the situation.

At the beginning of the summer I carried my family to Paris and took up residence in a pretty little house at 7, rue de M———, a build-

ing which in another period had been the mews of the great house beside it. The whole property is now owned and part of it inhabited by a noble French family of such age and purity that its members still consider the Bourbons unacceptable as claimants to the throne of France.

To this pretty little converted stable with three floors of rooms above a well-paved courtyard, I brought my immediate family, consisting of my wife, my three children (two small boys and a grown daughter), and of course myself. Our domestic arrangement in addition to the concierge who, as you might say, came with the house, consists of a French cook of great ability, a Spanish maid, and my own secretary, a girl of Swiss nationality whose high attainments and ambitions are only equaled by her moral altitude. This then was our little family group when the events I am about to chronicle were ushered in.

If one must have an agency in this matter, I can find no alternative to placing not the blame but rather the authorship, albeit innocent, on my younger son John who has only recently attained his eighth year, a lively child of singular beauty and buck teeth.

This young man has, during the last several years in America, become not so much an addict as an aficionado of that curious American practice, the chewing of bubble gum, and one of the pleasanter aspects of the early summer in Paris lay in the fact that the Cadet John had neglected to bring any of the atrocious substance with him from America. The child's speech became clear and unobstructed and the hypnotized look went out of his eyes.

Alas, this delightful situation was not long to continue. An old family friend traveling in Europe brought as a present to the children a more than adequate supply of this beastly gum, thinking to do them a kindness. Thereupon the old familiar situation reasserted itself. Speech fought its damp way past a huge wad of the gum and emerged with the sound of a faulty water trap. The jaws were in constant motion, giving the face at best a look of agony while the eyes took on a glaze like those of a pig with a recently severed jugular. Since I do not believe in inhibiting my children, I resigned myself to a summer not quite so pleasant as I had at first hoped.

On occasion I do not follow my ordinary practice of *laissez-faire*. When I am composing the material for a book or play or essay, in a word, when the utmost of concentration is required, I am prone to establish tyrannical rules for my own comfort and effectiveness. One of these rules is that there shall be neither chewing nor bubbling while I am trying to concentrate. This rule is so thoroughly understood by the Cadet John that he accepts it as one of the laws of nature and does not either complain or attempt to evade

the ruling. It is his pleasure, and my solace, for my son to come sometimes into my workroom, there to sit quietly beside me for a time. He knows he must be silent and when he has remained so for as long a time as his character permits, he goes out quietly, leaving us both enriched by the wordless association.

Two weeks ago, in the late afternoon, I sat at my desk composing a short essay for *Figaro Litteraire,* an essay which later aroused some controversy when it was printed under the title "Sartre Resartus." I had come to that passage concerning the proper clothing for the soul when to my astonishment and chagrin I heard the unmistakable soft plopping sound of a bursting balloon of bubble gum. I looked sternly at my offspring and saw him chewing away. His cheeks were colored with embarrassment and the muscles of his jaws stood rigidly out.

"You know the rule," I said coldly.

To my amazement tears came into his eyes and while his jaws continued to masticate hugely, his blubbery voice forced its way past the huge lump of bubble gum in his mouth.

"I didn't do it," he cried.

"What do you mean, you didn't do it?" I demanded in a rage. "I distinctly heard and now I distinctly see."

"Oh, sir!" he moaned, "I really didn't. I'm not chewing it, sir. It's chewing me."

For a moment I inspected him closely. He is an honest child, only under the greatest pressure of gain permitting himself an untruth. I had the horrible thought that the bubble gum had finally had its way and that my son's reason was tottering. If this were so, it were better to tread softly. Quietly I put out my hand. "Lay it here," I said kindly.

My child manfully tried to disengage the gum from his jaws. "It won't let me go," he sputtered.

"Open up," I said and then inserting my fingers in his mouth I seized hold of the large lump of gum and after a struggle in which my fingers slipped again and again, managed to drag it forth and to deposit the ugly blob on my desk on top of a pile of white manuscript paper.

For a moment it seemed to shudder there on the paper and then with an easy slowness it began to undulate, to swell and recede with the exact motion of being chewed while my son and I regarded it with popping eyes.

For a long time we watched it while I drove through my mind for some kind of explanation. Either I was dreaming or some principle as yet unknown had taken its seat in the pulsing bubble gum on the desk. I am not unintelligent. While I considered the indecent thing, a hundred little thoughts and glimmerings of understanding raced through my brain. At last I asked, "How long has it been chewing you?"

"Since last night," he replied.

"And when did you first notice this, this propensity on its part?"

He spoke with perfect candor. "I will ask you to believe me, sir," he said. "Last night before I went to sleep I put it under my pillow as is my invariable custom. In the night I was awakened to find that it was in my mouth. I again placed it under my pillow and this morning it was again in my mouth, lying quietly. When, however, I became thoroughly awakened, I was conscious of a slight motion and shortly afterward the situation dawned on me that I was no longer master of the gum. It had taken its head. I tried to remove it, sir, and could not. You yourself with all of your strength have seen how difficult it was to extract. I came to your workroom to await your first disengagement, wishing to acquaint you with my difficulty. Oh, Daddy, what do you think has happened?"

The cancerous thing held my complete attention.

"I must think," I said. "This is something a little out of the ordinary, and I do not believe it should be passed over without some investigation."

As I spoke a change came over the gum. It ceased to chew itself and seemed to rest for a while, and then with a flowing movement like those monocellular animals of the order Paramecium, the gum slid across the desk straight in the direction of my son. For a moment I was stricken with astonishment and for an even longer time I failed to discern its intent. It dropped to his knee, climbed horribly up his shirt front. Only then did I understand. It was trying to get back into his mouth. He looked down on it paralyzed with fright.

"Stop," I cried, for I realized that my third-born was in danger and at such times I am capable of a violence which verges on the murderous. I seized the monster from his chin and striding from my workroom, entered the salon, opened the window, and hurled the thing into the busy traffic on the rue de M———.

I believe it is the duty of a parent to ward off those shocks which may cause dreams or trauma whenever possible. I went back to my study to find young John sitting where I had left him. He was staring into space. There was a troubled line between his brows.

"Son," I said, "you and I have seen something which, while we know it to have happened, we might find difficult to describe to others with any degree of success. I ask you to imagine the scene if we should tell this story to the other members of the family. I greatly fear we should be laughed out of the house."

"Yes, sir," he said passively.

"Therefore I am going to propose to you, my son, that we lock the episode deep in our memories and never mention it to a soul as long as we live." I waited for his assent

and when it did not come, glanced up at his face to see it a ravaged field of terror. His eyes were starting out of his head. I turned in the direction of his gaze. Under the door there crept a paper-thin sheet which, once it had entered the room, grew to a gray blob and rested on the rug pulsing and chewing. After a moment it moved again by pseudopodian progression toward my son.

I fought down panic as I rushed at it. I grabbed it up and flung it on my desk; then seizing an African war club from among the trophies on the wall, a dreadful instrument studded with brass, I beat the gum until I was breathless and it a torn piece of plastic fabric. The moment I rested, it drew itself together and for a few moments chewed very rapidly as though it chuckled at my impotence, and then inexorably it moved toward my son, who by this time was crouched in a corner moaning with terror.

Now a coldness came over me. I picked up the filthy thing and wrapped it in my handkerchief, strode out of the house, walked three blocks to the Seine, and flung the handkerchief into the slowly moving current.

I spent a good part of the afternoon soothing my son and trying to reassure him that his fears were over. But such was his nervousness that I had to give him half a barbiturate tablet to get him to sleep that night, while my wife insisted that I call a doctor. I did not at that time dare to tell her why I could not obey her wish.

I was awakened—indeed the whole house was awakened—in the night by a terrified muffled scream from the children's room. I took the stairs two at a time and burst in the room, flicking the light switch as I went. John sat up in bed squalling, while with his fingers he dug at his half-open mouth, a mouth which horrifyingly went right on chewing. As I looked, a bubble emerged between his fingers and burst with a wet plopping sound.

What chance of keeping our secret now! All had to be explained, but with the plopping gum pinned to a breadboard with an ice pick, the explanation was easier than it might have been. And I am proud of the help and comfort given me. There is no strength like that of the family. Our French cook solved the problem by refusing to believe it even when she saw it. It was not reasonable, she explained, and she was a reasonable member of a reasonable people. The Spanish maid ordered and paid for an exorcism by the parish priest who, poor man, after two hours of strenuous effort went away muttering that this was more a matter of the stomach than the soul.

For two weeks we were besieged by the monster. We burned it in the fireplace, causing it to splutter in blue flames and melt in a nasty mess

among the ashes. Before morning it had crawled through the keyhole of the children's room, leaving a trail of wood ash on the door, and again we were awakened by screams from the Cadet.

In despair I drove far into the country and threw it from my automobile. It was back before morning. Apparently it had crept to the highway and placed itself in the Paris traffic until picked up by a truck tire. When we tore it from John's mouth it had still the non-skid marks of Michelin imprinted on its side.

Fatigue and frustration will take their toll. In exhaustion, with my will to fight back sapped, and after we had tried every possible method to lose or destroy the bubble gum, I placed it at last under a bell jar which I ordinarily use to cover my microscope. I collapsed in a chair to gaze at it with weary, defeated eyes. John slept in his little bed under the influence of sedatives backed by my assurance that I would not let the Thing out of my sight.

I lighted a pipe and settled back to watch it. Inside the bell jar the gray tumorous lump moved restlessly about searching for some means of exit from its prison. Now and then it paused as though in thought and emitted a bubble in my direction. I could feel the hatred it had for me. In my weariness I found my mind slipping into an analysis which had so far escaped me.

The background I had been over hurriedly. It must be that from constant association with the lambent life which is my son, the magic of life had been created in the bubble gum. And with life had come intelligence—not the manly open intelligence of the boy, but an evil calculating wiliness.

How could it be otherwise? Intelligence without the soul to balance it must of necessity be evil. The gum had not absorbed any part of John's soul.

Very well, said my mind, now we have a hypothesis of its origin, let us consider its nature. What does it think? What does it want? What does it need? My mind leaped like a terrier. It needs and wants to get back to its host, my son. It wants to be chewed. It must be chewed to survive.

Inside the bell jar the gum inserted a thin wedge of itself under the heavy glass foot and constricted so that the whole jar lifted a fraction of an inch. I laughed as I drove it back. I laughed with almost insane triumph. I had the answer.

In the dining room I procured a clear plastic plate, one of a dozen my wife had bought for picnics in the country. Then turning the bell jar over and securing the monster in its bottom, I smeared the mouth of it with a heavy plastic cement guaranteed to be water-, alcohol- and acidproof. I forced the plate over the opening and pressed it down until the glue took hold and bound the plate to the glass, mak-

ing an airtight container. And last I turned the jar upright again and adjusted the reading light so that I could observe every movement of my prisoner.

Again it searched the circle for escape. Then it faced me and emitted a great number of bubbles very rapidly. I could hear the little bursting plops through the glass.

"I have you, my beauty," I cried. "I have you at last."

That was a week ago. I have not left the side of the bell jar since, and have only turned my head to accept a cup of coffee. When I go to the bathroom, my wife takes my place.

I can now report the following hopeful news.

During the first day and night the bubble gum tried every means to escape. Then for a day and a night it seemed to be agitated and nervous as though it had for the first time realized its predicament. The third day it went to work with its chewing motion, only the action was speeded up greatly, like the chewing of a baseball fan. On the fourth day it began to weaken and I observed with joy a kind of dryness on its once slick and shiny exterior.

I am now in the seventh day and I believe it is almost over. The gum is lying in the center of the plate. At intervals it heaves and subsides. Its color has turned to a nasty yellow. Once today when my son entered the room, it leaped up excitedly, then seemed to realize its hopelessness and collapsed on the plate. It will die tonight I think and only then will I dig a deep hole in the garden, and I will deposit the sealed bell jar and cover it up and plant geraniums over it.

It is my hope that this account will set straight some of the silly tales that are being hawked in the neighborhood.

a *new* short-short story by

VICTOR CANNING

first publication in the United States

Eight-year-old Peter Letterworth liked to go fishing with a hickory stick, an old piece of string for a line, and a sixpenny hook. He got into trouble, like falling into the millpond, and then gave elaborate excuses. He was just a normal, healthy boy . . . or was he?

THE BOY WHO TOLD FIBS

by VICTOR CANNING

IT'S A COMMON ADULT MISCONCEPTION that a child's world is a curious mixture of fancy and reality, that the boundary between the bizarre and plain fact is a shadowy one. Nothing could be more untrue. A child's world is a sharp, vivid one where everything exists in a bold, unquestionable vitality. It's the adult who dreams, who believes in fairy tales and miracles—and he has to do this to escape now and then from life. Children don't need to escape: life to them is still sunrise and full of glowing colors.

Take a typical example of this misconception—Mr. and Mrs. Charles Letterworth. Charles was a country solicitor, about 40, level-headed, intelligent, and with no reason to suppose that he was anything else but an enlightened father. And as a solicitor he felt that he was well qualified to distinguish fact from fiction.

His wife, Phyllis, was a good-looking, capable woman who took her full share of the activities of the village in which they lived. She was a good pianist and before her marriage had been the assistant editor of a woman's magazine. Now, she was more than content to run a home in the country and to devote all her love to her husband and to their one son, Peter, aged eight.

Peter was the problem child—not a very big problem, but one which had begun to worry both Phyllis and Charles Letterworth. From a very early age both of them had cultivated the habit of telling Peter a bedtime story, and then later had directed his first reading efforts to children's books which they carefully selected.

Peter loved the stories he was

told and read and they were very real to him. If they hadn't been real to him they would have been bad stories. But now, with Peter eight years old, the Letterworths were worried because they felt that the love of fantasy and fairy stories which they had inculcated in Peter was spilling over into a distressing tendency on his part to tell lies.

One evening, over their before-dinner drink, Phyllis said to Charles, "He came home late this afternoon with six beautiful peaches. I know they must have come from the Rectory garden because that's the only place around here that grows peaches. And I know he must have stolen them because I telephoned the Rector—he knows every peach on his tree—and he confirmed that six were missing."

Charles sipped his sherry thoughtfully, and then asked, "What did Peter say?"

"That he was walking down the road by the Rectory when a man stepped out of the bushes and gave the six peaches to him."

"Just that?"

"No. He was carrying a jam jar full of tiddlers—I mean Peter was—that he'd caught up at the millpond. The man said that a jam jar was no place for fish to live and if he'd put them back in the stream he would give Peter the six peaches. But that's not all. Peter says the man was wearing a sort of fireman's helmet and carrying a sword—a kind of knight without a horse. Anyway, Peter put the fish back and took the peaches."

"It's all just an elaborate cover-up for stealing the peaches, isn't it? This knight-in-armor business? We've had that one before."

"I'm afraid so. Charles, I'm worried about it. It's natural enough for a child to steal a few apples or peaches. And in a way it's natural for them to tell a few fibs—but not this fantastic rigmarole! If he goes on like this and we don't check it, he'll grow up thinking he can always get away with it—and *then* we shall have a real problem."

"Well, it could be that he's one of those boys who's going to have to learn the difference between the truth and a lie the hard way."

"Oh, no, Charles—you couldn't!"

"I could and I will—if it's necessary. My father gave me one beating in my life. I've never forgotten it and I learned a valuable lesson. You talk to him and tell him that if he ever tells another lie like this one I shall have to punish him. What happened about the peaches?"

"The Rector was sweet—he begged me to keep them."

Well, Peter got his talking to, and nothing happened to upset Charles and Phyllis as far as the boy was concerned for three weeks. Then one evening Charles got home from his office to be greeted by his wife—

"Charles, I've sent Peter up to

bed without dinner. I'm afraid you're going to have to—well, it's just that the whole thing has got beyond me."

"What happened? Not this knight with a sword again?"

"I'm afraid so. And much more. This time the knight was riding a white horse. And he had jewels and—"

"Take it easy." Charles put a hand on his wife's shoulder. "Let's have it straight from the beginning."

His wife sat down and gave him the story as it had been told to her by Peter. The boy had arrived home about five o'clock and he was wet through. He said that he had been up at the millpond, fishing again. Like his father, he was a keen fisherman—though he used only a hickory stick with an old piece of string tied to the tip and a sixpenny hook with a worm on it.

Father and son often fished together in the millpond. It was the ambition—not only of Charles—but of every other fishing man in the village to catch an old cannibal trout that lived in the pond. The trout was referred to locally as Old Wary and on the few occasions he had been hooked he had got away. But leaning over the mill bridge, Charles and Peter had often watched him slithering in the green depths below.

Well, Peter—Phyllis continued—was fishing from the bank with a worm when he had got a bite. After a few moments he realized that it was Old Wary, and in the ensuing fight Peter had slipped and fallen into the water; but he had eventually managed to land Old Wary on the bank.

"What—on that rotten bit of string and his hickory stick? Nonsense! Couldn't be done!"

"He insists on it. But, of course, it's just a story to excuse his falling in and his fishing up there alone. He knows it's forbidden unless someone is with him."

"Of course . . . Why, if he'd caught Old Wary he would have brought him home. The whole village would have wanted to see the fish and he knows it."

"That's the point. He says that he was going to bring the fish home. But just at that moment down to the stream comes this knight of his, and this time riding on a white horse. From what I can make out from Peter, this knight of his looked down at the fish and said that it was wicked to pull it from the stream where it was so happy. He said that if the fish wasn't thrown back it would die, and once a thing was dead it could never come back to life. Not all the money and jewels in the world could bring it back to life."

The knight, Phyllis went on, had then pulled from his pockets a great handful of jewels—rings and strings of pearls—and had tossed them into the stream. He had said that you could fill the stream with riches and still the fish could never

be brought back to life once it had died.

"And Peter threw the fish back?" said Charles.

"Yes. And the knight, on his white horse, rode off waving his sword and with his helmet shining in the sun."

"He falls into the stream when fishing alone. Then, instead of admitting it frankly, he tells this whopper. I'll just have to deal with him. He's got to learn that an unpleasant fact can't be hidden by a fantastic fib."

Charles left the room, but he didn't go up to Peter right away. He went out and strolled down to the village pub. He hated the thought of beating his boy and he didn't mind admitting to himself that he wanted to put off the evil hour by having a quiet drink and thinking over what he would say to Peter. The beating by itself—he knew from experience with his own father—was nothing unless the words that went with it were the right ones.

The pub was empty except for the landlord who served Charles with a large whiskey and then, leaning his elbows on the counter, said, "You look a bit down, Mr. Letterworth. Tell you a story that'll cheer you up. Know that foreign sort of butler they've got up at the Hall? Well, he did a flit this afternoon. Took a lot of Her Ladyship's jewels, and what's more—this'll give you a laugh—pinched one of His Lordship's hunters. That white mare.

"Off he goes, as mad as a March hare—wearing an old helmet of His Lordship's and wavin' a cavalry sword. Caught him over near Roydall about an hour ago. Mad as a hatter, it seems. Once or twice before, apparently, he's had those fits and gone off—always with a helmet and a sword. Kept it quiet they did—you know how soft-hearted Her Ladyship is. But this time, because of the hunter and the jewels, they put the police on him.

"Funny world, ain't it? If I'd met a bloke coming down the street wearing a helmet, ridin' a white horse, wavin' a sword, and chucking jewels around, I'd say it just wasn't true. Wouldn't you?"

Charles looked up smiling. "Not any more I wouldn't."

THE GOLDEN 13

First Prize Winners in *EQMM*'s international contests

Many readers have asked us to reprint the 13 stories that won First Prizes in *EQMM*'s international contests, and we have finally decided to do so. The *EQMM* annual contests began in 1945 and continued without a break for 12 years, through 1956; after a hiatus of five years the 13th (and last) world-wide contest was held in 1961.

A few statistics: about 12,000 manuscripts were submitted to the 13 contests—an average of nearly 1000 entries per year. Over $75,000 was paid to the winners of First Prizes, Second Prizes, and Special Awards of Merit; an additional $75,000 went to Third Prize winners, Honorable Mention and Honor Roll stories, and to special awards for "first stories," Sherlockiana, and stories by college students—a grand total of $150,000 for the best new short stories and novelets of detection, crime, mystery, and suspense written throughout the world in those 13 years.

Here is the "Queen's dozen" (12 and an extra one for good measure) of First Prize Winners, in chronological order of their original appearance:

Manly Wade Wellman's *A Star for a Warrior*
H. F. Heard's *The President of the United States, Detective*
Alfredo Segre's *Justice Has No Number*
Georges Simenon's *Blessed Are the Meek*
John Dickson Carr's *The Gentleman from Paris*
Charlotte Armstrong's *The Enemy*
Thomas Flanagan's *The Cold Winds of Adesta*
Steve Frazee's *My Brother Down There*
Roy Vickers' *Double Image*
Stanley Ellin's *The Moment of Decision*
A.H.Z. Carr's *The Black Kitten*
Avram Davidson's *The Necessity of His Condition*
Cornell Woolrich's *One Drop of Blood*

We begin The Golden 13 in this issue by giving you the first First Prize Winner; the other 12 will appear in the remaining issues of this year, and a hardcover anthology, containing all 13 First Prize Winners, is planned for publication in 1970.

Now, about First Prize Winner Number 1:

Manly Wade Wellman's *A Star for a Warrior* was judged the most original short story in the 1945 contest for two reasons: it introduced not only a new detective character but a new *type* of detective character; and it placed this new type of detective against a background not previously used in the mystery field. The detective, named David Return, is a full-blooded American Indian—a young brave of the Tsichah, an imaginary tribe based mostly on the Cheyenne and partly on the Pawnee.

But don't misunderstand: Mr. Wellman has not created another Leatherstocking kind of detective; his David Return is not a version of J. Fenimore Cooper's Natty Bumppo sleuthing in the forest primeval. *A Star for a Warrior* is a story of today—of 1969 as much as of 1945. Young David is a government-trained policeman whose beat is an Indian reservation; with his grandfather Tough Feather, the senior lieutenant of the agency police, he serves the government "to make things better for all Indians."

Nor is Mr. Wellman's conception that of a modern detective who is Indian in name only: faced with his first murder case, David Return investigates not as a white man but as an Indian steeped in Red Man lore: his deductions arise out of a deep understanding of Indian character, tradition, and ceremonials. It is no exaggeration to say that in 1945 David Return was the first *truly American* detective to appear in print in many a moon—even more *authentically* American than Melville Davisson Post's Uncle Abner . . .

A STAR FOR A WARRIOR

by MANLY WADE WELLMAN

YOUNG David Return half-ran across the sunbright plaza of the Tsichah Agency. He was slim everywhere except across his shoulders, his tawny brow, his jaw. For this occasion he had put on his best

blue flannel shirt, a maroon scarf, cowboy dungarees, and on his slim toed-in feet, beaded moccasins. Behind his right hip rode a sheath-knife. His left hand carried his sombrero, and his thick black hair reflected momentary blue lights in the hot morning. Once he lifted the hat and slapped his thigh with it, in exultation too great for even an Indian to dissemble. He opened the door of the whitewashed cabin that housed the agency police detail, and fairly bounded in.

"*Ahi!*" he spoke a greeting in Tsichah to the man in the cowskin vest who glanced up at him from a paper-littered table. "A writing from the white chiefs, grandfather. I can now wear the silver star."

The other man lifted a brown face as lean, keen, and grim as the blade of a tomahawk. Tough Feather, senior lieutenant of the agency police, was the sort of old Indian that Frederic Remington loved to paint. He replied in English. "Reports here," he said austerely, "are made in white man's language."

David Return blinked. He was a well-bred young Tsichah, and did his best not to show embarrassment. "I mean," he began again, also in English, "that they've confirmed my appointment to the agency police detail, and—"

"Suppose," interrupted Tough Feather, "that you go outside, and come in again—properly."

Some of the young man's boisterous happiness drained out of him. Obediently he stepped backward and out, pulling the door shut. He waited soberly for a moment, then re-entered and stood at attention.

"Agency Policeman David Return," he announced dutifully, "reporting for assignment as directed."

Tough Feather's thin mouth permitted a smile to soften one of its corners. Tough Feather's deepset black eyes glowed a degree more warmly. "Your report of completed study came in the mail an hour ago," he told David, and picked up a paper. "They marked you 'Excellent' everywhere, except in discipline. There you're 'Qualified'. That's good, but no more than good enough."

David shrugged. "The instructors were white men. But you'll not have any trouble with me. You're my grandfather, and a born chief of the Tsichah."

"So are you a born chief," Tough Feather reminded him, "and don't forget it. This police work isn't a white man's plaything. We serve the government, to make things better for all Indians. *Ahi*, son of my son," and forgetting his own admonition Tough Feather himself lapsed into Tsichah, "for this I taught you as a child, and saw that you went to school and to the police college. We work together from this day."

"*Nunway*," intoned David, as at a tribal ceremony. "Amen. That is my prayer."

From a pocket of the cowskin

vest Tough Feather drew a black stone pipe, curiously and anciently carved. His brown fingers stuffed in flakes of tobacco. He produced a match and struck a light. Inhaling deeply, he blew a curl of slate-colored smoke, another and another and others, one to each of the six holy directions—north, west, south, east, upward, and downward. Then he offered the pipe to David.

"Smoke," he invited deeply. "You are my brother warrior."

It was David Return's coming of age. He inhaled and puffed in turn, and while the smoke clouds signalized the directions, he prayed silently to the Shining Lodge for strength and wisdom. When he had finished the six ritualistic puffs he handed the pipe back to Tough Feather, who shook out the ashes and stowed it in his pocket. Then from the upper drawer of the desk Tough Feather produced something that shone like all the high hopes of all young warriors. He held it out, the silver-plated star of an agency policeman.

Eagerly David pinned it to his left shirt pocket, then drew himself once more to attention. "I'm ready to start duty, grandfather," he said.

"Good." Tough Feather was consulting a bit of paper with hastily scribbled notes. "David, do you remember an Indian girl named Rhoda Pleasant, who came to the agent last week with letters of introduction?"

"I remember that one," nodded David. "Not a Tsichah girl. A Piekan, going to some university up north. She's pleasant, all right," and he smiled, for Indians relish puns as much as any race in the world.

"Not pleasant in every way," growled Tough Feather, not amused. "She's been here too long, and talked too much, for a stranger woman. Plenty of young Tsichah men like her even better than you do. They might finish up by not liking each other."

"Then she's still here on the reservation? I met her only the one time, and the next day she was gone."

"But not gone away," Tough Feather told him. "Gone in. She borrowed a horse and some things to camp with. You know why, don't you? She wants to learn our secret Tsichah songs." The hard-cut old profile shook itself in conservative disapproval.

"*Ahi,* yes," said David. "She talked about that. Said she was getting her master's degree in anthropology, and she's hoping for a career as a scholar and an Indian folklore expert. She told me she'd picked up songs that Lieurance and Cadman would have given ten years of their life to hear and get down on paper. But I couldn't tell her about our songs if I wanted to. We hear them only two or three times a year, at councils and ceremonies."

"The songs are like the chieftainships, passed from father to son in one or two families," reminded Tough Feather. "Right now only three men really know them—"

"And they're mighty brash about it," broke in David, with less than his usual courtesy. "I know them. Dolf Buckskin, Stacey Weed, and John Horse Child. All of them young, and all of them acting a hundred years old and a thousand years smart, out there in their brush camp with a drum—the kind with a pebble-headed stick—and a flute. They think we others ought to respect them and honor them."

"And you should," Tough Feather replied stiffly. "They're young, but their fathers and grandfathers taught them songs and secrets that come down from our First People. Those three young men are important to the whole Tsichah nation. Too important to be set against each other by Rhoda Pleasant."

"You mean she's out there seeing them?" David was suddenly grave, too. "I see what you're worried about. They'd not pay any attention to a man who asked rude questions, but a young woman as pretty as that Piekan—*ahi!* She'd give anybody squaw fever."

"Go to their camp," commanded Tough Feather. "It's off all the main trails, so you'll have to ride a pony instead of driving a car. Tell the girl she must report back here and then go somewhere else."

David frowned. This was not his dream of a brilliant first case for his record. Then he smiled, for he reflected that the ride back from the camp of the singers would be interesting, with a companion like Rhoda Pleasant. "Where is that camp, grandfather?"

Tough Feather pointed with the heel of his hand. "Southwest. Take the Lodge Pole Ridge trail, and turn at the dry stream by the cabins of old Gopher Paw and his son. There's no trail across their land, but you'll pick one up beyond, among the knolls and bluffs. That branches in a few miles, and the right branch leads to where the singers are camped. Take whatever pony you want from the agency stable."

"The paint pony?" asked David eagerly.

"He's not the best one," and Tough Feather eyed his grandson calculatingly. "Not the best traveler, anyway."

"Now about a saddle," went on David, "will you lend me the silver-mounted one that Major Lillie gave you ten years ago?"

Tough Feather smiled, perhaps his first real smile in twenty or thirty days. "All right, take it and take the prettiest bridle, too. You're probably right, David. You'll have less trouble bringing that girl back if you and your pony are good to look at."

The paint pony was not the best

in the agency stables, but he was competent on the narrow rough trail that David had to take. His light-shod feet picked a nimble way through the roughest part of the reservation, over ground even less fit for farming than the poor soil of prairie and creek bottoms. It was rolling and stony, grown up here and there with cottonwood scrub and occasional clumps of willow or Osage orange.

Once or twice rabbits fled from the sound of the hoofs, but not too frantically: animals felt safe in the half-cover of this section; long ago they had escaped here from the incessant hunting enthusiasm of Tsichah boys with arrows or cheap old rifles.

David followed the right branch of the trail that his grandfather had described and went down a little slope, across an awkward gully where he had to dismount and lead the pony, and beyond among scattered boulders.

He felt that he was getting near his work, and in his mind he rehearsed the words, half lofty and half bantering, with which he would explain to Rhoda Pleasant that she must cease her troublesome researches and head back with him. She was a ready smiler, he remembered, both bolder and warmer in manner than any Tsichah girl he knew. And she wore her riding things with considerable knowledge and style, like a white society girl.

Suppose she elected to be charmingly stubborn, to question his authority? He decided to stand for no nonsense and to admit no dazzlement from her smile and her bright eyes. He would be like the old warriors who had no sense of female romance or glamor, who took sex, like all important things, in their dignified stride.

Then he rode around a little tuft of thorn bushes, and saw that Rhoda Pleasant was beyond hearing arguments or considering authorities.

Here by the trailside was her little waterproofed tent, with a canvas ground cloth and a mosquito bar. Near it was picketed the bay horse she had borrowed at the agency. A fire had burned to ashes, and a few cooking utensils lay beside it. On the trail itself lay Rhoda Pleasant, grotesquely and limply sprawled with her face upward.

Her riding habit was rumpled, her smooth-combed black hair gleamed in the sunlight like polished black stone. She looked like a rag doll that some giant child had played with and dropped on tiring of it. Thrown away, that was how she looked. David Return knew death when he saw it.

He got off his pony and threw the reins over its head, then squatted on his heels beside the body. Rhoda Pleasant's neck-scarf had been white. Now it was spotted with stale blood, dark and sticky. David prodded her cool cheek

with a forefinger. Her head did not stir on her neck. That was *rigor mortis*. She had been dead for hours, probably since before dawn. Fully dressed as she was, she might have died before bedtime the night before.

David studied her clay-pale face. The dimmed eyes were open, the lips slack, the expression—she had no expression, only the blank look he had been taught to recognize as that of the unexpectedly and instantly stricken.

Gingerly he drew aside the scarf. The throat wound was blackened with powder but looked ragged, as if a bullet and a stab had struck the same mark. Someone had shot Rhoda Pleasant, decided David, then had thrust a narrow, sharp weapon into the bullet hole.

Rising, David turned his attention to the trail. Its earth was hard, but not too hard to show the tracks of moccasins all round the body, moccasins larger than David's. More tracks were plain nearer the tent and the fire, of the large moccasins and of a companion pair, long and lean. Here and there were a third set of moccasin prints, this time of feet almost as small as Rhoda Pleasant's riding boots.

Three men had been there, apparently all together. And there were three tribal singers camped not far away.

David broke bushes across the trail on either side of the body, and from the tent brought a quilt to spread over the blank dead face. Mounting again, he forced the paint pony off the trail and through thickets where it would disturb no clues. When he came to the trail beyond, he rolled a cigarette and snapped a match alight. Before he had finished smoking he came to another and larger camp.

In a sizable clearing among the brush clumps, by a little stream undried by the summer heat, stood an ancient Sibley tent like a square-bottomed teepee. Behind it was a smaller shelter, of bent sticks covered thickly with old blankets in the shape of a pioneer wagon cover. It was big enough for a single occupant's crouching or lying body, and entrances before and behind were tightly lapped over. Near one end burned a small hot fire, with stones visible among its coals. As David watched, a hand poked out with rough tongs made of green twigs, lifted a stone, and dragged it inside. Strings of steamy vapor crept briefly forth.

"Sweat lodge," said David aloud. The old Tsichah had built and used sweat lodges frequently, but he himself had seen only a few and had been in one just once in his life, as part of the ceremony of joining the Fox Soldier society two years back. He called in Tsichah: "*Ahi*, you singing Indians! Someone has come to see you!"

From the Sibley tent came Stacey Weed. He was taller than David, and leaner, with hair cut long for

a young Indian. All that he wore was a breechclout and moccasins. In one hand he carried a canvas bucket, and he turned at first toward where the camp's three horses were tethered on long lariats downstream from the tent. Then he pretended to notice David, and lifted a hand in a careless gesture of greeting. "*Ahi,* nephew," he said, also in Tsichah.

To be called nephew by a Tsichah can be pleasant or unpleasant. An older man means it in friendly informality; a contemporary seeks to patronize or to snub or to insult, depending on the tone of his voice. Stacey Weed was perhaps two years older than David, not enough seniority to make for kindliness in the salutation.

"John," called Stacey back into the tent, "we must be important. A boy with a new police star has ridden in."

John Horse Child followed Stacey into the open. He too was almost naked, powerfully built, and just under six feet tall. His smile was broad but tight. "I heard that David Return had joined the police," he remarked to Stacey, as though discussing someone a hundred miles away.

David kept his temper. He spoke in English, as he judged his grandfather would do. "I suppose," he ventured, "that Dolf Buckskin's in the sweat lodge."

John and Stacey gazed at each other. Their eyes twinkled with elaborate mockery. "They say that policemen get great wisdom with those stars they wear," said John, carefully choosing the Tsichah words. "They can tell who's in a sweat lodge and who is not. It's a strong medicine. They learn things without being told."

"Then why tell them things?" inquired Stacey brightly.

The two squatted on the earth, knees to chin. John began to light a stone pipe, older and bigger and more ornate than the one Tough Feather had shared with David earlier that morning. It was part of the ceremonial gear these tribal singers used in the rites they knew. John smoked a few puffs, passed it to Stacey, who smoked in turn, then handed the pipe back. Neither glanced at David who got quickly out of his saddle and tramped toward them. He still spoke in English, which he knew they understood, but he used the deep, cold voice of unfriendly formality.

"I'm as good a Tsichah as either of you ever dared to be," he told them. "I'm a good American citizen too, and whether you like it or not this ground is part of a government reservation, under police authority. If we're going to have trouble it will be of your starting. I want to ask—"

A wild yell rang from the sweat lodge. Out scuttled Dolf Buckskin, slimmer and shorter and nuder than either of his friends. He shone with the perspiration of the lodge's

steamy, hot interior. Even as David turned toward him, Dolf threw himself full length into the widest part of the stream and yelled even louder as the cold water shocked his heated skin. He rolled over and over, then sat up and slapped the water out of his shaggy hair.

"Come here, Dolf," called David, and Dolf pushed his slim feet into moccasins, tied a clout about his hips, and stalked over, with a grin as maddening as Stacey's and John's.

"Rhoda Pleasant," began David, "came and camped nearby, with the idea of tricking you into teaching her our tribal songs."

"We know that," said Dolf.

David decided to go back to the Tsichah tongue, since they refused to drop it. "She made eyes and smiles at the three of you," he went on. "She half promised all sorts of things if you would tell her your secrets."

"We know that," Stacey echoed Dolf, and the three of them looked at each other knowingly, like big boys teasing a little one.

Dolf sat down with his friends, and David stood looking down at them. He pointed trailward with his lifted palm.

"Rhoda Pleasant lies dead back there," he went on, "within a little walk from here."

Then he reflected silently that it is not good to stretch your face with a mocking grin, because when something takes the grin away you look blank, almost as blank as somebody who has been suddenly killed. The three singers betrayed no fear or shock, for they were Indians and steeped from boyhood in the tradition of the stoic; but they succeeded only by turning themselves stupidly expressionless.

John Horse Child broke the silence finally. "We know that, too," he said.

Stacey offered David the ceremonial pipe. It was still alight.

"Smoke," urged Stacey. "We will joke with you no more."

David squatted down with the three, puffing as gravely as when he had smoked with Tough Feather. Then he handed back the pipe and spoke in Tsichah.

"First, let me tell what I know already. You're all tribal singers, medicine men, and when you think your knowledge is big and your position strong, you think the truth. Nobody among the Tsichah can replace any one of you very well. You are keepers of knowledge that should live among the people. You," he tilted his chin at John Horse Child, "play the flute. You," and he indicated Dolf Buckskin, "beat the drum with the pebble-headed drumstick. And Stacey, you are the singer and dancer. Without one, the other two are not complete. Besides, you are close friends, like three brothers."

"*Yuh,*" assented Stacey. "That is true."

"I know things about the girl too. A small bullet was fired into her throat, and then a thin knife was stabbed into the same place. She died, I think, not too late last night. And all three of you have been at her camp."

"All three of us have been there several times," said John quietly. "Do you think, David, that all three of us killed her?"

"I think one went alone to her and killed her and made both the wounds," replied David. "I think that one hid his tracks, and that you went together and found her dead this morning. I think the killer has not told his two good friends what he did.

"If these things are true we can believe more things. Of you three, one knows who killed Rhoda Pleasant because he is the killer. Of the other two, each knows that one of his two friends killed her, and he wants to help whichever of the two it may be. I can see that much, because I know who you are and what you do, and what Rhoda Pleasant was trying to do here."

"She came smiling and flattering and asking for our songs," Dolf Buckskin admitted.

"*Ahi*," went on David, "she was a pretty girl, prettier than any on this reservation. Three men, living alone together, find it easy to look at that sort of girl and to like her. Now I come to the place where I am not sure what to think. I cannot say surely which of several reasons the killer had to do that thing."

"Every killer has a reason," said John weightily, handing the pipe along to Stacey.

"It was about the songs, anyway," David ventured.

Stacey smoked the pipe to its last puff, tapped out the ashes, and began to refill it. "Perhaps it was none of us, David. Perhaps some other man, someone who wanted to steal from her."

"No," said David emphatically. "Her face showed no fear or wonder. She had no trouble with the one who came to kill her, and she must have seen him, for the wounds were in front. Nobody else lives near here, anyway. I think the killer is right here."

John's grin of mockery found its way back. "Why don't you arrest the guilty man?" he challenged. "Nobody will stop you."

"But," added Stacey, rekindling the pipe, "you can't take the wrong man. The government courts would set him free, and pay damage money for false arrest. Probably, the policeman who guessed so foolishly would be discharged."

"I'll get the right one," promised David. "The two innocent men won't be bothered."

"*Ahoh*—thanks," said Stacey deeply, and passed the pipe to Dolf.

"*Ahoh* from me, too," echoed Dolf.

"And from me *ahoh*," chimed in John. The pipe traveled around the

circle again, David smoking last. Finally he rose to his feet.

"If you don't hinder me I want to search the tent," he said.

"What you wish," granted Stacey, receiving the pipe from him.

David went to the tent and inside. Sunlight filtered brownly through the canvas. Three pallets, made up of blankets spread over heaps of springy brush, lay against the walls. David examined with respectful care a stack of ceremonial costumes, bonnets, and parcels in a corner, then turned to the personal property of the three singers.

John's bed could be identified by three flutes in a quiver-like buckskin container, slung to the wall of the tent. David pulled out the flutes one by one. Each was made of two wooden halves, cunningly hollowed out and fitted together in tight bindings of snakeskin. Each had five finger holes and a skillfully shaped mouthpiece. At the head of the pallet lay John's carving tool. David slid it from its scabbard—an old knife, its steel worn away by years of sharpening to the delicate slenderness of an edged awl. It showed brightly clean, as from many thrustings into gritty soil. Someone had scoured it clean of Rhoda Pleasant's blood.

On another cot lay Dolf's ceremonial drum, of tight-cured raw buckskin laced over a great wooden hoop and painted with berry juices in the long ago—strange symbols in ocher and vermilion. David looked for the drumstick that he had often seen at public singings, a thing like a little war-club with an egg-sized pebble bound in the split end of the stick. It was not in sight, and he fumbled in the bedclothes.

His fingers touched something hard and he brought it to light—not the drumstick, but an old-fashioned pocket pistol barely longer than his forefinger. David broke it and glanced down the barrel, which was bright and clean and recently oiled.

His exploration of Stacey Weed's sleeping quarters turned up a broad sheath-knife, but no gun. He emerged from the tent with John's slender carving tool and Dolf's pistol.

"*You found them,*" said Stacey, hoisting his rangy body from its squat. "Which killed her?"

"Both," volunteered John, but David shook his head.

"Either wound would have been fatal," he said, "but the bullet went in first, and the knife followed. That changed the shape of the round bullet hole. As I say, she was struck down from in front, and she knew her killer and had not feared or suspected him."

"That bullet must have struck through her spine at the back of the neck," said Stacey at once, "or she would have looked surprised, at least, before she died."

"*Ahoh,* Stacey," David thanked

him. "That is a helpful thought. Now, Rhoda Pleasant smiled on you all, but who did she like best?"

"She wanted only the songs," replied Dolf.

"And did she get any of them?" demanded David quickly.

Stacey shook his head. "I don't think so, David. We sang when she first came, but when we saw her writing on that paper lined out to make music-signs on, Dolf said to stop singing. That was the first day she visited us and cooked our noon dinner."

David tried from those words to picture the visit. Rhoda Pleasant had tried to charm and reassure the three by flattery and food. She had almost succeeded; they had begun to perform. When they grew suspicious and fell silent, had she concealed her disappointment and tried something else? He hazarded a guess, though guessing had been discouraged by his instructors.

"Then she tried paying attention to one of you alone. Which?" He waited for an answer, and none came. "Was it you, John, because you could play the songs on the flute?"

John shook his head, and Stacey spoke for him. "It was I. She wanted both words and music, and I knew them. She whispered for me to visit her camp. That was two days ago.

"I went," Stacey continued, "but she tricked no songs out of me. She tried to get me off guard by singing songs she had heard on other reservations, and the best of them was not as good as our worst. I sang nothing in exchange. Yesterday she came back and tried her tricks on John instead."

"We went riding together," said John. "She talked about songs to me, too, but I only said I had forgotten to bring my flute."

"Then she hunted out Dolf?"

"*Wagh!*" Dolf grunted out the Tsichah negative like an ancient blanket Indian, and scowled more blackly still. "Why should she pay attention to me? I am a drummer, and drum music is easy. The one time she heard us all together was enough to teach her what she wanted to know about my drum."

More silence, and David examined these new grudging admissions. Rhoda Pleasant had, very practically, concentrated on the two singers whose secrets were hardest to learn. On their own showing, John and Stacey had kept those secrets loyally. "This brings us to last night," said David at last.

"I will say something," John spoke slowly. "You think the pistol killed her, and it's Dolf's pistol. But perhaps he didn't use it. Perhaps Stacey did, or I, to make it look like Dolf."

"Perhaps," granted David. "Perhaps not. I think the stab in the wound was to change the shape of the bullet hole. It covered the killer's trail, as the scratching away of the tracks at her camp did."

"But it hid nothing," reminded John.

"Perhaps it *pretended* to hide something," pursued David. "The killer might have thought that he would give the wound a disguise—but one easy to see through."

"*Ahi*," replied Stacey gravely. "You mean that the bullet hole would mean Dolf's pistol and make him guilty—because the knife is John's and the pistol is Dolf's. Perhaps you want to say that I stole them both and killed Rhoda Pleasant."

"Perhaps he wants to say that I used my own pistol to kill," threw in Dolf, "and did the other things to make the pistol wound look like a false trail."

"There is a way to show who fired the shot," David informed them. "A white man's laboratory trick, with wax on the gun hand and then acid dripped on to show footb[illegible] was a fleck of powder left on the hand from the gun going off."

"My hand would show flecks like that," Dolf said readily. "I fired the gun for practice yesterday."

"I saw him," seconded John. "Anyway, David, you promised that you would take only the guilty man. That means you must find him here and now, without going to the agency for wax and acid."

"It was a promise," David agreed, "and the Tsichah do not break their promises to each other." He held out the thin-ground knife. "This was bloody, and now it is clean. Who cleaned it?"

"Whoever used it," said Stacey.

David put the knife on the ground. "You were telling me a story, John. You stopped where you and Rhoda Pleasant went out riding and came back yesterday."

"She left me here at camp and rode on alone," John took up the account. "Dolf and Stacey saw her go away. We three were here together for supper, and together we went to sleep early. Then—"

"Then, this morning, I went to her camp alone," said Stacey. "Last night, when she came back past here with John, she made me a sign, like this." He demonstrated, a scooping inward to beckon Indian fashion, then a gesture eastward. "Come after sunrise, she told me by that sign. I thought she would beg again for the music. I would let her beg, then laugh at her and say she was wasting her time with us. But I found her lying face up in the trail."

"As I found her," finished David for him. "Well, you probably are telling the truth. If you were questioned long in this way, any lies in your stories would trip each other up. This much is plain as your tracks at her camp: the killer went to her alone, with the knife and the pistol. He did not want his friends to know—"

"His friends do not ask to know," said Dolf, with an air of finality.

"Because," amplified John, hugging his thick knees as he squatted, "his friends know, like him, that Rhoda Pleasant was a thief of secrets. Nobody here is sorry she died, though we would be sorry if one of us suffered for killing her."

"Nobody is sorry she died?" repeated David, and tried to study all three of their faces at once. They stared back calmly.

"But all three went to her camp," said David again. "Not Stacey alone."

"I came and got them to see her," Stacey told him. "We had to decide what to do. We saw everything there you saw. We talked as we waited there. Finally we agreed we must carry the news, after we all took sweat baths."

"Sweat baths?" echoed David, "Why?"

"We are medicine men, and we had all touched a dead body," John answered him coldly. "Sweat baths are purification; or have you forgotten the Tsichah way since you learned the policeman's way?"

"I have forgotten neither way," was David's equally cold response. "Who said to carry the news, and who said to take the sweat bath?"

"I thought of both those things," Dolf volunteered.

"No, I think I did," argued Stacey. "I built the fire anyway, and gathered the rocks to heat."

"But I took the first bath," insisted John, "for I touched her first when we saw her together. Then Stacey took his, and then Dolf, who had not finished when you first came."

David pointed to the slim knife he had brought from the sleeping tent. "This went to the lodge with you, John?"

"If you expect to find prints of guilty fingers, you will not," said John. "Yes, I took the knife into the sweat lodge—to purify it from the touch of that dead Piekan squaw, *Ahi*," and he put out his palm and made a horizontal slicing motion. "I finish. That is the end of what I will say."

There was silence all around. David stooped and took the knife, wedging it into the sheath with his own, then put Dolf's pistol into his hip pocket.

"Something here I have not yet found," he announced. "And I have wondered about it all the time we were talking. I think I know where it is now. I, too, am going into your sweat lodge. Can any of you say why I should not?"

They stared, neither granting nor denying permission. David walked past the Sibley tent to the close-blanketed little structure, pulled away the blanket that sealed the door, and peered in through the steam that clung inside. It billowed out, grew somewhat thinner, and he could see dimly. Under his breath he said a respectful prayer to the spirit people, lest he be thought sacrilegious in hunting there for what he hoped to find.

Then he dropped to all fours and crawled in.

On the floor stood an old iron pot of water, still warm. In it were a dozen of the stones that had been dropped in at their hottest to create the purifying steam. David twitched up his sleeve and pulled out one stone, then another and another. They were like any stones one might find in that part of the reservation. He studied the ground, which was as bare and hard as baked clay, then rose from all fours and squatted on his heels. His hands patted and probed here and there along the inner surface of blankets, until he found what he was looking for.

He seized its little loop of leather cord and pulled it from where it had been stuck between the blankets and one of the curved poles of the framework. A single touch assured him, and he edged into the for a clear examination of it.

The thing was like a tiny war-club of ancient fashion. A slender foot-long twig of tough wood had been split at the end, and the two split pieces curved to fit around a smooth pebble the size of an egg. Rawhide lashings held the stone rigidly in place. It was the ceremonial drumstick he had missed when searching Dolf Buckskin's bed in the tent, the absence of which he had been trying to fit into the story of Rhoda Pleasant's death. He balanced it experimentally, swung it against his open hand, carefully bent the springy wooden handle.

Then he thrust it inside his shirt, standing so that the three watching singers could be sure of what he handled and what he did with it. He walked over to where his pony cropped at some grass.

"I'm going to look at Rhoda Pleasant once more," he announced. "That look will be all I need to tell me everything."

Mounting, he rode slowly up the trail to the silent camp of the dead girl. He dismounted once again and took the cover from the expressionless face.

Again he put out a finger to touch, this time at the side of the head, where Rhoda Pleasant's hair was combed smoothly over the temple. He felt the other temple, and this time his finger encountered a yielding softness.

"*Ahi*," he grunted, as if to confirm everything. "The thin bone was broken."

He returned to his horse and lounged with his arm across the saddle, quietly waiting.

Hoofbeats sounded among the brush in the direction of the singers' camp. After a moment Dolf Buckskin rode into sight. He had pulled on trousers and a shirt, as though for a trip to the agency.

"I am waiting for you," called David to him.

"I knew you would be," replied Dolf, riding near. "Maybe I should have told you all about it when

you brought my drumstick out of the sweat lodge, but it was hard to speak in front of my two friends who were trying to help me."

"You need not tell me much," David assured him, as gently as he could speak. "I knew the answer when John told of purifying his carving knife in the sweat lodge because it had touched the dead body of Rhoda Pleasant. Your drumstick was missing. I reasoned that if the drumstick was also in the sweat lodge, all was clear. And it was. Why should you have taken the drumstick into the lodge? Only to purify it, as you yourself must be purified. Why should it need purifying? Only if the drumstick too had touched the dead body. Why should it have touched the dead body? Only if the drumstick were the true weapon."

David paused. "You're a good drummer, Dolf. By long practice you can strike to the smallest mark —even the thin bone of the temple —swiftly and accurately, with exactly the strength you choose. That pebblehead is solid, the handle is springy. It was a good weapon, Dolf, and easier to your hand than any other."

"She did not even hear me as I came up behind her," Dolf said with something like sorrowful pride. "You were wrong about her seeing the killer and not fearing him. She never knew."

"You used your own gun and John's knife to hide the real way of killing. They were the false trails. But you could not break the old ceremonial rites. The true weapon had to be purified—and so I knew the truth."

Dolf raised his head and looked at the still form. "It's strange to think of what I did. I wanted her so much."

"*Yuh*," and David nodded. "You wanted her. She would not look at you, only at John and Stacey. You were left out, and your heart was bad. Perhaps if you explain to the court that for a time your mind was not right, you will not be killed, only put in jail."

"I don't think I want to live," said Dolf slowly. "Not in jail, anyway. Shall I help you lift her and tie her on her horse's back?"

"*Ahoh*," said David. "Thank you."

When the three horses started along the trail back, David glanced down at his silver-plated star. It was dull and filmy—from the steam of the sweat lodge. An agency policeman's star should not be dull at the end of his first successful case. It should shine like all the high hopes of all young warriors. Proudly David burnished the metal with his sleeve—until it shone with the wisdom of the Shining Lodge and the strength of the white man's star.

a *NEW* crime-detective story by

HELEN NIELSEN

When is a triangle not a triangle? When it's a quadrangle? A "pentangle"? When love is mixed with public relations, public images, hypocrisy, gambling debts, hoodlums—and murder?

NO LEGAL EVIDENCE

by HELEN NIELSEN

AUGIE TAYLOR WAS THE MOST BEAUtiful piece of male flesh that Cy Crane had ever wet-nursed. This strange and random thought occurred to Cy at approximately 3:30 a.m. poolside at a motel on Rosarito Beach just as Augie, a neophyte in the mysteries of the beverage, passed into complete oblivion after his sixth Marguerite.

Augie was now twenty-seven. After a sensational career in college football he had switched to professional baseball and was well on his way to the Hall of Fame when an injury to his pitching arm terminated that career. He subsequently took up golf, tennis, swimming, and basketball with equal brilliance and thus became the natural selection for the role of Mr. All-American Athlete, the latest gimmick of Cy's employer, Vogel Sporting Goods.

Augie was big. Six foot four inches of virility stretched between his blond Kennedy haircut and his white rubber thongs. His skin was tanned to the shade of oiled teak. His massive hirsute chest tapered to an indecently flat stomach, narrow hips, and ballet-dancer legs. Except for the thongs, a wrist watch, and a pair of white Bikini trunks, he was nude. Sprawled thus across a poolside lounge, he resembled a Greek athlete who had been too long at the altar of Bacchus and would never make it as far as the bed without the aid of a devoted slave.

"Cyrus Crane, devoted slave, second-class, reporting for duty," Cy murmured, and began to roll Augie up to a sitting position. It wasn't easy. Forty-two years, the last eight of which has been spent jockeying a desk in Vogel's legal department, gave Cy a disadvantage in the weight-lifting event. He got one

arm behind Augie's back and jackknifed him forward just as the sliding glass door to one of the poolside apartments slid open and Callie, wearing only a knee-length negligee that should have gone out of style on her honeymoon, stepped outside.

"You'll never get him upstairs in that condition," she said. "Walk him over here and dump him on the bed."

By the time Cy dragged Augie across the pool decking, Callie had the glass door wide-open. The bed was turned down. King-size. Very cozy.

"He'll sleep it off," Callie said.

Cy dropped Augie on the bed and let him sprawl as he fell, arms outstretched, face to the ceiling. He mumbled something incoherent and faded back into the twilight zone. He was still a beautiful hunk of man.

"Is this what you had in mind when you booked the upstairs double for Mr. Athlete and keeper?" Cy asked.

Callie had stepped into the dressing room and started rubbing her face with a cleansing preparation. She hadn't gained a pound in fifteen years, and her skin was still as smooth as it had been the first time he kissed her. Tanner, with a few lines about her mouth and eyes —but just as smooth. She wore her hair in a little boy cut that gave her an elfin look, but she was anything but fey. As Public Relations Director for Vogel, she earned every cent of her $20,000 a year salary, and that was exactly $10,000 more than Cy earned as a junior legal advisor. This was a little embarrassing because Callie had been his wife for fourteen years.

She didn't bother to look at him when she answered his question.

"Don't be silly," she said. "You know Papa Vogel doesn't want Augie left alone at night when we travel. He's too adventurous, and Papa's paying too much for his contract to risk having that wholesome image spoiled. Did you want me to book him in with me?"

"Does it matter?"

Callie wiped the last trace of cream from her nose and turned her wide gray eyes on Cy's troubled face.

"Please, not the outraged husband routine tonight, Cy. It's about twelve years too late for innocence from either of us."

It wasn't really a marriage; it was an arrangement. Frederick C. Vogel was market-oriented. Sporting goods called for the image of good sportsmanship and clean living. Whatever his employees did discreetly was their own affair; divorce was bad publicity, and neither Callie nor Cy was about to give up their high standard of living. They had enjoyed a free-swinging affair without tears and few bruises, but tonight was different. Being sensitive, Callie knew that.

"You're in trouble," she said. "What is it? Bangtails or blondes?"

"I need $20,000," Cy said.

"You *are* in trouble! Nothing in the joint account?"

"Enough for this month's rent on the apartment and the insurance premiums. What about your account?"

Callie picked up the brush and began to stroke her hair. She smiled wryly.

"Cyrus," she said—and it was always a bad sign when she called him Cyrus—"inflation is breaking me. I had to pay $50 for this haircut, and it has to be trimmed every week. I meet the public daily. My dressmaker can retire to Acapulco in about two more seasons. I spend another fortune keeping my teenage figure—"

"Tell Vogel you need another $20,000 to exploit Mr. Superman. He'll buy anything you're selling."

"And if I don't choose to tell Vogel anything of the kind? What then, Cyrus?"

Cy studied her reflection in the mirror and knew he was wrong about Callie. She had changed through the years. She was tougher. He looked back at Augie now peacefully sleeping on the bed and wondered how anything so infantile could move a sophisticated woman. This wasn't the night to press the question.

And so he left Callie's challenge unanswered and went upstairs to the large room with Augie's bags piled on one bed and the other turned down for his own sleepless night ahead—sleepless because he had exactly forty-eight hours to raise the $20,000 or get used to the idea of not being alive any more.

Frederick C. Vogel was a disciplinarian. Punctuality was part of his religion, and a summons to his Wilshire Boulevard penthouse for five-o'clock cocktails had the urgency of a command performance. Everybody ran scared for Vogel. Callie had the accelerator floored all the way in from Tijuana, because Augie, the body beautiful, must get in his laps of the pool before breakfast, and later, in Tijuana, must do some personal shopping that hung them up for nearly half an hour with the border inspectors.

Callie supplied an explanation over the initial round of martinis. "To begin with," she said brightly, "the jai alai exhibition in Tijuana was sensational! Augie's a natural on the courts!"

Vogel beamed like a proud father. He was a huge hearty man who resembled Father Christmas, close-shaved. He poured a fruit punch for Augie, who accepted with a shy smile as befitted a clear-living teetotaler who didn't know a Marguerite from a chocolate soda.

"It was nothing," he said. "I just gave it my best."

Cy swallowed half his martini and tried not to become nauseated

with what was to follow. Vogel would play Big Daddy, Augie would play Augie, and Callie would play each against the other —which was a sport in which she excelled.

Vogel poured a second punch for Amy, his wife, a vague, child-like creature rapidly approaching middle-age armed with facial sauna, chin strap, and violet contact lenses. At the moment she was also armed with a tiny transistor radio which she used in lieu of a security blanket; it gave her something to do with her hands and an excuse for not entering into the conversation. This she relinquished only to accept the cup of punch. Cy recalled Callie's initial appraisal of Amy Vogel.

"Frederick built a better mousetrap and caught a better mouse," she said. "Be nice to her, Cy. She's a clinging vine of the old school. But I'll bet Vogel never makes a decision without first rehearsing every soul-stirring edict for her benefit. She may drop all sorts of tips into a sympathetic ear."

So reminded, Cy raised his glass in his sexiest salute to shy Amy. He still possesed a lot of charm, and usually received an embarrassed smile in response. But that was B.A.—before Augie. Amy now gazed at that semi-illiterate athlete with the same adoring expression of the affluent, diversion-starved women who swarmed to his exhibitions and subsequently bought so many Vogel products for sons, lovers, and husbands.

"It's an entirely new market," Callie said enthusiastically. "We should schedule an immediate series of jai alai exhibitions starting, naturally, with Mexico City."

"I wish I could go too!" Amy cried.

Augie had been coached to play up to Amy. "I bought a bottle of tequila for you," he said, "but the border guard confiscated it. Cy says it's illegal to bring liquor into California."

"*You* bought liquor?" Vogel demanded. "You're in training!"

"It was for you and Mrs. Vogel," Callie said quickly. "An ethnic souvenir."

"I like Kaluha much better," Amy cooed, "but the thought was sweet."

The dialogue was getting a bit sticky. Still clutching his drink, Cy edged away from the enthusiastic little group and stepped through an open glass door onto the patio. The penthouse was a combination urban-living-quarters and business-nerve-center. A matching pair of glass doors, closed, led to Vogel's study where a battery of telephones, ticker tape, and teletype kept him in constant touch with all his plants and distributors.

But Cy wasn't interested in the Vogel empire at the moment. He was more interested in his wrist watch. It was almost six o'clock. The smog had thinned out until

all the bank and savings-and-loan neons were clearly visible along Wilshire Boulevard, and in the street below the pedestrian traffic had dwindled to the nocturnal brigade of dogwalkers. Poodles, Cy noted, were losing popularity. The trend was now to Dobermans, Great Danes, and Weimaraners. The rising crime rate was bringing back the watchdog. Cy's mind was crime-oriented because fifteen of his last forty-eight hours had elapsed and he was still as far from the needed $20,000 as ever.

This line of reasoning led directly to a sharp awareness of one dogwalker who was distinctive by virtue of immobility. A huge barrel-chested man wearing an un-Californian black suit and hat stood motionless at curbside while an exasperated Schnauser on a long leash made frustrated circles around him. The man seemed oblivious of the animal, his full attention being focused upward toward the penthouse patio on which Cy was standing.

Cy hurriedly swallowed the rest of his drink and dropped the glass in a potted Monsterra plant. He was nervous. One didn't lose $20,000 to a syndicate bookie and get off with a light slap on the wrist. He reached into his breast pocket and pulled out a pair of black-rimmed glasses.

The man on the curb came into closer focus, but not close enough. Cy listened. Callie was still holding forth on her new promotion gimmick and nobody was in the study. The room was out of bounds unless Vogel presided over the desk, but Cy, in passing, had noticed a pair of binoculars on a bookcase, and the situation was urgent enough to merit invasion. The door opened easily. He was halfway to the bookcase before he saw the tape recorder in an open drawer of the desk busily spinning off all that sparkling dialogue in the adjoining room.

So Vogel bugged his own cocktail parties! It was an interesting discovery but not as pressing as the identity of the man across the street. Cy grabbed the binoculars and returned to the patio. The man was still standing in the same spot and the Schnauzer was still protesting. Focusing the binoculars, Cy realized why they were immobilized. The man in black had binoculars too, and they were focused directly on Cy.

Later, driving home to their Marina Del Rey apartment, Cy brought up the matter of the $20,000 and the man in black.

"You asked me last night what would happen if you didn't get the money for me from Vogel," he reminded. "I can tell you in two words: 'rub out'.

Callie always drove when they were together. It was one of her ways to relax. She pulled to an easy stop at a signal.

"It's that serious?"

"It is."

"Then it must be a gambling debt. You'd never be fool enough to get that mixed up with a woman."

He was grateful for the compliment however slight. "I heard you building up the Mexican tour," he said. "Pad the expense account."

Callie thought about that the rest of the way to their ocean-view complex and then, as they turned into the underground garage, delivered her decision. "It's too risky," she said. "Vogel goes over the bills with a fine-toothed accountant. I can't risk my Girl Scout badges."

"But it's my life!" Cy insisted. "You've got to help me! Callie, I can hurt you. Vogel's a four-square moralist when it comes to marriage. If he heard about you and Augie—not to mention a few more of your extracurricular activities!"

Callie switched off the ignition.

"If you say one word about me to Vogel," she said tightly, "I'll spill so much dirt you won't be able to practice law in this state as long as you live! He only keeps you on the staff to please me. Where do you think you can get so soft a cushion at your age? Now forget about that $20,000 and keep the insurance paid up. If I am going to be a widow, I don't want to get stuck for the expenses."

Callie hadn't believed a word of his story. She had missed the point completely. It was the man in black who wouldn't forget.

It was a waiting game. They took the elevator up to the apartment and Callie went to bed. Cy couldn't sleep. Having exhausted every possible idea for raising the money, he stepped out on the balcony for a last cigarette before taking sleeping pills. The marina was a new development with wide areas of vacant land and little traffic. The only sound was that of an occasional jet whining into the sky out of International Airport a few miles away, and in the darkness the ocean was only a black void picketed by hundreds of tightly furled masts in the small boat harbor. Neither Callie nor Cy sailed. Callie had chosen the apartment for its proximity to the airport and freeways; Cy liked it for the illusion of solitude that came from having the city at his back. But there was no solitude tonight.

He flicked the cigarette over the balcony rail and followed the course of the spark downward. The entrance to the complex was brightly lighted. On the sidewalk below, plainly visible, stood the man in black. By this time Cy had reached the only possible solution to his problem. He immediately left the balcony and returned to the garage to emerge, moments later, directly in front of the stranger.

"What happened to your Schnauzer?" Cy asked.

The man in black seemed embarressed by the confrontation.

"You shouldn't do this," he said.

"I was to contact you by telephone before making the hit. Suppose we're seen chatting together like old pals? I got a reputation to protect. And it wasn't my dog. I borrowed it out of a parked car so I wouldn't look conspicuous."

"You failed," Cy said, "but come out of the light if you're afraid of a tail. We can sit in the car and talk."

It was a new building and the garage was kept lighted all night, but there was no attendant. Cy slid in under the wheel and the killer got in beside him. "I have to call you something," Cy said. "What's your name?"

"Dutch."

"That's good enough. Dutch, I've got bad news for you. I don't have $20,000."

Dutch toyed with the push buttons on the radio which, fortunately, wasn't turned on. "You got it twisted," he said. "That's bad news for you. The organization figures getting rid of deadbeats is like insurance. A guy runs up a debt and won't pay. What happens? We get a reputation for being soft and pretty soon anarchy—nobody pays."

"So you're really going to kill me?"

"I got no alternative. You can see that."

"How are you going to kill me?"

"I got different techniques," Dutch mused, "but with you I figured a simple bullet in the head. The way I do it, the Johns figure it's a holdup or one of them crazy, hopped-up teen-agers. You got no idea what good cover they make for my business."

"Where do you intend to do the shooting? Here, in the garage?"

Dutch left off with the push buttons and scanned the area. "It's pretty light, but nobody's around."

"I live on the fourth floor," Cy suggested.

"I know where you live. I even got a floor plan of your apartment. I'm no amateur, Mr. Crane."

"Then you know the apartment has two bedrooms. I sleep in the smaller and my wife in the larger."

"That's right."

"And there's a den that I use for my office at home."

"I know," Dutch said. "What are you leading up to?"

"What are you paid for a contract to murder?" Cy asked. "$2500? I'll double it. How would you like to make an extra $5000 *and* collect the $20,000 debt as well?"

Callie's pointed reference to the insurance had been a seed that was now germinating in Cy's mind. He carried only a token policy on his own life, but a smooth-talking salesman had impressed Callie with her own earning capacity and sold her a $50,000 policy a few years ago. Dutch appeared interested, so Cy spelled it out for him.

"My wife's insured for $50,000," he said. "I'm the beneficiary. If she were shot instead of me, nobody would take a loss."

"Except your wife," Dutch suggested.

"Nobody lives forever. Look at it this way: she's a beautiful woman in her prime. In your expert hands she'll never wither and grow old. Now, there's a snub-nosed .38 in a desk drawer in the den. I'll make sure it's unloaded so you won't run into any trouble if she hears you in the apartment. Also, there's a bottle of about fifty bennies in the bathroom. Take it but spill out a few so the law will think that theft was the motive."

Dutch seemed impressed. "You think of everything," he marveled. "If ever I need a lawyer—"

"Thank you," Cy said modestly, "but that wouldn't be ethical. Now give me a phone number where I can reach you. I'll need another day to set up my alibi for the time of the actual shooting. I don't want you jumping the gun."

"Wait," Dutch protested. "I didn't agree—it seems pretty rotten killing a woman to pay your tab. Can't you raise the scratch some other way? Sell this car or something."

"We don't own the car," Cy explained. "We rent it. We rent the apartment, the furniture, the appliances—it's better for tax purposes. Outside of the insurance we don't have a thing."

Money was the universal solvent in Cy's world, and Dutch inhabited the same sphere. They ironed out the details. An extra day would be needed for Cy to set up his alibi and arrange a way to make contact with Dutch when everything was safe. This would have to be a precision job. The police didn't worry Cy, but insurance companies were fussy. When Dutch refused to reveal his local habitat, Cy gave him the telephone number at the apartment and set a time—6:00 p.m. of the following day—for the call.

In the morning Cy saw Vogel and reminded him that Mexico was a new territory for the company and that it presented unknown legal problems. He dropped the names of certain businessmen he had got in touch with in Tijuana and suggested that he return there to discuss such matters as licensing and tax exemptions for Callie's projected tour. Economics being close to Vogel's heart, the project was okayed for immediate activation.

Cy wired for a hotel reservation in Tijuana and spent the rest of the day making up a list of contacts and possible distributors throughout Mexico for Callie to send out her crisp, witty letters of introduction. It was her homework for the following evening. He then returned to the apartment to await Dutch's call.

It came at exactly six o'clock.

"I drive to Mexico in the morning," Cy explained. "I'll start back sometime after dinner—probably around nine or ten o'clock tomorrow evening. It's a two-and-a-half-hour drive, and I anticipate some trouble with the border guard.

"Your work should be completed before midnight. I'll have lost my keys when I return. No one will answer the doorbell, so I'll have to get the manager to let me into the apartment. There's a public phone booth a block from this building. I suggest that you ring the apartment before coming to make sure there's been no change in Mrs. C.'s plans. And you will be neat, won't you? No unnecessary brutality."

He heard Dutch blow his nose and sniff loudly. "I get sentimental when people show feeling for a loved one. I'll be real humane. You can make book on it."

"Thank you," Cy said, but it wasn't sentiment at all. The building was new. He wasn't too sure of the insulation between apartments, and it would be horrible if Dutch were caught in the act.

The drive to Tijuana alone was most pleasant. There was no Callie to take command, no Augie to take the limelight. Cy began to feel like a new man. He crossed the border shortly before noon. His appointments were all set for after 2:30, which gave him time for a leisurely lunch and a visit to one of the liquor stores for the purchase that would legally establish his alibi. Remembering Amy Vogel, he bought a large bottle of Kaluha and left it in the front seat of the sedan.

The afternoon passed quickly and was followed by cocktails and dinner with one of the local officials. Callie was a good mentor. Charming the customers was always her first campaign tactic. Dinner was an unhurried event in Mexico, so it was 10:15 when Cy turned the sedan northward and drove back over the border.

The bottle of liquor was still on the front seat when the guard queried him on purchases. Cy produced the bottle, waved it proudly, then displayed the proper degree of surprise, outrage, and grudging submission when the fate that had befallen Augie's tequila overtook the Kaluha. The entire procedure took no more than ten minutes, but it did entail an official record duly dated, timed, and stamped, and gave Cy an opportunity to toss his apartment key into a trash can as precaution against police search when questioned later about Callie's death. These things accomplished, he drove on toward San Diego on schedule.

At San Clemente he stopped at an all-night café for a cup of coffee. The counter was deserted, and the waiter was keeping himself awake with the assistance of a radio disc jockey from Los Angeles. Cy had lifted the cup to his lips when an announcer stopped the music for a newsbreak.

"A followup on our earlier report of the murder at Marina Del Rey," he said. "Authorities have now identified the bullet-riddled body found in the public telephone booth on Admiralty Way as that of Dutch Zelke, a known hoodlum

operating out of Las Vegas and Chicago. As indicated on our nine o'clock news, the style of this murder suggests a gangland execution, and the fact that Zelke was an out-of-state man may indicate an attempt of the mobs to move in on the flourishing drug trade in the southland area. This will bear watching. I repeat, Dutch Zelke, a known Las Vegas hood, was shot down in cold blood tonight . . ."

When Cy spilled the coffee over the counter top the waiter switched off the radio.

"Whatsa matter? Too hot?" he asked.

"Shook up," Cy answered. "That murder happened on the street where I live."

"Murder? What murder?"

"The murder in the news report. Don't you listen to the radio?"

The waiter started to sponge the counter. "I like the music," he said. "The talk I don't like. Wait, I'll fill up the cup for you—"

But Cy was no longer interested. He shoved a quarter across the counter and left the café. It wasn't necessary to stall for time any longer. Dutch had followed instructions. He had gone to the telephone booth to call Callie and had been killed there. The contract was off.

The street was deserted when Cy returned to the complex. No police cars, no mobile TV unit. If more of the apartments were still lighted past the usual hour, he made no special note of it. He parked the sedan and took the elevator up to the fourth floor. It wasn't until he reached the door of the apartment that he remembered the discarded key.

He rang the bell and waited. He didn't expect an immediate answer. Callie might be asleep. But after six unanswered attempts he was forced to go downstairs for Mr. Kelly, the manager, a wide-awake gentleman who seemed delighted at the intrusion and eagerly filled him in on the gory details of the phone-booth killing all the way upstairs in the elevator.

"Maybe Mrs. Crane is visiting one of the other tenants," Kelly suggested. "I know she's here. I spoke to her in the street when the ambulance came for that gangster. It was nine o'clock then."

Cy tried the bell once more while Kelly unlocked the door. The apartment was ablaze with light.

"Callie!" Cy called, "why didn't you answer the bell?" There was no reply.

He walked slowly through the apartment, the curious manager at his heels. Lights burned in the living room, dining room, and den. A drawer of the desk in the den stood open and Cy peered inside. The gun was gone. Gone too were the cartridges he had emptied from the chamber.

With a sense of dread he proceeded to the larger bedroom where he found Callie's body crumpled

on the thick wall-to-wall carpet, one-half of her face covered with blood from the bullet hole in her left temple.

"Call the police!" Cy gasped to the manager, and then ran into Callie's bathroom where he could douse his face with cold water until the walls stopped buckling and the floor became quiet. Callie couldn't be dead! Dutch had been dead since before 9:00, and Callie had watched his body being removed in an ambulance. Cy had told no one else about the gun in his desk.

Suddenly recalling the rest of his instructions to Dutch, he opened the medicine chest and received a second shock. The bottle of benzedrine was uncapped and empty, and and three telltale pills had been placed on the shelf.

Forty-eight hours elapsed before Cy walked out of police headquarters a free man. In the interim every facet of his alibi had been checked out and found foolproof. The medical examiner fixed the time of Callie's death at no later than 11:00 p.m.—a time when Cy had been approaching the café in San Clemente.

Death was caused by a .38 caliber bullet fired at close range. Cy's gun was unregistered, but he played the good citizen and admitted ownership of a Smith & Wessen Chief's Special which, together with five cartridges, was now missing. The benzedrine, he stated, was purchased in Tijuana by Callie, a frequent user of pep pills.

The shooting in the street raised the possibility that she might have left the apartment without locking the door and surprised the drug thief on her return. Two tenants of the building reported hearing what could have been a gunshot without being able to agree on the exact time it was heard. Both had hopefully assumed it was caused by a neighbor's television set, because one murder a night was sufficient for anyone's imagination. When Arne Vanno, an eastern syndicate hood with a long vice and narcotics background, was arrested at International Airport trying to board a plane for New York City, official interest focused on Zelke's liquidation, and everything about Callie's murder was explained—except the identity of the killer.

Cy took a two weeks' leave of absence in Hawaii and returned for a very important conference in Vogel's penthouse office. It was very cozy with just the three of them present—Cy, Vogel, and the tape recorder in Vogel's desk. After Cy had listened to the complete replay of his conversation with Dutch in the garaged sedan two nights before Callie's death, Vogel switched off the mechanism.

"You bugged Callie's car!" Cy shouted.

"And you recognized the voices,

which is tantamount to admission that you plotted your wife's murder," Vogel said. "How did you complete the job, Cy? How did you manage to get Callie murdered after Zelke was shot?"

"But I didn't!"

"Naturally, I can't keep you with the company now. The truth of this horrible thing may come out some day and cause very bad public relations for Vogel Sporting Goods. I've instructed the cashier to give you a month's termination pay and released a statement that grief over Callie's death has forced you into temporary retirement. The tape goes into my bank vault for safekeeping."

Cy's capacity for reasoning was breaking through the shock waves. He began to fight back. "Why?" he challenged. "If you think I'm responsible for Callie's death, why not take the tape to the police?"

"No legal evidence. You're a lawyer. You know that wiretapping's illegal. I had the telephone in the car bugged first—business reasons. Then the car itself. Never mind how—that's my affair. But even if the courts won't accept the tapes, I can still make it sticky for you with the insurance company. And you need that $50,000, Cy. Sooner or later another Zelke is going to come around to collect that gambling debt."

Vogel was absolutely right, but he seemed oblivious of how vulnerable he had made himself. "Why did you kill Callie?" Cy demanded.

Vogel tried not to strangle.

"It must have been you who killed her," Cy added. "Everything's set up for you on the tape—the location of the gun, the pills, even Callie's bedroom and the night Zelke was to kill her. And if you were so concerned about the conversations in the car you must have the apartment phone bugged, too. Why? Was she padding her expense accounts too much, or was it the hanky-panky with Augie that hit you where you live?"

"Get out!" Vogel shouted. "Get out before I change my mind and call the police!"

But Vogel would never do that; there was too much egg on his face. "So it was the hanky-panky," Cy decided. "You must have some very choice tapes in your collection. I'm sure you listened to this one at least twelve hours before she died, yet you didn't warn her. Did you hear about Zelke's death the way I did—over the radio? Or were you parked down the street waiting for him to finish the job when he made that fine target in the phone booth?"

"I did not hear this tape before Callie was dead!" Vogel screamed. "I was sick—"

"I don't blame you," Cy said.

He didn't expect an admission of guilt. He merely wanted Frederick C. Vogel to know that Cy also had something for safekeeping. And he did take the termination

pay. It would come in handy until the insurance check arrived.

Six months later Cy surfaced after a dive into the cliffside pool at the El Mirador Hotel in Acapulco and found himself staring at the most beautiful piece of male flesh he had ever wet-nursed. Augie Taylor didn't see him. He was much too preoccupied with the owner of the lovely feminine legs protruding from an umbrella-shaded chair.

When the possesser of the legs leaned forward to retrieve a tiny transistor radio from the decking, Cy met Amy Vogel eyeball to eyeball. She didn't flinch. No longer mousy, no longer the clinging vine, she was now a woman who had found something she wanted and had taken it.

Shaken, Cy swam back across the pool to his bungalow. His solution to Callie's murder needed revision, and it was Callie who gave him the answer: *"But I'll bet Vogel never makes a decision without first rehearsing every soul-stirring edict for her benefit."* Amy lived at the penthouse and must have known about Vogel's penchant for wiretapping. The playback of those sedan conversations could have roused a killing jealousy that found an unexpected outlet when her ever-present transistor announced Dutch Zelke's gangland death. The victim and method were waiting; all that was needed was someone with a strong enough motive to carry out the plan.

Cy felt more comfortable with the knowledge that Amy had shot his wife. She might even be a source of blackmail if he didn't get a good job before the insurance money ran out. It was neighborly to keep in touch with old friends, so he telephoned the bar and had a gift delivered to Mrs. Vogel's suite. Doubting that she was still on fruit punch, he sent her a bottle of Kaluha.

Double-O Section — license to kill

a JAMES BOND novelet by

IAN FLEMING

What can be said or written about Ian Fleming and James Bond that has not already been said or written? Perhaps very little, perhaps nothing at all—until sufficient time elapses to justify taking a new look, to warrant making a new appraisal . . .

Suffice it to say now, here is (to quote Ian Fleming's American publisher) one of "the last great adventures of James Bond 007." In this novelet thriller the Commander's assignment is (to quote Bond himself) "dirty work, bad news"—or (to quote M.) a "nasty job" . . . all euphemisms, of course, for—murder . . .

THE LIVING DAYLIGHTS

by IAN FLEMING

JAMES BOND LAY IN THE FIVE-hundred-yard firing point of the famous Century Range at Bisley. The white peg in the grass beside him said 44, and the same number was repeated high up on the distant butt above the single six-feet-square target that, to the human eye and in the late summer dusk, looked no larger than a postage stamp. But through Bond's glass—an infrared sniperscope fixed above his rifle—the lens covered the whole canvas. He could even clearly distinguish the pale blue and beige colors in which the target was divided, and the six-inch semicircular bull's-eye looked as big as the half-moon that was already beginning to show low down in the darkening sky above the distant crest of Chobham Ridges.

James Bond's last shot had been an inner left. Not good enough. He took another glance at the yellow and blue wind flags. They were streaming across range from the east rather more stiffly than when

he had begun his shoot half an hour before, and he set two clicks more to the right on the wind gauge and traversed the cross-wires on the sniperscope back to the point of aim. Then he settled himself, put his trigger finger gently inside the guard and onto the curve of the trigger, shallowed his breathing, and very, very softly squeezed.

The vicious crack of the shot boomed across the empty range. The target disappeared below ground, and at once the dummy came up in its place. Yes. The black panel was in the bottom right-hand corner this time, not in the bottom left. A bull's-eye.

"Good," said the voice of the chief range officer from behind and above him. "Stay with it."

The target was already up again, and Bond put his cheek back to its warm patch on the chunky wooden stock and his eye to the rubber eyepiece of the scope. He wiped his gun hand down the side of his trousers and took the pistol grip that jutted sharply down below the trigger guard. He splayed his legs an inch more. Now there were to be five rounds rapid. It would be interesting to see if that would produce "fade." He guessed not. This extraordinary weapon the armorer had somehow got his hands on gave one the feeling that a standing man at a mile would be easy meat.

It was mostly a .308-caliber International Experimental Target rifle built by Winchester to help American marksmen at World Championships, and it had the usual gadgets of superaccurate target weapons—a curled aluminum hand at the back of the butt that extended under the armpit and held the stock firmly into the shoulder, and an adjustable pinion below the rifle's center of gravity to allow the stock to be nailed into its grooved wooden rest. The armorer had had the usual single-shot bolt action replaced by a five-shot magazine, and he had assured Bond that if he allowed as little as two seconds between shots to steady the weapon there would be no fade even at five hundred yards.

For the job that Bond had to do, he guessed that two seconds might be a dangerous loss of time if he missed with his first shot. Anyway, M. had said that the range would be not more than three hundred yards. Bond would cut it down to one second—almost continuous fire.

"Ready?"

"Yes."

"I'll give you a countdown from five. Now! Five, four, three, two, one. Fire!"

The ground shuddered slightly and the air sang as the five whirling scraps of cupronickel spat off into the dusk. The target went down and quickly rose again, decorated with four small white discs closely grouped on the bull's-eye. There was no fifth disc—not even a black one to show an inner or an outer.

"The last round was low," said the range officer lowering his night-glasses. "Thanks for the contribution. We sift the sand on those butts at the end of every year. Never get less than fifteen tons of good lead and copper scrap out of them. Good money."

Bond had got to his feet. Corporal Menzies from the armorers' section appeared from the pavilion of the Gun Club and knelt down to dismantle the Winchester and its rest. He looked up at Bond. He said with a hint of criticism, "You were taking it a bit fast, sir. Last round was bound to jump wide."

"I know, Corporal. I wanted to see how fast I *could* take it. I'm not blaming the weapon. It's a hell of a fine job. Please tell the armorer so from me. Now I'd better get moving. You're finding your own way back to London, aren't you?"

"Yes. Good night, sir."

The chief range officer handed Bond a record of his shoot—two sighting shots and then ten rounds at each hundred yards up to five hundred. "Damned good firing with this visibility. You ought to come back next year and have a bash at the Queen's Prize. It's open to all comers nowadays—British Commonwealth, that is."

"Thanks. Trouble is, I'm not all that much in England. And thanks for spotting for me." Bond glanced at the distant clock tower. On either side, the red danger flag and the red signal drum were coming down to show that firing had ceased. The hands stood at 9:15. "I'd like to buy you a drink, but I've got an appointment in London. Can we hold it over until that Queen's Prize you were talking about?"

The range officer nodded noncommittally. He had been looking forward to finding out more about this man who had appeared out of the blue after a flurry of signals from the Ministry of Defense and had then proceeded to score well over ninety percent at all distances. And that after the range was closed for the night and visibility was poor-to-bad. And why had he, who only officiated at the annual July meeting, been ordered to be present? And why had he been told to see that Bond had a six-inch bull's-eye at five hundred instead of the regulation fifteen-inch? And why this flummery with the danger flag and signal drum that were only used on ceremonial occasions? To put pressure on the man? To give an edge of urgency to the shoot?

Bond. Commander James Bond. The N.R.A. would surely have a record of anyone who could shoot like that. He'd remember to give them a call. Funny time to have an appointment in London. Probably a girl. The range officer's undistinguished face assumed a disgruntled expression. Sort of fellow who got all the girls he wanted.

The two men walked through

the handsome façade of Club Row behind the range to Bond's car, which stood opposite the bullet-pitted iron reproduction of Landseer's famous Running Deer.

"Nice-looking job," commented the range officer. "Never seen a body like that on a Continental. Have it made specially?"

"Yes. The Mark IV's are anyway really only two-seaters. And damned little luggage space. So I got Mulliner's to make it into a real two-seater with plenty of trunk space. Selfish car, I'm afraid. Well, good night. And thanks again." The twin exhausts boomed healthily, and the back wheels briefly spat gravel.

The chief range officer watched the ruby lights vanish up King's Avenue toward the London Road. He turned on his heel and went to find Corporal Menzies on a search for information that was to prove fruitless. The corporal remained as wooden as the big mahogany box he was in the process of loading into a khaki Land Rover without military symbols.

The range officer was a major. He tried pulling his rank without success. The Land Rover hammered away in Bond's wake. The major walked moodily off to the offices of the National Rifle Association to try and find out what he wanted in the library under *Bond, J.*

James Bond's appointment was not with a girl. It was with a B.E.A. flight to Hanover and Berlin. As he bit off the miles to London Airport, pushing the big car hard so as to have plenty of time for a drink, three drinks, before the takeoff, only part of his mind was on the road. The rest was reexamining, for the umpteenth time, the sequence that was now leading him to an appointment with an airplane. But only an interim appointment. His final rendezvous on one of the next three nights in Berlin was with a man.

He had to see this man and he had to be sure to shoot him dead.

When, at around 2:30 that afternoon, James Bond had gone in through the double padded doors and had sat down opposite the turned-away profile on the other side of the big desk, he had sensed trouble. There was no greeting. M's head was sunk into his stiff turned-down collar in a Churchillian pose of gloomy reflection, and there was a droop of bitterness at the corner of his lips. He swiveled his chair around to face Bond, gave him an appraising glance as if, Bond thought, to see that his tie was straight and his hair properly brushed, and then began speaking, fast, biting off his sentences as if he wanted to be rid of what he was saying, and of Bond, as quickly as possible.

"Number 272. He's a good man. You won't have come across him. Simple reason that he's been holed

up in Novaya Zemlya since the war. Now he's trying to get out—loaded with stuff. Atomic and rockets. And their plan for a whole new series of tests. For nineteen sixty-one. To put the heat on the West. Something to do with Berlin. Don't quite get the picture, but the FO says if it's true it's terrific. Makes nonsense of the Geneva Conference and all this blather about nuclear disarmament the Communist bloc is putting out.

"He's got as far as East Berlin. But he's got practically the whole of the KGB on his tail—and the East German security forces, of course. He's holed up somewhere in East Berlin, and he got one message over to us. That he'd be coming across between six and seven P.M. on one of the next three nights —tomorrow, next day, or next day. He gave the crossing point. Trouble is"—the downward curve of M.'s lips became even more bitter —"the courier he used was a double. Station WB bowled him out yesterday. Quite by chance. Had a lucky break with one of the KGB codes. The courier'll be flown out for trial, of course. But that won't help. The KGB knows that 272 will be making a run for it. They know when. They know where. They know just as much as we do—and no more.

"Now, the code we cracked was a one-day-only setting on their machines. But we got the whole of that day's traffic, and that was good enough. They plan to shoot him on the run. At this street crossing between East and West Berlin he gave us in his message. They're mounting quite an operation—Operation Extase, they call it. Put their best sniper on the job. All we know about him is that his code name is the Russian for Trigger. Station WB guesses he's the same man they've used before for sniper work. Long-range stuff across the frontier. He's going to be guarding this crossing every night, and his job is to get 272.

"Of course they'd obviously prefer to do a smoother job with machine guns and what-have-you. But it's quiet in Berlin at the moment, and apparently the word is it's got to stay so. Anyway"—M. shrugged —"they've got confidence in this Trigger operator, and that's the way it's going to be!"

"Where do I come in, sir?" But James Bond had guessed the answer, guessed why M. was showing his dislike of the whole business. This was going to be dirty work, and Bond, because he belonged to the Double-O Section, had been chosen for it. Perversely, Bond wanted to force M. to put it in black and white. This was going to be bad news, dirty news, and he didn't want to hear it from one of the section officers, or even from the Chief of Staff. This was to be murder. All right. Let M. bloody well say so.

"Where do you come in, 007?" M.

looked coldly across the desk. "You know where you come in. You've got to kill this sniper. And you've got to kill him before he gets 272. That's all. Is that understood?"

The clear blue eyes remained as cold as ice. But Bond knew that they remained so only with an effort of will. M. didn't like sending any man to a killing. But, when it had to be done, he always put on this fierce, cold act of command. Bond knew why. It was to take some of the pressure, some of the guilt, off the killer's shoulders.

So now Bond, who knew these things, decided to make it easy and quick for M. He got to his feet. "That's all right, sir. I suppose the Chief of Staff has got all the gen. I'd better go and put in some practice. It wouldn't do to miss." He walked to the door.

M. said quietly, "Sorry to have to hand this to you. Nasty job. But it's got to be done well."

"I'll do my best, sir." James Bond walked out and closed the door behind him. He didn't like the job, but on the whole he'd rather have it himself than have the responsibility of ordering someone else to go and do it.

The Chief of Staff had been only a shade more sympathetic. "Sorry you've bought this one, James," he had said. "But Tanqueray was definite that he hadn't got anyone good enough on his station, and this isn't the sort of job you can ask a regular soldier to do. Plenty of top marksmen in the B.A.O.R., but a live target needs another kind of nerve. Anyway, I've been on to Bisley and fixed a shoot for you tonight at eight fifteen when the ranges will be closed. Visibility should be about the same as you'll be getting in Berlin around an hour earlier. The armorer's got the gun—a real target job—and he's sending it down with one of his men. You'll find your own way. Then you're booked on a midnight B.E.A. charter flight to Berlin. Take a taxi to this address."

He handed Bond a piece of paper. "Go up to the fourth floor, and you'll find Tanqueray's Number Two waiting for you. Then I'm afraid you'll just have to sit it out for the next three days."

"How about the gun? Am I supposed to take it through the German customs in a golfbag or something?"

The Chief of Staff hadn't been amused. "It'll go over in the FO pouch. You'll have it by tomorrow midday." He had reached for a signal pad. "Well, you'd better get cracking. I'll just let Tanqueray know everything's fixed."

James Bond glanced down at the dim blue face of the dashboard clock. 10:15. With any luck, by this time tomorrow it would all be finished. After all, it was the life of this man Trigger against the life of 272. It wasn't *exactly* murder. Pretty near it, though.

He gave a vicious blast on his triple wind horns at an inoffensive family sedan, took the roundabout in a quite unnecessary dry skid, wrenched the wheel harshly to correct it, and pointed the nose of the Bentley toward the distant glow that was London Airport.

The ugly six-story building at the corner of the Kochstrasse and the Wilhelmstrasse was the only one standing in a waste of empty bombed space. Bond paid off his taxi and got a brief impression of the neighborhood—waist-high weeds and half-tidied rubble walls stretching away to a big deserted crossroads lit by a central cluster of yellowish arc lamps—before he pushed the bell for the fourth floor and at once heard the click of the door opener.

The door closed itself behind him, and he walked over the uncarpeted cement floor to the old-fashioned lift. The smell of cabbage, cheap cigar smoke, and stale sweat reminded him of other apartment houses in Germany and Central Europe. Even the sigh and faint squeal of the slow lift were part of a hundred assignments when he had been fired off by M., like a projectile, at some distant target where a problem waited for him, waited to be solved by him.

At least this time the reception committee was on his side. This time there was nothing to fear at the top of the stairs.

Number Two of Secret Service Station WB was a lean, tense man in his early forties. He wore the uniform of his profession—well-cut, well-used, lightweight tweeds in a dark green herringbone, a soft white silk shirt, and an old school tie (in his case Wykehamist). At the sight of the tie, and while they exchanged conventional greetings in the small musty lobby of the apartment, Bond's spirits, already low, sank another degree.

He knew the type—backbone of the civil service . . . overcrammed and underloved at Winchester . . . a good second in P.P.E. at Oxford . . . the war, staff jobs he would have done meticulously—perhaps an O.B.E. . . . Allied Control Commission in Germany where he had been recruited into the I Branch . . . And thence—because he was the ideal staff man and A-One with Security, and because he thought he would find life, drama, romance—the things he had never had—into the Secret Service. A sober, careful man had been needed to chaperone Bond on this ugly business. Captain Paul Sender, late of the Welsh Guards, had been the obvious choice. He had bought it. Now, like a good Wykehamist, he concealed his distaste for the job beneath careful, trite conversation as he showed Bond the layout of the apartment and the arrangements that had been made for the executioner's preparedness and, to a modest extent, his comfort.

The flat consisted of a large double bedroom, a bathroom, and a kitchen containing tinned food, milk, butter, eggs, bread, and one bottle of Dimple Haig. The only odd feature in the bedroom was that one of the double beds was angled up against the curtains covering the single broad window and was piled high with three mattresses below the bedclothes.

Captain Sender said, "Care to have a look at the field of fire? Then I can explain what the other side has in mind."

Bond was tired. He didn't particularly want to go to sleep with the picture of the battlefield on his mind. But he said, "That'd be fine."

Captain Sender switched off the lights. Chinks from the streetlight at the intersection showed round the curtains. "Don't want to draw the curtains," said Captain Sender. "Unlikely, but they may be on the lookout for a covering party for 272. If you'd just lie on the bed and get your head under the curtains, I'll brief you about what you'll be looking at. Look to the left."

It was a sash window, and the bottom half was open. The mattresses, by design, gave only a little, and James Bond found himself more or less in the firing position he had been in on the Century Range. But now he was staring across broken, thickly weeded bombed ground toward the bright river of the Zimmerstrasse—the border with East Berlin. It looked about a hundred and fifty yards away. Captain Sender's voice from above him and behind the curtain began reciting. It reminded Bond of a spiritualist séance.

"That's bombed ground in front of you. Plenty of cover. A hundred and thirty yards of it up to the frontier. Then the frontier—the street—and then a big stretch of more bombed ground on the enemy side. That's why 272 chose this route. It's one of the few places in the town which is broken land—thick weeds, ruined walls, cellars—on both sides of the frontier . . . 272 will sneak through that mess on the other side, and make a dash across the Zimmerstrasse for the mess on our side. Trouble is, he'll have thirty yards of brightly lit frontier to sprint across. That'll be the killing ground. Right?"

Bond said, "Yes." He said it softly. The scent of the enemy, the need to take care, already had him by the nerves.

"To your left, that big new ten-story block is the Haus der Ministerien, the chief brain center of East Berlin. You can see the lights are still on in most of the windows. Most of those will stay on all night. These chaps work hard—shifts all round the clock. You probably won't need to worry about the lighted ones. This Trigger chap will almost certainly fire from one of the dark windows. You'll see there's a block of four together on the corner above the intersection.

They've stayed dark last night and tonight. They've got the best field of fire. From here, their range varies from three hundred to three hundred and ten yards. I've got all the figures when you want them.

"You needn't worry about much else. That street stays empty during the night—only the motorized patrols about every half an hour. Light armored car with a couple of motorcycles as escort. Last night, which I suppose is typical, between six and seven when this thing's going to be done, there were a few people that came and went out of that side door. Civil-servant types. Before that nothing out of the ordinary—usual flow of people in and out of a busy government building, except, of all things, a whole damned woman's orchestra. Made a hell of a racket in some concert hall they've got in there. Part of the block is the Ministry of Culture.

"Otherwise nothing—certainly none of the KGB people we know, or any signs of preparation for a job like this. But there wouldn't be. They're careful chaps, the opposition. Anyway, have a good look. Don't forget it's darker than it will be tomorrow around six. But you can get the general picture."

Bond got the general picture, and it stayed with him long after the other man was asleep and snoring softly with a gentle regular clicking sound. A Wykehamist snore, Bond reflected irritably.

Yes, he had got the picture. The picture of a flicker of movement among the shadowy ruins on the other side of the gleaming river of light, a pause, the wild zigzagging sprint of a man in the full glare of the arcs, the crash of gunfire—and then either a crumpled, sprawling heap in the middle of the wide street or the noise of his onward dash through the weeds and rubble of the Western Sector. Sudden death or a home run. The true gauntlet!

How much time would Bond have to spot the Russian sniper in one of those dark windows? And kill him? Five seconds? Ten?

When dawn edged the curtains with gun metal, Bond capitulated to his fretting mind. It had won. He went softly into the bathroom and surveyed the ranks of medicine bottles that a thoughtful Secret Service had provided to keep its executioner in good shape. He selected the Tuinal, chased down two of the ruby and blue depth charges with a glass of water, and went back to bed. Then, poleaxed, he slept.

He awoke at midday. The flat was empty. Bond drew the curtains to let in the gray Prussian day, and, standing well back from the window, gazed out at the drabness of Berlin, and listened to the tram noises and to the distant screeching of the U-Bahn as it took the big curve into the Zoo Station. He gave a quick, reluctant glance at

what he had examined the night before, noted that the weeds among the bomb rubble were much the same as the London ones—campion, dock, and bracken—and then went into the kitchen.

There was a note propped against a loaf of bread: "My friend [a Secret Service euphemism that in this context meant Sender's chief] says it's all right for you to go out. But to be back by 1700 hours. Your gear [doubletalk for Bond's rifle] has arrived and the batman will lay it out this P.M. P. Sender."

Bond lit the gas cooker, and with a sneer at his profession, burned the message. Then he brewed himself a vast dish of scrambled eggs and bacon, which he heaped on buttered toast and washed down with black coffee into which he had poured a liberal tot of whiskey. Then he bathed and shaved, dressed in the drab, anonymous, middle-European clothes he had brought over for the purpose, looked at his disordered bed, decided to hell with it, and went down in the lift and out of the building.

James Bond had always found Berlin a glum, inimical city, varnished on the Western side with a brittle veneer of gimcrack polish rather like the chromium trim on American motor cars. He walked to the Kurfürstendamm and sat in the Café Marquardt and drank an espresso and moodily watched the obedient queues of pedestrians waiting for the Go sign on the traffic lights while the shiny stream of cars went through their dangerous quadrille at the busy intersection.

It was cold outside and the sharp wind from the Russian steppes whipped at the girls' skirts and at the waterproofs of the impatient hurrying men, each with the inevitable brief case tucked under his arm. The infrared wall heaters in the café glared redly down and gave a spurious glow to the faces of the café squatters, consuming their traditional "one cup of coffee and ten glasses of water," reading the free newspapers and periodicals in their wooden racks, earnestly bending over business documents.

Bond, closing his mind to the evening, debated with himself about ways to spend the afternoon. It finally came down to a choice between a visit to that respectable-looking brownstone house in the Clausewitzstrasse known to all concierges and taxi drivers and a trip to the Wannsee and a strenuous walk in the Grunewald. Virtue triumphed. Bond paid for his coffee and went out into the cold and took a taxi to the Zoo Station.

The pretty young trees round the long lake had already been touched by the breath of autumn, and there was occasional gold among the green. Bond walked hard for two hours along the leafy paths, then chose a restaurant with

a glassed-in veranda above the lake and greatly enjoyed a high tea consisting of a double portion of *Matjeshering*, smothered in cream and onion rings, and two *Molle mit Korn*. (This Berlin equivalent of a boilermaker and his assistant was a schnapps, double, washed down with draft Löwenbräu.) Then, feeling more encouraged, he took the S-Bahn back into the city.

Outside the apartment house a nondescript young man was tinkering with the engine of a black Opel Kapitan. He didn't take his head out from under the hood when Bond passed close by him and went up to the door and pressed the bell.

Captain Sender was reassuring. It was a "friend"—a corporal from the transport section of Station WB. He had fixed up some bad engine trouble on the Opel. Each night, from six to seven, he would be ready to produce a series of multiple backfires when a signal on a walkie-talkie operated by Sender told him to do so. This would give some kind of cover for the noise of Bond's shooting. Otherwise, the neighborhood might alert the police and there would be a lot of untidy explaining to be done. Their hideout was in the American Sector, and while their American "friends" had given Station WB clearance for this operation, the "friends" were naturally anxious that it should be a clean job and without repercussions.

Bond was suitably impressed by the car gimmick, as he was by the very workmanlike preparations that had been made for him in the living room. Here, behind the head of his high bed, giving a perfect firing position, a wood and metal stand had been erected against the broad window sill, and along it lay the Winchester, the tip of its barrel just denting the curtains. The wood and all the metal parts of the rifle and sniperscope had been painted a dull black, and, laid out on the bed like sinister evening clothes, was a black velvet hood stitched to a waist-length shirt of the same material. The hood had wide slits for the eyes and mouth. It reminded Bond of old prints of the Spanish Inquisition or of the anonymous operators on the guillotine platform during the French Revolution.

There was a similar hood on Captain Sender's bed, and on his section of the window sill there lay a pair of nightglasses and the microphone for the walkie-talkie.

Captain Sender, his face worried and tense with nerves, said there was no news at the Station; no change in the situation as they knew it. Did Bond want anything to eat? Or a cup of tea? Perhaps a tranquilizer—there were several kinds in the bathroom?

Bond stitched a cheerful, relaxed expression on his face and said, "No, thanks," and gave a lighthearted account of his day while

an artery near his solar plexus began thumping gently as tension built up inside him like a watch-spring tightening. Finally his small talk petered out and he lay down on his bed with a German thriller he had bought on his wanderings, while Captain Sender moved fretfully about the flat, looking too often at his watch and chain-smoking Kent filter-tips through (he was a careful man) a Dunhill filtered cigarette holder.

James Bond's choice of reading matter, prompted by a spectacular jacket of a half-naked girl strapped to a bed, turned out to have been a happy one for the occasion. It was called *Verderbt, Verdammt, Verraten*. The prefix *ver* signified that the girl had not only been ruined, damned, and betrayed, but that she had suffered these misfortunes most thoroughly. James Bond temporarily lost himself in the tribulations of the heroine, Gräfin Liselotte Mutzenbacher, and it was with irritation that he heard Captain Sender say that it was 5:30 and time to take up their positions.

Bond took off his coat and tie, put two sticks of chewing gum in his mouth, and donned the hood. The lights were switched off by Captain Sender, and Bond lay along the bed, got his eye to the eyepiece of the sniperscope, and gently lifted the bottom edge of the curtain back and over his shoulders.

Now dusk was approaching, but otherwise the scene (a year later to become famous as Checkpoint Charlie) was like a well-remembered photograph—the wasteland in front of him, the bright river of the frontier road, the farther wasteland, and, on the left, the ugly square block of the Haus der Ministerien with its lit and dark windows. Bond scanned it all slowly, moving the sniperscope, with the rifle, by means of the precision screws on the wooden base. It was all the same except that now there was a trickle of personnel leaving and entering the Haus der Ministrien through the door onto the Wilhelmstrasse.

Bond looked long at the four dark windows—dark again tonight—that he agreed with Sender were the enemy's firing points. The curtains were drawn back, and the sash windows were wide open at the bottom. Bond's scope could not penetrate into the rooms, but there was no sign of movement within the four oblong black gaping mouths.

Now there was extra traffic in the street below the windows. The woman's orchestra came trooping down the pavement toward the entrance. Twenty laughing, talking girls carrying their instruments—violin and wind instrument cases, satchels with their scores—and four of them with the drums. A gay, happy little crocodile. Bond was reflecting that some people still seemed to find life fun in the So-

viet Sector, when his glasses picked out and stayed on the girl carrying the cello. Bond's masticating jaws stopped still, and then reflectively went on with their chewing as he twisted the screw to depress the sniperscope and keep her in its center.

The girl was taller than the others, and her long, straight, fair hair, falling to her shoulders, shone like molten gold under the arcs at the intersection. She was hurrying along in a charming, excited way, carrying the cello case as if it were no heavier than a violin. Everything was flying—the skirt of her coat, her feet, her hair. She was vivid with movement and life and, it seemed, with gaiety and happiness as she chattered to the two girls who flanked her and laughed back at what she was saying.

As she turned in at the entrance amid her troupe, the arcs momentarily caught a beautiful, pale profile. And then she was gone, and, it seemed to Bond, that with her disappearance a stab of grief lanced into his heart. How odd! How very odd! This had not happened to him since he was young. And now this single girl, seen only indistinctly and far away, had caused him to suffer this sharp pang of longing, this thrill of animal magnetism!

Morosely, Bond glanced down at the luminous dial of his watch. 5:50. Only ten minutes to go. No transport arriving at the entrance. None of those anonymous black Zik cars he had half expected. He closed as much of his mind as he could to the girl and sharpened his wits. Get on, damn you! Get back to your job!

From somewhere inside the Haus der Ministerien there came the familiar sounds of an orchestra tuning up—the strings tuning their instruments to single notes on the piano, the sharp blare of individual woodwinds—then a pause, and then the collective crash of melody as the whole orchestra threw itself competently, so far as Bond could judge, into the opening bars of what even to James Bond was vaguely familiar.

"Moussorgsky's Overture to *Boris Godunov*," said Captain Sender succinctly. "Anyway, six o'clock coming up." And then, urgently, "Hey! Right-hand bottom of the four windows! Watch out!"

Bond depressed the sniperscope. Yes, there was movement inside the black cave. Now, from the interior, a thick black object, a weapon, had slid out. It moved firmly, minutely, swiveling down and sideways so as to cover the stretch of the Zimmerstrasse between the two wastelands of rubble. Then the unseen operator in the room behind seemed satisfied, and the weapon remained still, fixed obviously to such a stand as Bond had beneath his rifle.

"What is it? What sort of gun?" Captain Sender's voice was more

breathless than it should have been.

Take it easy, dammit! thought Bond. It's me who's supposed to have the nerves.

He strained his eyes, taking in the squat flash eliminator at the muzzle, the telescopic sight, and the thick downward chunk of magazine. Yes! Absolutely for sure —and the best they had!

"Kalashnikov," he said curtly. "Submachinegun. Gas-operated. Thirty rounds in seven sixty-two millimeter. Favorite with the KGB. They're going to do a saturation job after all. Perfect for range. We'll have to get him pretty quick, or 272 will end up not just dead but strawberry jam. You keep an eye out for any movement over there in that rubble. I'll have to stay married to that window and the gun. He'll have to show himself to fire. Other chaps are probably spotting behind him—perhaps from all four windows. Much the sort of setup we expected, but I didn't think they'd use a weapon that's going to make all the racket this one will. Should have known they would. A running man will be hard to get in this light with a single-shot job."

Bond fiddled minutely with the traversing and elevating screws at his fingertips and got the fine lines of the scope exactly intersected, just behind where the butt of the enemy gun merged into the blackness behind. Get the chest—don't bother about the head!

Inside the hood Bond's face began to sweat and his eye socket was slippery against the rubber of the eyepiece. That didn't matter. It was only his hands, his trigger finger, that must stay bone-dry. As the minutes ticked by, he frequently blinked his eyes to rest them, shifted his limbs to keep them supple, listened to the music to relax his mind.

The minutes slouched on leaden feet. How old would she be? Early twenties? Say twenty-three? With that poise and insouciance, the hint of authority in her long easy stride, she would come of good racy stock —one of the old Prussian families probably or from similar remnants in Poland or even Russia. Why in hell did she have to choose the cello? There was something almost indecent in the idea of this bulbous, ungainly instrument between her splayed thighs. Of course Suggia had managed to look elegant, and so did that girl Amaryllis somebody. But they should invent a way for women to play the damned thing sidesaddle.

From his side Captain Sender said, "Seven o'clock. Nothing's stirred on the other side. Bit of movement on our side, near a cellar close to the frontier. That'll be our reception committee—two good men from the Station. Better stay with it until they close down. Let me know when they take that gun in."

"All right."

It was 7:30 when the KGB submachinegun was gently drawn back into the black interior. One by one the bottom sashes of the four windows were closed. The cold-hearted game was over for the night. 272 was still holed up. Two more nights to go!

Bond softly drew the curtain over his shoulders and across the muzzle of the Winchester. He got up, pulled off his cowl, and went into the bathroom, where he stripped and had a shower. Then he had two large whiskeys-on-the-rocks in quick succession, while he waited, his ears pricked, for the now muffled sound of the orchestra to stop. At eight o'clock it did, with the expert comment from Sender—"Borodin's *Prince Igor,* Choral Dance Number 17, I think"—who had been getting off his report in garbled language to the Head of Station.

"Just going to have another look. I've rather taken to that tall blonde with the cello," Bond said to Sender.

"Didn't notice her," said Sender, uninterested. He went into the kitchen. Tea, guessed Bond. Or perhaps Horlick's. Bond donned his cowl, went back to his firing position, and depressed the sniperscope to the doorway of the Haus der Ministerien.

Yes, there they went, not so gay and laughing now. Tired perhaps. And now here she came, less lively, but still with that beautiful careless stride. Bond watched the blown golden hair and the fawn raincoat until it had vanished into the indigo dusk up the Wilhemstrasse. Where did she live? In some miserable flaked room in the suburbs? Or in one of the privileged apartments in the hideous lavatory-tiled Stalinallee?

Bond drew himself back. Somewhere, within easy reach, that girl lived. Was she married? Did she have a lover? Anyway, to hell with it! She was not for him.

The next day, and the next night watch, were duplicates, with small variations, of the first. James Bond had his two more brief rendezvous, by sniperscope, with the girl, and the rest was a killing of time and a tightening of the tension that, by the time the third and final day came, was like a fog in the small room.

James Bond crammed the third day with an almost lunatic program of museums, art galleries, the zoo, and a film, hardly perceiving anything he looked at, his mind's eye divided between the girl and those four black squares and the black tube and the unknown man behind it—the man he was now certainly going to kill tonight.

Back punctually at five in the apartment, Bond narrowly averted a row with Captain Sender because, that evening, Bond took a stiff drink of the whiskey before he donned the hideous cowl that now

stank of his sweat. Captain Sender had tried to prevent him, and when he failed, had threatened to call up Head of Station and report Bond for breaking training.

"Look, my friend," said Bond wearily, "I've got to commit a murder tonight. Not you. Me. So be a good chap and stuff it, would you? You can tell Tanqueray anything you like when it's over. Think I like this job? Having a Double-O number and so on? I'd be quite happy for you to get me sacked from the Double-O Section. Then I could settle down and make a snug nest of papers as an ordinary staffer. Right?"

Bond drank down his whisky, reached for his thriller—now arriving at an appalling climax—and threw himself on the bed.

Captain Sender, icily silent, went off into the kitchen to brew, from the sounds, his inevitable cuppa.

Bond felt the whiskey beginning to melt the coiled nerves in his stomach. Now then, Liselotte, how in hell are you going to get out of this fix?

It was exactly 6:05 when Sender, at his post, began talking excitedly. "Bond, there's something moving 'way back over there. Now he's stopped—wait, no, he's on the move again, keeping low. There's a bit of broken wall there. He'll be out of sight of the opposition. But thick weeds, yards of them, ahead of him. Now he's coming through the weeds. And they're moving. Hope to God they think it's only the wind. Now he's through and gone to ground. Any reaction?"

"No," said Bond tensely. "Keep on telling me. How far to the frontier?"

"He's only got about fifty yards to go," Captain Sender's voice was harsh with excitement. "Broken stuff, but some of it's open. Then a solid chunk of wall right up against the pavement. He'll have to get over it. They can't fail to spot him then. Now! Now he's made ten yards, and another ten. Got him clearly then. Blackened his face and hands. Get ready! Any moment now he'll make the last sprint."

James Bond felt the sweat pouring down his face and neck. He took a chance and quickly wiped his hands down his sides and then got them back to the rifle, his finger inside the guard, just lying along the curved trigger. "There's something moving in the room behind the gun. They must have spotted him. Get that Opel working."

Bond heard the code word go into the microphone, heard the Opel in the street below start up, felt his pulse quicken as the engine leaped into life and a series of ear-splitting cracks came from the exhaust.

The movement in the black cave was now definite. A black arm with a black glove had reached out and under the stock.

"Now!" called out Captain Sender. "Now! He's run for the wall! He's up it! Just going to jump!"

And then, in the sniperscope, Bond saw the head of Trigger—the purity of the profile, the golden bell of hair—all laid out along the stock of the Kalashnikov! She was dead, a sitting duck! Bond's fingers flashed down to the screws, inched them round, and as yellow flame fluttered at the snout of the submachinegun, he squeezed the trigger.

The bullet, dead-on at three hundred and ten yards, must have hit where the stock ended up the barrel, might have got her in the left hand—but the effect was to tear the gun off its mountings, smash it against the side of the window frame, and then hurl it out of the window. It turned several times on its way down and crashed into the middle of the street.

"He's over!" shouted Captain Sender. "He's over! He's done it! My God, he's done it!"

"Get down!" said Bond sharply, and threw himself sideways off the bed as the big eye of a searchlight in one of the black windows blazed on, swerving up the street toward their block and their room. Then gunfire crashed, and the bullets howled into their window, ripping the curtains, smashing the woodwork, thudding into the walls.

Behind the roar and zing of the bullets Bond heard the Opel race off down the street, and, behind that again, the fragmentary whisper of the orchestra. The combination of the two background noises clicked. Of course! The orchestra, that must have raised an infernal din throughout the offices and corridors of the Haus der Ministerien, was, as on their side the backfiring Opel, designed to provide some cover for the sharp burst of fire from Trigger. Had she carried her weapon to and fro every day in that cello case? Was the whole orchestra composed of KGB women? Had the other instrument cases contained only equipment—the big drum perhaps the searchlight—while the real instruments were available in the concert hall? Too elaborate? Too fantastic? Probably.

But there had been no doubt about the girl. In the sniperscope Bond had even been able to see one wide, heavily lashed, aiming eye. Had he hurt her? Almost certainly her left arm. There would be no chance of seeing her, seeing how she was, if she left with the orchestra. Now he would never see her again. Bond's window would be a death trap. To underline the fact, a stray bullet smashed into the mechanism of the Winchester, already overturned and damaged, and hot lead splashed down on Bond's hand, burning the skin. On Bond's emphatic oath the firing stopped abruptly and silence sang in the room.

Captain Sender emerged from beside his bed, brushing glass out of his hair. Bond and Sender crunched across the floor and through the splintered door into the kitchen. Here, because the room faced away from the street, it was safe to switch on the light.

"And damage?" asked Bond.

"No. You all right?" Captain Sender's pale eyes were bright with the fever that comes in battle. They also, Bond noticed, held a sharp glint of accusation.

"Yes. Just get an Elastoplast for my hand. Caught a splash from one of the bullets." Bond went into the bathroom.

When he came out, Captain Sender was sitting by the walkie-talkie he had fetched from the sitting room. He was speaking into it. Now he said into the microphone. "That's all for now. Fine about 272. Hurry the armored car, if you would. Be glad to get out of here, and 007 will need to write his version of what happened. Okay? Then *over* and *out.*"

Captain Sender turned to Bond. Half accusing, half embarrassed he said, "Afraid Head of Station needs your reasons in writing for not getting that chap. I had to tell him I'd seen you alter your aim at the last second. Gave Trigger time to get off a burst. Damned lucky for 272 he'd just begun his sprint. Blew chunks off the wall behind him. What was it all about?"

James Bond knew he could lie, knew he could fake a dozen reasons why. Instead he took a deep pull at the strong whiskey he had poured for himself, put the glass down, and looked Captain Sender straight in the eye.

"Trigger was a woman."

"So what? KGB has got plenty of women agents—and women gunners. I'm not in the least surprised. The Russian woman's team always does well in the World Championships. Last meeting, in Moscow, they came first, second, and third against seventeen countries. I can even remember two of their names—Donskaya and Lomova. Terrific shots. She may even have been one of them. What did she look like? Records'll probably be able to turn her up."

"She was a blonde. She was the girl who carried the cello in that orchestra. Probably had her gun in the cello case. The orchestra was to cover up the shooting."

"Oh!" said Captain Sender slowly. "I see. The girl you were keen on?"

"That's right."

"Well, I'm sorry, but I'll have to put that in my report too. You had clear orders to exterminate Trigger."

There came the sound of a car approaching. It pulled up somewhere below. The bell rang twice. Sender said, "Well, let's get going. They've sent an armored car to get us out of here." He paused. His eyes flicked over Bond's shoulder,

avoiding Bond's eyes. "Sorry about the report. Got to do my duty, y'know. You should have killed that sniper whoever it was."

Bond got up. He suddenly didn't want to leave the stinking little smashed-up flat, leave the place from which, for three days, he had had this long-range, one-sided romance with an unknown girl—an unknown enemy agent with much the same job in her outfit as he had in his. Poor little bitch! She would be in worse trouble now than he was! She'd certainly be courtmartialed for muffing this job. Probably be kicked out of the KGB. He shrugged. At least they'd stop short of killing her—as he himself had done.

James Bond said wearily, "Okay. With any luck it'll cost me my Double-O number. But tell Head of Station not to worry. That girl won't do any more sniping. Probably lost her left hand. Certainly broke her nerve for that kind of work. Scared the living daylights out of her. In my book, that was enough. Let's go."

CRIMINALIMERICKS

THE ESPION AGE by D. R. BENSEN
(corrected version)

Since Leamas came in from the chill,
Of spy books we've had a whole hill;
With weapons exotic
And talents erotic,
These agents are licensed to thrill.

Most of us have probably known men like Boyd G. Crowley, and most of us can identify poignantly with Herbert Menlo—so this story will have a special impact. But it does raise some interesting questions. Are all crimes obviously crimes? There is no doubt, for example, about murder, arson, theft, blackmail, and—unfortunately —so many others. But what about contempt, greed, mental cruelty, disdain, effrontery? Are they crimes? What about bullying, insult, rudeness, menace, persecution, the infliction of suffering, or even of humiliation? And then there is the question raised by the end of the story: we leave that for you to ponder. But please don't pass over it lightly: it is important—crucially important . . .

THE FUR-LINED GOODBYE

by JOHN PIERCE

LIKE MOST DOGS OF HERBERT Menlo's experience, the mongrel Andrew, rescued from the pound for his eight-year-old son Marvin, proved a primordial hoax. A huge beast of murky intellect, he spent much time in the front hall closet, challenging airliners, motorbikes, and the noon factory whistle with muffled growls. Trained to fetch the evening *Herald* from the yard, he expanded on the office with a manic diligence, bringing bedsheets and lingerie from the neighboring washlines, paint brushes, bicycle tires, and mateless tennis shoes, and spreading them ageometrically about the Menlo grounds.

Despite all this, the dog Andrew was regarded with affection by most of Mulberry Street, and was anything but the menace that Boyd Crowley, who had twice called the police, made him out to be. It was typical of Crowley that he be standing in his yard the night Andrew brought home the mink stole. Where Crowley was not wanted, Crowley generally managed to be, if only after careful reconaissance.

To Herbert Menlo, a mild, balding realtor of forty plus, Crowley was a tired story—large, loud, and overbearing, derivative of the fat son of the doting mother who terrorizes nearly every schoolyard in the land. Herbert often wondered if such men were not wired, like bats, with special sensory equipment, so unerringly did they home on those they could bully—the timid, the peace-loving, and the

underweight—at whose expense they disposed one by one of every communal decency.

Red-faced, with prominent gold fillings, Crowley commuted to New York where he sold something, and lived with his wife, a sullen redhead, across the street from the Menlos. He surveyed you head to foot as though searching out the source of an odor; he laughed often and perfunctorily while his eyes wandered. New to the neighborhood, he had locked upon Menlo's defenselessness with a radar sensitivity, coming in time to manifest his venom in a series of deft insults ranging from minor boorishness to open theft.

It began innocuously enough—Crowley easing ahead of him in the commuter ticket line, Crowley shoving past him to the last empty seat in the car, but each accomplished with that slight fillip of arrogance—the tiny smile, the tip of the hat—that invited the reprisal which Herbert would not make. He would park his car to block the Menlo driveway and not answer the doorbell when Herbert rang. He twice reported the dog Andrew for barking, a sound he, insulated by air conditioning, could at best have heard faintly. A new, unmarked garbage can disappeared; an identical one was seen at the Crowley's soon thereafter.

"What is it that fat clown wants from me?" Herbert asked Ellen one night. He was frail and had high blood pressure; he had not been in a fist fight since elementary school.

"He wants you to put up your hands so he can throw all his self-hatred into beating you to a pulp."

"Yeah, but why? What did *I* ever do to him?"

"You didn't like him. You got his number the first week he moved in, and that's the one thing he can't stand."

"Plenty of others around here have his number."

"Not like you do, dear. They're more his size and he doesn't pull this kind of stuff on them, consequently they're not in position to see him as you do."

"That's a hell of a talent to have," he remarked glumly.

"You've got others. You're solvent and well-liked, and he's a bum."

"Maybe I ought to take up karate."

He had to join her laughter.

"He's not that im*por*tant," she said. "And quit grousing about those damned shears."

Those damned shears. That, of course, was the sorry climax of it: through them was exposed this prideless side of him to his son. He had lent to Mrs. Crowley, early in the relationship, his $6 pruning shears. Twice phoning about them a month later and getting evasions, he had walked over one evening to where Crowley and wife Myrna were sorting boxes in their garage.

The interview had been curt and degrading. Pretending first not to hear him, Crowley had then disclaimed any knowledge of the shears, and both had dismissed him by returning to their interrupted conversation. He was halfway back down their drive when the high shrill of her laughter froze him. Flushing deeply, he then noticed young Marvin, who must have been behind him all along.

"Are you going to let him have the shears, daddy?" the boy asked.

"You should be getting ready for bed," he replied. He wanted to say something else; there was nothing. Head down, dying, he watched the boy walk away. He endeavored to avoid Otto Muhlbacher, his sexagenarian jeweler neighbor, but Otto, who detested Crowley, divined his plight. "You all right, Herb?"

He nodded, not trusting his voice to behave.

"You got to keep clear of him, Herbert. I've had him in my store, I know him. He's just no good."

In bed he had laid plans: to watch for the Crowleys' departure some evening; in their absence he could poke around their garage for the shears. He imagined himself swinging at Crowley and, by some fantastic punch, knocking out his front teeth. He felt the kick of the rifle as he shot the man through the navel, or, if not that, saw himself holding the gun on him until he fell gibbering to the ground. He had never hunted and owned no weapons. He might scout around in a sporting goods store tomorrow.

His tossing had wakened Ellen, who questioned him until he surrendered the account.

"How much of this birdseed is your self-respect designed to take?" he wanted to know.

"Did you take your pills?"

"I took them."

"Well, just keep calm. There's not anything that a heart attack's going to cure."

"Oh, I can take anything he gives me short of a skull fracture, but when it starts costing me the respect of my boy—"

"I'll explain it to Marvin. You just concentrate on ignoring Crowley. He'll tire of it soon. It takes a lot more manhood to be civilized than to knock someone down, or we wouldn't always be fighting wars."

"Sure," he said wryly.

"You just wait. I'll bet you five bucks he queers himself clear out of this neighborhood before long. I've been hearing a lot about those two—their bad credit, their rudeness, grabbing Charlie Eden by the shirt collar right in Charlie's own house; they haven't got a friend on this street."

None of this had cheered him. He heard again the shrill laughter of that woman and saw Crowley as far ahead as he looked.

She said, "He's just not worth your souring your whole life."

Wasn't he?

He was turning up the soil around the tallow tree by the light of the porch the night Andrew trotted home with the fur stole. Noting that Crowley was working in his own yard, Herbert turned away, offering him not even a chance meeting of the eye. Here it was that the dog, mountainous and dirty, emerged from the shadows, growling and shaking viciously whatever it was he had brought.

Herbert put the shovel aside and lunged for him. He saw and caught his breath. Carefully he disengaged the dog's jaws and held the fur to the light. A silver mink stole that he'd bet would run to a thousand dollars! He was debating its origin when the footsteps came up from behind.

"I ought to run an ax through that dog's skull," Crowley said. "And you'd better start praying it's not chewed up."

"Yours?" asked Herbert weakly.

"You'd better believe it."

"Where'd he get it?"

"Off a chair on our terrace. And I'll tell you something else. This ends that dog's local career."

"That should make you happy," Herbert said.

"We'll talk about happy after Myrna gets a look at this fur in the light."

Herbert heard his footsteps on the pavement. Inside he waited for the doorbell and the police. They were strict about dogs; they had warned him that another complaint would mean the pound again.

He sat until midnight in the silence, then went to bed. He lay awake, thinking unconstructively. For once he had no legitimate quarrel with Crowley's churlishness. The fur was an expensive one, and to see it dragged about so, across the asphalt and through grass still wet from the watering—it was enough to rile a president of the S.P.C.A. But the police hadn't come. Not yet.

Nothing in the whole spectrum of his misery quite upset him as much as the prospect of Marvin's losing the dog, which he worshipped. To liquidate that picture—of the two nestled asleep on the floor together—was beyond his imagination. More and more it seemed, since the coming of Crowley, that the dog was the last viable bond between himself and his son. And now? Certainly if Crowley had complained before about some minor barking, he'd not hesitate to complete the job now.

His eyes came open. On those two earlier occasions the patrol car had come straight to the house on receipt of the call, or so the officers had told him. Tonight, no. Why *hadn't* he reported it? It went against precedent. Was Crowley, then, preserving the dog for continued leverage, or could it be that in the case of the mink he did not want the police around?

His mind whirling, Herbert started through the street's tenantry, house by house. Amy Wiswel had a silver mink stole, and it was from that direction Andrew had come! He was half out of bed reaching for the telephone when he recollected it was 3:45 A.M. Unless Amy's fur was safely in her house, Crowley stood a fair chance of being an out-and-out crook. It was almost with relief that Herbert at last saw it so—saw what Otto Muhlbacher had more than once implied. For the first time since moving to this street Crowley took comprehensible—or pregnable—definition in Herbert's mind.

From his New York office he telephoned the Wiswell home that morning, but got no answer. He tried repeatedly through the day. Not until late afternoon did he catch Thurston Wiswell at his Stamford office. Yes, by God, they *were* missing a stole, had turned the house upside down looking for it and—Suddenly Thurston broke into hearty laughter: "Was it that silly old dog of yours, Herb? I thought he just specialized in ladies' underwear."

Herbert acknowledged shamefacedly that it was, confessed his embarrassment, and reassured Thurston that the mink was undamaged. He did not mention Crowley. Why drag Thurston into that muck?

"I'll bring it over first thing this evening," Herbert said.

Thurston Wiswell, still laughing, said no. Amy was in town to meet him and they were driving direct to their place in Maine for a week. Would Herbert hold onto it until they returned?

Things—revenge, petty victories of the ego—did they satisfy in accomplishment the ecstasies of their contemplation? Thus far no. Armed properly to beard Crowley with his dishonesty and perhaps free himself of his bullying for the duration, Herbert felt only a disquietude that pressed more uncomfortably with every mile of the commuter ride home. Vaguely he had hoped Crowley would be on the train; he could have broached the thing in the security of the crowd. He did not see him.

With Ellen, who met him at the station, he achieved surface amiability but feigned a headache in reply to her concern. He had said nothing to her about the fur and would not, for the time. He could see *her* going over for it, and did not trust his temper should they humiliate her. Everything about it was dirty, and it was his thing to do. Somehow, somewhere, he hoped for redress, if only in his own eyes.

He played ball with the boy and the dog and was preoccupied during supper. What did he really know about Crowley, anyway? With this act the man had slipped beyond his experience, into ever

more unwholesome shadows. What reason had he to think he'd return the fur, Wiswell not being here to identify and claim it? There had been no witness to the transfer. Had he already sold it somewhere, and would he take this provocation to do as Ellen had predicted—beat him senseless in a sick search of himself?

He wished Marvin weren't here. He wished it were the week-end so he could send Marvin to some friend's place for the night. He dabbled about in his toolshed and moved the lawn sprayer. He went about the yard collecting more of Andrew's booty and spoke vacant reproof to the dog. His voice, chiding the animal, shamed him, and finally he started across the street.

There was no answer to the door chime. He circled the house to their rear terrace where they were lounging on lawn furniture watching a portable television set. Their eyes lifted to him, but returned to the picture screen without acknowledgement. He made his claim for the stole, saying the owner had stepped forward, but not mentioning the Wiswells by name. They watched the television, without answering. He asked again.

"Mink stole?" Crowley said. "Myrna?"

"What?"

"Know anything about a mink stole?"

"No, why should I?" she said.

"Fighter from across the street's accusing us again."

"Just so he doesn't get rough about it."

"I keep worrying about that," Crowley said. "Can't sleep nights. Wake up sweating."

"The stole belongs to someone in this neighborhood," Herbert persisted. "I want it now."

"Get rid of him, will you," she said.

"You heard her," Crowley said. "Good night, Menlo, huh?"

Herbert stood looking at that wasted face, conscious of nothing so much as semiconsciousness, a veiled limbo lit blue by the television, a timespread he could not get hold of or categorize. He turned and walked away. In midstreet he stopped, and again by the tallow tree. Nothing just like it had ever happened to him—the cold effrontery, the calculated contempt, the reduction of him to a compost of hated parts.

For the first time he took note of the furious race of his heartbeat. It frightened him and he hurried to the door—the pills. Inside he stood looking at Ellen and Otto Muhlbacher. Both came to their feet in alarm.

"Oh, Herbert," she gasped, "sit down, lie on the sofa, you're pale as a sheet. Help him, Otto, I'll get the pills."

He lay on the sofa, his eyes closed. He swallowed the pills with water and told them the tale complete.

"Well, that does it," she flared.

"I knew he was a damned sadist but not a thief on that scale."

"I'm surprised you didn't," Otto said. Irritatingly, he seemed amused at the revelation. His eyes sparkled and he paced the floor rubbing his hands.

"Well, we know what to do now," Ellen said. "I'm calling the police."

"*Don't* call them," Muhlbacher urged. "Let's think this thing out."

"No, we've done all the thinking we're about to do. You see Herbert, you know about his blood pressure. If he'd fallen dead over that swine I'd—"

"Yes, but wait—"

"Wait why, Otto? We're going to have to pay for that mink if we don't get it back."

"And if he hasn't already sold it," Herbert said.

"And what if he has?" answered Otto, blocking her off from the phone. "Suppose he has. What'll you have then? Nothing. No proof, no evidence, a new something for them to laugh and swagger about."

"Don't even say it," Ellen said. "Don't make me sick."

"No, no, let me finish. Could you identify it as Amy's fur if you saw it? Can you place a charge against them over something belonging to someone else?" He was excited now, dancing from the windows to a wall and back again. "He's blundered badly, can't you see it? He's done the kind of thing we've been wanting him to do if we're to run him out of the neighborhood. Don't spoil it by being hasty. Sit down."

Ellen sat. "It's worth listening to, I suppose."

"I've been thinking," Otto said. "I'm wondering just *how* stupid he might be. That's our gamble, of course, but what a lovely scene we could have." He studied the rug pattern at his feet then spoke slowly, "Crowley has a watch in my shop for repair. He came by yesterday and I told him we'd have it ready Thursday. That's good, that's two days away; it will let this thing this evening settle down."

"And give him that much more time to unload the fur," Herbert said.

"No, I don't agree with you. Can you see Myrna Crowley letting go of a mink stole for the pittance they'd get for it, and her doing her dress buying at the Zerbee discount sales? Anyway, I'm sure Thurston has it well insured. Let's take the slight risk, let's make this foolproof. There's a Ladies Block Party scheduled this week, isn't that on Thursday, too, Ellen? And isn't Myrna Crowley likely to be there?"

It was and Myrna was and Boyd Crowley picked up his watch from Muhlbacher's Jewelry Store and as dusk fell Herbert Menlo took position in his yard. Like cheese in a Number 6 trap, he reflected; this

I do in the cause of civic betterment, in the fight against crime. From his and neighboring windows numerous eyes watched him; comforting though they were, it was not their attention he sought.

Nor was he confident that anything good would come of it, for all Otto Muhlbacher's jubilation. Weeding his rosebed, Herbert sent a siren song against the first wave of Crowley's perversions—his cruelty, his egoistic obtuseness, his greed.

When at eight his back tired from the kneeling, Herbert straightened and brushed the dirt from his trousers and stepped off the curb to the street. He'd never known Crowley to be so bashful, but neither had there been a stake of the value offered now. For $4500 they'd do well to conjecture on his gullibility and his proneness to forgive.

Herbert leaned to pick up a discarded cigarette package, a candy wrapper, and miscellaneous waste. He glanced about him as if seeking a depository and wandered toward the Crowley drive. Their garbage cans were out for the morning pickup, among them the new one identical to the can Herbert had lost. Idly he inspected it, saw on the lid the torn portion of the label he remembered trying to rub away. It was definitely his own can, with which certainty he felt a resurgence of his rage. How casually the man had spit in his face!

He lifted the lid and dropped in the collected waste, closed it with vigor. It clanged with the loud efficacy of an alarm bell and now the Crowley door opened and the two of them advanced across the lawn. Never had Crowley appeared to him in better physical condition—the broad shoulders, the hamlike forearms, the confidence of the disdain in his eyes. Joyless, pale, raddled, his wife came up behind.

"Just getting rid of some loose trash," Herbert said, providing openers.

"Be our guest," Crowley answered. "We had something we wanted to clear up as long as you're here."

"I did find you a bit difficult the other evening."

"Well, you're a businessman, you know how it is, a hard day. And it doesn't set worth a damn when you charge in with an accusation like that, so I've got something here I want to show you before you start spreading the wrong kind of information around the street. This should satisfy you about that mink stole."

He extended a folded sheet of paper. Herbert read it by the light of the streetlamp—an informal, signed typewritten statement dated four months ago. It acknowledged receipt of $1200 paid to the undersigned by Boyd G. Crowley for a silver mink stole.

"All straight now? asked Myrna Crowley.

Herbert folded it and offered

half a nod. All straight and highly authentic—if you dismissed a few considerations. Why had they waited until now? Why the sudden concern for what *he* thought of them? Why and whence $1200 cash to a private owner for a second-hand mink when Myrna wore bargain-sale clothes? All as bogus as their new-found solicitude.

Now Herbert wanted it done and over. To get it done and never see either of them again. Seeing them, eyes eager, in the lamplight, recoiling from the unction of their new approach, he had the feeling they'd have knocked him down and left him lying just to make a green traffic light.

He returned their new-found document. "Mistakes happen."

"Where that dog's concerned they do," Crowley said. "But now, about his latest venture, we'll give you more benefit of the doubt than you were willing to give us."

"I don't understand."

"Our back door was off the hook this morning while we were putting in a new screen. Your dog got in there. An hour later Myrna came up with something missing."

"Oh, no," said Herbert. "Something else?"

"We thought sure you'd know."

"He's been bringing home an awful lot of stuff.

"We lost a black suede bag with a choke string."

Herbert looked away. "The diamond bracelet," he breathed.

"Oh, thank God," emoted Myrna. With pull Myrna might make Hollywood about the year Herbert did, but no sooner. He led Crowley to the front door. He reached inside and took the black suede bag from the drawer of the front-hall table and surrendered it. Crowley opened it, held the diamond bracelet in his hand, replaced it in the bag and walked away.

In the living room were Ellen, Muhlbacher, Charlie Eden, Betty Bolling, and the Jackson couple, all of whom had suffered from some form of the Crowley mystique.

"Go ahead," said Herbert, and poured a drink while Otto made his phone call and left by the back door. It took eleven minutes. A blue Chevy sedan disgorged two blue-suited men who rang at the Crowley door and disappeared inside.

Within five minutes they emerged with the Crowleys, a silver mink and a black suede bag, headed for Otto Muhlbacher's next door. Three minutes more brought the ring of their own bell. Herbert heard Ellen say, "Yes, officer," heard her invite them in, saw them, Otto now in tow, at the double door of the living room.

"There is a misunderstanding about some missing property," Lieutenant Anderson said. "We're told your dog might have been involved. Mr. Crowley?"

"Your dog, Menlo," Crowley said. "He brought this stuff and

left it lying in our yard and we took it in until we could find out who it belonged to. That's right, isn't it, Menlo?"

Herbert turned to face the veiled menace in those eyes. Was he still threatening him, here in the presence of the police and all these people? Yes, he was, but this time as an animal snarls at a trap.

"Dog?" Herbert said.

"This morning the bag with the diamond bracelet, the mink the other night."

"Quite impossible," Ellen said. "Our dog's at the kennel being clipped and laundered. He's been there since last night. Use our phone if you want—"

"Why, you bitch," screamed Myrna Crowley. "At the party today you told Peggy Coleman your dog brought a dia—" She winced with the jab of her husband's elbow.

"I'm afraid I don't follow her, officer," Ellen said. "Myrna, you must have misoverheard."

"We're sorry to have bothered you," the Lieutenant said, turning, but Crowley's eyes had not yet left Herbert. He'd been had and he knew it, but whom did he tell it to? "I'll be back to see you, yellowbelly," he shouted.

"Get moving," said Anderson.

They heard the slam of the car doors and the engine moving away.

"I wish I could say I felt better," Herbert said.

"It's why you'd make a bum crook," Ellen said.

"We had to resort to Crowley's own tactics to finally get him and you haven't his kind of mind."

"I'm not even sure what he was doing was stealing, though. He asked me for the stuff in both cases. I handed it over."

"Browbeat you, you mean. Strummed your innate honesty like guitar strings, representing the stuff as his own."

"I still don't see it," Herbert said. "He didn't steal the bracelet from Otto's store, but that's what they've got him on."

"No, I never told them he'd stolen it," Otto said. "I said I was missing a diamond bracelet and had concrete evidence it was in the Crowley home. I hope you're not still naive enough to think he was going to make the slightest effort to find out to whom it belonged."

"No more than he'd have lost three seconds' sleep over your having to pay a thousand dollars for that mink," Ellen said.

"Yes, but we trapped him with the worst kind of temptation—"

"Oh, come on, Herb," said Otto. "Who among us isn't tempted every day? Let's not have any tears for Crowley. We had to get into the gutter to reach him, but I'm not out to put him in jail. We'll let them have a night there, then I'll agree not to press charges if he'll agree to return every bit of property that doesn't belong to them and move out of here."

"Which they're more or less forced to do after that exhibition," Charlie Eden said.

"And which is a lot better break than he'd give you."

"I still don't see how you were so certain he'd bring the cops over here, Otto," Eden said.

"What else could he do?" replied Muhlbacher. "He had to grab fast at something—what better excuse than the most obvious one right under his nose, a dumb, defenseless dog? And because Herb's done virtually nothing but turn the other cheek to him, he actually thought—he had to think—he could come over here and bulldoze him into that lie."

"His lie as opposed to ours," Herbert said.

"Oh, stop being such a killjoy," said Ellen. "He's out of our hair and the neighborhood's going to be nice again and you need another drink."

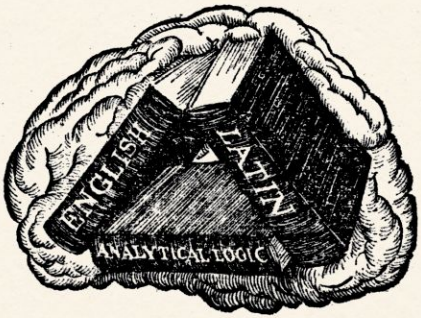
"It's intriguing, though," said Charlie Eden. "What did they take him in on? Theft?"

"Possession of stolen goods, maybe," Betty said.

"Stolen goods how?" asked Charlie. "Stolen by whom?"

"By our dog Andrew," said Herbert. "By our deliverer."

"Who is currently serving his sentence," said Ellen. "Two nights at the veterinary and a bath."



BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Well, it has not been an easy month for books. Several adequate and tolerable items have landed on my desk. But the merely adequate and tolerable won't do. When this department opened its doors, you were promised only the best blood and thunder on the market. Failing a sufficiency of outstanding new books, I said, I should beg leave to mention old favorites, especially those now available in paperback.

And the time for it has come sooner than I wanted or really expected.

This month we shall consider three titles rather than the customary four. However, since all have high quality and the third is almost six hundred pages long, such an arrangement seems only fair. The first two are novels, detective classics from a bygone day. The last is both new and factual, a detailed biography of America's greatest detective family.

Just over forty years ago (in 1926, to be exact) the late Willard Huntington Wright, under the pen-name of S. S. Van Dine, inaugurated his series of fair-play detective stories featuring Philo Vance, a young New York aristocrat and patron of the arts who could never stop talking about art. No other fictional detective, during Vance's dominant period from the nineteen twenties to the early thirties, exercised so much influence—or provoked so much argument. Any discussion of the novels themselves seemed to revolve less round whether they were good detective novels (and at least half a dozen were very good) than round whether you liked or disliked Philo Vance. He had many detractors, one of whom made vocal their feelings with the refrain that *'Philo Vance needs a kick in the pance.'*

But most of us, in those days still youngsters learning our trade, could not help liking Philo, despite his tendency to favor us with little discourses on Cézanne watercolors, translations of Menander, or whatever else preoccupied him. We also liked his associates: solemn, no-nonsense District Attorney Markham, and doughty Sergeant Heath of the Homicide Bureau, a ham-handed cop (for once) sympathetically portrayed.

The author's masterpieces, *The Greene Murder Case* and *The Bishop Murder Case,* have not yet appeared in paperback in this series. Meanwhile, for a very modest sum you may buy either or both of Vance's first two adventures, complete with footnotes, diagrams, and digressions too.

In **The Benson Murder Case,** by S. S. Van Dine (Fawcett, 75¢), Alvin Benson, Wall Street broker and gambler, is shot through the head amid many dubious associates. Using his once-famous 'psychological' method, Vance tears apart an elaborate and craftily spun web. The people of this book debate our hero's character as heatedly as reviewers were soon to do. The part of Philo Vance, said by his creator to look like John Barrymore, was played in early talking films by almost every leading man except John Barrymore. Here is how it all began.

The Canary Murder Case, by the same author (same publisher, same price) dives at once into the half-world. Since writers used polite language four decades ago, nowhere are we told in blunt words that Margaret Odell, the 'Canary,' is a high-class prostitute.

But her activities (including blackmail?) become all too clear when someone strangles her amid the wreck of her apartment, where it seems nobody could have got in to do the strangling. Vance spots the murderer by watching him play poker, which may seem too easy. And yet it is very appropriate that the whole trick of the murderer's plot should be wrecked by Vance's taste for classical music. Culture does have its uses on occasion.

And now for fact. In **The Pinkertons: The Detective Dynasty That Made History,** by James D. Horan (Crown, $7.95) the author combines immense thoroughness of research with a sparkling readability that never falters or flags.

It was in 1842 that hard-headed young Allan Pinkerton, political rebel from Glasgow's toughest slum, fled with his bride to America, where later he founded a detective agency which had begun to flourish even before the Civil War. During that conflict, as Chief of the Union Secret Service and fanatical admirer of General McClellan, he blundered more than once in exaggerating Confederate strength. But he won great success and prosperity in later years. When two worthy sons succeeded him, the former Scots radical had long hardened into a dour arch-conservative at war with labor.

The Pinkerton badge of the open eye has given us the 'private eye' of fiction. And this book is more than good fare for the crime-minded. It is an achievement; you will see living history unfold.

a *NEW* Karmesin story by

GERALD KERSH

Karmesin the Kolossal—admittedly, either the world's greatest larcenist or the world's greatest liar (take your choice). There is no field of criminal shenanigans in which Karmesin hasn't left his mark—including (for profit, of course) a shady alliance with ghosts. Here is Karmesin's faithful rendering of one of the most baffling mysteries of the century (Karmesin's own evaluation), and naturally (rather, supernaturally), only the Klever, the Krafty Karmesin knew the secret behind it . . .

KARMESIN AND THE TRISMAGISTUS FORMULA

by GERALD KERSH

"YOU ARE A FOOL," SAID KARMESIN, "because you believe nothing. And yet if I may coin a phrase, there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy. Yes, indeed, if you will permit me to lapse into verse: things aren't always what they seem. When I told you about the affair at Rocky Center you seemed not to believe me. Little Henry, the ghost of Mr. Thurston's valet, was something you could not swallow, yes? Yet he existed. Oh, yes! And twice! Oh, yes! I mentioned to you that, though I had a lucrative offer to make to him, he went with an American millionaire to the United States, lured there on the promise of a company directorship."

"Bah," I said. "What would a ghost want with money, since he can't spend it?"

"Why, you confounded idiot," said Karmesin, "don't you realize that a ghost, in order to have social status in the Shades, must have a treasure to gloat over? Haven't you read your books? Ghosts are as delicate about such matters as live men and women: they need money in order to keep up their appearances. For example: one of the most respected phantoms in the spirit world is that of Attila, the Scourge of God, whose fabulous treasure is still undiscovered, and who can, therefore, still boast about it.

"You mark my words, there was more than mere superstition in the

preoccupation of the ancients with the treasure that was buried in their graves. In Limbo, as elsewhere, you need a little cash in your pocket; for the spirits are but the shades of human beings, and are therefore still influenced by human follies. Have you never heard of a revengeful ghost? Yes. Very well, then. Should a greedy or acquisitive ghost be so difficult to accept, therefore? I would not harp on my partnership with the ghost Henry, if a certain topical indication had not arisen."

Karmesin pointed to a clipping from a newspaper:

PROBE MYSTERY OF SAGO KING; IRA K. KILJOY STILL MISSING
F.B.I. Questions Waxie Maxie, But Gangster Won't Talk

"Missing," said Karmesin. "Disappearance. *Pfui* and *pfui* and *pfui!* That means to say he went to his country club without notifying his relations, or visited one of his love nests. The Bureau of Missing Persons will find him. To be lost in a country like the United States is like being a needle in a haystack: it is hard to fine one, but one is there and may certainly be found. Now I don't know whether you ever heard of Dickson M. Sackbutt, the Copper Baron. It was one of the most baffling mysteries of the century," said Karmesin, "and only I know the secret behind it."

He fumbled in a pocket and found nothing; then he said peremptorily, "Cigarette!" He lit it, and went on, "Now, listen."

"You will not have heard of Dickson M. Sackbutt. I forgot: the maternal milk is hardly dry on your lips. You are a child. This happened in 1906, in America. Sackbutt was a copper king; he had come from nowhere and by dint of doing nothing, he made a huge fortune. He was a decent sort of man, but a fool, who did not understand finance. If there was too much copper in the market, he simply flashed his ten-thousand-dollar cuff links and bellowed, 'Then we must mine more!'

"In effect, he made a bit of a beast of himself, like all men who acquire great fortunes and don't know how to handle them. He could not think in terms of tens or hundreds: I liked him for that. He thought in thousands, millions, billions. If he bought a girl a bouquet it turned out to be a carload of gardenias; and though his early drinking had been black tea out of a dirty cup, in his latter life he was grossly insulted if his champagne was served in anything but a gold goblet. A mining man, my friend, a wild fellow.

"*Bon.* When I arrived in America in 1906, I met him in Chicago, and I liked the man. He was very nice. There was something about him that appealed to my Russian sense of proportion—it was delightful to see him bathing barmaids in brandy, and beating the waiters. I saw him

knock out Pig Iron Maloney with one left hook, merely for spitting on Sackbutt's newly polished boots; and then smash up the Multimillionaire's Bar because his *Sole Meunière* was not done to his liking.

"*Sta Bene*! He liked the ladies. All right, all good men do. I like the ladies, *chort vozmi*! He was fooling with a certain woman named Mrs. Winkletoe—an absurdly pure woman, my friend, such as these ignorant miners love; a spinsterish matron with prominent teeth and bony shoulders; a thinker of beautiful thoughts. Rough men seem to like these caricatures of womanhood—or, at least, sentimental men who lead rough lives.

"She, however, was married to a certain Roger Winkletoe of Schenectady, a kind of adventurer. Though they had been man and wife for years, one felt that there was nothing between them, if you know what I mean. You could not imagine making love to this woman, amiable though she was. The bones of her shoulders would have lacerated your enfolding arms, and she had hips like a giraffe. What Sackbutt saw in her, the Lord knows. But he pursued her.

"It happened that they were riding together in an open carriage when the horse shied and she was thrown into his arms. A hundred people saw it. Mr. Winkletoe spoke of taking his father's sword from the wall and confronting the homewrecker with cold steel. Father's sword—*bah* and *pfui* and *ptoo!* His father never had a sword; and anyway, he never had a father.

"The incident ended with divorce proceedings—a scandal which Sackbutt, in the state of his business, could not afford. You know what American women are—one hint of homewrecking and they will start a landslide, though they always love an unmarried rake.

"Sackbutt had an attack of nerves. He wanted to negotiate—he dreaded the serving of the papers. Yet he could not get out of Chicago. He was ringed around. He was a man whom any kind of incarceration would have driven mad—a man of the open spaces, if you get what I mean, whom fifty minutes in an opera house afflict with claustrophobia. So he dared not move out of his hotel room. It was a dreadful situation.

"I had gone to Detroit on certain business about which the less said the better. The day after my arrival I received a telegram as follows:

> COME AT ONCE DAMN IT STOP KEPT BLASTED PRISONER IN DAMN BEDROOM BY DINGBUSTED PROCESS HYPHEN SERVER STOP HELP ME OUT BY THE JUMPING JIMINIES COMMA OR I BY HECK COMMIT SUICIDE
>
> SACKBUTT
>
> HOTEL CROESUS CHICAGO

"I received the wire at midnight, and wondered what to do about it. I was aware of the circumstances, and felt baffled. And so I sat and thought; and even as I sat and

thought, I heard a nasty, shy, little voice say, 'Ahem, Mr. Karmesin?'

"I looked and saw nobody. Nerves? I wondered. I said, in as calm a voice as I could muster, 'Well?'

"The voice replied, 'Ah, still as brave as ever, I see.' And looking in the direction of it I saw a mist appear, like a breath on a mirror, just by the bathroom door. Then, out of this mist, my little ghost Henry appeared. He looked fatter, more prosperous.

"'What the devil!' I said. 'I thought you were in New York.'

"'Honeymoon trip.'

"'Where's your wife?'

"'Here,' he said. 'Oh, Janey!' And beside him materialized the spirit of Lady Jane Yule, coyly holding out her head between her hands to kiss me on the cheek.

"'Drink?' I said. He replied that he had given up drinking. 'Cigar?' No. I was astonished, for he had always been partial to a good Havana.

"Then he said, 'I am in training. If you'll permit me to say so—you know how it is. We ghosts get around a bit. Only the other day I was saying to William Shakespeare—one of the Stratford-on-Avon Shakespeares, you'll remember, sir, a nice man, but no gentleman—he wouldn't have done for His Grace, sir—that although he was quite well-known as a journalist he would have done better if he could have got around a bit more. The people we ghosts meet!'

"'That nice Mr. Casanova!' said Lady Jane, playing ball with her head.

"'Yes. But one meets useful people too, Mr. Karmesin. For example: a couple of Biblical prophets, sir, who put me on to the winner of the Kentucky Derby; and, above all, Mr. Samson Trismagistus, a sorcerer. A man who knows all sorts of things. He was burnt alive in 1446. He had the gift of invisibility, you know.'

"I started. 'The what? Now look,' I said, 'be a good ghost, Henry, and give one of your oldest and most intelligent friends the inside dope.'

"'Most intelligent? Ha! Do you realize that I have, by dint of enterprise, humility, and energy, succeeded in making friends with the sorcerers and magicians of all history? The oldest? I know Methusaleh personally. But look here, I like you, Mr. Karmesin, and am prepared to make a deal with you—for a ghost, you understand, must have a corporeal representative.'

"'Seventy-five per cent to me of all monetary proceeds,' I said quickly.

"We compromised at fifty per cent and I telephoned Sackbutt. 'How much is it worth to you?' I asked.

"'I'll give you one of the Sackbutt Mines and fifty thousand dollars in cash.'

"'Keep the mine and make it sixty thousand,' I said. 'Done? Then do exactly as I say.'

"So I went with Henry and his wife to Chicago. It was then that we participated in the greatest mystery of the century. What was it? It was this:

"Sackbutt, the multimillionaire, guarded on every side by process servers, went into his bathroom to bathe and locked the door. Water pouring to the floor below indicated that the tap was running. Suicide was suspected. They broke open the bathrooom door. His clothes were in the bedroom, his bathrobe in the bathroom, together with his slippers —but he was nowhere to be seen.

"There was no closet for him to hide in and no chimney for him to creep up. More mysterious still, the bathroom was locked on the inside, and the window, which was small, was twenty stories above the ground, with less foothold than a fly could have taken advantage of.

"He had disappeared into what the novelists call *thin air*. It was Henry's doing, at my instigation, on the formula of the mysterious Trismagistus. The divorce proceedings fell through, for lack of a material correspondent.

"Days passed. It was all very simple, of course. The multimillionaire was there, of course, but invisible. We met him in the lounge of the hotel and discussed matters. I asked for the sixty thousand dollars in cash. He said, 'Bah!'

"I said, 'Then stay invisible.'

"He laughed in my face. 'I'd like to stay invisible,' he said, with a dirty laugh. 'You'd be surprised at the things I see and the way I get around. I was in Birdlime's office this afternoon and caught him selling out Oleaginous Oil. It's good— I'm having fun!'

"Then a nasty little voice by my side said, 'Oh, all right. He won't pay. Very well, I'll make him visible again.' The invisible multimillionaire laughed. *'Allez-oop!'* said Henry. And the whole hotel gasped. There at my table, naked as the day he was born, sat the multimillionaire.

"'Now,' said Henry, while the multimillionaire struggled with the table cloth, trying to cover himself. 'As an invisible man you have no civic obligations. If I keep you visible now, you'll be arrested, probably thrown into an insane asylum. Pay, therefore, Mr. Sackbutt, without further delay. Yes?'

"'Yes, yes! Only make me invisible again.'

"I caught his arm. Henry said another strange word, and the multimillionaire vanished, just as the waiter came running up.

"'There was a naked man at your table,' he said.

"'Pardon me!' I said, with a look such as only I can give.

"The waiter went away. 'Now,' said Henry, 'lead us to the sixty thousand dollars.'

"We followed Sackbutt upstairs to his suite without accident—except one, when the invisible Sackbutt brushed against the Countess of

Gaga on the staircase. He opened his door, lifted his mattress, and produced a great wad of money.

"'There,' he said. 'Now make me visible again.'

"'*Allez-oop!*' said Henry, and there stood Sackbutt before us, in the flesh.

"'Damn you,' said the multimillionaire, and went into the bathroom.

"I reached out a hand for the money. The sixty thousand dollars grew misty, wavered, and was gone. 'Henry! Would you double-cross a friend?' I cried. His only answer was a wicked laugh. The money was gone. When the people of the hotel came up and found Mr. Sackbutt in his bath they were thunderstruck, but he said, 'What the hell! I've been here all the time.'

"That was one of the very few occasions when I was swindled, and even then it was by no human agency."

Karmesin looked solemn. I stared at him. "And am I supposed to believe all that?" I asked.

"Since it is true, why not?"

I could find no words to say, except, "And Henry? Did you ever see him again?"

"Many times, and I had my revenge too. But that is another story, as the poet said," said Karmesin, taking another of my cigarettes.

a MISS MARPLE story by

AGATHA CHRISTIE

The story of a placid-seeming English village (which Agatha Christie knows so well), but under the surface—a tale of black deeds, black bad luck, black sorrow. Can a new house in a quiet, peaceful English village be tainted and poisoned by the malevolence of a crazy old woman? Ask Miss Marple—she always knows . . .

THE CASE OF THE CARETAKER

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

"WELL," DEMANDED DR. HAYDOCK of his patient. "And how goes it today?"

Miss Marple smiled at him wanly from pillows.

"I suppose, really, that I'm better," she admitted, "but I feel so terribly depressed. I can't help feeling how much better it would have been if I had died. After all, I'm an old woman. Nobody wants me or cares about me."

Dr. Haydock interrupted with his usual brusqueness. "Yes, yes, typical after-reaction to this type of 'flu.' What you need is something to take you out of yourself. A mental tonic."

Miss Marple sighed and shook her head.

"And what's more," continued Dr. Haydock, "I've brought my medicine with me!"

He tossed an envelope on the bed.

"Just the thing for you. The kind of puzzle that is right up your street."

"A puzzle?" Miss Marple looked interested.

"Literary effort of mine," said the doctor, blushing a little. "Tried to make a regular story of it. 'He said, she said, the girl thought, and so forth.' Facts of the story are true."

"But why a puzzle?" asked Miss Marple.

Dr. Haydock grinned. "Because the interpretation is up to you. I want to see if you're as clever as you always make out."

With that Parthian shot he left.

Miss Marple picked up the manuscript and began to read . . .

(*Beginning of Dr. Haydock's manuscript*)

"And where is the bride?" asked Miss Harmon genially.

The village was all agog to see the rich and beautiful young wife that Harry Laxton had brought back from abroad. There was a general indulgent feeling that Harry—wicked young scapegrace—had had all the luck.

Everyone had always felt indulgent toward Harry. Even the owners of windows that had suffered from his indiscriminate use of a catapult had found their indignation dissipated by young Harry's abject expresson of regret. He had broken windows, robbed orchards, poached rabbits, and later had run into debt, got entangled with the local tobacconist's daughter—been disentangled and sent off to Africa—and the village as represented by various aging spinsters had murmured indulgently, "Ah, well! Wild oats! He'll settle down."

And now, sure enough, the prodigal had returned—not in affliction, but in triumph. Harry Laxton had "made good" as the saying goes. He had pulled himself together, worked hard, and had finally met and successfully wooed a young Anglo-French girl who was the possessor of a considerable fortune.

Harry might have lived in London, or purchased an estate in some fashionable hunting county, but he preferred to come back to the part of the world that was home to him. And there, in the most romantic way, he purchased the derelict estate of the Dower House in which he had passed his childhood.

The Kingsdean estate had been unoccupied for nearly seventy years. The Kingsdean house had gradually fallen into decay and abandon. An elderly caretaker and his wife lived in the one habitable corner of it. It was a vast, unprepossessing, grandiose mansion, the gardens overgrown with rank vegetation and the trees hemming it in like some gloomy enchanter's den.

The Dower House itself was a pleasant, unpretentious house and had been let for a long term of years to Major Laxton, Harry's father. As a boy, Harry had roamed over the Kingsdean estate and knew every inch of the tangled woods, and the old house itself had always fascinated him.

Major Laxton had died some years ago, so it might have been thought that Harry would have had no ties to bring him back; nevertheless it was to the home of his boyhood that Harry brought his bride. The ruined old Kingsdean House was pulled down. An army of builders and contractors swooped down on the place and in almost a miraculously short space of time—so marvelously does wealth tell—the new house rose white and gleaming among the trees.

Next came a posse of gardeners and after them a procession of furniture vans.

The house was ready. Servants arrived. Lastly, a costly limousine deposited Harry and Mrs. Harry at the front door.

The village rushed to call, and Mrs. Price, who owned the largest house, and who considered herself the leader of society in the place, sent out cards of invitation for a party "to meet the bride."

It was a great event. Several ladies had new frocks for the occasion. Everyone was excited, curious, anxious to see this fabulous creature. They said it was all so like a fairy story!

Miss Harmon, weatherbeaten, hearty spinster, threw out her question as she squeezed her way through the crowded drawing-room door. Little Miss Brent, a thin, acidulated spinster, fluttered out information.

"Oh, my dear, quite charming. Such pretty manners. And quite young. Really, you know, it makes one feel quite envious to see someone who has everything like that. Good looks and money and breeding—most distinguished, nothing in the least common about her—and dear Harry so devoted!"

"Ah," said Miss Harmon, "it's early days yet!"

Miss Brent's thin nose quivered appreciatively. "Oh, my dear, do you really think—"

"We all know what Harry is," said Miss Harmon.

"We know what he was! But I expect now—"

"Ah," said Miss Harmon, "men are always the same. Once a gay deceiver, always a gay deceiver. I know them. Dear, dear. Poor young thing." Miss Brent looked much happier. "Yes, I expect she'll have trouble with him. Someone ought really to warn her. I wonder if she's heard anything of the old story?"

"It seems so very unfair," said Miss Brent, "that she should know nothing. So awkward. Especially with only the one chemist's shop in the village."

For the erstwhile tobacconist's daughter was now married to Mr. Edge, the chemist.

"It would be so much nicer," said Miss Brent, "if Mrs. Laxton were to deal with Boots in Much Benham."

"I daresay," said Miss Harmon, "that Harry Laxton will suggest that himself."

And again a significant look passed between them.

"But I certainly think," said Miss Harmon, "that she ought to know."

"Beasts!" said Clarice Vane indignantly to her Uncle, Dr. Haydock. "Absolute beasts some people are."

He looked at her curiously.

She was a tall, dark girl, handsome, warm-hearted, and impulsive. Her big brown eyes were alight now with indignation as she said, "All these cats—saying things—hinting things."

"About Harry Laxton?"

"Yes, about his affair with the tobacconist's daughter."

"Oh, that! A great many young men have affairs of that kind."

"Of course they do. And it's all over. So why harp on it? And bring it up years after? It's like ghouls feasting on dead bodies."

"I daresay, my dear, it does seem like that to you. But you see, they have very little to talk about down here and so, I'm afraid, they do tend to dwell on past scandals. But I'm curious to know why it upsets you so much?"

Clarice Vane bit her lip and flushed. She said, in a curiously muffled voice, "They—they look so happy. The Laxtons, I mean. They're young and in love and it's all so lovely for them. I hate to think of it being spoiled by whispers and hints and innuendoes and general beastliness."

"H'm. I see."

Clarice went on, "He was talking to me just now. He's so happy and eager and excited and—yes, thrilled—at having got his heart's desire and rebuilt Kingsdean. He's like a child about it all. And she—well, I don't suppose anything has ever gone wrong in her whole life. She's always had everything. You've seen her. What did you think of her?"

The doctor did not answer at once. For other people Louise Laxton might be an object of envy. A spoiled darling of fortune. To him she had brought only the refrain of a popular song heard many years ago: *Poor Little Rich Girl . . .*

A small, delicate figure, with flaxen hair curled rather stiffly round her face and big, wistful blue eyes.

Louise was drooping a little. The long stream of congratulations had tired her. She was hoping it might soon be time to go. Perhaps, even now, Harry might say so. She looked at him sideways. So tall and broad-shouldered with his eager pleasure in this horrible dull party. *Poor Little Rich Girl . . .*

"Ooph!" It was a sigh of relief.

Harry turned to look at his wife amusedly. They were driving away from the party. She said, "Darling, what a frightful party!"

Harry laughed.

"Yes, pretty terrible. Never mind, my sweet. It had to be done, you know. All these old pussies knew me when I lived here as a boy. They'd have been terribly disappointed not to have got a good look at you close up."

Louise made a grimace. "Shall we have to see a lot of them?"

"What? Oh, no. They'll come and make ceremonious calls with card cases, and you'll return the calls and then you needn't bother any more. You can have your own friends down or whatever you like."

Louise said, after a minute or two, "Isn't there anyone amusing living down here?"

"Oh, yes. There's the County, you know. Though you may find them a bit dull, too. Mostly interested in flowers and dogs and horses. You'll ride, of course. You'll enjoy that. There's a horse over at Eglinton I'd like you to see. A beautiful animal,

perfectly trained, no vice in him but plenty of spirit."

The car slowed down to take the turn into the gates of Kingsdean. Harry wrenched the wheel and swore as a grotesque figure sprang up in the middle of the road and he only just managed to avoid it. It stood there, shaking a fist and shouting after them.

Louise clutched his arm. "Who's that—that horrible old woman?"

Harry's brow was black. "That's old Murgatroyd. She and her husband were caretakers in the old house. They were there for nearly thirty years."

"Why does she shake her fist at you?"

Harry's face got red. "She—well, she resented the old house being pulled down. And she got the sack, of course. Her husband's been dead two years. They say she got a bit queer after he died."

"Is she—she isn't—starving?"

Louise's ideas were vague and somewhat melodramatic. Riches prevented you coming into contact with reality.

Harry was outraged. "Good Lord, Louise, what an idea! I pensioned her off, of course—and handsomely, too! Found her a new cottage and everything."

Louise asked, bewildered, "Then why does she mind?"

Harry was frowning, his brows drawn together. "Oh, how should I know? Craziness! She loved the old house."

"But it was a ruin, wasn't it?"

"Of course it was—crumbling to pieces—roof leaking—more or less unsafe. All the same, I suppose it meant something to her. She'd been there a long time. Oh, I don't know! The old devil's cracked, I think."

Louise said uneasily, "She—I think she cursed us. Oh, Harry, I wish she hadn't."

It seemed to Louise that her new home was tainted and poisoned by the malevolent figure of one crazy old woman. When she went out in the car, when she rode, when she walked out with the dogs, there was always the same figure waiting—crouched down, a battered hat over wisps of iron-gray hair, and the slow muttering of imprecations.

Louise came to believe that Harry was right—the old woman was mad. Nevertheless, that did not make things easier. Mrs. Murgatroyd never actually came to the house, nor did she use definite threats, nor offer violence. Her squatting figure remained always just outside the gates.

To appeal to the police would have been useless and, in any case, Harry Laxton was averse to that course of action. It would, he said, arouse local sympathy for the old hag. He took the matter more easily than Louise did.

"Don't worry about it, darling. She'll get tired of this silly cursing business. Probably she's only trying it on."

"She isn't, Harry. She—she hates us! I can feel it. She—she's ill-wishing us."

"She's not a witch, darling, although she may look like one. Don't be morbid about it."

Louise was silent. Now that the first excitement of settling in was over, she felt curiously lonely and at a loose end. She had been used to life in London and on the Riviera. She had no knowledge of or taste for English country life. She was ignorant of gardening, except for the final act of "doing the flowers." She did not really care for dogs. She was bored by such neighbors as she met.

She enjoyed riding best, sometimes with Harry, sometimes, when he was busy about the estate, by herself. She hacked through the woods and lanes, enjoying the easy paces of the beautiful horse that Harry had bought for her. Yet even Prince Hal, most sensitive of chestnut steeds, was accustomed to shy and snort as he carried his mistress past that huddled figure of a malevolent old woman.

One day Louise took her courage in both hands. She was out walking. She had passed Mrs. Murgatroyd, pretending not to notice her, but suddenly she swerved back and went right up to her. She said, a little breathlessly, "What is it? What's the matter? What do you want?"

The old woman blinked at her. She had a cunning, dark gypsy face, with bleared, suspicious eyes. She spoke in a whining and yet threatening voice. "What do I want, you ask? What, indeed! That which has been took away from me. Who turned me out of Kingsdean House? I'd lived there, girl and woman, for near on forty years. It was a black deed to turn me out and it's black bad luck it'll bring to you and him!"

Louise said, "You've got a very nice cottage and—"

She broke off. The old woman's arms flew up as she screamed, "What's the good of that to me? It's my own place I want and my own fire as I sat beside all them years. And as for you and him, I'm telling you there will be no happiness for you in your new fine house. It's the black sorrow will be upon you! Sorrow and death and my curse. May your fair face rot."

Louise turned away and broke into a little stumbling run. She thought: "I must get away from here! We must sell the house! We must go away."

At the moment such a solution seemed easy to her. But Harry's utter incomprehension took her aback. He exclaimed, "Leave here? Sell the house? Because of a crazy old woman's threats? You must be mad."

"No, I'm not. But she—she frightens me. I know something will happen."

Harry Laxton said grimly, "Leave Mrs. Murgatroyd to me. I'll settle her!"

A friendship had sprung up between Clarice Vane and young Mrs. Laxton. The two girls were the same age, though dissimilar both in character and in tastes. In Clarice's company Louise found reassurance. Clarice was so self-reliant, so sure of herself. Louise mentioned the matter of Mrs. Murgatroyd and her threats, but Clarice seemed to regard the matter as more annoying than frightening.

"It's so stupid, that sort of thing," she said.

"You know, Clarice, I—I feel quite frightened sometimes. My heart gives the most awful jumps."

"Nonsense, you mustn't let a silly thing like that get you down. She'll soon tire of it."

She was silent for a minute or two. Clarice said, "What's the matter?"

Louise paused for a minute, then her answer came with a rush. "I hate this place! I hate being here. The woods and this house, and the awful silence at night, and the queer noise the owls make. Oh, and the people and—and everything!"

"The people. What people?"

"The people in the village. Those prying, gossiping old maids."

Clarice said sharply, "What have they been saying?"

"I don't know. Nothing particular. But they've got nasty minds. When you've talked to them you feel you wouldn't trust anybody—not anybody at all."

Clarice said harshly, "Forget them. They've nothing to do but gossip. And most of the muck they talk they just invent."

Louise said, "I wish we'd never come here. But Harry adores it so." Her voice softened. Clarice thought: "How she adores him."

She said abruptly, "I must go now.'

"I'll send you back in the car. Come again soon."

Clarice nodded. Louise felt comforted by her new friend's visit. Harry was pleased to find her more cheerful and from then on urged her to have Clarice to the house often.

Then one day he said, "Good news for you, darling."

"Oh, what?"

"I've fixed the Murgatroyd. She's got a son in America, you know. Well, I've arranged for her to go out and join him. I'll pay her passage."

"Oh, Harry, how wonderful! I believe I might get to like Kingsdean after all."

"Get to like it? Why, it's the most wonderful place in the world!"

Louise gave a little shiver. She could not rid herself of her superstitious fear so easily.

If the ladies of St. Mary Mead had hoped for the pleasure of imparting information about her husband's past to the bride, this pleasure was denied them by Harry Laxton's own prompt action.

Miss Harmon and Clarice Vane were both in Mr. Edge's shop, the

one buying mothballs and the other a patent medicine, when Harry Laxton and his wife came in.

After greeting the two ladies, Harry turned to the counter and was just asking for a toothbrush when he stopped in mid-speech and exclaimed heartily, "Well, well, just see who's here! Bella, I do declare."

Mrs. Edge, who had hurried out from the back parlor to attend to the congestion of business, beamed back cheerfully at him, showing her big white teeth. She had been a dark, handsome girl and was still a reasonably handsome woman, though she had put on weight and the lines of her face had coarsened; but her large brown eyes were full of warmth as she answered, "Bella it is, Mr. Harry, and pleased to see you after all these years."

Harry turned to his wife.

"Bella's an old flame of mine, Louise," he said. "Head over ears in love with her, wasn't I, Bella?"

"That's what you say," said Mrs. Edge.

Louise laughed. She said, "My husband's very happy seeing all his old friends again."

"Ah," said Mrs. Edge, "we haven't forgotten you, Mr. Harry. Seems like a fairy tale to think of you married and building up a new house instead of that ruined old Kingsdean House."

"You look very well and blooming," said Harry, and Mrs. Edge said there was nothing wrong with her and what about that toothbrush?

Clarice, watching the baffled look on Miss Harmon's face, said to herself exultantly, "Oh, well done, Harry, you've spiked their guns."

Dr. Haydock said abruptly to his niece, "What's all this nonsense about old Mrs. Murgatroyd hanging about Kingsdean and shaking her fist and cursing the new regime?"

"It isn't nonsense. It's quite true. It's upset Louise a good deal."

"Tell her she needn't worry—when the Murgatroyds were caretakers they never stopped grumbling about the place—they only stayed because Murgatroyd drank and couldn't get another job."

"I'll tell her," said Clarice doubtfully, "but I don't think she'll believe you. The old woman fairly screams with rage."

"Always used to be fond of Harry as a boy. I can't understand it."

Clarice said, "Oh, well—they'll be rid of her soon. Harry's paying her passage to America."

Three days later Louise was thrown from her horse and killed.

Two men in a baker's van were witnesses of the accident. They saw Louise ride out of the gates, saw the old woman Murgatroyd spring up and stand in the road waving her arms and shouting, saw the horse start, swerve, and then bolt madly down the road, flinging Louise Laxton over his head.

One of them stood over the unconscious figure, not knowing what

to do, while the other rushed to the house to get help.

Harry Laxton came running out, his face ghastly. They took off a door of the van and carried her on it to the house. She died without regaining consciousness and before the doctor arrived.

(*End of Dr. Haydock's manuscript*)

When Dr. Haydock arrived the following day, he was pleased to note that there was a pink flush in Miss Marple's cheek and decidedly more animation in her manner.

"Well," he said, "what's the verdict?"

"What's the problem?" countered Miss Marple.

"Oh, my dear lady, do I have to tell you that?"

"I suppose," said Miss Marple, "that it's the curious conduct of the caretaker. Why did she behave in that very odd way? People do mind being turned out of their old homes. But it wasn't her home. In fact, she used to complain and grumble while she was there. Yes, it certainly looks fishy. What became of her, by the way?"

"Did a bunk to Liverpool. The accident scared her. Thought she'd wait there for her boat."

"All very convenient for somebody," said Miss Marple. "Yes, I think 'The Problem of the Caretaker's Conduct' can be solved easily enough. Bribery, was it not?"

"That's your solution?"

"Well, if it wasn't natural for her to behave in that way, she must have been 'putting on an act,' as people say, and that means that somebody paid her to do what she did."

"And you know who that somebody was?"

"Oh, I think so. Money again, I'm afraid. And I've always noticed that gentlemen always tend to admire the same type."

"Now I'm out of my depth."

"No, no, it all hangs together. Harry Laxton admired Bella Edge, a dark vivacious type. Your niece Clarice was the same. But the poor little wife was quite a different type —fair-haired and clinging—not Harry's type at all. So he must have married her for her money. And murdered her for her money, too!"

"You use the word murder?"

"Well, he sounds the right type. Attractive to women and quite unscrupulous. I suppose he wanted to keep his wife's money and marry your niece. He may have been seen talking to Mrs. Edge, but I don't fancy he was attached to her any more. Though I daresay he made the poor woman think he was, for ends of his own. He soon had her well under his thumb, I fancy."

"How exactly did he murder her, do you think?"

Miss Marple stared ahead of her for some minutes with dreamy blue eyes.

"It was very well timed—with the baker's van as witness. They could see the old woman and, of course,

they'd put down the horse's fright to that. But I should imagine, myself, that an airgun, or perhaps a catapult —he used to be good with a catapult. Yes, just as the horse came through the gate. The horse bolted, of course, and Mrs. Laxton was thrown."

She paused, frowning. "The fall *might* have killed her. But he couldn't be sure of that. And he seems the sort of man who would leave nothing to chance. After all, Mrs. Edge could get him something suitable without her husband knowing. Otherwise, why would Harry bother with her?

"Yes, I think he had some powerful drug handy, that could be administered before you arrived. After all, if a woman is thrown from her horse and has serious injuries and dies without recovering consciousness, well—a doctor wouldn't normally be suspicious, would he?"

Dr. Haydock nodded.

"Why did you suspect?" asked Miss Marple.

"It wasn't any particular cleverness on my part," said Dr. Haydock. "It was just the trite, well-known fact that a murderer is so pleased with his cleverness that he doesn't take proper precautions. I was just saying a few consolatory words to the bereaved husband—and feeling damned sorry for the fellow, too—when he flung himself down on the settee to do a bit of play-acting and a hypodermic syringe fell out of his pocket.

"He snatched it up and looked so scared that I began to think. Harry Laxton didn't use drugs, he was in perfect health, what was he doing with a hypodermic syringe? I did the autopsy with a view to certain possibilities. I found strophanthin. The rest was easy. There was strophanthin in Laxton's possession and Bella Edge, questioned by the police, broke down and admitted to having got it for him. And finally old Mrs. Murgatroyd confessed that it was Harry Laxton who had put her up to the cursing act."

"And your niece got over it?"

"Yes, she was attracted to the fellow, but it hadn't gone far."

The doctor picked up his manuscript.

"Full marks to you, Miss Marple —and full marks to me for my prescription. You're looking almost yourself again."

'Q'.

a *NEW* "woman's story" by

FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY

Here is another look into the heart and mind of a woman—and into something else—through a magnifying glass shaped and ground as recently as this morning's newsheadlines . . . What in the world is the world coming to?

LOST SOARING DREAM

by FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY

IT DIDN'T START WITH KEITH. BUT he finished it off. There he was floating into my room in the middle of the night. Last night, it was. I thought I'd seen the last of him. But there he was, hanging around like always. He kept saying in that flat monotonous voice of his, "You're lost, you're lost, you're lost-lost-lost-lost,"—like a needle stuck in a bad groove.

I struck at him. Only, he wasn't there. It's the truth. How should I know where he went—where do the dead go? Tell me that, has anyone ever found them once they're dead?

I got up and dressed.

People, that's what I wanted. Maybe someone would help me find myself, tell me where I was. At what point, I mean. In the forever. The place I know as well as anybody. Reno.

You know how Virginia Street is around midnight. Livelier than Market Street in San Francisco at eight. People all over, sightseers, gamblers, bums—nice people like me, haha, big laugh, laugh-along-with-Suzie—did I say it already? The name's Suzie Wrong.

No. No, of course not. It's Susan Rachel Hill. Old-fashioned. Gary said it was an anachronism, one of my hangups, one of the things that helped louse me up—twisted me in two directions with a hard knot in the middle. Oh, I forgot. Gary comes later. And earlier. Fact is, Gary's everything. Y'know?

I walked down to Virginia Street.

Couldn't see Keith. But he was right there beside me. I felt him. Tagging along like nothing had happened. Like it was old times, before Gary showed up in Reno,

and Keith and I walked a lot down Virginia Street. Window shopping. Lunches here and there. Sometimes the clubs. Never any big thrill, mostly a big nothing. Keith was kind of a stick. Not like Gary. Never. But Keith looked so good. A greyhoundy type in tweeds. I mean, he was a man a girl could wear like a Paris dress.

I was wearing him when I met Gary. No, not last night. A long time ago. Six months maybe.

I'm talking about last night now. Last night Keith walked with me again. His feet made no sound on the pavement. But he was there. I felt the heavy pull of him, leaden, and disapproving like always, yet following along because he wouldn't, not even when he was dead, let me go. We turned into that "in" place on the side street—you know, the club with no name, only a big question mark on its sign. The one the Easterners always head for. I couldn't care less about it being an "in" club. To me it's simply the place where I first met Gary.

Keith followed me up to the bar. He didn't say a word. What with not being able to see him, and him not talking, it was a frenzy in a freeze-up. I jabbed at him with my elbow and said, "If you insist on hanging around, then speak up! Where's that breeding you're always showing off, always bragging about?"

"Lady, go home and try again some other night," the bartender said. "You've already had your outing."

"I only want coffee," I told him. "Black coffee. And people. And music. I don't drink. Who needs to drink? Certainly this character beside me doesn't need to."

"Which side of you is this character on" asked the bartender, looking smart. "Right or left? So I can pick him up in case he falls."

Smart aleck. Both of them. I glared at the spot where Keith was. Idiot, making me look ridiculous. Well, no, not idiot. Smug. It could have been his way of paying me back.

I said to the bartender, "You can't see him. He's dead."

His funny-boy look pulled together like a trap snapping shut. He nodded. Next thing a slate-eyed character was squeezing my elbow, and I was out on the sidewalk.

Well, I saw a cop sauntering along the street—mostly they stay around the big clubs where the action is, but here he was, handy. At the same time I saw him, my side turned cold and shivery again. For a few minutes, while that bouncer gave me the rush to the street, Keith had gone away. Now he was back. "Keith, please, leave me alone!" I begged. But he moved closer. I could hear him sigh, sigh, and it drew the breath out of me. I ran to catch the policeman. "Please, please, run him in!" I said. "Make him leave me alone!"

"Who?" asked the cop.

"Keith."

"Where?"

"Here," I told him. "Right here beside me. He's dead. But it doesn't do any good. He won't leave me alone."

Next thing I'm here at the police station. "So test me," I told them. "Go ahead. Any test you want. I told you, I don't drink."

So they asked if it wasn't drink, what was it?

That was what I had asked Gary. "What is it, Gary?" But he never told me. And he was so touchy all the time—I couldn't bear to have him get mad again. Or worse, maybe just not care at all, just wander off.

So I told them, nothing. It's nothing, I said, and that was the truth. The truth for today, that is. And for yesterday. But the day before—I didn't tell them about that. Police wouldn't understand—that Gary was only experimenting, that it was really a scientific investigation. He told me that, but he wouldn't tell me what it was. Said it was beyond me.

It will always be beyond me. Gary won't help me any more. He left me alone. All I know is, it's as if wires in my brain were unplugged and then put back wrong. Ever since the day before yesterday. Not all the wires. Just some. I'll be going along all right, feeling just like me. Then, suddenly, I'm far away. Scrambled. And lost.

It was the way all those policemen stood around me. In a circle. Staring and staring, and asking me things. Like they were closing in on me, smothering me. Someone screamed and screamed. I screamed back. That frightened me more. Which was me, and which was my echo?

So they hustled me into this little room and called you.

Doctor, please do something to get Keith to leave me alone. Make him realize I'm sick. Tell him I'm sick, he'll believe you. Tell him to go away and stay dead.

How did Keith die?

Well, I'll have to tell you about Gary first. There's no real meaning about Keith unless you know about Gary.

Gary went to San Francisco two weeks ago. He'd gotten his divorce a long time ago but he'd stayed on in Reno. Because of me, I thought. I thought—well, I even said it to him, I thought we might get married. I should never have said it. Because then he left Reno. The next day.

Keith begged me not to, but I followed Gary. Keith said Gary was ruining me with his crazy ideas. I told him it wasn't so. It was just that Gary had a scientific nature. Really, Doctor. And poetic too. He was conducting some fascinating experiments, and I felt lucky that sometimes he let me help.

Keith followed me to the airport.

It was embarrassing. Tears look so—well, Keith is a tall lean dignified type. It was ridiculous.

And if he had really wanted me to stay, why didn't he *make* me? That's what I couldn't stand about him. He had no spirit. Believe me, Gary never cried. Only gave a funny little laugh when he was terribly moved—even when he was angry. But no tears. Never.

At first Gary wouldn't let me inside his apartment in San Francisco. Oh, I'd had such a hard time getting his Reno landlady to tell me where he'd gone and then tracing him through friends we both had in San Francisco. I had such a hard time finding him, and now he wouldn't even talk to me. I did cry. And whispered to him through the door.

Finally he let me in. After a while he stopped being angry. You see, he was all excited about his experiments, on himself. But he said he needed perspective. He needed to observe objectively, on someone else, how the edges of the mind curled until the mind became round and beautiful, inside itself like a cornucopia. And then unfolded, spilling the secrets it had gathered. Like a system boring into the mind—corkscrew in, unfold out. He said something like that.

"Be my charming little guinea pig, Suzie. You're all shaped up for the pig part—greedy, greedy little Suzie. Want to swallow me up in some nasty utilitarian life, don't you, Suzie-pig? But we can find your true purpose, can't we? Pry you out of the wallow-hole of this muddy little world. Lift you into the big dream. With me, little piggie. Game?"

The way he said things was—well, not like it sounds when I say it. Not insulting. Superior, yes. But not insulting. It was like listening to electricity speak—it crackled all through me. I agreed.

It didn't take long.

My mind began to roll, curling around itself. Shooting up—sparkling up and up! Zoom!—like a roller coaster it shot into space. Then, when I thought I was away forever, it rolled back. Plunk! Earth. World. Then zoom! Up and out again!

I tried to tell him about it. But I was so busy doing it that words couldn't follow me. "I'm walking on the sky, Gary," I said. "But it's lonely, Gary. Come up with me, Gary. You're not up here like you said you'd be. You're far away, down there." I begged him, "Gary, don't leave me alone so high!"

I heard a keening wail. Everything was *blue*-blue, *high*-high. The soaring stopped. Boom! Inside me there was an explosion. Zoom! Then down again, up again! It tore me into shreds.

It grew so cold. Suddenly. The cold began in my middle, and spread. Shivers of ice splintered my veins, my flesh. Then all of me contracted into my mind—and my

mind turned into a pellet of ice. Would it melt away? Entirely? Oh, God, I thought, I'll be all gone!

My fingers were bleeding ice. The sky changed from blue to red, like a flame. But icy cold. Then it blotted out. Just dark. Black dark everywhere.

I screamed. The world was gone. Everything and everyone was gone. I was lost in nothingness.

My face slammed into something. Funny, it made the dark go away. Gary was there, in front of me. I wasn't alone any more. "Shut your raucous mouth!" he was saying, "shut your raucous mouth!" He hit me again.

The scream stopped, but the moaning wouldn't. A bruise slipped out of my mouth, down my throat. I watched it go, deep purple, mottled, threaded with red. It settled down with the ice in my middle.

It surprised me to hear that the moaning had words. "Gary, please marry me, please, please, Gary, please marry me—" I didn't want to keep saying it, but I couldn't stop.

He said, "Let's boost you to another dream, right to the sky!"

Did you know the sky has a ceiling?

When I woke up, the purple bruise had left my stomach. It was in my ears, throbbing, like the ocean pounding in my veins.

After a while I sat up. I saw Gary and talked to him, but he wouldn't answer. He lay half on the sofa, half on the floor, pale hair over his brow. Like a little boy, a very little one. Like the little English princes.

Well, I mean, his body was there. Gary wasn't. He was gone. Completely. Not like Keith. Keith keeps popping in and out, he doesn't stay away. But Gary was gone. Out of this world.

I saw the icepick in his chest. Well, only the handle. When I pulled it out, it was the icepick. The last time I had seen it, it was lying on the coffee table. Gary had been working on a leather belt with it when I came—punching extra holes in his belt. Poor Gary, he'd gotten so thin, he kept forgetting to eat.

Right away I knew what had happened. Keith had followed me. Just like he threatened to. He had followed me. Hung around the apartment, listening. Then—well, when Gary hit me, he must have just come in. Killed Gary. Then run away.

There was nothing I could do for Gary. It wasn't even him lying there. Just his outside. He was gone.

I washed my face. It made the bruise seem bigger and darker. I powdered over it, tied a scarf over my head. When I turned up my coat collar, the bruise didn't show much.

Then I flew back to Reno.

It was easy to find Keith. Right at home, cooking dinner—meat.

Like what he'd done, he hadn't done. "Susan, darling, you've come back!" No shame, just glad. Can you imagine? Nothing but glad!

I used the same icepick he'd used on Gary. Retribution, Doctor. He deserved it . . .

"Sir—Doctor, could you break off for a minute? It's important, the Chief sent me. No, lady, you stay put. Right there, you're not going any place for a while.—Sir, what did she tell you? There's a real screwy tie-up with her. A guy just phoned, right here in Reno, he's hurt bad, we're sending an ambulance for him. He says he fell on an icepick while he was cooking dinner. That's screwy enough, there. Who uses an icepick for turning meat? But he claims that's what happened and he's worried about this woman, says she was there when he fell on this icepick, got scared, ran off, and could we find her, she might need medical treatment.

"And listen, something else. He thinks another man she knows may have had a similar accident in San Francisco—yeah, the shock of two in a row, he says, was too much for her. Man, do they fall hard for her! Right on the end of an icepick. So we've got a call in now to San Francisco. And they're tracing this guy. But the Chief thought maybe she's already spilled something to you.

"Did she tell you anything, Doc?"

In previous issues of EQMM, Jon L. Breen has parody-pastiched Ed McBain's 87th Precinct, S. S. Van Dine's Philo Vance, and Burt L. Standish's Frank Merriwell. Now Mr. Breen gives the full treatment to Ellery Queen, having fun and playing games (as EQ usually does) with the "dying message" technique . . .

THE LITHUANIAN ERASER MYSTERY

by JON L. BREEN

THE THEATRICAL SEASON OF 1968 began in a disconcerting manner. E. Larry Cune went to a play. For E. Larry was an unabashed sentimentalist who loved to return to the scenes of his past detectival triumphs.

Witness, for example, his periodic visits to the small town of Wyattsville. the New England village that had the highest per-capita murder rate of any incorporated community in the world, including even St. Mary Mead, England. Since murder seemed to follow E. Larry, he had taken on the aspect of a Jonah, or so some thought; but the police department of Wyattsville was never sorry to see him since they had a 100% record of solutions to their homicides, a record also unmatched by any community anywhere.

But this is not a tale of Wyattsville, disappointing as that may be to the many Wyattsville fans everywhere; it is the story of E. Larry's return to the old and revered Greek Theatre (the one on Broadway, not the one in Hollywood), the scene of his first great triumph, the solution of the vicious murder of Mr. Anagopolous, an asthmatic but otherwise inoffensive member of the audience—a case known to the world as *The Greek Coughin' Mystery.*

That was many years ago, in 1929, when E. Larry had been in his early thirties, and his father, Inspector Richard Cune, had been the elderly and respected birdlike bulldog of Centre Street. Now almost forty years had slipped by, wars had come and gone, skirts had lowered again and risen again, *pince-nez* and Duesenbergs had gone out of style, science had advanced and humanity deteriorated. Now, in 1968, E. Larry was in his late thirties, and his father, Inspector Richard Cune, was the elderly and respected birdlike bulldog of Centre Street, having survived one serious bout with retirement.

Nostalgically, E. Larry surveyed

the huge playhouse from his orchestra seat. He and a full house of first-nighters were waiting to see the premiere of Orson Coward's new musical comedy, *Gold*, a one-man tour de force with book, music, and lyrics by Orson Coward, who had also produced and directed. He had also planned to star as the show's youthful hero, but advancing years and a spreading waistline had led him to retire as a performer, for this production at least. The new show was a musical version of Frank Norris' turn-of-the-century novel, *McTeague*. Many scoffers doubted that this grim naturalistic story of greed and tragedy would make suitable musical comedy material, but after all hadn't Orson Coward made musical successes of Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* and John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath?* (It's not true, however, that he paid two million dollars for the theatrical rights to *How To Avoid Probate.*)

Shaking hands with the famed writer-director-producer-composer prior to the curtain, E. Larry was conscious of an edginess in Orson Coward's manner, something he had never seen there in the many years he had known Orson Coward, dating back to the thirties when the then-boy wonder could have played teen-aged heroes with ease. Thus, tonight's nervousness could hardly be ascribed to opening-night jitters.

As they parted, E. Larry to return to his seat and Orson Coward to return backstage, the great man (Orson Coward, not E. Larry) said, "The show must go on, you know."

Must go on.

In spite of what?

Had that been fear in Orson Coward's demeanor?

What had he to fear?

E. Larry, of course, realized that his very presence at any function put the fear of sudden death in all those around him. He hadn't attended a play, sports event, or party in years without having to solve a murder at some time during the festivities, perhaps because so many potential murderers (and, in fact, their victims) leaped at the opportunity to match wits with him. But why was Orson Coward so sure he'd be tonight's victim? This would bear watching.

The curtain rose.

E. Larry had seen from his program that the first musical number was to be an ensemble titled "Be a Friend to Your Dentist." So he was surprised to see the show's ingenue, Pat Alison, come onto the stage and immediately begin to sing "Never Been Kissed," a sentimental ballad that was scheduled to close the first act.

"E. Larry, that's not right," squealed Nora Redcap, his companion of the evening.

"I know," said E. Larry. And as he watched the lovely young

Pat Alison sing the words of the haunting melody, he thought he noticed an expression of puzzlement on her face, as though this change in the program were a surprise to her too.

Apparently the script had been rewritten sufficiently so that the opening number seemed naturally placed. Although several actors were somewhat unsure of their lines, the story progressed well enough until the time came for the second song. It proved to be "Alone in My Solitude," sung by the show's star, Van Washington, portraying the young dentist McTeague.

"E. Larry," Nora implored him, "that song isn't supposed to come until the second act! And it doesn't make sense to have two pensive ballads in a row. I don't understand this at all."

"Nor do I," said E. Larry pensively.

Van Washington was in good voice, but his face also betrayed a lack of understanding.

For some reason Orson Coward had changed the order of the musical numbers, E. Larry told himself.

Why? What did it mean?

Closing the initial scene, Washington appeared again, lustily singing the show's biggest potential hit, "I know the Score Now."

"E. Larry," Nora almost screamed, "that's supposed to be the finale!"

"You're right, Nora," E. Larry said.

"He's ruining the show, E. Larry."

Orson Coward ruining a show? A man with his sense of showmanship, with his dedication to the theater? E. Larry told himself it could not be. Somehow, subtly, Orson Coward must be improving the show.

After the first three, the songs came in their proper order and the actors seemed more at ease, as though playing the show as rehearsed. By the curtain of Act One the enthralled audience had almost forgotten the curious early events of the evening.

During intermission a man E. Larry recognized as Hugh Vivyan, a backer of the show and longtime friend of Orson Coward, rushed up to E. Larry's aisle seat, saying breathlessly, "Mr. Cune, you must come backstage at once! Orson Coward has been murdered!"

Grieved but scarcely surprised, E. Larry followed the distraught "angel." He found Orson Coward's body lying in a hallway off the dressing rooms. The writer-director-producer-composer had been murdered by a heavy blow to the head, obviously the work of a blunt instrument. A volume entitled *The Complete Wit of Orson Coward*, found near the body, appeared to be the weapon.

Standing over the body were Pat Alison, the ingenue; Van Wash-

ington, the star; Millicent Grady, the wardrobe lady; Alfie Tanager, the stage manager; Flossy Blore, a Broadway showgirl romantically linked with Orson Coward; and Victor Towne, the assistant producer.

Washington was saying, "This is a calamity, Towne! What a loss to show business!"

Victor Towne nodded gravely. Flossy Blore wept quietly into her crocodile bag. Millicent Grady's beady eyes darted back and forth. Alfie Tanager looked truculent. Pat Alison looked ingenuous.

"Mr. Cune, who could possibly have done this terrible thing?" Towne asked.

"I don't know, Mr. Towne. Yet. But I know this: Orson Coward expected to be murdered tonight. He left me a clue to his murderer's identity."

"A clue?" said Pat Alison. "How?"

"By his rearrangement of the musical numbers in the show," Ellery reasoned.

"So that's it!" exclaimed Van Washington. "We couldn't understand why he did that. Five minutes before curtain he handed each of us a revised script."

"Each of us" included 89 principals and 203 singers and dancers, most of whom were now milling around behind the great Greek Theatre curtain, since there was not enough room to join the suspects in the hallway.

"Mr. Tanager," E. Larry told the stage manager, "check with the unions and see if one of your men can call Centre Street. Have him ask for Inspector Cune, the birdlike bulldog. I expect to have this case wrapped up before dad gets here, though."

"Mr. Cune," said Vivyan, the backer, "why didn't Orson say something if he expected to be murdered? Why did he simply allow it to happen, do nothing to prevent it?"

"When he saw me in the audience," E. Larry admitted sadly, "he knew there was no hope; he was doomed. Showman that he was, he knew his role now was to leave me a dying message, or a predying one in this case, to help me deduce the murderer."

"Can't you solve a murder without a dying message?"

"Yes, but it usually takes me a whole novel to do it. I should wrap up this one in a few thousand words."

"I hope so," Van Washington said fervently. "The curtain for Act Two is already overdue."

"Yes, indeed," said E. Larry. "So let's get on with this at once." Suddenly E. Larry's keen silvery eyes spotted something on the floor near the body. He stooped to pick it up. "Ah, just what I've been looking for!"

"What's that, Mr. Cune?" Towne asked.

"A rubber eraser." He turned it

over. On the less worn side was clearly stamped: MADE IN LITHUANIA.

"Is that a clue, Mr. Cune?" Pat Alison asked.

"We shall see, Miss Alison," E. Larry replied, slipping the eraser into his pocket. "Now to the message: what do those three songs in sequence mean?

'Never Been Kissed'
'Alone in My Solitude'
'I Know the Score Now'

How do they apply to the people here? I seriously doubt that any of you has never been kissed. One or more may be lonely, but that seems tenuous as a clue. Was anyone here ever an athlete, amateur or professional?"

"I played football in college," Vivyan admitted. "Second string all-American."

"Are you lonely?"

"Well, I guess so—but no lonelier than the average Broadway show backer."

"Have you ever been kissed?"

"Really, Mr. Cune, is this necessary?"

"Have you ever been kissed?"

"Yes, frequently. I've been married four times."

"All right, Mr. Vivyan. No need to get excited. Let's take a different approach. The letters of the first words of each of these songs—do they spell anything?"

"N-A-I," said Nora Redcap, who had joined the group backstage.

"I don't see any meaning in that, E. Larry."

"Try the last letters."

"D-E-W. That could mean something. But what?"

"Early morning, I suppose. How about spelling it backward?"

"W-E-D."

"And the first letters?" exclaimed E. Larry, triumph rising in his voice.

"I-A-N."

E. Larry whirled to face the other ladies present. "Has any of you ever been married to a man named Ian?"

"No, no Ian," Flossy Blore said. Pat Alison and Millicent Grady shook their heads.

E. Larry struck his forehead with the heel of his hand. "Who is this Ian? Whom did he wed? If we can find a woman who has been married to a man named Ian, we'll have the killer!"

The assembly seemed impressed. E. Larry was in the fervor of creative ratiocination that his intimates knew so well.

"Imagine Orson telling us so much," Van Washington marveled, "simply by changing the order of the numbers."

Suddenly E. Larry stopped in his tracks.

"Numbers. Numbers. Of course! I'm an idiot, a moron, a gibbering imbecile. I should have seen it at once. How could I have been so blind? Numbers!"

"Numbers, E. Larry?" A small

birdlike man had appeared on the scene.

"You're just in time, dad. I've cracked the case."

"It's just like 1929 all over again!" said Inspector Cune, beaming.

Hugh Vivyan appeared thunderstruck at the remark. "My God! I must call my broker at once!"

Inspector Cune, his face mirroring puzzlement, watched the backer's retreating back. "Why's he in such a hurry, son? Is he the killer?"

"No, let him go, dad, he's not the culprit. Mr. Tanager, I'm going to address the audience. Open the curtain. The rest of you come out, too, and we'll wrap this thing up the way Orson Coward would have wanted."

CHALLENGE TO THE READER: *Who killed Orson Coward? And how did E. Larry know? What was the meaning of Orson Coward's pre-dying message? All the clues are now in your possession, so match wits with E. Larry Cune.*

The stage manager shrugged resignedly and signaled for the great Greek Theatre curtain to open, to the surprise of hundreds of extras. E. Larry then walked onto the stage, raising his hands for silence, and the others filed quietly out behind him, even the star Van Washington content in this instance to play a supporting role.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I regret to announce that there has been an unfortunate occurrence—"

Immediately men with black bags began making their way to the aisles all over the massive playhouse.

"No, we don't need a doctor. I must tell you that Orson Coward is dead." A startled roar from the audience. "Murdered." This came as an anticlimax, since most of them had already recognized the famous E. Larry Cune.

"Fortunately, Mr. Coward left behind a clue to his murderer's identity. You may have noticed that the first three musical numbers in tonight's performance were not in the order indicated on your program. This was devised by Mr. Orson Coward to tell me who he *knew* was planning to kill him.

"Note the titles of the three numbers, ladies and gentlemen:

'Never Been Kissed'
'Alone in My Solitude'
'I Know the Score Now'

What does each of these suggest?

"*Each suggests a number,*" E. Larry italicized. "For instance—sweet *sixteen* and never been kissed."

The crowd gasped at the revelation.

"Now, what number does 'Alone in My Solitude' suggest?"

"One!" shouted a voice from the balcony.

"Right! And the third title, 'I Know the Score Now'?"

Silence.

"Score, score!" E. Larry insisted.

"Twenty!" Inspector Cune exclaimed.

"Exactly, dad," said a proud son. "Twenty. Now examine the three numbers—16, 1, 20. What do they tell us?"

Silence.

"It's a simple code. *The numbers represent the letters of the alphabet.* A equals 1, B equals 2, C equals 3, and so on. Thus the sixteenth letter is —"

Suddenly Pat Alison was running across the stage, but her flight was interrupted when she became trapped in the hammy hands and beefy arms of Sergeant Healy.

The audience was on its feet giving E. Larry Cune a standing ovation in recognition of the long established fact that he, like Orson Coward, was a great showman.

As the tumult subsided, Inspector Cune said, "But, E. Larry, will we have a strong enough case to stand up in court?"

"I don't know, dad. Thank God I'm not the District Attorney."

"I must tell you something," said Millicent Grady, the wardrobe lady. "I'm her mother; Orson Coward, my ex-husband, was her father. She hated him for keeping me on in such a menial position, but I really liked it for I still loved him. And I can reveal now that she was once married to Ian Fellmer, the spy-story writer."

"Now I know we have a case that'll stand up in court," said Inspector Cune with birdlike satisfaction.

"I'm relieved, dad. I hate to have my cases end in messy suicides." E. Larry did not know at the time that Hugh Vivyan had just leaped nine stories to the sidewalk below from his broker's office on Wall Street.

"I have just one question, Mr. Cune," said Victor Towne, the assistant producer. "What did the Lithuanian eraser have to do with the case?"

"Not a thing really. But doesn't it make a marvelous title?"

Just to prove that Ellery Queen's "dying message" technique is not always just "fun and games" . . .

MURDER IN THE PARK

by ELLERY QUEEN

IF NOT FOR THE FACT THAT MOUNTED Patrolman Wilkins was doing the dawn trick on the bridle path, where it goes by the Park Tavern, the Shakes Cooney murder would never have been solved. Ellery admits this cheerfully. He can afford to, since it was he who brought to that merry-go-round some much-needed horse sense.

A waiter with a hot date had neglected to strip one of his tables on the Tavern's open terrace at closing time the night before, whereupon the question was: Who had done a carving job on Cooney's so-called heart about 6 A.M. the next morning? Logic said nearly 8,000,000 people, or roughly the population of New York City, the law-abiding majority of whom might well have found Shakes Cooney's continued existence a bore. But Mounted Patrolman Wilkins was there when it counted, and it was he who collared the three gentlemen who, curiously, were in the neighborhood of the deserted Tavern and Cooney's corpse at that ungentlemanly hour.

Their collars were attached to very important necks, and when Inspector Richard Queen of police headquarters took over he handled them, as it were, with lamb's-wool knuckles. It was not every morning that Inspector Queen was called upon in a homicide to quiz a statesman, a financial titan, and an organization politician; and the little Inspector rose to the occasion.

Senator Kregg responded loftily, as to a reporter from an opposition newspaper.

Piers d'I. Millard responded remotely, as to a minority stockholder.

The Hon. Stevens responded affably, as to a party worker.

Lofty, remote, or affable, the three distinguished suspects in riding clothes agreed in their stories

to the tittle of an iota. They had been out for an early canter on the bridle path. They had not addressed or seen any fourth person until the mounted policeman gathered them in. The life and death of Shakes Cooney were as nothing to them. Patrolman Wilkins' act in detaining them had been "totalitarian"—Senator Kregg; "ill-advised"—Financier Millard; "a sucker play"—Politician Stevens.

Delicately, Inspector Queen broached certain possibly relevant matters, *viz.*: In the national forest of politics, it was rumored, Senator Kregg (ex-Senator Kregg) was being measured as a great and spreading oak, of such timber as Presidents are made. Financier Piers d'I. Millard was said to be the Senator's architect, already working on the blueprints with his golden stylus. And small-souled political keyholers would have it that the Hon. Stevens was down on the plans as sales manager of the development.

Under the circumstances, said the Inspector with a cough, some irreverent persons might opine that Shakes Cooney—bookie, tout, gambler, underworld slug, clubhouse creep, with the instincts of a jay and the ethics of a grave robber—had learned of the burial place of some body or other, the exhumation of which would so befoul the Senator's vicinity as to wither his noble aspirations on the branch. It might even be surmised, suggested Inspector Queen apologetically, that Cooney's price for letting the body stay buried was so outrageous as to cause Someone to lose his head. Would the gentlemen care to comment?

The Senator obliged in extended remarks, fortunately off the record, then he surged away. Prepared to totter after, Financier Millard paused long enough to ask reflectively, "And how long, did you say, Inspector Queen, you have been with the New York police department?", and it sounded like the *coup de grâce* to an empire. The Hon. Stevens lingered to ooze a few lubricating drops and then he, too, was gone.

When Ellery arrived on the scene he found his father in a good, if thoughtful, temper. The hide, remarked Inspector Queen, was pretty much cut-and-dried; the question was, To whose door had Shakes been trying to nail it? Because Shakes Cooney hadn't been a man to take his murder lying down. The evidence on the Tavern terrace showed that after his assailant fled, Cooney had struggled to his hands and knees, the Tavern steak knife stuck in his butchered chest, and that he had gorily crawled—kept alive by sheer meanness, protested the Inspector—to the table which the preoccupied waiter had forgotten to clear off the night before; that the dying man had then reached to the table top and groped for a

certain bowl; and that from this bowl he had plucked the object which they had found in his fist —a single lump of sugar. Then, presumably with satisfaction, Shakes had expired.

"He must have been one of your readers," said the Inspector. "Because, Ellery, that's a dying message or I'm the Senator's uncle. But which one was Shakes fingering?"

"Sugar," said Ellery absently. "In Cooney's dictionary sugar means—"

"Sure. But Millard isn't the only one of the three who's loaded with heavy sugar. The ex-Senator's well-stocked, and he recently doubled his inventory by marrying that greeting-card millionaire's daughter. And Stevens has the first grand he ever grafted. So Shakes didn't mean that kind of sugar. What's sugar mean in *your* dictionary, son?"

Ellery, who had left page 87 of his latest mystery novel in his typewriter, picked the lint off his thoughts. Finally he said, "Get me the equestrian history of Kregg, Millard, and Stevens," and he went back home to literature.

That afternoon his father phoned from Centre Street.

"What?" said Ellery, frowning over at his typewriter.

"About their horseback riding," snapped the Inspector. "The Senator used to ride, but he had a bad fall ten years ago and now he only punishes a saddle in the gym—the electrical kind. Moneybags hasn't been on the back of a plug since he walked out on Grandpa Millard's plowhorse in '88, in Indiana. Only reason Piers d'I. allowed himself to be jockeyed into those plushlined jodhpurs this morning, I'm pretty sure, is so he, Kregg, and Stevens could have a nice dirty skull session in the Park out of range of the newsreel cameras."

"And Stevens?"

"That bar insect?" snorted the old gentleman. "Only horse *he* knows how to ride is a dark one, with galluses. This morning's the first time Stevens ever set his suède-topped brogans into a stirrup."

"Well, well," said Ellery, sounding surprised. "Then what did Shakes mean? Sugar . . . Is one of them tied up with the sugar industry in some way? Has Kregg ever been conspicuous in sugar legislation? Is Millard a director of some sugar combine? Or maybe Stevens owns some sugar stock. Try that line, dad."

His father said wearily, "I don't need you for that kind of fishing, my son. That's in the works."

"Then you're in," said Ellery; and without enjoyment he went back to his novel which, like Shakes Cooney, was advancing on its hands and knees.

Two days later Inspector Queen telephoned his report. "Not one of them is tied up with sugar in any

way whatsoever. Only connection Kregg, Millard, and Stevens have with the stuff is what they drop into their coffee." After a moment the Inspector said, "Are you there?"

"Lump of sugar," Ellery mumbled. "And Shakes evidently thought it would be clear . . ." The mumble ended in a glug.

"Yes?" said his father, brightening.

"Of course," chuckled Ellery. "Dad, get a medical report on those three. Then let me know which one of 'em has diabetes."

The Inspector's uppers clacked against his lowers. "That's my baby! It's as good as wrapped up!"

The following day Inspector Queen phoned again.

"Whose father?" asked Ellery, running his fingers through his hair. "Oh! Yes, dad? What is it?"

"About the case, Ellery—"

"Case? Oh, the case. Yes? Well? Which one's diabetic?"

The Inspector said, "None."

"None! You mean—?"

"I mean."

"Hmm," said Ellery. "Hnh!"

For some time Inspector Queen heard nothing but little rumbles, pops, flutters, and other ruminative noises, until suddenly the line was cleared by a sound as definite as the electrocutioner's switch.

"You've got something," said the Inspector doubtfully.

"Yes. Yes," said Ellery, with no doubt whatever, but considerable relief. "Yes, dad, now I know whom Shakes Cooney meant!"

"Who?" demanded the Inspector.

"We ruled out all the reasonable interpretations of sugar," said Ellery, "leaving us where we started —with a lump of sugar in Cooney's clutch as a clue to his killer. Since the fancy stuff is out, suppose we take a lump of sugar in a man's hand to mean just that: a lump of sugar in a man's hand. Why does a man carry a lump of sugar with him?"

"I give up," said the Inspector promptly. "Why?"

"Why?" said Ellery. "Why, to feed it to a horse."

"Feed it to a—" The old gentleman was silent. Then he said, "So that's why you wanted to know their riding history. But Ellery, that theory fizzled. None of the three is what you'd call a horseman, so none of the three would be likely to bring a lump of sugar."

"Absolutely correct," said Ellery. "So Shakes was indicating a fourth suspect, only I didn't see it then. Cooney was a bookie and a gambler. You'll probably find that this fellow was over his noggin in Cooney's book, couldn't pay off, and took the impulsive way out—"

"Wait, hold it!" howled his father "*Fourth* suspect? What fourth suspect?"

"Why, the fourth man on the bridle path that morning. And he *would* be likely to carry a lump of sugar for his horse."

"*Mounted Patrolman Wilkins!*"

a *NEW* crime story by

ANTHONY GILBERT

We have commented on it before, but it is worth repeating: Anthony Gilbert has a rare talent for writing crime stories about old ladies, especially maiden ladies. But it is also true, and worth repeating, that she has just as perceptive a talent for writing crime (and detective) stories about young girls. Here, for example, is the story of little Julie and the horrific adventure she had when she was eight years old—on the fearful, fateful Night of the Monster more than fifty years ago . . .

THE PUZZLED HEART

by ANTHONY GILBERT

WHEN I WAS EIGHT YEARS OLD I had a governess named Miss Gardiner whom I loved more than anyone in the world. It was not simply for her beauty—my mother, I now realize, was more beautiful—but hers was the first deep human relationship I ever knew. She made me aware of myself as an individual whereas hitherto I had been only a child.

Until her coming ours had been a somber household: my mother was absorbed in her own interests and in her husband. My father, who was almost 40 when I was born, was a remote courteous figure, a well-known writer on botanical subjects for learned journals, who kept bees in his garden. That is all I knew of him at that time, and to this day I know little more. I used to experience a *frisson* of admiring terror when he took a swarm, a dark unfamiliar figure in a floating veil and black gloves. I watched from behind the safety of the windowpane; in my heart I feared that if I went out, the bees might swarm on me and sting me to death.

One of Miss Gardiner's charms was that she wore bright-colored clothes in an age when adult women went about clad mostly in grays and blacks.

"Those are the colors of mourning," my governess told me. "But I have nothing to mourn."

"You will never leave me," I

would implore her. Life without Miss Gardiner would be like a world without the sun.

"Never is a long time, Julie."

"Will you always love me?" I would urge.

She smiled and her whole face was bright as the new day. "Why not?"

"Even if I were wicked?" I tried to think of the wickedest thing I could do.

"Oh, love has nothing to do with virtue," she told me astonishingly. "We are led to believe that Our Lord loved Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him, as much as He loved the faithful Saint John."

"I would never betray you," I declared ardently.

She put down the scrap of bright embroidery with which she was occupying her hands—beautiful hands she had, long and slender.

"No, Julie," she said softly. "I don't believe you ever would."

All this, of course, was before the Crisis that was to drive my father from the village and part me from Miss Gardiner forever. She had been with us rather more than a year when her name and ours could be seen in every newspaper in the land.

The affair began one night in spring, when my parents were to attend a music festival in the nearest town. It chanced that it was also Miss Gardiner's evening off. I was to remain at home in the charge of Mrs. Gully, our resident housekeeper.

I had been in bed all day with a chest cold. Such things were taken seriously in those days: I had a hot brick to my feet, a burning linseed poultice on my chest, and a strip of cotton saturated with camphorated oil round my throat. At about six o'clock Mrs. Gully received a telegram, summoning her to her sister, who had been taken suddenly ill.

"Of course you must go," my mother said. "Miss Gardiner will stay with Julie, I am sure. We will make up the time to you later," she added to my governess. "If you have made any plans for the evening you may use the telephone. I am sure your friend will understand."

Even to me any other solution was out of the question. Mama could not be expected to change her plans and I could not be left alone.

"Remain in your room," my mother told me when she came in to say good night, "and do not trouble Miss Gardiner. I am sure she will have plenty of her own affairs to occupy her. Now promise me."

Meekly I promised.

After my parents had departed I could hear Miss Gardiner talking to her friend. What a disappointment for *her*, I thought, while acknowledging a guilty sense of relief. For I was desperately jealous of everyone she knew outside of

my sphere, people whose names I wouldn't recognize, one of whom might eventually lure her away. (I had heard my father say, "I can't think what the young fellows are at, neglecting an attractive girl like that." "Not a girl," my mother told him; "she is twenty-five.") I knew that 25 was quite old.

Presently Miss Gardiner came to my room and we settled down to a game called "Harry in the Attic." I'm not sure she didn't invent it herself, as I never played it with anyone else. To my great satisfaction I won and then Miss Gardiner went downstairs to fetch my supper tray. She sat with me while I ate, then kindled my nightlight —it was thanks to her that this luxury was permitted me, and went downstairs—to write letters, she said.

"If you should want anything, Julie, just ring your bell," she told me. When she had gone I lay daydreaming. In these fantasies, that occupied many of my waking hours, I rescued my darling governess from death by a runaway horse, mad dog, and drowning, though we had no water for miles round and at that time I could not even swim. Presently I heard the telephone bell, and a little later Miss Gardiner came to my door.

"Was it Papa?" I asked, but she was quite still for a moment; then sitting on the foot of my bed, her face grave but resolute, she said, "Julie, could you be very brave?"

At her words all my courageous impulses fled. "How brave?" I faltered.

"I need to go out for a short time," she told me. "A very dear friend finds herself in a great predicament. Her mother is ill, she must go for the doctor and to fetch medicines, and she asks if I will sit with her mother during her absence. Would you be afraid to be left alone for perhaps half an hour?"

She must have seen the fear in my face, for she continued at once, "I have my answer, Julie. It is Yes. In that case I shall not leave you."

But I now realized that here was my opportunity to prove my devotion. She asked nothing of me, she was the eternal giver, and now . . . "Of course you must go," I said, just as my mother had done to Mrs. Gully an hour or two earlier. "I shall be all right."

She accepted my assurance without demur. "I will lock all the doors and leave the light burning in the hall," she promised. "No one can get in, even if they wished, and I shall return as soon as I can. Julie, you're sure—?"

"I am quite sure," I said. "Eight years old is not a baby. Besides, I'm nearly nine."

There was an air about her that night that I still recall—of resolution and radiance, I don't know the right words.

"I wouldn't leave you, but it is a matter of life and death," she said.

After I heard the front door close I began to repeat aloud all the poetry I knew by heart, my own voice giving me courage. But I had soon come to the end of my repertoire; there was nothing left but Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,* and that contained the line about the fearful fiend, which set my heart beating afresh. In fact, I was convinced I could hear footsteps in the hall and strained my ears for the sound of them mounting the staircase.

Then disgust at my own cowardice overwhelmed me. I leaped out of bed, calling, "Is it you, Miss Gardiner?"

But when I opened the door and came onto the landing there was no one there. In the hall the gas jet was turned on high, like a beautiful blue and gold blossom. The familiarity of my surroundings calmed me. I thought, "I know what I will do."

There was a book Miss Gardiner had given me that my mother had removed saying I should understand it better when I was older. I knew where it would be—in the attic room. Everything in our house that was not in immediate use was kept there—books, unwanted furniture, garden accessories, rugs, trunks, as well as the flotsam and jetsam of a normal household. I will fetch the book, I decided, pleased by my own daring. Absorbed in that I shouldn't notice the passage of time, and I could return the book before my mother discovered I had taken it.

Snatching up my nightlight I ran quickly up the attic stairs. Ours was a strange and interesting house, built high on the side of a slope, so that from the upper windows one could look down into the houses on the other side. These were much less pretentious than our own, a lane of small neat buildings called Arbour Cottages. We knew no one who lived there—even if my mother had been more socially minded she would never have paid visits in the lane.

To my surprise, since my own curtains had been drawn, the attic room was bright with moonlight, which robbed it of its terror and gave it a magical aspect. Through the uncurtained windows I could see the backs of the cottages, and though I knew it was ill-bred to pry into the privacy of others, this glimpse of an unknown world proved too powerful a temptation for me to resist.

Setting down the nightlight I pattered over to the window. The moonlight lay in sheets of silver over the shining slate roofs, and was reflected in the glass panes. Most of the curtains were drawn or else the window reflected a black gape; but in the house opposite me —Arbour Cottage No. 6—I could see the room as clearly as I saw my own.

The room opposite was cluttered with furniture, and on a bed in the

corner a woman was lying. She must have been asleep since she did not stir. There was a tapestry chair that caught my fancy, but what most impressed me was a stone effigy of an angel standing against the wall. I knew that dead people sometimes had these angels over their graves. I wondered if she knew she was going to die and had ordered the angel in advance.

I was still considering this fascinating possibility when there was a new development. The door of the room began to open. I shrank back against the wall, not wishing to be detected spying, but too much enthralled to find my book and leave. An instant later I was clinging to the window sill in a paroxysm of terror, for the creature that now came in was like nothing I had ever beheld!

It was not human, the dark face had no distinguishable feature, and it moved as though its owner was blind. The dark arms ended in long dark claws, and it moved with a sort of gliding step toward the bed. I remembered an horrific story I had heard of a lady dressing for dinner in front of her glass, and seeing her door open and, instead of the husband she expected, seeing an immense ape standing on the threshold. The details eluded me but I was sure she had met with a dreadful fate.

I ducked down under the shelter of the sill, convinced that if I were observed the creature would leap through space and through my window. When I found the courage to lift my head, the curtains of the room opposite had been drawn, and by the light shining behind them I saw the upper part of that monstrous shape still moving about the room. I thought of my dreams of rescuing Miss Gardiner from dire straits, but now I knew I was not the stuff of which heroines are made.

Retrieving my nightlight I fled from the attic, only pausing on the landing to lock the attic door and drop the key into my pocket. If by some evil alchemy the Monster could traverse the space between the two houses, at least he could not get into the attic and then follow me to my room.

When Miss Gardiner returned she opened my door softly, thinking perhaps I was asleep; but I rose crying out her name with such passion that she struck a match and kindled the gas bracket on the wall beyond my reach.

"Julie, my dear child, what has happened?"

I sat up, stretching my arms, and she folded hers about me. Words poured from my lips, like rainwater bubbling in a gutter. It didn't occur to me that she would cast doubts on my story, fantastic though it might seem; but when I had talked myself dumb she said, "Oh, Julie, how I blame myself, though that is nothing to how

others will blame me. If I had not left you this would never have happened. But try to believe it is not real; it seems shocking and terrifying to you, and so it must have been, but it is only a dream. When you are calmer you will understand. You were alone in the house, you were afraid, and this fearful nightmare visited you."

Instinctively I drew myself out of her grasp. If the suggestion had come from my mother or Mrs. Gully it would not greatly have surprised me—a figment of her imagination, they would say, and I knew that would be the normal adult view; but this was Miss Gardiner, my own Miss Gardiner, who in my eyes could do no wrong. To be doubted by her was a burden I felt I could not bear.

"It was no dream," I declared. "I saw them all—the Monster, the woman in the bed, the stone angel." That surely would convince her; no one could have dreamed up the angel. "I was in the attic—"

Then came the question I should have foreseen. "What were you doing in the attic, Julie? You promised your mother you would not leave your room."

I started. I had forgotten my promise; but I argued that my mother could not have foreseen my situation, so she would understand. "I went to fetch a book."

"From the attic?"

"Mama put it there. And I couldn't sleep."

Miss Gardiner looked about her. "Where is the book now?"

"When I saw the Monster I forgot all about it."

I had pulled myself free of her grasp and now lay back against the pillow. My governess was silent for a minute, then she said, "They will never forgive me for this. And they will be quite right."

"They?"

"Your parents. They left you in my charge. My first duty was towards you."

I could not endure to hear her blame herself. "But your friend needed you," I protested. "Didn't you owe her a duty too?"

Miss Gardiner drew a deep breath. "One of life's greatest problems is the conflict of loyalties," she told me. "To set right against wrong, there the decision is clear; but to set one promise against another—I had such a choice tonight—but how could I dream this would happen?"

She had a rich and ardent voice that well suited her passionate personality. Even over a gulf of more than fifty years—yes, it is that long ago—I can recall her at that instant, her cheeks burning, her eyes ablaze. "I have betrayed my trust," she went on. "Now you see why I say they will never forgive me."

I stared, understanding her but not believing what she said. "You mean, they might send you away? Oh, no, I couldn't live without you!" And then the obvious solu-

tion occurred to me. "Why should they ever know?" I demanded excitedly. In her presence even the Monster seemed to dwindle. "Who will tell them if we do not? And perhaps," I added desperately, "you are right, it was only a dream."

"Julie, you know you are only saying that to comfort me."

This charge I could not deny, but the suggestion gave me a fresh access of courage. It was the first time anyone had credited me with an ability to provide consolation.

When she went downstairs a few minutes later to fetch me some warm milk, there was an unspoken agreement between us that the secret should remain ours alone. I had trespassed accidentally into a strange world, and what went on there was really not my concern.

It was about three days later that my mother sent me to post a letter in the mail box at the corner of the road. Ours was a quiet neighborhood; there was little traffic and in any case I did not have to cross the street. I was behaving unusually well just then in the vague belief that if I was obedient and willing, God would allow our secret to remain inviolate.

It was a fine windy day, with blue skies and clouds like flocks of sheep moving across it. It was so seldom that I found myself out alone that I resolved to make the most of my opportunity. I would not, of course, disobey my mother, but nothing had been said about my walking a little further along the street.

I turned the corner and found myself looking down a row of small, neatly kept houses whose stiff curtains moved sedately at the shining windows, and where little front gardens were bright with the promise of spring. In front of one of the houses stood a long black carriage, drawn by black horses with a smaller carriage in tow. As I watched, four men came through the gate carrying a long box on their shoulders. I had occasionally seen funeral corteges pass through the street, but I had never been so close to one before. The horses had black cloths over their backs but not the nodding plumes that I so much admired. I supposed the relatives of the deceased were too poor to afford plumes.

When they had thrust the box into the hearse, two of the men went back to the house, returning with wreaths in their hands. Glancing up I realized I was not the only eyewitness; behind the curtains of the upper windows on both sides of the street women were watching. I was about to turn away, reflecting what my mother would think of this prying—vulgar, unworthy, she would declare—when a man came out of the House of Mourning, as I knew it should be called, and stepped into the waiting carriage.

He was tall and dark with curly hair and a black mustache; he wore a black hat and had a black armband round his sleeve. I thought he sent me a scornful glance and instantly I pretended to be absorbed in the garden of the house where I stood. It had a rockery with miniature plants and shrubs and I thought how much I should appreciate one like it. In the next garden there was only a monkey-puzzler tree, said to be a sign of ill fortune, and a few strangling border plants.

The door of the carriage slammed shut and the hearse began to clip-clop down the road. I was turning away, realizing my mother would wonder what had happened to me, when my eye lighted on the number painted on the House of Mourning's cream-colored wall.

Arbour Cottage No. 6, I read. And my world suddenly crashed about me.

Fantastic though it may sound, I had more than half convinced myself that the Monster had been part of an inexplicable nightmare, and so had dismissed the thought of the sleeping woman from my mind. Now I had to face the hideous truth. I had seen the Monster, he had invaded the room, and in consequence the woman was dead. It did not occur to me that the coffin could contain any body but hers. This, I felt sure, made me partly responsible for what had occurred. I had been the sole witness of an appalling crime and, to further my own ends, had remained silent.

True, I had promised Miss Gardiner to say nothing to anyone, but this development changed the situation. No one could ask me to keep that promise now, yet to whom should I turn? Not to my governess, since she was similarly involved, though she really had believed I was dreaming, which perhaps absolved her; and I shrank in terror from the thought of confessing to either of my parents. They were not unjust, but this, I felt, would erect a barrier that nothing would destroy.

"I don't know what to do," I said aloud, forgetful of the watchers at the windows who might well overhear me. An instant later I cried out, for a hand touched my shoulder and in my terror I thought this must be the Finger of God.

But the voice that addressed me was familiar enough and nothing to fear. It belonged to Sergeant Holland, a middle-aged kindly police officer, working out the remainder of his time in this village until he could get his pension and retire to grow roses.

"Like Sergeant Cuff in *The Moonstone*," Miss Gardiner had remarked.

I turned to Sergeant Holland eagerly. I knew him not only by sight but also because he had once

come to our house to examine the bags of a dishonest servant whom my mother had dismissed and who was making off with some of our silver. Now I greeted him with the flood tears of relief. He was the Law, he was impersonal, the situation held no chagrin for him, and he would advise me what to do.

"Someone has died," I began, unable to collect my thoughts more tidily.

He nodded. "That 'ud be old Mrs. Claygate. I did hear they were burying her today. But that's nothing for you to cry about, my dear. She was an old lady and getting very cantankerous. A rest for all," he added.

"But she didn't die," I insisted. "She was murdered." I felt hysteria rising in me, and fought it down. "It was the Monster—I saw him from our attic window."

And for the second time I broke into my story of the happenings of that fearful night.

Unlike Miss Gardiner, the sergeant did not suggest that this might have been a dream. He looked about him and all the curtains fell miraculously into place. Then he took my hand and began to draw me away.

"Where are you taking me?" I asked, and he looked surprised.

"Why, home to be sure. Did you think I was taking you to prison? Miss Julie, have you told this to your father?"

I shook my head violently. "Of course not. And he mustn't know —about Miss Gardiner, I mean. Leaving me alone in the house that night. I promised her I would never betray her. You won't tell him, will you?"

"That's not the sort of thing you can ask of a policeman," the sergeant said gravely. "This Monster, whoever or whatever he may be, is still at large. He might choose another victim, and this time it might be in your own house. The police are here to protect the public. Had you thought of that?"

I hadn't, of course. Only of Miss Gardiner and my own future.

My father was crossing the hall when we reached the house, and he stopped to say. "Why, Julie, Mama was wondering what had become of you. What has my daughter been up to, Sergeant?"

He spoke lightly, but the sergeant's face was as grave as a tombstone.

"I'd like a word with you, if you please, sir," he said. "Miss Julie, go to your Mama."

And though he had no right to command me in my father's house I went without a word.

After that everything happened with the speed of a cloudburst. It was like a tidal wave breaking over the neighborhood.

Ours was a small community and even little ripples stirred our pond. When it became known that old Mrs. Claygate had no sooner

been buried than she was hauled out of the grave even before the sexton's men had had an opportunity to shovel back the earth everyone was agog. Apparently nobody had liked her much; she was mean-fisted, a miser, I heard Mrs. Gully say to the milkman, and he answered that he didn't suppose Jack Claygate would waste much brass going into mourning.

Mr. Claygate himself seemed flabbergasted. He said (so I heard, though not from my parents or Miss Gardiner, who refused to discuss the matter) that he'd had no reason to suppose his mother hadn't died from natural causes, as Dr. Millin declared. Heart failure was what the doctor had put on the death certificate. The old lady had been in poor health for some time, and at her age a sudden collapse wasn't very surprising, though when the doctor had seen her a few days before she had seemed as well as she usually was. The doctor admitted he hadn't viewed the body before giving the certificate but he had no reason to suppose—it was Mr. Claygate over again.

As for Mr. Claygate, he said he had given his mother her usual glass of hot milk, waited with her while she drank it, left her bottle of sleeping mixture and a tumbler of water beside the bed, and gone down to The Eight Ravens to have a drink and play dominoes with some friends. When he came back he glanced into his mother's room; it didn't look as though it had been disturbed and she was asleeep, so he closed the door and went to bed.

In the morning he took her a cup of tea—people in Arbour Lane didn't keep servants—and found she was dead. He went along to Dr. Millin's house, and the doctor said it wasn't altogether unexpected and he would send along the death certificate. As for the story of the Monster, it was a child's hallucination, and he was astounded that the police should pay any attention to it.

But the coroner ordered an autopsy and as a result of that it was announced that Mrs. Claygate had died of an overdose of veronal.

It seemed this was something no one had expected. Dr. Millin agreed that he had prescribed veronal when Mrs. Claygate complained of insomnia. It was as much for the son as for anyone, he said frankly, because she had a way of calling him and keeping him talking half the night. Mr. Claygate was the active partner in her business in the town, and it was said that she ran him like a dog. Every time he thought about getting married she threatened to change her will and on what she paid him he couldn't afford to keep a wife and family.

"Shouldn't a grown man be able to choose for himself?" I asked my governess, but she said sharply, "I've told you before, Julie, you

shouldn't listen to gossip. People will say all kinds of malicious things."

"Perhaps she took it herself," I suggested, but no one seemed to agree with me. Going down to the kitchen to ask for a glass of milk I heard Mrs. Gully say to some invisible companion, "Never tell me that a woman who never willingly parted with a halfpenny would give away her whole life just to oblige her son."

It was all very confusing and I didn't understand it. My father wanted to send me and my mother away until the dust settled, but the police said we must wait. I might be what was called an "integral witness."

"You can't involve a child of eight," my father protested, but Sergeant Holland said, "Miss Julie's involved herself, sir. Though of course we'll keep her out of it, if we can."

It wasn't only I, it was the whole household who seemed involved. Strange men pushed open the gate and came to the front door asking for Miss Gardiner. One of them caught me one day in the front garden and offered me a box of chocolates and a half crown if I'd answer a few questions; but Miss Gardiner saw him from a window and came rushing out.

"I should think you'd be ashamed," she cried, "trying to bribe a child."

"I've got my living to make," the man told her calmly, but he went away, taking the chocolates and the half crown with him.

I understood that Jack Claygate was the man I had seen stepping into the mourning carriage, but I had no time to pity him. For my mother told me that Miss Gardiner would be leaving us.

"Your father is going to send us to France for a holiday when all this is over," she said. "He thinks it is time you saw something of the world."

"Miss Gardiner could take me," I insisted, with childhood's cruelty. I felt the responsibility was all mine. I had promised I would not betray her, and I had broken my word. I was no longer surprised that Judas Iscariot had hanged himself, though I would not have had so much courage myself. Miss Gardiner herself seemed to bear no resentment.

"Of course I don't blame you, Julie," she said. "It's the nature of a stone to roll downhill. The mischief was done when you looked through the attic window."

If only I had remembered my promise, I thought in anguish. The Claygates and their affairs were nothing to me, and the impersonal figure of Justice was even less.

On the evening before she was due to leave I crept up to Miss Gardiner's room for a few last minutes of companionship, minutes that must last me to the end of my life. For I believe I knew then that

I should never see her again. But when I pushed open the door the room was empty. The atmosphere reeked of departure. Her big trunk was locked and strapped, and a suitcase lying open on the bed contained her bright dresses and their matching scarves.

I put out my hand to touch a rose-colored skirt, then, thinking I heard her foot on the stairs, turned quickly away and in so doing jolted the case, which tilted so that the rose-colored dress came sliding like a bright wave over the edge.

It was then that I saw them.

I had always associated her with vivid colors and sunlight. So that the blackness was the greater shock. There was no need to ask what they were—I had seen them often enough when my father took a swarm of bees—the black-banded veil, the night-black gloves. I knew now beyond all doubt the identity of the Monster I had seen through the attic window on the night Mrs. Claygate died.

A child's mind moves in a narrow compass, pursuing one objective at a time, perceiving only the goal and not the pitfalls along the way. I was overwhelmed by a sense of urgency, and had no time to think of her heartless deception of me, the manner in which she had played on my affection to achieve her ends, or the adroitness she had shown to keep me silent—not, as I was later to realize, for my sake but for her own.

Her plans for the future had never included me—but I saw none of this for the time being. All I did see was that my darling was in terrible danger—what if the police were to examine her luggage as they had once rootled through the bags of the dishonest housemaid?

I knew now there was but one thing to do. These—these objects—which I had always hesitated to touch—must be restored to their normal place in the attic before their loss was discovered. When that was accomplished I could let her know what I had done, and thus convince her in the most reliable way of my love for her.

It was as though a ruthless wind bore me along. I whirled up the attic stairs, not even pausing to restore her suitcase to order. My breath panted, my stomach churned. But when I reached the landing I found that the attic door was locked.

I was instantly engulfed in a mixture of fury and dismay. I remembered my father asking me to return the key and taking the sergeant upstairs to make certain, I suppose, that I could have seen the interior of the upper room at No. 6 in all the detail I had described. I had not attempted to enter the attic room since—in fact, I believed I should never wish to enter it again.

Now I rattled the knob as though by sheer will power I could compel the door to open. At any moment Miss Gardiner might come

upstairs and discover me. Then it went through my mind that one of the keys to the other doors on this landing might fit the attic lock. Hastily I withdrew one, but my trembling fingers could not insert it; it fell to the ground and as I stooped to recover it I heard Miss Gardiner's footstep on the stair.

Instantly I froze, my hand over my mouth, my whole body rigid as Lot's wife after she was turned into a pillar of salt. I heard her go into her room, and too late I remembered the rose-colored dress that I had left dragging to the floor. A moment later her voice rang out.

"Julie! Julie, where are you?"

I could not have answered her even if I had wished to—my mouth was too dry. Sure enough a moment later I saw her head come round the turn of the stairs. She took in the situation in an instant, but her mind was more agile than mine. She came quickly up to me. "What do you have there? Why, Julie, surely that is your father's beekeeping outfit. What are you doing with it in your possession?"

If she had intended to deprive me of speech she could have found no better words. It was a full minute before I was able to gasp out, "I was putting it back, I thought no one need ever know."

"But the attic is locked," she said. I didn't at that stage stop to wonder how she knew, since neither of us ever had reason to penetrate this part of the house.

"I thought perhaps another key . . . I would never say a word."

I turned my imploring glance upon her—and was still. I had asked her once what a basilisk might be, and she had told me it was a fabulous reptile hatched by a serpent from a cock's egg with the ability to blast its victim by look or breath. "But you need have no fear, Julie," she had added, "it is a mythological fantasy. You will never meet one this side the grave."

But now I knew that this was one more of her deceptions, for it was surely a basilisk who faced me across the narrow landing, eyes bright, unquenchable, stony as a marble tomb.

"Why, Julie," she said, "I believe I have heard that before."

And she laughed, without changing a feature of that impenetrable mask.

At that sound such terror engulfed me that I cried out aloud, then burst into a flood of sobs that half suffocated me. She caught my shoulders.

"Julie, be quiet! Do you wish to arouse the whole house?"

"I only wanted to put it back," I gulped. "You must understand . . . I will say I took it for a joke."

She nodded, but before she could speak again, my father's voice called from below and in another instant he too had joined us.

"What is all this?" he demanded. "Julie, what are you doing with my beekeeping outfit?"

"That is just what I was asking her, Mr. Fisher," my governess said. "She told me she was trying to put it back."

"So much is clear," my father agreed drily. "Now, Julie, try to control yourself, my dear, and tell me how it came into your possession in the first place. These things are always kept in the attic."

"I was going to put them back," I whispered.

"You must have had them for several days," my father continued. "That door has been locked, first by yourself and later by me, since the night Mrs. Claygate died."

"She says she took the outfit for a joke," interposed Miss Gardiner softly.

"A joke? But Julie could never be persuaded even to touch it."

"I was going to put it back," I repeated in agony. "I didn't know the door would still be locked. And then I thought one of the other keys . . ." My voice faltered into silence.

Miss Gardiner still regarded me with her basilisk smile. "I could have told you the other keys would be of no use," she said.

At once the atmosphere changed again. Now I was in the presence not of one basilisk but of two. My father and my governess confronted each other over my terrified head.

"Why, that is so, Miss Gardiner," my father observed, "but I wonder how you knew."

Even now, more than fifty years later, it is hard for me to realize that it was I—who at that time, I verily believe, would have died for her—that it was I who encompassed that final betrayal. I can imagine her secret dismay when artlessly I let her know that, in spite of all their scheming, there had been a witness to what one journalist described as "the most cowardly crime of the century."

I can imagine how, leaving my room that night, she must have sped up the stairs to return the disguise to its usual place, her chagrin at discovering the attic door locked, and the straits to which she was put in the days that followed to learn where I could have hidden the key. I suppose she did not dare ask me outright, lest she arouse my suspicions.

I picture her peering here and there searching for it, never guessing that I had simply dropped it into a box of keys kept in what was called the Garden Room where my mother made her flower arrangements and where normally Miss Gardiner never went. And after my father took the key she was driven to trying to open the lock with some other key, but without success. So she decided to take the beekeeping outfit away with her.

When its loss was discovered she must have hoped no one would associate its disappearance with her, and indeed she was as loath to ap-

proach a swarming hive as I was. That her luggage might be examined by the authorities was something she never conceived, or if she thought of it, it was something she felt compelled to risk.

Yet it was a case of the dishonest housemaid all over again, but in this instance with melodramatic results. For in her trunk, concealed in her neat boots, folded among her stockings, interleaved in her books, the police recovered a sum of £1200, all in banknotes—a disappointment to me who had always visualized money as consisting of gold pieces. Even so I heard she refused to acknowledge defeat.

"Are you accusing me of robbing you of this sum, Mr. Fisher?" she demanded; to which my father replied that it would be difficult for her to rob him of money he had never owned. But all her defiance did her no good. Mr. Barton, the local bank manager, identified some of the larger denominations of the notes as among sums he had paid in cash to the dead woman.

"She mistrusted banks," Mr. Barton explained. "When she received a check she would put a small amount into the bank, since she maintained a balance there for her convenience, but the rest she would take in cash."

In those days £1200 was a great deal of money, enough to permit an eloping couple to settle in a country where the extradition laws did not operate and to begin life anew. It was a little while before I understood the part that Jack Claygate had played in the dreadful affair. What I did understand was that Miss Gardiner had loved him beyond reason and beyond law. Even from the dock she displayed no signs of remorse, so it was said. The money, that she finally admitted taking, was his by right; he had earned it and Mrs. Claygate was ready to cheat him out of it. Since he would be the obvious suspect it was arranged that she should enter the house, with a key supplied by him, and take the money from its hiding place while the old woman slept, under the influence of the veronal. What she steadfastly denied throughout the trial was any connivance at murder.

"If I had known she would not live to give evidence against me," she cried scornfully, "why should I risk wearing the disguise? It would not have mattered whether she recognized me or not."

Jack Claygate came less nobly out of the affair, allowing her to bear the brunt of responsibility for the plan, and also denying any intention to give his mother a fatal dose. But the only alternative was that she had taken it herself, and no one believed that.

I think it was Miss Gardiner's courage and her lover's cowardice that tilted the scales in her favor. For Jack Claygate there was not even a recommendation of mercy, but a jury reluctantly acquitted her

of the murder charge, substituting a long prison sentence that even my father said was savage.

I wept for her as I have never wept for anyone since. The event marked the passing of an era. My mother took me abroad and when we returned some months later it was to another house in another county—a house and county that never seemed like home.

Last year I took my oldest grandson to Madame Tussaud's Waxworks and like all children he insisted on visiting the Chamber of Horrors. Here we found Jack Claygate, a handsome figure, his hair and mustache as black as on the day he had stood in the dock. Around him were the kindly-looking Mrs. Dyer, the Baby Farm murderer of Reading; the gentle, bespectacled Dr. Crippen, who cut up his wife's body and hid it in the cellar; the infamous Frederick Seddon who poisoned an old maid for her money. The boy beside me seemed disappointed.

"I thought you said they were all wicked people, Grandmother."

"A jury found all of them guilty of murder," I said.

"I thought they would look different," he told me in a voice of quiet despair. "But they look just like everyone else. It's very puzzling, isn't it, Grandmother?"

Yet there is something to me more puzzling still—a doubt that has haunted me almost all my life. We are taught that the end can never justify the means, that we must not do wrong even though good may result; yet, if I had kept my promise to my mother on that fateful night I should never have seen the Monster; old Mrs. Claygate would have lain quiet in her obscure and honored grave; Miss Gardiner and Jack Claygate would have married and been accepted as deserving members of society, dying, no doubt, in an odor of sanctity. Yet he was a convicted murderer and she a self-confessed thief. After so many years I can force myself to say the word—so where does righteousness lie? In obedience—and subsequent injustice? Or did I receive a divine dispensation to break my word?

I have pondered this puzzle so often, without result. I have to confess it has always been too hard for me to solve—or to understand.

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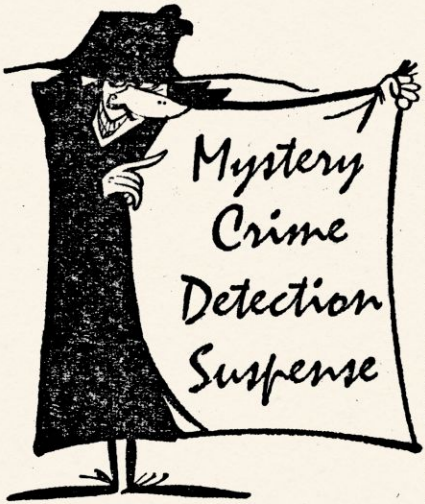

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