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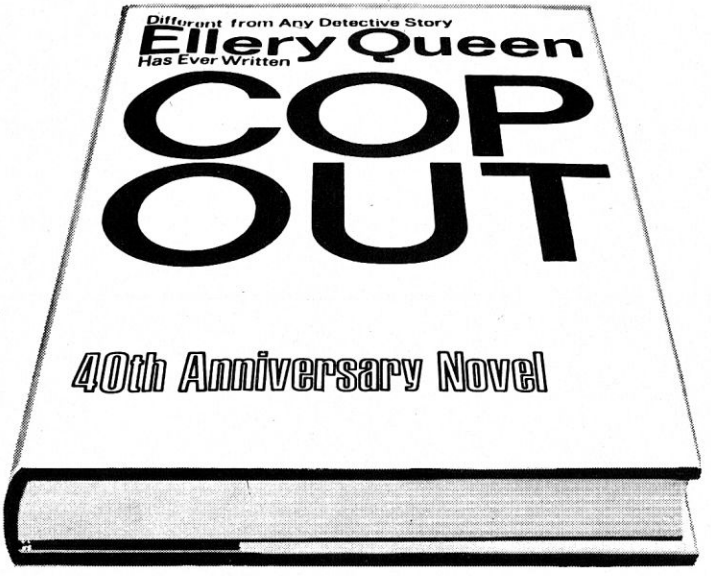

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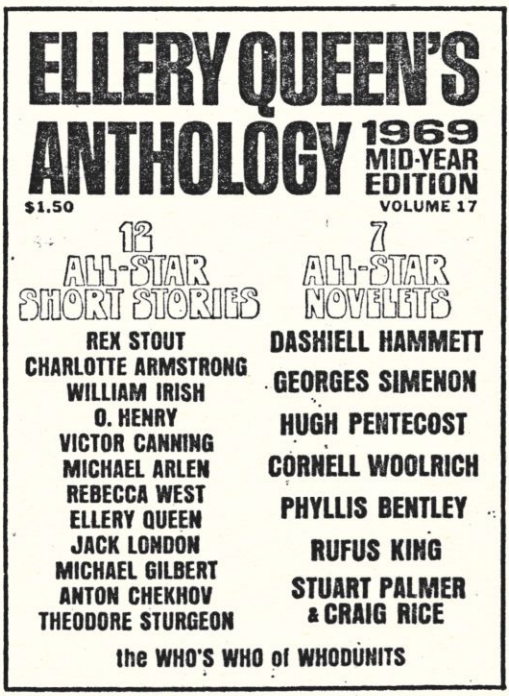

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ELLERY QUEEN'S
Mystery Magazine

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PAPER TIGER

by R. BRETNOR

LORING GIROUX WAS THE DIRECT opposite of Marshal Feng Teh-chih. There was nothing spectacular about Giroux. He had not won the Presidency of the United States by ruthlessly exterminating his rivals. He had not even campaigned for it dramatically at a time of crisis. He had inherited it. He had been a compromise Vice-President, chosen for his Southern votes and as a solid, stable counterweight to the flamboyance of Cardey Corcoran. Then, two months after Corcoran took office, to the sorrow of the ladies and the relief of many highplaced people in his own administration, Cardey had crashed his private plane into a mountainside, taking half his Cabinet along with him, and Loring Giroux had moved quietly, with his wife and one unmarried daughter, his shaggy sheepdog and his yellow cat, into the loneliest house in the world.

That was when Marshal Feng Teh-chih had started in on him.

Loring Giroux's background was as quiet and solid as his person. He had been a naval officer in the Tojo War, a junior deck officer aboard high-test tankers. He had a few decorations, awarded after forgotten actions in which nothing much had happened to his ship—twice against subs, more often against air attacks. He had served in the Louisiana State Legislature. He had been appointed to a Board or two in Washington, to something in the OAS, and then to a South American ambassadorship.

Between times he had practiced law at home. Finally, he had been elected Governor, and then—to everyone's surprise—Vice-President.

Giroux's ancestry went back before the Louisiana Purchase on the one hand, and to the Revolution on the other. His grandfather had come out of the Civil War a young captain under Jubal Early; afterward he had wandered angrily into the West and Mexico, finally returning to a late marriage and a reconciliation with his country. His father had gone to West Point, and had retired, a colonel, after the obsolescence of the cavalry. Giroux himself was neither short nor tall, neither fat nor thin. His main distinguishing feature was a slightly Teddy Rooseveltish mustache, which the political cartoonists—Chinese and American alike—had latched onto immediately.

The cartoonists also—the Chinese especially, because they had beeen ordered to—went for the big striped yellow tomcat. American cartoonists, even the opposition, were almost kind about it: they loved to show Giroux asking the cat's advice on how to catch the mice of international politics, or how he could turn himself into Cardey Corcoran. But the Chinese used it to illustrate their ancient Paper Tiger theme. Loring Giroux, they screamed, had brought Beauregard to the White House to prove that the American paper tiger wasn't made of paper after all. The Chinese madness had made a great deal of headway since the days of Mao Tse-tung and his Red Guards, and Marshal Feng, a Red Guard graduate, had turned it to his private purposes.

Feng concentrated on President Giroux. The Russians now were seldom named, and then only as Giroux's criminal, treacherous, and unspeakable collaborators. Giroux was a weakling. Giroux was the degenerate symbol of a decadent bourgeois society. The missiles, the fusion weapons, which he as President controlled—these were the Paper Tiger. The young and vigorous Maoist Workers State, wielding its unconquerable weapon—the thoughts of Mao and of Feng Teh-chih, though Mao's were fading rather rapidly—would certainly triumph for the simple reason that survival was the natural prize awarded to the fittest.

The fittest would survive!—so proclaimed Marshal Feng. It was a curious Marxist Darwinism, naive, grossly oversimplified, trumpeted with each new insult, each new provocation. It accompanied the wiping out of the Hong Kong and Macao enclaves, and the overrunning of Nepal. It became even more personal and more strident when Feng launched his invasion of North India late in the 1970's, penetrating deep into Assam.

Feng's personal attack on Loring Giroux was ridiculous. The press of the Free World thought so, and

laughed about it several days a week. The press of the Neutralist and non-Chinese-Communist aligned nations took a similar, though rather self-consciously anti-American, stance. The State Department thought it was absurd; so did the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Every Security Council meeting included a few moments of innocent merriment focused on Feng's personal venom against Giroux.

Until, that is, the Council met on the 16th of September. It was a crash session, with the Joint Chiefs in attendance. Marshal Feng had gone on the air that morning, and President Giroux opened the meeting five and a half hours later. He looked around at the faces, the uniforms, the business suits.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I know that you all have either watched Feng's latest performance or heard about it, Still, we're going to replay it, so there'll be no misunderstanding."

"Mr. President," exclaimed the Secretary of Defense, "Feng's just a crazy thug. Aren't you taking his nonsense a little seriously?"

"A little, Jake. It isn't every day a man gets this kind of invitation. Let's watch our boy again."

He gestured them to silence, picked up translation headphones, but didn't put them on immediately. Feng appeared without warning on the screen—a tall long-faced North Chinese with basalt eyes. He was lean and hard, obviously an athlete. He turned his speech on suddenly, full blast, like turning on a fire siren.

"Who does he remind you of?" asked the President, unsmiling, knowing that no reply was necessary, that despite the difference of race, language, and doctrine the image of Hitler came instantly to every mind. The speech was Feng's usual one, an almost hysterical rodomontade using all the old cliches, but this time, after barely fifteen minutes, coming to a very different climax.

"You are a filthy Capitalist coward, Loring Giroux. You are afraid of me and of the irresistible thought of Mao Tse-tung. You are afraid because the working masses and their leaders do not fear your paper tiger. We spit on you, Giroux! You are not fitted to survive. I will destroy your vile imperialism. I will humiliate you. I, Feng Teh-chih—I myself will rub your face in filth. Coward! You are afraid to fight. I challenge you to fight, to fight *me*, with your hands, with guns, with knives, anywhere, at any time, with any weapons you desire! Do you understand, Mr. President of the United States? Do you dare to fight me, Feng Teh-chih, before the world? No, you do not. You know that you could not survive, you corrupt weakling! I will show you how I will destroy you, Paper Tiger—"

On the screen an aide stepped into view, carrying a striped

orange cat—a cat that looked as much like Beauregard as possible. Feng's left hand grasped it, lifted it. Then with a swift and brutal judo chop he broke its back. He hurled the poor small body against a wall, showed all his teeth, and screamed, "*That* is how I kill you, weak Giroux!"

The screen went blank. The show was over. There was silence. Such a display was difficult for men used to the normal courses of diplomacy to understand. Even the Joint Chiefs, men of war, still could not quite believe what they had seen. Had it not been a replay their reaction would have been immediate. As it was, they hesitated, looked at the President questioningly, and began to simmer as the pressure rose.

Before it could erupt Giroux touched them with his voice. It was not harsh. But it was quiet as cold steel. "*Don't,*" he said. "Don't comment. That's not the purpose of this get-together."

State looked at CIA, CIA at Defense; the Joint Chiefs exchanged anxious glances.

"You are here for one reason and one reason only—" Loring Giroux rose "—to hear my decision regarding Marshal Feng's challenge. I have accepted it."

There are things which never should be dropped: rare porcelains, pots of hot molten lead, live hand grenades. People react too naturally. Instantly noise erupted. *But it's illegal for a Presi . . . Not constitu . . . Without any consultation! . . . B-but we're a civilized peo . . .*

Loring Giroux looked at Quinton, Army, who was sounding off as loudly as the rest. "General Quinton!"

Quinton stood, large and dark and graying. He put his palms flat down on the shining table, letting his jaw and football shoulders jut out over it. The others became silent.

"Mr. President," boomed Quinton. "You've flipped. You, sir, are out of your ever-loving mind."

"Why?" rapped Giroux.

"Because, dammit, you're sixty-one years old. You're in no shape to fight him hand to hand. Even when we were kids you couldn't learn to shoot for sour apples. Feng's in top condition. There's not a weapon he's not expert in. You're outclassed—that's why!"

"Is that all, Quinton?"

"Mr. President—Laurie—" Quinton pleaded now. "Look, you just can't *do* it. Anyhow, military law prohibits dueling, you know that. We—we'll have to stop you!"

There was noise again.

"Be *quiet!*" There was a lash of discipline in Giroux's voice. "You *cannot* stop me. My message of acceptance went out an hour ago. It is being broadcast all over the world. General Quinton, I am as expert in the weapon I have chosen as Marshal Feng can be. My physi-

cal condition is more than adequate. As for legality, we'll fight in Uruguay, where dueling's legal. Besides—"

He stopped and regarded them. "What the hell do you propose to do about it? Use violence against me? Mount a quick revolution? Don't be damned fools. I am not only President of the United States, gentlemen. I am Commander-in-Chief of our armed forces. I have already issued orders to all those immediately concerned."

State pushed his chair back. Blood draining from his face, he stood erect. "I cannot be a party to this—this savagery, th-this absurdity. Man, can't you think what you'll be doing to this country's image everywhere? To your own? I—I *resign.*"

"Earnshaw," Giroux said, "what will Feng do to our image if I ignore him? If I refuse to fight? Don't you see—it may be I won't win, but I can't *lose.* Even if he kills me Feng can't win. And if any of you does try to stop me—if you so much as *try*—what will that do to our country's image when the news gets out? What will it do for Feng?"

He sat down slowly and deliberately. The others hesitated, weighing the chances, each trying to guess what the rest would do. Almost imperceptibly the Joint Chiefs seemed to move in a little closer to each other, to the President.

Quinton sat down. Finally, muttering, the Secretary of State lowered himself into his chair. Their heavy breathing was the only sound.

"For a long time," said the President, "something has been needed to clear the air—preferably to clear it of Feng. I'll grant you that my acceptance is a break with all tradition, with diplomatic usage, but —believe me—I know what I am doing."

"That's asking us to take a lot on faith," Quinton put in. "I'll grant you, sir, you've called your shots right in the past, but—"

"Feng and I will fight at three o'clock tomorrow afternoon. With weapons of my choosing, under conditions set by me. Exactly equal weapons and conditions for both of us, naturally. No practice will be necessary for either of us. And each of us will bring three seconds, including an interpreter."

"Who will they be, sir?" Navy asked.

Giroux smiled. "First, if he cares to come, General Quinton, who has watched me shoot. Major Harrison Ouyang, of Air-Space, who will interpret for our side. And Sergeant Easting, Sergeant Major of the Army, who holds the Congressional Medal of Honor from Vietnam and who was good enough to carry my message of acceptance to the Polish Embassy." He saw annoyance on the face of the Navy. "I myself will represent

our service, Admiral," he explained. "Who Feng's seconds will turn out to be, I of course do not know. That is all, gentlemen. Turn on your TV sets tomorrow. Our encounter will probably get world-wide coverage, live."

"Or dead," the Secretary of State said through his teeth.

"Or dead," the President agreed. He rose and made a gesture of dismissal. They filed out, strangely silent, and politely the President walked them to the door.

Quinton, last to leave, held back a little. "How'd I do?" he whispered.

"Beautifully, Tom, beautifully." The President touched his shoulder. "Just as if you'd never heard a word about it."

"You're *still* nuts," growled Quinton.

The world press reacted—unpredictably, chaotically, often hysterically. But frequently policy was drowned in the enthusiasm of newsmen—enthusiasm for the unexpected courage, for the brave cutting of a Gordian knot, for a lost chivalry, for Giroux himself. Only rarely was there enthusiasm for Feng, and that, as *Le Monde* later pointed out, was usually of an "or else" variety.

There were solemn protests in the United Nations—protests which went round and round and ended nowhere. The temperate Scandinavians, the Dutch, the Indians and Ceylonese, the more leftish Britons disapproved—but their disapproval was usually of the principle, seldom of the man. The French, not too surprisingly, changed sides at once, recalled the duels of men like Clemenceau, and attributed Giroux's most admirable sense of personal and national honor to his Gallic ancestry. The Poles and the Hungarians, forgetting all their ties with the East, came out just as strongly. So did the Japanese. Latin America literally went wild. As for the Russians, they broadcast their denunciations almost incomprehensibly in Marxist dialectic.

The press at home was even more confusing and confused. A San Francisco newspaper perhaps outdid the rest. It ran three major editorials: one damned President Giroux as a Racist Southerner bent on National Suicide; another compared him quite favorably with Generals Andrew Jackson and MacArthur; the third, striking at the iniquities of an unfinished local rapid transit system, said flatly that no institution as evil as the duel could possibly solve problems which were sociologically insoluble.

Secretary of State Earnshaw resigned, as publicly as possible, and demanded instant emergency action by the Congress. Neither the Congress nor the press paid much attention to him. Before the subject could even be brought up in either House, Giroux was on his way—

and every politician realized that in spite of any odds, he *might* come back the winner. It was no time for drastic statements, or drastic action.

Before he went to bed that night the President said goodbye to his lady. He told her that he loved her, and they remembered something thirty years gone by, something small and really unimportant and very precious only to themselves. She had guessed what he planned to do.

He kissed her, and she asked, "How—how are you going to fight him, Loring?"

He looked away from her. "The way Cousin Kerby fought the steamboat man."

"I was afraid of that," she whispered, remembering all the details of that duel a century and a quarter in the past, when Kerby Loring and the steamboat man had met each other on the Mississippi. "Yes, I was afraid of that."

Then, to make things easier, the President said, very softly, "Goodbye, Jen," and kissed her through her tears, and quickly went away

The next day, when his plane set down at Montevideo Airport, Giroux seemed fresh and rested, though some observers thought they saw signs of strain around his mouth. He met a hero's welcome. The President of Uruguay was an old fishing and poker-playing friend, from OAS days; before either of them had become a President they had exchanged visits in each other's houses, in each other's countries. Besides, Fernando Estrada Orde had himself fought a duel or two, with sabers, once against a Uruguayan colonel, again with a combative professor-journalist. Now, under his properly sober brows, his eyes were flashing, aware of the personal drama his friend was facing, the unprecedented history which would soon be made. They walked together to the waiting limousines, under the guns of four armored cars.

"Feng is here," Estrada said, when they were under way. "He arrived less than an hour ago. I have given him an unusually heavy escort." He smiled, showing his strong teeth. "I almost hope he violates our hospitality. I do not like the man."

"All the arrangements have been made?" Giroux asked, in Spanish.

"*Si.* My military aide went out this morning, with the North Korean minister and some sort of delegate from Peking, and they bought the ammunition and the guns. My aide did not choose the shops; they did. They bought four guns, as you requested—in four separate places. They are being very careful."

"*Naturalmente.* And the rest?"

"As you specified. Feng has been shown your requirements. He has agreed to meet you in an empty office in our Ministry of Agricul-

ture, where there is room for TV cameras. From there you and he will go into the other room, where all is as you wanted it, but that room he does not know about."

"Otherwise he is satisfied?"

"*De seguro.* He says that he can kill you anywhere."

There was a silence before Estrada asked, "How do you propose to fight this man, my friend? Now that we have bought the tools how will you use them?"

He listened to Giroux's explanation, then spoke very softly. "I should not say this thing to you, *amigo.* I should never say it to the head of a great and friendly state. But do you realize that you are mad?"

"How would *you* fight him?"

"I have watched him. I would never fight him unless I absolutely had to."

"I have to," said the President of the United States.

They entered the small room simultaneously, by adjoining doors, each group escorted by four Uruguayan officers. The room was new and almost bare, its slate-gray walls forbidding. Between the doors stood a table, guarded by two more Uruguayans and a grim Chinese. On it there were four double-barreled shotguns and a box of shells.

Feng was in his marshal's uniform. In the flesh he seemed even taller, harder, straighter than on the television screen. His cold eyes had taken in the room; obviously he did not like what he had seen. He was speaking to one of his three seconds who, like Quinton and Ouyang and Sergeant Easting, were armed with submachine guns. Feng's seconds were burly men, obviously military but with more than a hint of secret police about them. Loring Giroux was the only man there out of uniform; he wore slacks and a tweed jacket.

"Sir, he's been asking whether he's on TV," Major Ouyang said, *sotto voce.* "They've told him he is, and he's annoyed because there's just one camera. It looks like he's going to make a speech."

Almost immediately the lights went on dazzingly, and the familiar tirade started.

"Want me to translate it, sir? It's the same malarkey, only he's accusing you of trickery. He says he's going to kill you anyhow."

"Don't bother," Loring Giroux answered. "I've heard it all before." He watched Feng's mobile face, and listened to the ranting voice, and wondered if he had underestimated him, or overestimated him, or—Abruptly in his mind he saw a picture of Ouyang, of his expression when he had looked at Feng. Ouyang's parents, he recalled, had been in China when the Reds took over.

"Major—" he smiled at him "—let's try and keep it cool, shall we?"

As suddenly as it had started

the speech was over, and Feng was barking questions.

"Sir, he wants to know just what the conditions are."

"Tell him," said the President, speaking very clearly, "that we are going to fight with two of those four shotguns. Remind him that they were chosen by his own people, not by ours, and that there was no time for prearrangement or collusion. Tell him to pick two guns —any two—then select one of the two for himself. I will take one of the two remaining."

They waited while the Marshal and his seconds made a choice. Then Giroux made his. He picked a double-trigger brush gun, with 25-inch barrels, by Francotte, opened it, checked the safety, locks, and firing pins.

"Now, Mr. President, this Feng demands to know where you will fight."

"Say that I will tell him after we enter the next room. We will go first."

They went through the door which an Uruguayan brigadier opened for them; then, carefully and suspiciously, Feng and his seconds followed them. It was a room slightly larger than the other, windowless, equally slate-gray. It was glaringly illuminated for the TV cameras which, raised on platforms high above the floor, stared down through armor plate. Dead center there was a standard poker table, with two facing chairs. An armor screen was so placed that the seconds, three on each side of the screen, would hold the table in their field of fire—but would not be able to fire at each other.

"What does this mean?" demanded Feng.

"Tell him," Giroux said. "It means that we will fight here, in this room. Tell him that in my part of the United States, many years ago, we had a type of duel which men fought only when nothing else could settle a dispute—when neither would be satisfied with less. We will sit together at that poker table he and I. Face to face we will aim our loaded shotguns at each other, our fingers on the triggers. Then we will wait while the countdown clock—" he pointed at the wall "—ticks off one minute. The last ten seconds of the count down will be oral, spoken aloud. When it comes to zero we will fire—together. If either of us fires prematurely, the other's seconds will be free to kill him. It is all very simple."

Feng listened to his interpreter's translation, and as he listened his brows drew together like gathering thunderclouds. His voice erupted in a burst of rage.

Loring Giroux waited for no translation. "Ask him," he said. "Is he afraid?"

Ouyang snapped out a few contemptuous words of Mandarin. There was no answer. Momentarily a look of calculation flickered

across the anger on Feng's face. Then, spitting on the floor viciously, he strode toward the table in the center of the room.

Briefly, after that, politeness and formality took over. Two Uruguayan field officers stood behind each chair. They bowed to the two duelists. They seated them. They ushered the two groups of seconds into their positions, the Americans with their Smith & Wesson 9mm caseless submachine guns on one side of the impenetrable screen, the Chinese with their approximately equal pieces on the other. Then the Uruguayan field officers left the room, closing the door behind them.

The brigadier stepped forward. "Gentlemen," he asked, "are you ready?"

Loring Giroux, looking into the twin muzzles of Feng's gun, said, "I am ready."

Feng nodded.

The brigadier stepped back out of the seconds' field of fire. "Begin!" he ordered.

The count-down clock began to tick. Like every fatal, final clock it ticked with an immense and deadly slowness.

Sixty.

Fifty-nine.

Fifty-eight.

While the world held its breath Loring Giroux raised his eyes to the unfamiliar and unfathomed eyes confronting him. He had done this at many another poker table, not always at completely friendly games. But it had never been like this. He felt the mounting tension in the room, the silent-screaming tautness of friends and enemies.

Fifty-six.

Fifty-five.

Fifty-

Strangely, his own tenseness did not mount. He knew he was afraid, but it was as though he rode his fear with tightly gathered reins. Looking into those eyes, into their blacknesses, he thought, *Did I read him right? Have I succeeded in reading him at all? What sort of hand does he think he's holding? What does he make of me? Now that he knows what this is all about, how is he really taking it? He must have thought he had it all figured out just now when he decided to shut up and fight. Did I judge him right?*

The clock ticked on, but Loring Giroux made no attempt to keep count. Perhaps forty seconds were left—forty or thirty-eight or thirty-seven. It made no difference—in less than a minute he faced certain death. *Here!* He brought himself up short. *Now that's no way to think.* He saw the cable-tightness of Feng's jaw, and wondered if Feng also felt fear. *This is how the world stands today,* he thought. *That is why he and I must kill each other—*

Suddenly his fear welled up within him, and the outcome, whose certainty he had not fully dared to face, confronted him, and

through his mind flowed all those thoughts which come to men who know they are about to die. Thoughts of those loved, those lost, those who would never touch his hand again. He tried to tell himself that even though he died his country could not lose. Nor could the world. Feng could not win.

Oh, God! Were there now only twenty seconds between him and death? Twenty? Perhaps only fifteen.

He dropped his eyes. He saw the fingers of Marshal Feng's left hand, around the fore end of the pointed gun. Five precious seconds passed before he comprehended their significance. Their knuckles were beginning to turn white, and on the index finger's tip stood one small drop of sweat. And there was one thing more.

Then his own fear fell away. He raised his eyes again and looked once more into the eyes of Feng Teh-chih, and smiled.

"Ten!" called the Uruguayan brigadier.

Slowly, with the ticking clock, the brigadier counted down, while the Marshal and the President measured the death that lay between them. His voice rising against his will, the brigadier said,

"Six."

"Five."

"Four."

And with three seconds left Feng very deliberately put his shotgun on the table and stood up.

It was an excellent performance. Feng's face, carefully composed, showed only anger and contempt. Even his voice, at first, was thoroughly controlled. "This is an idiocy!" he said. "Did you think that I, Feng Teh-chih, would really sit and play your stupid game?" Then suddenly he yelled, "It can prove nothing, nothing, *nothing!* I shall not let the Chinese people be cheated by this trick of the imperialists! *Never!* I— I shall yet defeat you, weak Giroux!"

Loring Giroux, of course, did not learn what he had said until he heard it translated later—but he divined its meaning. "Well, Marshal Feng," he answered, "are you leaving us? These shotguns are as nothing compared to H-bombs. Surely you aren't going to give up so good a chance to prove that I'm a paper tiger?"

Feng did not wait for a translation. He sent his chair crashing to the floor and bellowed to his seconds. Then without another word he marched out through the door, and they followed him.

Loring Giroux knew that death left with them. Gradually his fingers on the shotgun relaxed. Mechanically he opened the gun, took out the shells. He pushed his own chair back—

Then there was tumult all around him. Estrada Orde had pulled him to his feet and was embracing him. Major Ouyang was doing his best to shake his hand.

Quinton, swearing mightily, was pounding him on the back. Newsmen were swarming in, and the TV crews were practically hysterical. Champagne, as if by magic, had appeared out of nowhere.

It was not until some hours afterward, when finally they were relaxing in the plane, that General Quinton said, "My God, that was tight there for a while. Laurie, I would've sworn that guy would never chicken out."

"He didn't," said the President.

"Sir?"

"He didn't. He's no coward. He's just completely practical; he'd never give his life unless he'd win by doing it—undying fame, perhaps. At least a victory. He had me buffaloed for just a minute though—until I saw his hands. He wasn't keyed up half enough—not for a man who'd put on all those raving acts. His hands were tight, but they weren't tight enough, and they were steady as a rock. It was then I knew he wouldn't go the route, that he was waiting for *me* to back down. He's not a good poker player."

"What about that threat he'd defeat you later?"

"That was for the home folks. Now he's going to try and play another hand. He figures he'll get it all explained away, or if not, he'll simply polish off the opposition. But this time I think he's wrong. I think he's done for. His people don't like losers."

Two weeks later, Loring Giroux dismissed a special evening meeting of his Cabinet and went upstairs to where his wife was waiting. He scratched the sheepdog sitting by the desk. He rubbed Beauregard's smug whiskers. "That cat's getting fatter than a pig," he said. "What have you been feeding him?"

She smiled. "Shrimp, liver, and filet mignon."

"He has it coming. He's no paper tiger." He returned her smile. "You've heard the news?"

"Feng?"

"Yes, he's down the drain. But, Jen, that isn't all. The Chinese have just sent a message to the world. They want no across-the-table shotgun duels; they said exactly that. They want to settle all outstanding differences. It's just been broadcast."

She came to him, took his hands, and kissed him on the lips. "Oh, God!" she whispered. "The way Cousin Kerby fought the steamboat man—oh, thank God!"

Then Loring Giroux put his arm around her and led her to the doors that gave out on the balcony and threw the doors open,

They stood there together, breathing the clear new air.

***from* ENGLAND**

a spy-and-counterspy story by

MICHAEL GILBERT

Another dangerous adventure of our old friends, Mr. Behrens and Mr. Calder, in the deadly game of international intrigue, of espionage and counterespionage, of move and countermove on the chessboard of power politics... Join the two secret agents in this case of Soho skulduggery—with a throne at stake ...

THE KROKODIL AFFAIR

by MICHAEL GILBERT

GOUGH, WHO WAS EIGHTEEN and a half, weighed 154 pounds, and had dark red hair and a dark red temper, opened the door of his study and shouted "Boy-y-y!" in a voice that would have done credit to a Sergeant Major in the Brigade of Guards.

The sound floated along the corridor, descended the stairs, and penetrated to the Day Room in the far corner of which a thin boy, of indeterminate age, with a serious, coffee-colored face and wiry black hair was sitting on the hot-water pipes reading, for the third time, an airmail letter with a foreign stamp on it.

He was so intent on what he was reading that the sound took a few, fatal seconds to register. Then he stuffed the letter into his pocket and hurled himself out of the room.

"Last again, Thorn," said Gough. "You're a dozy kid. I want these boots buffed up for parade this afternoon. I want to be able to see my face in the toecaps. And you've only got half an hour to do it, so look slippy."

The boy addressed as Thorn took the boots without comment and scuttled off. ("Thorn" was a serviceable approximation of his name; no one had been able to

get his tongue round the double "a" and dipthong when he first arrived.)

He didn't mind cleaning boots. It was a job—a job of definite proportions. You could start it and finish it and contemplate the results with satisfaction. There were jobs which were not like that.

His long sensitive fingers touched the letter in his pocket. Instead of the usual three days it had taken five to arrive. He wondered if the delay was entirely accidental.

He had started on the second boot when Hepplewhite put his sleek head round the door and said, "Hello, Nuri. I've been looking for you. Flathers wants you."

"Flathers must wait," said Nuri. "I have only got ten minutes left to finish these for Gough."

"He said he wanted you at once."

"Gough will not like it if I do not finish these. I am in disfavor already."

It was a delicate problem. The Reverend Dudley Fletcher (or "Flathers") was a housemaster, and capable of being unpleasant if flouted. On the other hand, Gough was head of the house, and a beating from Gough was a thing to be avoided at all costs.

"Look here," said Hepplewhite. "Suppose I finish that other boot. You go and see what Flathers wants."

"Do it well," said Nuri. "Gough desires to see his reflection in the toecaps."

"If I had a face like Gough's," said Hepplewhite, "I wouldn't be so keen to look at it, would you?"

The housemaster was not alone. A second man was seated on the other side of the fireplace. Nuri, who was a quick judge of character, put him down as a senior civil servant or a retired schoolmaster. Both men got up as Nuri came in. His housemaster said, "This is Mr. Behrens. He's connected with the British Foreign Office. He has some news for you."

There was no need for them to say any more. Nuri could read the news in their faces. He had read it, unmistakably in the labored cheerfulness of his father's letter.

Twenty minutes later he faced a wrathful Gough.

"This boot's all right—but this one's a mess. And anyway, who the hell said you could hand the job over to Hepplewhite? I told you to do it yourself."

"I am sorry, Gough," said Nuri seriously. "Had the interruption not been of a vital nature, I should certainly have personally concluded the task you gave me."

"*What* interruption?"

"I have had news from home. My father died yesterday. I have to return at once."

"I'm sorry," said Gough. He added, being a perfect gentleman, "May I wish your Highness the best of luck."

"That I may need," said Nuri.

Mr. Behrens said the same thing to him in the car on the way to London Airport. "You realize," he said, "that it's not going to be plain sailing. It's unfortunate that you were out of the country when your father died. Everyone thought he was getting over his stroke, and then he had this second one."

"Was it a stroke?"

"Oh, I think so," said Mr. Behrens. He looked at the young man beside him, and wondered what was going on behind that solemn face. "Your father was well liked, and well guarded."

"He had enemies, too."

"Powerful and bitter enemies," agreed Mr. Behrens.

Two years before, when the King was on a state visit to London, Mr. Behrens and his old friend and colleague, Mr. Calder, had both been involved in the security arrangements—arrangements which had culminated in a suitcase bomb that exploded prematurely while the intended assassin was still carrying it, blowing him to bloodstained rags, killing one bystander and blinding another.

"They would give a good deal," Mr. Behrens said, "to delay or spoil your Coronation."

The fog rolled up to meet them as they crossed the new bridge at Staines. Mr. Behrens cursed, switched on his fog lamp, and joined the bumping, crawling line of traffic. It took them two hours to reach the Airport.

In the VIP departure lounge they found a reception committee assembled. Mr. Absalom, Senior Councillor from the Embassy, stout and agreeable; Mr. Moustaq, his assistant, thin and silent; and a small worried man named Forbes, who apparently represented the Ministry of Civil Aviation.

Mr. Absalom and Mr. Moustaq kissed Nuri formally, on both cheeks, and Forbes shook his hand, and said, "I'm afraid, your Majesty, that there is no possibility of a flight before tomorrow morning. Garwick is worse than we are, and conditions at Manchester are almost as bad. We have arranged accommodations for you at the Airport Hotel—"

As he said this, he looked at Mr. Absalom. Mr. Behrens guessed that there had been a difference of opinion about this.

Mr. Absalom showed his teeth in a smile. "It seemed to us that if there was an entire evening to be passed, it could be spent more pleasantly in London than in the lounge of an Airport hotel."

Everyone looked at Nuri.

The King said, "We will go to London." It was his first pronouncement as Ruler, and deep-

ly though he disapproved of the decision, Mr. Behrens could not help admiring the manner in which it had been promulgated.

He said to Forbes, "I shall have to advise our people about this change of plan. May I use the telephone in your office?" —and then to the others, "I strongly suggest that we leave our cars here and use official transport. The official drivers will be much quicker and safer in the fog. I expect Mr. Forbes can arrange it for us."

Mr. Forbes said he would be glad to do so. The thought of getting rid of the whole party had cheered him up considerably.

It was an evening to remember. One of the things about it had been the speed with which Nuri had grown up; a process which normally takes years was compressed into hours.

They had gone first to the Embassy where clothes more suitable than the regulation school uniform had been found. The King's suit was dark, a little modern in its cut for Mr. Behrens' taste, but inoffensive.

"You will need money," said Mr. Absalom. He produced a wallet. "Some cigarettes—" this was a thin but expensive-looking case of silver with black filigree work— "and a lighter."

Nuri seemed more pleased with the cigarettes than with the money. He offered them round and lit one himself. "It was the thing I missed most when I went to that school."

"When did you start smoking?" asked Mr. Behrens.

"Not until I was ten," said Nuri. "It is considered wrong in our country for young children to smoke." He exhaled luxuriantly, then slipped the cigarette case into the side pocket of his jacket, running his fingers over its smooth surface and machine-turned corners. "Where shall we eat?"

They ate at the Savoy Grill. Nuri's sophistication did not, Mr. Behrens was glad to see, go as far as drinking alcohol in public, but he had a very good meal. When the last flakes of a second helping of a sticky confection had disappeared, he summoned the head waiter with a gesture which brought that dignitary scurrying across the room, and said, "Please congratulate the chef for me. It was an excellent meal," and to Mr. Absalom, "What shall we do next?"

"We have a long and tiring day tomorrow," said Mr. Behrens.

"I had reserved a table at a night club," said Mr. Absalom. "There is a first-class floor show."

"Splendid," said Nuri. He added, "If you feel tired, Mr. Behrens, there would be no need for you to accompany us."

"I am not in the least tired,"

said Mr. Behrens tartly. "I was thinking of your Highness."

Mr. Behrens scribbled a note on a piece of paper, and as they went out, he handed it to the restaurant manager who accepted it without comment.

The Krokodil Club in Soho was not quite the sort of place that Mr. Behrens had anticipated. The large Embassy car, complete with chauffeur and assistant chauffeur, after threading its way with difficulty through Old Compton Street and Frith Street, had finally forced itself into a crowded cul-de-sac from whose dark end a green crocodile winked a red eye at them and thrashed its neon tail.

"It is not pretentious," agreed Mr. Absalom. "But they have a good band, and the girls are not only beautiful but discreet."

With this last statement Mr. Behrens had so far found no reason to disagree. Angie, Edie, and May had attached themselves to the party as soon as they reached the table. Angie had unbelievably blonde shoulder-length hair, and was now dancing with Nuri. There was not much scope for finesse on the tiny crowded floor, but both danced well, touching, parting, approaching and recoiling in the stylized modern fashion. May, who had red hair, was engaged in a thoughtful flirtation with Mr. Absalom.

Edie had given up trying to fathom Mr. Behrens, and was drinking her fourth glass of champagne. She had black hair and a sulky but intelligent face. Mr. Behrens thought that, in a more promising milieu, she might have demonstrated quite an attractive personality.

He said "Where have all the pictures gone?"

Edie stared at him over the rim of her glass, and then giggled. "You've been here before, I can see that. They took 'em down this afternoon for cleaning."

"I noticed the faded patches on the walls," said Mr. Behrens. "What kind of pictures are they?"

"Photographs. The usual sort of thing. They're a bit vulgar actually."

"They must have heard that I was coming," said Mr. Behrens.

Edie looked at him curiously. She thought that he was "an odd 'un." She had put him down, at first, as a sugar daddy, but now she was not sure. There was a curious hardness about his eyes and mouth, which contradicted his appearance of grumpy middle-aged benevolence.

"A doctor once told me," said Mr. Behrens, "that too much champagne is bad for the lining of the stomach. Let's have a change." He picked up the wine list, signaled to the waiter, and said, "I should like a glass of this brandy." He indicated the most expensive

drink on the list. "And I'm sure this young lady will join me."

"You can only die once," said Edie.

The waiter said, "I'm sorry, sir, we are out of stock of that brandy."

Mr. Behrens moved his finger up the wine list. "Armagnac, then," he said.

"I *think*," said the waiter, "that we are out of that too. I could find out."

"Don t bother," said Mr. Behrens. He seemed to have lost interest.

"A little more champagne, sir?"

"Not at the moment." He turned to Mr. Absalom and said, "I hope that lovely car we came in isn't going to be stolen."

"Why should it be?"

"Soho is a dishonest quarter. Or so I have always understood. I don't come here much, in the ordinary way."

"The men will look after it."

"They will find it difficult to do so," said Mr. Behrens, "unless they have periscopic eyes. Both of them are drinking at that table in the corner."

Mr. Absalom uttered an angry exclamation, jumped up, and went over to the table. Mr. Behrens saw him expostulating with the men, one of whom got up and walked out. Mr. Absalom rejoined them.

"It was right of you to point it out to me," he said. "I shall report the men to the head of Chancery. They had no right to come in together. One should certainly have stayed with the car."

"There is very little discipline among young men today," Mr. Behrens remarked sadly. "If you will excuse me for a moment—"

He got up and made his way out to the foyer. A thickset man in a dinner jacket was standing there. He wasn't exactly guarding the exit, but he was within easy reach of it.

"I would like to use your telephone," said Mr. Behrens. "An urgent call."

The man considered the matter, running his hand down a chin which looked as if it had already been shaved twice that day, and was about ready for a third scraping. He said, "There's a telephone up there" —and pointed to stairs at the end of the passage.

Mr. Behrens thanked him and walked along the passage, conscious of the man's eyes focused, like twin gun barrels, on the small of his back. The stairs were carpeted and led up to a hallway which was on ground-floor level at the back of the building. There were three doors on each side of the passage, but no sign of a telephone.

As Mr. Behrens was hesitating, the middle door on the left-hand side of the passage opened and a man came out. He was a big man, bulky but not fat, with skin the color of creme caramel and

black hair set in tight, varnished waves.

Mr. Behrens said, "The man downstairs—um—told me I could find a telephone up here. I—um—see no telephone. A most important call—"

"You could use the telephone in my office if you wished, sir."

"That's very good of you," said Mr. Behrens. He followed him in. "You would be the manager, I take it? I hardly like to trouble you in the middle of such a busy evening."

"All evenings are busy here. That telephone will put you through to Exchange."

"But it's not every night that you have to anticipate a police raid, I imagine," said Mr. Behrens calmly.

"What makes you think we're anticipating a raid, sir?"

"I noticed that you had removed all the—um—exciting pictures from the walls downstairs. And most of the exciting drinks, too. I suppose those are the sort of things that get damaged, or perhaps lost, when you have a lot of heavy-handed policemen about the place."

Mr. Behrens was holding the telephone in one hand as he spoke, and was watching the manager's face. He saw the calculating expression in his eyes, and that was all he did see before the ceiling fell on him and the room rolled slowly over and dissolved.

Mr. Calder was sitting on a hard chair in an almost unfurnished room next to the Superintendent's office in Carver Street Police Station.

When Mr. Behrens had telephoned him from the Airport, he had suggested West End Central Police Station as a rendezvous. They both knew Chief Superintendent Park, head of the C.I.D. there, and had worked with him on many occasions.

When Mr. Calder reached West End Central, after crawling for three hours through the fog, abandoning his car in a garage at New Cross and finishing the journey by train, he found a message from the Savoy waiting for him. It said that the party was apparently going on to a night club in Soho, and it suggested that Mr. Calder go to Carver Street, which is the substation directly concerned with this area.

When Mr. Calder arrived at Carver Street he realized that the move had been a mistake. The Superintendent in charge had behaved with perfect correctness. He had accepted Mr. Calder's credentials, backed as they were by a message from his own Chief, but he had made it quite plain that he regarded the position with disfavor.

The Superintendent did not like any civilians, even official civilians, interfering in police matters. And he did not like his superiors pass-

ing such civilians onto him, particularly on a night when he had his hands full. He probably had gastritis and troubles about his allowances as well, thought Mr. Calder; but that didn't make the situation any easier.

The Superintendent explained, as if he grudged every word dispensed. "We've got a big job on tonight. Large-scale traffic in hashish. Involves two or three night clubs and a lot of boarding houses. Well—they're brothels, really."

"It sounds exciting," said Mr. Calder. "Which particular clubs and brothels have you got your eye on?"

The Superintendent hesitated, then rapped out a list of names, adding, so quickly that there wasn't even a full stop at the end of the sentence, "I'm afraid I can't ask you to accompany us."

"Of course not," said Mr. Calder.

He continued to sit patiently on his chair. The minute hand of the clock crept down toward the half hour after midnight.

"I fear," said Mr. Absalom, "that Mr. Barrens has been called away. We should, I think, be leaving."

"Why slide off now?" said May. "The night's hardly started."

Mr. Absalom looked past her at the thickset black-jowled man standing in the doorway. He came forward, smiling. The girls became silent.

"I think," said Mr. Absalom, "that it is agreed we go. Yes?"

"Oh, sure," said May. "Sure. I'm not objecting." She swallowed half a glass of champagne quickly, as though it had been a prop that the stage manager was going to remove. "Come on, Angie. The party's over."

"Angela will be coming with us," said Mr. Absalom.

The blonde girl had one arm linked through Nuri's. She was smiling nervously. They were all looking at the boy. There was the briefest pause, a tiny hitch, a half beat in the music, a trip in the heart's rhythm.

Then Nuri said with a smile, "Time to leave, eh?"

"That's right," said Mr. Absalom.

The group moved to the door, then out into the foyer. The thickset man said, "Pleasant dreams, your Highness."

Mr. Absalom gave him a sharp, unfriendly glance. Then they were in the car. One of the chauffeurs was driving. The other held the door, then climbed into the car with them, taking the seat previously occupied by Mr. Behrens.

"Where are we going?" said Nuri.

"Actually," said Angie, "you're coming with me for the night."

Nuri opened his brown eyes a little wider. Then he said, "That's very kind of you. We hardly know each other."

The girl chuckled. "You're a good boy," she said. "I can see that. You behave yourself and we'll have no trouble. Right?"

"Naturally there will be no trouble," said Mr. Absalom. "Our first care must be for his Highness' comfort."

Mr. Behrens rolled over, grunted, and sat up. His fingers scrabbled on the carpet. He opened his eyes fractionally, then closed them again, as an unfriendly hand thrust a white-hot skewer through the top of his head. Keeping his eyes shut, he fumbled in his top waistcoat pocket and brought out a transparent capsule, about the size of a cigarette stub. He snapped it between finger and thumb and held it under his nose.

Five deep breaths later he sat up cautiously and opened his eyes. The pain had retreated into a dull, throbbing doughnut at the top of his head. His neck felt as though it had been broken and inexpertly reset. Otherwise he seemed to be functioning normally.

He saw that he was in a cell-like room, with two round windows placed high up in the wall, and two doors. It looked like the sort of place a man might squeeze a secretary into if the secretary wasn't too fussy about her working conditions. It was furnished with a cheap typing table and one of those curious chairs with spindly chromium legs.

Mr. Behrens picked it up. It was a better weapon than an ordinary chair. Unfortunately there was no one to hit with it. He put it down again and tried the doors. Both, as he had expected, were locked.

Mr. Behrens took out his key case. Hanging among his car keys and door keys were two steel implements. One looked like a toothpick with a spatulate tip, the other like a thinner version of the implement with which Boy Scouts are supposed to extract stones from horses' hoofs.

Mr. Behrens moved the chair across to the inner door and sat down. It took him three patient minutes to locate the spring in the lock, and another minute to lift and slide the gate. Then he opened the door and found himself, as he had already guessed he might, back in the office in which he had been knocked out. It was now empty.

Mr. Behrens sat down behind the desk and tried the drawers. None of them were locked. In one he found, under some papers, a Walther automatic pistol with a full magazine. He put this in his jacket pocket, walked across to the passage door, and opened it.

There was no one in sight, but there seemed to be quite a lot of people about. There was a hum and clatter from the floor below, and he heard a door open and

shut. Mr. Behrens was a man who liked to do things in the simplest and least troublesome way. He went back to the office, lifted the receiver from the telephone, and started to dial.

At one o'clock Mr. Calder had strolled out into the Charge Room. Here he found the Station Sergeant, a friendly soul, who produced a cup of tea and some biscuits, which Mr. Calder attacked gratefully, having eaten nothing since lunchtime.

"How's the big cleanup going?" he asked.

"It's Operation Washout so far," said the Sergeant. "We get these tipoffs. Sometimes they're hot, sometimes just the opposite."

"Nothing at the clubs?"

"We gave the Krokodil the once-over. Clean as a chapel. We're moving in on the Quart Pot and the Tableau next. We'll do the boarding houses later. You know what we'll find there? A lot of businessmen, down from Manchester and Liverpool. Virile, these Midland businessmen. You want to try those fluffy ones, with chocolate inside. My kids love 'em."

The telephone rang. The Sergeant picked it up, listened, and said, "It's for you."

"Take your coat off," said Angie. "Make yourself comfortable. We got a bit of time to put in before anything happens."

"What is going to happen?" inquired Nuri.

"Actually we're waiting here till the police come."

"The police. That will be embarrassing for you, I imagine."

"I'm used to 'em," said Angie. "Besides, confidentially, I'm prepared to put up with a bit of embarrassment, if the money's good enough. It's you who's supposed to be embarrassed."

"Suppose I walk out before they come?"

"Well, first, you can't, because I've locked the door and put the key where you wouldn't find it, and even if you did find it and unlocked the door, there's someone outside and he'd put you back in again, twice as quick as you went out. So let's relax. We'll have a cup of tea, shall we?"

Nuri looked round the bedroom with interest. It was neat and compact, like a cabin on a ship; the long cupboards with shelves above and below, the bed that folded up into the wall, the tiny curtained alcove into which Angie had disappeared, and which seemed, from the glimpse he had had of it, to be bathroom, kitchen, and scullery combined. It was not unlike his own cubicle at school. Frillier, of course.

"You wouldn't happen," said Angie, "to have such a thing as a cigarette on you. I'm all out of them."

"But of course." Nuri put his hand in his pocket and stood for a moment, unmoving. Then he took out the case, selected a cigarette, and sniffed it delicately.

"I hope you don't mind," he said. "These are Egyptian."

"I'm not fussy," said Angie, reappearing with a tray on which she had set cups, saucers, milk pitcher, and a sugar bowl. "Light it for me, there's a dear."

Mr. Behrens had finished telephoning and being a man who did not believe in wasting opportunities, he was examining the contents of the desk drawers when he heard footsteps in the passage. The door opened and Mr. Absalom came in. When he saw Mr. Behrens he started to retreat. When he saw the gun in Mr. Behrens' hands he abandoned the effort and stood very still.

"Come in," said Mr. Behrens, "and shut the door. Sit down. I'm glad you've come along. It's saved me the trouble of looking for you. What have you done with the boy?"

"When you deserted us," said Mr. Absalom, "I still do not understand why—we took him back to the Embassy. He is there now. Asleep. I came back here to find out what had happened to you."

"Ingenious," said Mr. Behrens. "But not ingenious enough. The police are planning to raid a number of brothels tonight. The boy has been planted in one of them. You've got thirty seconds to tell me which one it is."

Mr. Absalom's small black eyes shifted from Mr. Behrens' face to the gun in his hand, then back again.

"If you fire that," he said, "a lot of people will hear it."

"Were you aware," said Mr. Behrens, "that there are twenty-six separate bones in the human foot? The astralgus, the calcaneum, the scaphoid, the cuboid, three different cuneiform bones, five metatarsals, and no fewer than *fourteen* phalanges."

As he spoke the last word he fired. Mr. Absalom gave a little squeal of surprise. The bullet had carried away the heel of his shoe.

"That was only a sighting shot," explained Mr. Behrens.

There were hurried footsteps in the passage. Mr. Behrens got up, picked up a heavy ruler from the desk, and stood behind the door. It was the caramel-colored manager who came in. Mr. Behrens hit him, very hard, on the base of the skull, dragged him into the room, locked the door, and turned his attention back to Mr. Absalom, who seemed pinned to his chair.

"The last time I shot a man in the foot," Mr. Behrens continued, "the bullet struck the entocuneiform bone—that's the large one on the left—and broke three of the five metatarsals. He was

three months in the hospital, and the surgeons then cut off the foot. It was the only way of relieving his agony."

He raised the pistol.

Mr. Absalom's face was gray and his lips were quivering. He said, "I will tell you."

"You'd better not tell me any lies," said Mr. Behrens. "I know the addresses and if you happen to mention one which *isn't* on my list—"

He fired again. The bullet hit the leg of the chair on which Mr. Absalom was sitting.

"Stop, stop," said Mr. Absalom. "I am telling you now. It is a house in Spencer Street. At the corner. Number eighteen, I think."

There was a rattling at the door handle, followed by a knocking. Mr. Behrens walked over and opened the door.

Mr. Calder was standing in the passage outside. From below came the sounds of shouting, crashing, and the stamping of feet.

Mr. Behrens said, "I'm glad you managed to get here. What's happening down there?" As he spoke he carefully wiped the gun on his handkerchief, then put it away in the desk drawer.

"When I got your telephone call," said Mr. Calder. "I persuaded our friends at Carver Street to organize a *second* raid here. I think it's going to be more fruitful than the first. Have you found out where the boy is?"

"I have," said Mr. Behrens. "The next thing is to get him out without a fuss."

Mr. Absalom seemed to be trying to say something. His mouth was opening and shutting like an expiring frog.

"You will be too late," he said.

Nuri looked at the girl. She was lying back on the bed, her mouth half open, a smile of drowsy contentment on her lips. Her left hand, hanging down beside the bed, held a cigarette.

She must be entirely ignorant of the properties of bhang, he thought, or she would have realized at once, from the taste, what she was smoking. It was her third cigarette. The first had made her amorous. The second, fortunately, drowsy. The third was going to make her unconscious.

As Nuri watched, her fingers parted and the half-smoked cigarette fell onto the carpet. Nuri picked it up and put it on the ashtray. Then he tiptoed across to the hanging curtains and into the bathroom. Behind him, the girl stirred, and mumbled, "Where are you going?"

"Back in a moment," said Nuri.

He was standing at one end of the bathtub working at the catch of the window. It was a very small window, but Nuri was as thin as an eel and nearly as slippery. He went through feet first and found himself on a slop-

ing slate roof which led up to a ridge. This was a highway, threading among the chimney stacks, and leading the whole length of the block. Halfway along it, Nuri paused.

Something was happening in the street below. He could see the lights of cars and hear the slamming of doors, followed by loud knocking and shouting voices. Nuri smiled. For the first time that night he felt happy, by himself, up among the sooty chimneys. The last of the fog had gone and from above the stars winked back at him in friendly conspiracy.

He made his way as far as the end house and found a promising-looking window. It was fastened, but he broke one of the panes of glass with the heel of his shoe, inserted his hand, and slipped the catch. It was an attic, and empty.

He went out into the passage, made his way down three flights of stairs—first bare boards, then linoleum, then carpet—and finally out into a front hall. He got the front door unlocked and unbolted, and opened it a few inches.

There was a great deal of activity in the street, but most of it seemed to be happening at the far end. He slipped out, pulled the door shut behind him, and ran.

As he turned the first corner, he saw a car parked with its lights out and two men standing beside it. One he did not recognize. The other was Mr. Behrens.

On the way to the Airport and the early-morning flight being held for them, Nuri told Mr. Behrens and the stranger, who turned out to be a Mr. Calder, something of his adventures.

"I can feel things with my fingers," he said, holding out a thin brown hand, "things which I could not see with my eyes. All our family have that facility. I knew, as soon as I touched it, that it was *not* the cigarette case which that fat pig Absalom gave me earlier. He had changed it for another. Probably in the car, when we were sitting squeezed together. It was obvious then that there would be something wrong with the cigarettes. Bhang, I guessed. What do you call it?"

"Hashish."

"It is against the law to smoke it."

"It's against the law even to possess it," said Mr. Calder. "If you had been found in that girl's room with a cigarette case of reefers, it would have created an international incident."

"It would not have been sufficient simply that I was in her room? She is a prostitute."

"It wouldn't have been good for your reputation, but it's not illegal."

"Curious," said Nuri, "that the law should punish the lesser sin."

"A lot of our laws are like that," said Mr. Behrens. "Here's the hotel. You've just time for a bath and breakfast."

Three days later, several thousand miles away from the soot of Soho and the fogs of London Airport, Mr. Calder and Mr. Behrens were standing on the first-floor balcony of the Hotel Continentale.

The town had been *en fete* since dawn. The streets were packed with the outlandish crowds that had poured in overnight from the country districts. Houses and shopfronts still blazed with electric lights now paled by the morning sun. Every roof and window showed a flag or a portrait, flowers or paper streamers.

In the distance a band struck up.

"They'll be here soon," said Mr. Calder. And added, "I hope so. I want my breakfast."

"By the way," said Mr. Behrens, "did they catch that fellow Absalom?"

"No. He and Moustaq both escaped by plane that morning. Fortescue thinks they're in Cairo."

"If they know what's good for them," said Mr. Behrens, looking down at the crowd below, "they'll stay in Cairo. I hope they've made trouble for that club." His head still ached.

"The second raid was a huge success. They found a lot of contraband liquor, a cache of drugs, and a very interesting collection of blue films. Here they come."

A burst of cheering heralded the head of the procession. First came a company of Boy Scouts, older than their English counterparts, some of them sporting quite impressive black mustaches, but all bare-kneed and serious. Behind them, the Red Cross and the St. John's Ambulance. Then the massed bands. The Municipalities. The Fire Brigade. The Heroes of the Revolution, and the Foreign Diplomats.

Mr. Behrens was glad to see that the procession had been organized to play down the military side. It was essentially a civilian jamboree. After the diplomats came several more bands, all playing vigorously, and all playing different tunes, followed by senior members of the government, and every male relative of the Royal House, each in a gorgeous motor car.

Then came the mounted troopers of the police, with their ceremonial lances and useful-looking carbines slung from their shoulders.

Then, as the seventh wave of seven gathers itself together, checks for a moment, then crashes down onto the beach, there came the roar of the crowd as the open, pale-blue and silver Rolls Royce turned the corner.

In the back, upright, serious and straight as a blade, sat Nuri.

"'Upon the King,'" Mr. Behrens quoted softly to himself. "'Let us our lives, our souls, our debts, our careful wives, our children and our sins lay on the King.'"

In the last four days Mr. Behrens had grown very fond of Nuri. The boy had shown himself courageous and resourceful. He knew what he wanted to do and would, if given time, learn how to do it. If he could escape the sudden bullet or the planted bomb. If he could answer propaganda with deeds.

He had already captured their hearts. Now he would have to capture their minds as well.

Mr. Behrens thought there was a chance, an outside chance, that he might do just that.

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(Continued on page 101)

Alfonso Ferrari Amores is an extremely versatile writer—journalist, short-story writer, novelist (including more than a dozen detective novels published under English-sounding pseudonyms), radio and TV scriptwriter, prize-winning dramatist, and composer of popular and successful tangos.

His story, "A Scrap of Tinfoil," is considered "one of the cleverest short-short tales written by a contemporary Spanish-American author."

A SCRAP OF TINFOIL

by ALFONSO FERRARI AMORES

(translated by Donald A. Yates)

JOACO MIGUELES, MY WINE-LOVING friend and philosopher, winked at me as he gulped a mouthful of La Rioja.

"Look here," he said. He set down his glass and took from his pocket a neatly folded piece of tinfoil, the kind that chocolate bars and packs of cigarettes are wrapped in.

"Waterproofing for the roof," he said, smiling proudly. "I found it on the road today. It's perfect to cover the holes."

I looked up between the rafters of the little shack Joaco shared with his second wife, far out on the Argentine sand dunes of La Magdalena. The glistening blue sky of the hot afternoon cut through in a few places with shafts that appeared to burn the holes bigger as I watched.

"No time to waste, my friend," I said, clouding his contented grin. "I heard thunder on my way over. We'll have rain soon, and I'd better be leaving."

"Oh, no, no!" he exclaimed. "Stay and talk a little more. It's a lonely existence out here on this desert. And when the wife is out—" He gazed sadly at me, patting his wine glass as if it too were a dear friend. Joaco's wine glasses are the size of vases, since he could splash in virtually the entire contents of a bottle of wine in one pouring.

"Well," I said hesitatingly, "perhaps a half hour more."

He sighed happily and leaned back in his wicker chair across the table from me . . .

One of the things about my com-

panion which made him tolerable company on these unbearably hot days was his unpolished but unfailing gift for conversation—or, perhaps better put, for soliloquy. So I knew the reason he wanted me to linger before returning to the city was not that he wished to hear my voice. On the contrary—

"This scrap of tinfoil here, my friend," he began, "it carries a very worthwhile lesson." Joaco looked at me from under his bleached and bushy eyebrows to see if I were interested. I nodded noncommittally.

"It shows one that no matter how poor a man's existence"—with a gesture he indicated his humble dwelling—"he can improve it by taking advantage of any small windfall that may come his way."

"Yes, I suppose you're right," I commented, reaching over to refill my glass; my throat had become parched from the hot dry air.

Joaco sat in silence for a moment, tugging pensively at his lower lip. Presently he cleared his throat and said, "It reminds me of something, you know. I once lived in Patagonia —years ago, when I was young. It was a miserable life there, but it taught me to be satisfied with what I have now."

"Well, that's nice," I said.

"I was poor as a beggar then. It was in Río Negro—El Nireco, to be exact. For many months I lived in an old cement water tank which I had converted into a sleeping room. All the other fellows were making decent money working on the road gangs. But not me.

"I wasn't cut out to work from sunup to sunset like a pack horse. So I just kept on being as poor as ever. What I've told you of my modest living quarters will suffice to explain why, when the snows began, I didn't find it hard to choose between my cold water tank and a cot in the back room of an herb grower's shop in Viedma, where I was offered a job as clerk.

"So there I was—the sole resident of the shop—when one day who should stroll in but wealthy Don Hellmuth, the most infamous miser and wife beater in the province. A shady, underhanded character, too, if ever there was one! Well, this day we chatted about a thousand things —this and that—and ultimately came around to the subject of herbs.

"At an appropriate moment I mentioned casually to him my theory that if it were true that diabetes consisted of an excess of sugar in the bloodstream, it seemed to me that the eating of poisonous mushrooms, which kill by depriving the blood of the same substance, could be effective—in carefully determined doses—in curing diabetics. It was a simple question of logic.

"Don Hellmuth thought a moment, then asked me, 'Do you have any poisonous mushrooms here?'

"My only answer was to reach down, take two sacks from behind the counter, and lay them before him.

"'These are the good ones,' I said, pointing to one sack. 'The others are poisonous. They look a lot alike, don't they?'

"Don Hellmuth agreed, marveling at the identical appearance of the poisonous and nonpoisonous varieties.

"'Just imagine,' I continued. 'If they were served separately on two plates, no one could distinguish the deadly ones from the edible ones. Of course it would be wise to have the antidote ready—just in case.'

"'What would that be?' Don Hellmuth asked, revealing great interest in this matter of poisonous mushrooms. I had judged him shrewdly.

"'The same sugar we were speaking of. A very concentrated solution of glucose. It could be swallowed or injected.'

"'Give me some of both kinds of mushrooms,' he said impetuously. 'And the antidote!'

"As I was collecting his money for the mushrooms and the bottle of antidote, I said, 'Of course, if the antidote were within reach of—um—an enemy who might have eaten the poisonous mushrooms, it would be better perhaps to disguise it, so that the enemy would not recognize it and take it.'

"'How would you do that? Disguise it, I mean,' Don Hellmuth asked, looking at me narrowly.

"I opened a drawer and took out a label with a red skull and crossbones on it, and below, the word POISON. I glued it to the bottle of antidote.

"'There,' I said. 'Now only you and I know that this is not what the label says. Try not to forget this point, my friend!'

"Now by chance that very night Don Hellmuth's wife came to take refuge in my shop. She was young and very beautiful, a native girl whom Don Hellmuth was known to beat unmercifully.

"She told me how, after dining on mushroom stew, he had thrown her out of the house, chasing her with a whip. Don Hellmuth, as cruel as he was rich and tight-fisted, often had such fits of anger. Ah, me! The girl was crying like a baby! And women were so scarce in those parts.

"So I called up on the telephone, asked for Don Hellmuth, and the moment I heard his voice I cried out excitedly, 'Listen! I made a mistake with the mushrooms. Hurry! The harmless ones are poisonous, and the—'

"I heard that they found him the next day—dead from a dose of cyanide. The doctor analyzed the contents of the bottle Don Hellmuth had drained completely, and said, 'Poison—just as the label says. Obviously, Don Hellmuth committed suicide.'

"Afterwards, of course, there were those who looked at me suspiciously. You see, I married his widow. Ah, she was a prize, so beautiful—and so rich!"

The sky had darkened now, and the thunder came again, resounding over the limitless stretch of arid plains. Joaco glanced up at the holes in the roof of the hut, then turned his gaze down on the piece of tinfoil on the table. He smiled.

"She was my scrap of tinfoil, just like this bit I found today—something to help improve my humble existence." He chuckled softly. "Humph. You can imagine what a cause for gossip our marriage was. A source of endless chatter among the envious fellows, that's all. Bah, they see the mark of money on everything. And she was so beautiful, so lovely!"

I shook my head slowly and rose to leave. But Joaco placed a hand on my sleeve.

"They did the routine autopsy on Don Hellmuth soon afterwards. And that was how they proved, incidentally, that the mushrooms he ate were harmless, perfectly harmless."

Joaco winked at me again, lifted his glass before his eyes and gazed at it appreciatively. "What did they think, anyway? That *I* would sell poisonous mushrooms!"

Iain Gallantry published his first story, "Death in Kenya," in the February 1962 issue of EQMM. At that time we promised you more of Mr. Gallantry's African stories, but is has taken us seven years to make good our promise. In the meantime the author left Africa, tried living in Greece, Sicily, Germany, and England, and at the time of this writing is settled in Ireland with his Glenwherrie Collie that watches him write and fish ("which seem to be the only two worthwhile occupations"—the author's words, not the Editors').

Here then is another tale of death in Africa—this time in Tanganyika, now part of Tanzania. It is a story that could have happened in only one place in the entire world—which points up the international scope and purpose of this issue . . .

DEATH IN TANGANYIKA

by IAIN GALLANTRY

THE HOUSEMAID WAS A HUGE, laughing African called Bella, and although she was only five feet tall she carried her 230 pounds with a good-humored energy that made me feel ashamed of my tropical lassitude. When the shade temperature hit the century and the humidity gauge hung in the nineties I was content to work while sitting in the breeze of a fan; but Bella continued to work on her feet in defiance of the climate, washing shirts and shorts, scrubbing floors, polishing furniture, sometimes even cleaning the car.

While working she was attended by two of her seven children, following her with bars of soap, brushes, mops, and dusters, and she talked incessantly to them as she worked. I think she was telling them humorous stories. The house rang with their laughter, and in the late afternoon, after they had gone home, the rooms seemed to have little character without the cries of the children and the quick slap of their bare feet on the tiled floors.

I liked to watch her family bathing in the evening when the light

softened after the glare of the day, and the Tanganyika coast grew cool in the off-shore breeze that blew before dusk. The children, gleaming black and naked, rolled in the surf, and she sat fully dressed in the small waves with a yellow duster wrapped round her head to protect her hair from the spray. She looked remarkably like a hippo, even though she wore an ankle-length cotton dress. Her husband, who was a strong swimmer, swam out beyond the breakers, then swam back at high speed, splashed her, and threatened to tow her out to deep water to give the sharks a meal. And she would laugh and push him away with enormous chubby hands, and cry, "No, my Juma, no, no, no! Who will feed you if I feed the sharks?"

They seemed to be a happy family, and I watched them walk home, dripping from the sea, hand-in-hand along the beach to their hut at the cactus nursery; and it did not seem that there was any deep emotion among them that could disrupt their happiness.

It was not surprising that I became physically sick one Monday morning when a message arrived that Bella would be unable to work that day because her husband had killed himself. I went to the bathroom and retched, wondering why he had done it. Suicide is always alarming, and a suicide such as this—so unexpected and so contrary to the man's apparent nature—frightened me and brought a sense of illness.

Juma had never seemed to be a man who would do violence to anyone, least of all to himself. He had never seemed to be worried or afraid, never seemed to have had the mixed qualities of desperation and resignation which suicide demands. I cleaned my teeth and rinsed my mouth, and I thought that he must have gone suddenly mad. It was the only possible explanation.

My relations with him and his wife were better than relations between most whites and blacks in Tanganyika. He called me "bwana" and I called him "bwana" because it was his right to be called "bwana." He was a mature and responsible man, and a reliable member of his community. He was a better husband than most semi-urbanized Africans. He didn't drink; he didn't smoke hashish; he put a large part of his savings in a bank; he had insured his life during the first year of his marriage; he allowed Bella to keep her earnings to spend on herself; and he didn't upset his household by keeping a second wife. I had always liked him, and I felt ill on that Monday morning when the bad news came.

He had been a foreman at a cactus nursery that was owned by a Swiss named Peiffer, and later that morning I walked along the beach to see if Peiffer could tell me

what had happened. Peiffer and I had never had much in common: I thought him unintelligent and insensitive, but he had known Juma well.

Peiffer was visibly obvious at the nursery, making himself the center of the landscape with his clothes. He wore sapphire-blue shorts, a tangerine beach shirt, a straw panama with a tangerine band, and rope-soled sandals. He was transferring some small round succulents from boxes to pots, using a small trowel with skillful hands.

"Ah, yes," he said, "poor Juma, a tragedy, great tragedy, especially for the cactus. D'you know what he did? He came back from the mission church with Bella—they've been going to this mission every Sunday for months—he came back from church and went to the beach to play with his children. Then he went to the garage and took a length of towing rope. He took it back to the beach, climbed a casuarina tree with it, and did the job properly. The fool! The unforgivable fool!

"Oh, the children! The noise they made . . . Bella came running to see what was happening—and d'you know what the stupid woman did? Do you know? She didn't try to cut him down. Oh, no, she caught hold of his legs and pulled! She thought she could pull him down by brute force. Stupid."

I was silent for a moment, wanting to insult this unsympathetic Swiss who could do such delicate work with his cactus trowel yet who seemed to know nothing of human grief. Then I said, "But why did he do it? Did he go mad?"

Peiffer grinned at me. "You ought to know," he said. "Bella works for you. You were always talking to him."

"I don't know," I said. "They always seemed a happy couple."

"Happy?" Peiffer laughed and slapped his thigh with the trowel. "Happy? She drove him to his death. You know their last child? The baby—Josiah? Juma wasn't the father. It was some black policeman from Bagamoyo. Juma had always suspected it, but she didn't admit it until yesterday. She was overcome with guilt at the church. You know how these sects preach hellfire for deceivers in the missions, and urge people to public confession of sins. She stood up in the church and confessed everything, and that was that. Stupid woman! And Juma was stupid, too. Now I'll have to find another foreman, and lord knows where I'll find one. You know what the labor situation's like."

I drove into Dar es Salaam that afternoon to the office at which Juma had paid his monthly insurance premiums, and found that as far as the insurance company were concerned Juma had died from natural causes. Deaths such as his were so unlikely and so infrequent

among Africans that their policies did not contain suicide clauses. I was pleased to find that Bella would receive a few thousand shillings before the end of the month: the security of the money might help to console her.

I was still puzzled, however, by Peiffer's assertion that she had been unfaithful to Juma. Apart from my belief that she was too good a wife to deceive him, it seemed unlikely that anyone would be tempted to lead her astray. She was far from beautiful: prolonged motherhood and an excessively starchy diet had made her physically unattractive. She had a 53-inch waist, and I couldn't imagine any man, even a simple policeman, being tempted by Bella.

I was still puzzling over this problem when I met the doctor, and I told him about it.

"Peiffer was more or less right," the doctor said, "except that his details and anlysis were wrong. Bella is notorious for her misbehavior. It wasn't just the last child —three or four of the children weren't Juma's. I ought to know— I helped them into the world. She's always been a terrible one for men."

"Are you sure?" I asked. "Because physically she has nothing to recommend her."

"Oh, but she has," the doctor said. "She's got everything—about 230 pounds of it at a rough guess. She attracts the Wafipa men—those chaps from the cattle tribe near the Rhodesian border. They measure beauty in terms of weight. The fatter the girl the better she is in their opinion."

"And Peiffer's analysis?"

"Well, I'm sure Juma didn't hang himself because she suddenly admitted things which he'd always suspected. The African mind doesn't run in these Freudian paths. No, he quite simply killed himself because he had lost face at the mission. She confessed in front of everyone they knew, thus making the worst kind of complete fool of him."

That made sense, but it still seemed more likely to me that Bella had not been persistently faithless; that the rumors about her were shining examples of tropical malice; and that the district was singularly free from news if the whites had taken to gossiping about black servants instead of one another.

Poor Bella observed two months of almost silent mourning, weeping occasionally, working in the house without speaking. The attendant children followed her as before, but there were no more stories for them; they padded silently behind her, sniffing occasionally, and sneezing when she used the fly spray, but making no other sound. There were no more swimming parties in the cool of the evening. I longed for the two months of ritual mourn-

ing to end so that laughter would return to the house.

When the mourning ended, however, Peiffer decided that Bella should quit her hut at the cactus nursery because he had found a new foreman and the hut was needed for him. So I told Bella that she could live in a small hut in my garden, and this pleased her. It was a very small hut, she agreed, but that did not matter; she was going to send her six oldest children to the highland village 300 miles away where her parents lived. Juma's parents lived there, too, and the two sets of grandparents would have the joint care of the children. She would keep the youngest child, the infant Josiah. She said that he needed her; and this seemed right to me.

It was agreed that I should take the children to the grandparents, and Bella gave me a surprisingly accurate set of directions for finding the village. Her directions were at variance with the map (a typically useless thing produced by careless British colonial officers), and included a number of route-finding instructions that were astonishing in their confusion and faith.

"Go towards the sun at Idodi," she said.

"But, Bella, the map says to turn north—"

"No matter," she said, "turn towards the sun into the river valley and there you will find an old, old man sitting beneath a very large baobab tree. There you turn over the hill—"

I protested: "Bella, that old man will have moved by now."

She said firmly, "No, he is always there. He sits there because travelers expect him to be there."

Bella moved into my hut and early one morning I put the six children, in their best clothes, into the car, and set out for the village in the highlands, using the useless road map and being surprised to find at Idodi an old, old man sitting beneath a very large baobab tree. It occurred to me then, as it often did, that customs in Africa were slow to die, slower than in more advanced white communities where the pace of life was faster and fashions in behavior changed as quickly as fashions in clothing. That old, old man had probably sat beneath his tree every day for thirty years while he watched his flock of goats and amused himself by chatting to travelers; and he would probably sit there until he grew too old to protect the flock from leopards. Then his son would take his place in the shade of the baobab tree.

I found the village at dusk, after ten hours of driving over rough, stony roads marked more by feet than by wheels. It was a poor and remote village, housing about sixty people who lived on the maize and tubers that grew in red patches of soil among the

scrub. Stunted in-bred chickens and lean goats wandered between the mud huts that surrounded a central dusty square.

The people of the village were as lean as the goats, and most of them seemed to be suffering from premature senility. At least a quarter of them had withered arms or legs, the results of some locally endemic paralyzing disease; some had tubercular coughs; most were pockmarked and had the red eyes of bilharzia; a few were noseless.

The grandparents were pleased to see me and the children. White faces were rare, and it was a pleasure to see one when it didn't come to collect taxes, and what a pleasure to see these fine healthy children in such wonderful clothes . . .

Yes, they knew about Juma's death. The district officer, whose office was sixty miles away, had sent a messenger to tell them. Yes, it was a bad thing, a very bad thing indeed, but you know what happens to people who go to live at the coast. They get worms in their heads from eating coastal pigmeat, and it sends them mad. Ah, a very bad thing. Madness always ends in unhappiness for somebody. Far better never to leave this village, to be poor but alive.

Would the bwana stay the night? Yes, the bwana from the coast would stay the night—so a goat would be cooked in his honor. He could have the liver and both kidneys, and a thick slice off the back.

Bella's father shouted some orders to a youth who was standing with his head thrown back, balancing a tin can on his chin. The youth dropped the can, tightened his loin cloth, and pounced on a young billy goat that was quietly chewing a yellowed copy of the Tanganyika *Standard*. He brought the goat to the old man who pinched its limbs and back, and approved it as meat suitable for the bwana and himself.

The youth carried the goat to a tree beside the old man's hut. From a branch of the tree dangled a noose of rope. The youth lifted the goat's head into the noose, and tightened the rope. The animal swung clear of the ground, kicked and jerked, arching its back, then its belly, throwing its legs forward and backward as if swimming in the air.

No one, except the youth, showed any interest in the hanging goat. The villagers were examining the clothes worn by Bella's children, fingering buttons and feeling in pockets. The goat's jerking grew stiffer; it pawed feebly at the air with its hoofs, then its body was still. The youth knelt beside it, grasped it firmly by the back legs, then tugged viciously. He lifted it from the noose, laid it on the ground, and prepared to skin it.

Involuntarily I said aloud, "My

God! These local customs—" And I thought again how slowly African customs died.

"What's that?" said the old man, not understanding English.

I asked the old man, speaking in Kiswahili, "Do you always hang your goats like that?"

"Yes," the grandfather said vaguely. "It's a village custom. I don't think it happens anywhere else. Other visitors have said how strange a custom it is."

I said to him, "You hang them with the rope, then give them a pull. Is that right?"

"Yes," he said testily, as if irritated to be asked about anything as trivial as goat slaughtering. "Yes, you have to pull them to make sure they're dead. It's the most practical method."

"My God," I said again.

He called to a woman who was pounding millet in a wooden mortar at the door of his hut. "Now we shall have some good maize beer," he said. "One of my wives is an expert brewer. She made this beer three days ago."

It was quite a pleasant beer, tasting slightly of soil, but a few hashish leaves had been allowed to infuse in it, and it was a soothing drink. I slept fitfully that night, rolled in a blanket on the ground.

I drove home next day, past the old man under his tree at Idodi, and arrived at my house half an hour before sunset. I was hot, tired, dusty, and I went to the beach for a swim. I stayed in the sea for nearly an hour, floating on my back and watching the first stars creep into the sky above Zanzibar; then I rolled in to the shore with the breakers.

In the cool half light I saw two dark figures sitting side by side in the small waves, looking out to sea. One was Bella—squat, huge, and hippo-like; the other was a man, slim and well-muscled. I found his clothes beneath a palm tree at the top of the beach. On the shoulder of the khaki drill jacket was a badge that read: *Tanganyika Police.*

I called across the coral sand. "Hey, you policeman!"

His voice came back from the sea. "The bwana calls?"

I shouted, "Are you from the Wafipa tribe?"

The voice came back: "Yes, my bwana. I am of the Wafipa."

I showered in the bathroom, washing salt off my skin, drank a long Scotch on the rocks as I dressed, and debated whether to turn Bella in to the magistrate or to fire her with a month's pay.

In the end I did neither. Her life was her own business, and it was unlikely she would find me hanging from a tree; and she was a very good housemaid. And it gave me a strange secret pleasure to realize that my knives were being sharpened by a killer who believed that her crime was unknown.

FIRST PRIZE WINNER NUMBER 3

Alfredo Segre's First Prize Winner of 1947 never strays from the path of real life. That is not to say there is no imagination in it; but it is the imagination which stems from sensitive observation and from the awareness of never-changing truths—"remember that the harvest, the coffin, the skylark, and the pregnant woman have the same number" in fortune cards and in the lottery of life—for "all things in the world are numbers," and "numbers have rules like the stars"...

The detective in *Justice Has No Number* is one of the little men of the world—one of the forgotten men, the men of deepest good will, the blessed men whose atomic meekness shall some day inherit the earth. Bastia is a simple but natively shrewd organ grinder in Italy who has an even smaller being as his colleague —Pasqualino, a kind of Watson brand-new to detective fiction. Pasqualino knows only one word of speech—but it is the almighty word, the right word.

You will find in Bastia, the unassuming little hurdy-gurdy man, qualities rarely encountered in contemporary detectives, in these hard, loose, cynical days—warmth, kindness, understanding, and most of all, a passion for justice and a compassion for his fellow men...

JUSTICE HAS NO NUMBER

by ALFREDO SEGRE

BASTIA SCRAMBLED BACK UP THE embankment and pulled his hurdy-gurdy off the road, setting one wheel firmly in the ditch. Then, carefully carrying the cage in which Pasqualino was napping, he started down the slope once again, toward the bushes where he

had first seen the blackberries shining in the sun. There, behind the bushes, he had found the body of a man. The sight would have been a shocking one had it not been for the war which was still going on up North and which had accustomed him to seeing bodies scattered around everywhere.

He squatted down on the grass and emptied his pockets of all the berries he had picked. Pasqualino began to groan because the sun hit him right in the eyes, but Bastia paid no attention. He had even forgotten to be hungry, staring at the body, not frightened, but somehow fascinated, as if he had been called to share a secret, with some strange force guiding his steps down the embankment and then around the bushes. The fact that the man was dead, and that he was an utter stranger, sharpened his curiosity. Finally he said to himself: I will call him Luigi. Then he felt more at ease and swallowed a handful of berries.

That Luigi was young, of that there was no doubt—his calves were strong and full. That he had been dead only for a short time was equally clear—there was no stench, just the faint odor of a butcher shop early in the morning. But more than that was hard to know, and yet he should know, because there was a reason for everything; the berries had shone in the sun and he had been hungry just so that he could meet Luigi sprawled behind the bushes, before the police could intrude on his secret. The police!

He hated the police, the guards, and the carabinieri. Time and again they had made him sleep in jail, the hurdy-gurdy rusting in the rain, just to question him about things that had happened along the road. Let the police beat out their brains trying to find out who the man was: the body had no head.

"They will go and dig in some faraway cemetery," Bastia said, turning to Pasqualino.

"Why?" Pasqualino asked, lifting one claw and swaying a little.

"Because the police must have a head, any head, to show they know everything."

"Why?" repeated Pasqualino; and he spread his toes wide on the perch and then cramped them together like the leaves of an artichoke, still swaying with that air of nonchalant understanding which Bastia loved like a subtle tickling.

"Because the commissario is a lawyer."

"Why?" Pasqualino went on, shifting onto the other leg.

"It's difficult to explain," said Bastia, trying to think of the answer. But Pasqualino got excited and asked why five or six times in succession.

"Because you are a parrot, shut up!" said Bastia; and he shook the cage until Pasqualino lost his

grip and retreated between the water cup and the box where the fortune cards were stacked.

Bastia moved nearer to the body. A parade of faces kept bouncing up; some of them fitted nicely onto the strong neck, others were too small and stood up funny, like the hook on a hanger. Whom did he know who had such broad shoulders? He cast a glance at the distant hills where the towns struggled to stand upright. He mumbled their names, and at each name he sorted out two, three, even five dubious characters whose shoulders were broad.

To thin the confusion, he began anew, starting with the town of Monticello, the nearest one. There lived Stefo, a thief, and Vincenzo, who prowled around the houses from which the men had been shipped to Germany. Suppose Stefo had been caught at night stealing a few rabbits, or a husband had come back all of a sudden and bumped into Vincenzo creeping into the bedroom.

Bastia stared again at the headless body and shrugged: to cut off a man's head meant that the murderer must have hated him for a long time, and both Stefo and Vincenzo were such petty offenders that the people of Monticello accepted them with tolerance, especially now that things all around were so much worse. And besides, Stefo and Vincenzo had never worn boots.

Bastia's eyes slid along the hills and stopped at the whitish spot of Castelnuovo. First he thought of Don Marco, the landowner and Mayor, who lived in a big house, half farm and half villa, and who once had told him to find a job that would be more decent than grinding a hurdy-gurdy. The thought of the Mayor brought back the thought of the police. It would be better to keep going, because if the patrol caught him here, the first thing they'd do would be to shove him into the rotten dampness of a cell and call him a suspect.

Still he hesitated: this Luigi was so helpless without a head that he felt an impulse of friendship. So he said aloud, "I'd like to take care of you, believe me, Luigi," and he wished he had a piece of gauze to lay over his neck, like on a slice of watermelon, to keep the flies away—those green flies which cluster wherever there is something open and about to spoil. He looked at the boots, and then at his own feet. "I'll let you keep them," he said, shoving a handful of berries into his mouth, "because you are my friend. Now we must go," he added, turning to Pasqualino.

Bastia gave a last look at the body. Suddenly he grabbed the cage and whispered to the parrot, "You see, the grass is green, green and clean."

"Why?" asked Pasqualino.

"That's the point," Bastia answered, starting slowly up the embankment.

At the approaches to Monticello he almost decided to skirt the town and go right on to the next one, four miles away. Monticello was too near to the body, Monticello had a carabinieri station, and behind his back he could sense a net being dragged over the road and beyond the road and catching stones, posts, berries, and the headless body, and finally his hurdy-gurdy, and dumping everything into jail.

But this was Friday. On Fridays he always visited Monticello; the townsfolk waited for him so they could buy the fortune cards and play the numbers at the weekly lottery. He could easily make fifty lire and eat a decent meal. With the meal he thought of a bottle of wine, and he pulled hard along the uphill street which led into Monticello's main square.

He stopped by the fountain, filled Pasqualino's cup, and showed him a handful of dried chestnuts, which was Pasqualino's pay for picking out a card and offering it to the customer. By the shadow of the lamppost he reckoned it was almost eight o'clock. A few minutes later the bells began to call for the second mass. He wound up the hurdy-gurdy and turned the pointer to a mazurka, glancing at the wine shop which was still closed, and then at the black hole of the post office which accepted lottery numbers and gave receipts for them.

On the point of letting the music pour out he reminded himself that it would irk the priest. The priest was the ecclesiastic authority. Every town had authorities who were only too glad to shout abuse at a man with a hurdy-gurdy. Once Bastia had dreamed of putting all the authorities together and letting them starve because there would be no peasants to grow food for them. And he would then play a mazurka for them.

After half an hour he grew impatient. His feet were burning and wine could make the heat even all over. He counted his money again. In his pocket he mashed a couple of berries and his mind went back to the murdered man and his eyes looked for the carabinieri station. Suddenly he realized that except for the killer he was the only one who knew about the crime.

"I have been chosen," he said to Pasqualino in a whisper.

"Why?"

"Because I'm the only one who's going to play the right numbers of the cabala."

Besides selling cards with personal advice and lucky numbers printed on them, Bastia kept the cabala for the use of his customers. The cabala was a book which had on its cover the picture of a

blindfolded girl stretched out on a golden quilt. Everything that existed, everything that could possibly happen or that could be dreamt of in the world, was listed there with its number. But since the numbers of the weekly lottery were only the first ninety, and since the things, the facts, and the dreams in the world were many more, each number in the cabala had several meanings. Bastia had studied them for years until he had memorized them all, and often he would impress the townsfolk by saying, "Remember that the harvest, the coffin, the skylark, and the pregnant woman have the same number," and then he would take the book and show that he never made a mistake.

He closed his eyes to conceal the numbers popping about inside his head. 84, which corresponded to *Man Beheaded,* appeared in a luminous halo. He was a little bit upset: that halo smelled of religion, and no saints had ever protected him. But then, Luigi wasn't a martyr; he had lost his head in some unsaintly way. Finally he solved it by accepting Luigi as his personal friend and the halo around 84 took on a special meaning of privilege. That was a sure number.

Still he had to guess the other two, because guessing three numbers correctly out of the five which were drawn every Saturday in the lottery at Rome meant winning three thousand five hundred times the stake.... Suppose I sell fifty lire's worth of fortune cards, I'll go and play the whole amount.. Three thousand five hundred times fifty is.. No figures came into his mind—he only saw a bed, and under the bed a jug of wine ...84 is a sure number.... Christ was crucified for all men, Luigi was beheaded for me alone... I must find the other two numbers, and there is a lot to work out, starting with the berries, and the day which is Friday, and the crime without blood...

He kept studying the numbers and the circumstances and the constellation of the month of May, and the association of the Moon with Uranus, which always brought unforseeable events; and in the meantime he pulled his hurdy-gurdy to the front of the church, watching the two doors that opened softly and let people out without any warning. At about nine o'clock five or six women came out, folded their black kerchiefs, and gathered around the hurdy-gurdy.

"I had a dream," one of them said. "Will you explain it to me?"

"Tell the beast to pick a lucky card for me," said another, holding out a two-lire bill.

"He's not a beast," Bastia grunted; and he showed Pasqualino the chestnuts. Pasqualino quickly thrust his beak among the leaflets.

"This advice is for a young girl,"

the woman complained.

"Pasqualino thinks you are young—parrots are used to living three hundred years," Bastia replied, grabbing the two-lire bill.

"In my dream I saw two baskets full of eggs."

The church door opened noiselessly and a man slid out. Bastia caught his quick turn to the left of the stairs and noted that he walked awkwardly.

"Was he at confession?" he asked one of the women. At that moment the man turned into a narrow street. "Do me a favor, watch my stuff, I'll be back in a minute," Bastia said hurriedly, "and don't fool around with Pasqualino, he pecks hard... Two baskets full of eggs is 2 for the baskets, 21 for eggs, and 33 for hunger..."

He ran through the square and walked into the narrow street. The man was fifty yards ahead of him. On his way to Monticello the man had certainly cut across the fields, because there were briars stuck to the cuffs of his trousers. Bastia quickened his pace. "He must have gone to pick blackberries just after I did," he said to himself, "then he went to confession."

He was on the point of calling to the man, but instead, a few yards away, he walked on tiptoe and suddenly caught up to him, slightly grazing his elbow. The man jerked, but Bastia continued to stare at the ground, keeping just abreast of him, swaying toward the ditch when the man swayed and measuring every step to his step. In a few seconds the man began to pant and then to cough. Bastia didn't raise his head, but all at once he stepped hard on the man's foot, and with the weight of his body shoved him against a mound of gravel. There the man sat down and with trembling hands took off his boots; then he stood up, jumped into the ditch, climbed over the other side of it, and started to run across the fields.

Bastia took off his jacket, picked up the boots and wrapped them in it, and with the bundle under his arm, walked back to the town.

When the women finally left with their dreams and their cards, Bastia gave Pasqualino his chestnuts and said angrily, "Men are cowards and imbeciles."

But Pasqualino didn't ask why, because he was busily using his beak and claws to peel his fruits, and Bastia felt disappointed. Pasqualino was his only partner, the only one who was always interested in hearing his opinions. That Pasqualino questioned him with unending why's was not an accident. Bastia had experienced the why's set forth by the police and had found out that every answer to them almost always turned out somehow to be a confession of guilt. Therefore he had learned to keep his mouth shut with the po-

lice and had taught the parrot the word—the almighty word.

"Men are cowards and imbeciles," Bastia repeated, when the last chestnut was swallowed. This time Pasqualino asked a soft why, and Bastia smiled: "Because they would steal a pair of boots from a living man who needed them and be proud of it; but when they steal them from a dead man who doesn't give a damn, then they are scared. And now let's go and get a glass of wine."

He pushed the hurdy-gurdy to the wine shop, went inside, and sat down.

The owner hastened to inform him that the price of a glass of wine was ten lire. "Everything is getting expensive," the owner commented, wiping the glass and setting it down on the table.

Bastia put a five-lire bill and a fortune card on the tray, and quickly gulped the wine.

"At least you could give out good numbers," grumbled the owner. "You remember when the airplanes dropped those bombs?"

"I remember: 14 bombs, 6 airplanes, 17 dead, and Salvatore's dog jumping on three legs."

"You gave out the wrong numbers—they never came out."

"I told the people that nothing right can come out of a war. Good numbers want justice."

"You know," said the owner of the wine shop, "no one understands you?"

Bastia pressed his hands to his forehead, to squeeze out the two other numbers which, with 84, would give him three thousand five hundred times fifty lire. It was hard to choose, his brain was getting numb. For example, take 35—*blackberries*. It was true that the blackberries had led him to the discovery of the beheaded body; but still, should more value be attributed to the things *around* a crime or to the things *inside* a crime? And which were the things inside the crime?

Take another example: *death without blood* was 49 in the cabala, but who knew the number for a bloodless wound? The grass was green, not a drop had fallen from the big gash in Luigi's neck.

Bastia's face became all wrinkled: from somewhere a thought had crept under his forehead and reaching his eyes had changed swiftly into an image: a hog hanging by the feet from the wall of a slaughterhouse. There was no doubt: in no other way could Luigi's body have been emptied of blood. This was butchering. And the number for *butchering* was 14.

"You're always talking to yourself," the owner said from behind the counter. "Do you understand yourself?"

But Bastia had already left. He was pulling the hurdy-gurdy across the square, watching the open windows of the carabinieri

station. Everything was quiet. The wife of the brigadiere was setting the table on the second floor; in the courtyard there were bicycles chained to the gate. All this meant that the news of the crime had not yet reached Monticello.

Inside the post office where they took the numbers and gave receipts for the weekly lottery, Bastia leaned against the wall. He was unhappy. He knew that all things in the world are numbers, but he knew also that numbers have rules like the stars, that they group together because of certain attractions which were hard to detect. He touched the bills wadded up in his pocket. 84 and 14... he didn't believe in them... they were easy; they might be good enough for the townsfolk who could only grasp the appearances of facts. No, he should wait, 84 and 14 lacked the link between them, the vital third number—the reason for the crime.

As he turned toward the door a man with a gray hat walked straight over to the counter and said something to the clerk. Bastia noticed that his accent was thick—he must be one of the Southerners who had fled when Sicily was first invaded. He lingered on the threshold and waited curiously to hear his words. But instead he heard the post-office clerk ask, "Did you say 84 and 14?"

"And 72," said the man, leaning over the counter.

Bastia pushed his hurdy-gurdy off the road till one wheel sat firmly in the ditch, locked the drawer into which he had stuffed Luigi's boots, and taking the parrot with him he slowly started down the slope.

The women were lined up on one side, the men opposite them, all of them behind the Mayor, the brigadiere, and the carabinieri. In the middle was Luigi's body. The odor was stronger—the flesh had begun to cook.

Bastia crouched on the ground, in back of the black skirts, and screened Pasqualino's cage with the front of his jacket. He had the clear feeling that the world of stars and numbers was present in the order with which everything around him had grouped together. The people were silent. They seemed to be one with the murdered man, maybe because he was pitiful, maybe because they thought he had been a good fellow. This was one group, a universe eclipsed by pity.

Then there was a second group, and it was like two planets circling around Luigi's body. The first planet was the man who had stolen Luigi's boots. Its light was pale, made of tremors of fear. The second planet was the man who had played 84, 14, and 72. It gave no light.

"Can you explain to me why this body happens to be on your property?" the brigadiere asked the

man who had stolen the boots. There was no answer. The Mayor whispered into the ear of the brigadiere, two carabinieri stepped to his side, then they sandwiched the man in between them and all three walked toward the town.

The authorities formed the third group. They were rings around a crime.

"We should have an ambulance to take it to the cemetery," the Mayor remarked.

"First I'd like a picture taken," the brigadiere said pointedly.

"No one would recognize him, anyway," Don Marco the Mayor replied, after a moment of reflection.

"But in Rome there is an office called the Anthropometric Police," the brigadiere said resentfully. Everyone looked at him with respect, and Don Marco's eyes became sulky.

"In Rome they do nothing!" he grumbled.

While the crowd was distracted by the quarrel of the authorities, Bastia crept along stealthily until he reached an opening between the first and second row of women. From there he had an unobstructed view of the face of the man with the gray hat. Why did he play 72? In the cabala 72 meant *bride, travel by coach, flying without wings,* and *being pursued by a horse.* Why on earth had he played 72?

Green flies were clustered in bunches on Luigi's neck. One, big as a beetle, kept chasing away the others, flying low and bumping them, to clear the spot over which it wanted to land. A peasant came bringing a blanket. At a gesture of the Mayor he laid it down on the body, lingering to feel the material as if he were going to buy it.

"Don't worry, you'll get it back," the Mayor told the peasant.

"Don't take it back, you'll never be able to sleep," someone warned.

"This winter you'll die of pneumonia," Bastia remarked, pulling him by the sleeve and winking.

The flies had flown away, but the big one came back, walked over the blanket, testing it here and there, and found a hole. Bastia followed it intently. All of a sudden the fly buzzed away and then Bastia saw it swoop down on the man with the gray hat. Green flies love rottenness, he thought. The fly climbed along the jacket, reached the shoulder, then turned back and disappeared into a fold at the elbow.

Now Bastia's vision was shut off by a pair of legs accompanied by a scabbard. He crawled back, went all around the bushes to avoid being noticed by the authorities, and stopped next to the man with the gray hat. He looked at his shoes. They were nasty shoes, almost yellow. He touched the man lightly, as if he wanted to speak to him; but at that moment the crowd

broke up to let two men pass through with a stretcher. The women crossed themselves.

The man with the gray hat shuffled back, treading on Bastia's foot. Bastia looked up at his face. There was a twitch running over his lips, like ripples over the skin of a horse. The man had hooked his thumbs under the armpits of his vest. His hands lay flat on his breast, showing thick nails bordered with dark strips. The big green fly had landed on the middle finger and was seesawing on the nail, alternately bending forward to taste it and then rocking back to rub its feet together, because, caked under the nail, was dried blood.

When the carabinieri lifted the blanket to place the body on the stretcher, even the Mayor stopped giving orders. Bastia saw the green fly hovering frenziedly over the glaring gash; he felt sorry for those sturdy shoulders which ended in nothing. He put the cage on the ground and took off his hat.

Then the stretcher was carried away, and the entire crowd followed it down the road. The man with the gray hat walked alone toward the hills.

"Who's that fellow?" Bastia asked a woman, starting to pull his hurdy-gurdy.

"They say he has opened a butcher shop somewhere in the valley. He is a butcher, that much I know."

Bastia scratched his ear. Were things getting silly or were they getting straight?

Saturday came, and then Sunday and Monday. On Monday night, in the main square of Monticello, the people were gathered in front of the post office. Soon the numbers for this week's lottery would be pasted in the window. And there was much impatience—every player had had to wait three long days to know his luck, now that the telephone line had been torn down by the spring offensive and the numbers had to come from Rome on the bus which ran only twice a week.

In the center of the square, near the fountain, Bastia was sitting on the handle of his hurdy-gurdy, swinging Pasqualino's cage from left to right. From time to time he would answer the questions of the women, or listen to their chattering. But his mind was pursuing intricate combinations of thoughts, and several times his eyes looked high over the church belfry where Cassiopeia would shine soon, with her five stars seeming to form a cardinal's hat.

"Linda's daughter saw the head on top of a tree," a woman said. "She ran home and her mother took her to church."

"Did they find the head?" asked Bastia, startled.

"No, when the police arrived, it had disappeared."

"It was her sick stomach," the owner of the wine shop intervened. "The pharmacist explained it, he is a learned man. You see, he said that children have the special power of indigestion."

"You mean suggestion," Bastia said.

"What?"

The owner of the wine shop turned to the women, who were listening intently, and waved his hand in a gesture of pity and contempt.

"What numbers did you get out of the murder?" the owner asked, lifting his chin challengingly.

"The numbers, the numbers!" someone called out. The crowd rushed over to the post office. Only Bastia remained seated, but he strained his eyes to see, and repeated to himself: 84, 14, 72. The sun struck just above the window and made it difficult to peer through the deep shadow below. Bastia unhooked Pasqualino's cage and walked, head down, toward the post office. When he reached the window, he raised his head with a jerk.

None of the easy numbers had been drawn.

"You are no good," a voice said behind his back. It was the woman who had dreamed of two baskets of eggs.

"And your fortune cards are fakes," another added.

The wine shop owner blocked his way. The people closed in.

"Listen," he said, "you paid half price for my wine and gave me good numbers. Good numbers—bah! Give me my five lire, you cheat!"

"You always bring bad luck," commented an old man. "The day you were here the planes came and my house was bombed out."

Bastia grabbed the handles of the hurdy-gurdy, slung the strap across his shoulder, and started down the hill that led out of town. On the main road he gathered his strength and pushed on toward a village three miles away. The shadow was climbing swiftly to the hilltops. One by one the farmhouses, left behind by the sun, sprang white upon the earth. Bastia kept looking at the fugitive light. Always, as night found him on the road, the image of a jug of wine under a bed with a mattress would become so haunting as to lose all sense of reality.

Once, when it was harvest time, he was so thirsty and tired that he had seen in the contours of jug and bed a new constellation, on the left side of Orion. But now he was not thinking of wine and rest. After a while he slowed down and then came to a stop. There was the embankment and the blackberry bushes behind which the headless body of Luigi had lain. There the authorities had picked up the farmer who owned that piece of land and had dumped him into jail. The people of Mon-

ticello wanted good numbers for the crime, not justice for the crime.

He turned to Pasqualino. "So you don't care to listen to me, either? You haven't spoken all day long."

The parrot squinted a couple of times. His pupils were opaque, they no longer showed their round funny bewilderment. Bastia resumed pulling the hurdy-gurdy.

"Remember that I brought you up," he went on. "You couldn't even crack an almond when I first met you. Now I am only asking you to speak, to ask me why—it helps me to grasp the ideas... All right, I'll tell you again: the easy numbers don't group together. Wait, first of all you must understand that the perfect group is three."

He stopped pulling and sat down on the handle of the hurdy-gurdy, waiting for Pasqualino's question. He wanted very badly to explain to him the recurrence of three in all the patterns he had ever worked out: happiness was made of bread, bed, and peace; bread was made of flour, water, and yeast; bed was made of mattress, pillow, and sheets; peace was made of wine, women, and dreams.

"You see, Pasqualino," he said, "now I have a group of two: Luigi and the butcher. Between them there is an attraction, but an attraction is not a link." He paused for a few seconds. "Ask me why, Pasqualino."

The parrot rocked slowly along the perch.

"Ask me why," Bastia said again, growing impatient.

Pasqualino blinked and said nothing.

"Yesterday I had thirty five lire and I spent thirty of them to buy chestnuts for you! Listen to me, and answer me, or I swear I'll starve you to death!"

He opened the drawer, took out half a loaf of dark bread, the cabala, Luigi's boots which he would wear only in the winter, and finally the sock filled with Pasqualino's chestnuts. He piled everything on the board between the handles of the hurdy-gurdy, next to the cage, and drew out a handful of chestnuts.

"See, look! You rascal... Aren't they sweet and crunchy?"

Pasqualino thrust his head between the bars, puffed up his neck, stretched it out to reach the chestnuts, but one of the boots was in his way; angrily he riffled his feathers, pecked at the sole, then with beak and claw he gripped the boot and instead of pushing it away, dragged it right against the cage.

"Now you are stuck!" Bastia laughed. "What will you do? Eat the leather?"

Pasqualino was nibbling at the boot. He had painstakingly lifted his body, clutching the bars with both claws, and every second he would slide down a little, pull his

body up again and resume nibbling, stubbornly feeling along the thick edge of the sole before biting it. Bastia saw Pasqualino getting hold of a tiny thing, a corner of some paper, and then pulling, pulling, until a small oblong card came out.

"Give it to me," he whispered.

On the card there was a flag and these words:

The bearer of this card is authorized by the Committee of National Liberation to requisition cattle in behalf of the Partisan Brigades. Payment will be made as soon as a free government is established.

Bastia's face became all wrinkled. He scratched his ear; he felt a great confusion inside his head. But he caught Pasqualino's look, and it was sad and imploring.

"Here, here," he stammered, "eat your chestnuts, eat them all.. You are a good fellow, a great fellow... I promise you one day I'll be rich, I promise. Then I'll buy you real peanuts. You remember that professor who told us that your food should be peanuts? But they are too expensive, they come from abroad... You've never seen them... How can I describe them to you? They look like butterfly cocoons—hunchback butterflies, Pasqualino."

That Friday the people of Monticello waited long hours for Bastia and his fortune cards. But Bastia never showed up. In a wake of mazurkas and waltzes the hurdy-gurdy had jolted through the streets of all the towns in the valley and the surrounding hills, as far as Castelnuovo, where it was now resting in front of a butcher shop.

"Don't put stones into candy wrappers or Pasqualino will get mad," Bastia was warning a gang of children.

For one hour he had been watching the shop, and the butcher was never alone. At this moment only one customer was left, but she was still debating whether it was more economical to buy the skinny chicken she held by the feet or the chunk of beef the butcher was showing her. Bastia waved his hand to attract her attention.

"The beef has no bones," he advised her.

The woman bought the chicken and went away. Bastia released the catch, waited until the first notes of a tango sprang from the hurdy-gurdy, and then hurried into the shop.

"Good morning," he said as he entered. "Would you be interested in three good numbers?... I'm sorry to disturb you, but this is a real bargain. Three brand-new numbers... You can have them for just a piece of meat."

The butcher wiped his face with the apron. It seemed to Bastia that he was trying to hide behind it, it took him so long.

"I bet you've never heard about American numbers, have you? . No, I suppose not. You see, numbers are drawn from lucky stars—that's why Americans are so rich: their sky has more stars than ours."

The butcher turned toward the wall, lifted a quarter of beef from one of the huge hooks, and slammed it down on the marble counter. But Bastia wasn't impressed. He reached out and flipped a bunch of fortune cards under his nose.

"Look, I'm going to tear them to pieces," he announced. "They are no good now that I've learned the American numbers." And he tore up the cards and scattered the pieces over the floor. "In America they have professors, big professors who study the numbers.. You think you know the number for Death and the one for the Moon? ... Ha, ha, just remember that both of them are wrong!"

Bastia dug into his pocket and pulled out a bunch of papers tied with a shoelace. He began to look through them. He was very tense; now he could feel the butcher's black pupils on the tips of his fingers every time he turned a page.

'Wait, I'll show you ... Here it is: Carolina, the widow who lives down in the valley. A fine woman, I say, and she believes in the changing world. 'Carolina, try the American numbers,' I told her, and she put twenty lire on them—twenty lire, mind you, and she picks rags for a living ... Excuse me, I have to go and wind up my machine."

Bastia backed out of the door into the street and when the tango ended he moved the pointer to a mazurka, wound up the spring, and returned to the shop, carrying Pasqualino in his cage.

"Here is Pasqualino," he announced, "And you, what's your name?"

"Mastrantonio," the butcher answered sharply.

"Pasqualino, meet my friend Mastrantonio ... Did you see him nod? He's a really well-behaved parrot, and he's smart, too. Do you know how many languages he can speak?"

"What about that woman?" the butcher asked, jerking his apron.

"Woman? Oh, Carolina."

"Yes, Carolina."

"I told you she played twenty lire on the American numbers."

"And?"

Bastia sat down on a stool and placed the cage on the floor.

"Now she's in Rome," he sighed; and seeing that Mastrantonio was about to explode he added promptly, "There wasn't enough money at the post office to pay her three thousand five hundred times twenty lire."

"You mean—she won?"

"She promised me a present."

"How did she win? What did you tell her?"

"I told her: 'Carolina, give me your book of numbers—I'll correct them. These are brand-new, they are rich, they come from America.' Carolina has a brother in America, he has two automobiles."

Mastrantonio stepped down from behind the high counter, took off his apron, and sat down opposite Bastia. For a while he punched the palm of his left hand with his right fist; then he stopped, opened his mouth, and again he punched his hand, harder and harder. Bastia quietly continued to scratch Pasqualino under the soft feathers of his chest, attentive as ever, waiting for the words Mastrantonio was going to speak.

"Write down these new numbers for me too," Mastrantonio said in one breath.

"First you'll give me a couple of pounds of meat," Bastia replied with a smile.

The butcher rushed behind the counter, took a knife, and started to cut.

"You forgot to give me the book," Bastia reminded him. "How do you expect me to correct the numbers?"

"You swear that woman Carolina—"

"I swear."

Mastrantonio wrapped up the meat in a piece of newspaper and went through the door at the rear of the shop. He came out with a book and handed it to Bastia, holding the meat behind his back.

"First write down the new numbers," he said.

Bastia glanced at the cover: the picture on it was not the blindfolded girl stretched out on a golden quilt; it was a kind of trumpet, overflowing with fruits and jewels.

"I'll only correct a few of them to start... You didn't even weigh the meat. Is it lean or fat? I don't like fat meat."

Bastia's ears heard something about beggars who shouldn't be so particular. His eyes seemed to follow the up-and-down motion of the scale. His fingers kept leafing unobtrusively through the book and his mind went on repeating: Does this cabala give different meanings for the numbers? Did Mastrantonio play 72 as the middle link of the crime?

When the butcher told him that stripped of all the fat, the meat still weighed more than two pounds, Bastia nodded in approval and turned to the page where the column started with 70.

"I have to go and lock up my hurdy-gurdy," he said. "Wait just a minute."

He turned his back to the butcher, put the open book on the stool, and bent to pick up Pasqualino's cage. Quick as a shot he read: 72 —*the bride, traveling by coach, the assassin.*

Out in the street he said to Pasqualino, "Will you ever get tired of chestnuts?"

"Why?"

"Because 72 doesn't add up to anything—it doesn't even add up to peanuts."

Coming back into the shop he saw the butcher sitting on the low stool, his thumbs hooked under the armpits of his vest, his dark eyes half shut, with an air of waiting for something to happen.

"Here is a pencil—"

But Bastia didn't hear. He began to pace up and down the narrow passage which led to the door; then he turned abruptly and said, "I've thought it over; I'm not going to give you the new numbers."

"What?"

"You can keep your meat. You don't believe in the order of the world, you are like the people of Monticello."

"I'm from Rispoli," Mastrantonio replied, "It's down South, near the Straits."

"North or South, people are all the same when they're fools." Bastia put the cage on the counter and clapped his hands in a gesture of discouragement. "Do you know Cassiopeia?"

"Where does she live?"

"Tonight she'll be on top of the belfry at Monticello—don't stare at me!" Bastia screamed so unexpectedly that the butcher became pale. "I'm not crazy, I can name every star in the sky! The people of Monticello make fun of me, they don't listen to me, and so now they've lost the greatest chance of their lives ... Tell it to him, Pasqualino!"

"Why?"

The butcher snapped up from the stool. "Who said why?"

"You did."

"I did not!"

"Then it was the parrot, who cares! ... Let me get up on this counter, I was born to sit on marble ... Oh, how Cassiopeia was shining, that sweet and lucky Cassiopeia! And the people of Monticello didn't realize that their great day had come, because they watch the sky only for rain or snow, and never for the portentous signs of the stars. The rules of numbers are drawn from the stars ... Below Cassiopeia lay the body of a man whose head had been chopped off ..."

Bastia slid promptly from the counter. An old lady entered the shop and asked for a pound of giblets.

"Giblets?"

"Yes, giblets."

"Giblets," Mastrantonio repeated stupidly.

"I'm sorry, I just bought the last of them," Bastia explained. "Good day, Madam ... And the people of Monticello," he resumed as soon as the lady was out of sight, "those morons played the numbers for the beheaded man, the butchering, and the assassin"—he banged his chest and spat on the floor—"without thinking that any man could be a

beheaded man whose body had been strung up by the feet, and that any other man who had got rid of a head could be an assassin! Imbeciles! The rule of Cassiopeia says that the important numbers don't show, that what counts is *what's missing,* and that only when everything is in its place, with its name and its reason, so that no confusion is possible—only *then* do the right numbers group together, bright as the first stars after sunset!"

He put his foot on the stool and climbed up on the counter again, hugging Pasqualino's cage with one arm. "And now tell me, Mastrantonio: What was missing there? Can't you see? The head was missing, the head wasn't there, the head was important! ... And what else was missing? The reason for the killing wasn't there, the reason was missing, the reason was important! ... But something else wasn't there: justice was missing, justice wasn't there, and justice is the most important of all—because justice has no number for itself—*it is what links the other numbers together!*"

A twitch was running over Mastrantonio's lips. Before Bastia could continue, he jumped up and kicked the stool, shouting, "Get out! You have green eyes, you bring bad luck—get out!"

"First, I'd like to tell you the number I found," Bastia said calmly, picking up the cage. "Then I'll go. Write it down if you want to ...55. It's the reason for the crime."

"What's 55?" the butcher snapped, and his pupils were small and nasty.

"Cattle."

Mastrantonio sat down.

"Who told you?"

"Pasqualino."

"Get out, you and your crazy bird! Get out, get out!"

"All right, I'll go. But don't say that Pasqualino is crazy—he has been living for more than two hundred years, he spots the truth wherever it is, he never cracks an empty shell!" Bastia slid off the counter. "All right, remember the rule of Cassiopeia. Ah, I almost forgot," he added from the threshold, "The rule says also that when you find one of the missing things it will lead you to another one. I think I've found the second number. Good day, Mastrantonio."

The butcher grabbed Bastia by the arm and pulled him back.

"Is he possessed?" he muttered pointing at the parrot.

"He was blessed by the bishop of his town," Bastia answered gravely. "He is like a human being, except that he doesn't lie."

"You swear?"

"I swear."

"Otherwise I'll choke him. Was it he who told you the second number?"

"May I sit here? Thank you. I love marble, it's cool and smooth,"

Bastia remarked, climbing back onto the counter, "You can follow its veins all the way through, like thoughts in a brain... Look here: I'll start from this black spot and I'll show you. Here is cattle. Now ask yourself: Who owns cattle? Let's see... move your finger along this streak—that's a thought winding into your brain—and what do you find at the end of it? You find a peasant—a peasant owns cattle, right?

"Now, put your finger down again and follow this second streak, that's right—and when you reach the end what do you have? You have a butcher—a butcher owns cattle too. See how it works? And now switch to the third streak, this yellow one that's as straight as a dart, and let your finger run along it until you meet a landowner—a landowner owns cattle."

Bastia paused, his eyes on Mastrantonio's finger. He saw the butcher's finger stiffen, and again the twitch ran over Mastrantonio's lips. Then Bastia rapped his forehead lightly with his knuckles.

"Do you see how a brain can work?" he said. "So, where are we? A landowner owns cattle, or a peasant, or a butcher. But here we are stuck, because if someone steals ten cows from a landowner, or a single pig from a peasant, or one quarter of beef from a butcher, the hatred is the same and a man could be killed for it. So we still don't know who the killer is. But the rule of Cassiopeia says also that when you find one of the missing things it will always lead to another.

"So let's think together: What kind of man would steal cattle? He might be a thief, and then the peasant, the landowner, or the butcher might kill him. But if he were just a thief would they kill him and chop off his head? Would they be afraid to have people see the face of a thief? No, they wouldn't. So the man who was killed had stolen cattle, but he was not a thief. And so there is only one possibility for the second number: it's the only clean, lucky number that the war brought us: 11, *the partisan*... Partisans would take away cattle to be able to carry on the fight in the mountains, but they are not thieves."

Slowly Mastrantonio's finger slid back along the yellow streak on the marble. "If you have the third number," he stammered, "will they come out for sure? Will you win a million lire?"

"No, by God, no," Bastia sighed, getting off the counter. "You are as dumb as the people of Monticello. The head is missing, and the killer is missing, and justice is missing. Do I have to repeat it all over again?"

"What should I do?" the butcher asked; and tiny bubbles crept from underneath his tongue.

"Listen, Mastrantonio, one thing

leads to another. I told you! Look for the head—the head may show the killer ... Do you remember what happened to John the Baptist? A woman became crazy with love for him, and he was cold as ice. She felt so terribly insulted that she chopped his head off. So, if you had found the head of John the Baptist, you could have easily guessed who the killer was."

"And if—if I don't find the head?"

"If you don't find the head—look for the killer." Bastia's green eyes had become two narrow slits. "One thing leads to the other—the head shows the killer, the killer shows the head. Then there will be justice, and justice will link the numbers together and give you a million lire. Now I must go, it's getting late."

"Wait, wait, take your meat!"

"Keep it," Bastia replied, stepping out into the street, "You are as dumb as the people of Monticello."

He turned back and gave him a hard look. "This is your chance, Mastrantonio. Don't be a fool!"

Two days later a farmer, dripping with sweat and covered with dust, entered the main square of Monticello. He was carrying a basket, his outstretched arm holding it carefully away from his body, as if he were taking a mangy dog to the veterinary. A gang of children were walking at his side, storming him with questions; and the farmer kept quickening his pace and saying no at every step, and once he even made a gesture as though to kick a little girl, when she tried to put her hand inside the basket. When he reached the carabinieri station, he called out, "Brigadiere, brigadiere, come down, hurry, hurry!"

In shops and houses people heard him call. In a minute the shops and houses were empty. The crowd saw him in the room on the main floor, the basket on the table and the brigadiere closing the shutters of the window, and so they swarmed in, filled the corridor, and pushed the door open.

"Everyone out!" the brigadiere shouted.

No one moved.

"Then keep quiet!"

Someone sneaked over to the table and screamed, "The head, the head!"

The scream echoed through the corridor and out into the square. The people inside the room moved slowly, the women murmuring prayers, the men coughing awkwardly, all staring at the basket, at the bundle in the basket, wrapped in newspapers on which they could read, *The Anzio Landing,* and nothing else, because it was all splattered and wrinkled, and here and there it was torn and black hair showed through.

"You say you found it just above the embankment," the brigadiere

said. "Let's see... You, Pirotta, go to the Town Hall and call the Mayor. He was so sure the head would never show up. He wanted to make a bet with me. He certainly doesn't understand the mechanics of criminal psychology!"

The people looked at the brigadiere respectfully. The carabiniere came back and said that the Mayor was not in his office.

"Then we will examine it now," the brigadiere decided. "Give me a pair of scissors."

He began to cut away the newspaper. A green fly entered the room through the window and stopped, hanging in the air just above the basket. The brigadiere cut the paper round and round, laid down the scissors, rolled up his shirt sleeves, and pulled the wrappings away with one jerk. With his other hand he lifted up the head of the Mayor.

The following Monday, at about sunset, the people of Monticello were gathered in the square. They were waiting for the numbers to be pasted in the window and were speaking excitedly about the terrible things which had happened. They were anxious to know the truth, but the truth was a secret; the brigadiere and the carabinieri were deaf and dumb, and the Chief of Police who had come from the city with two special agents and a doctor had declared that the work of justice couldn't be hampered by unsolicited statements. Only the priest and the pharmacist had been admitted into the narrow circle of the authorities.

The people of Monticello glanced from time to time at the balcony of the Town Hall, where the authorities were sitting, and then at the White Horse Inn, where a supper had been ordered for them, in the small secluded room upstairs.

"A clear case of homicidal mania," the doctor was saying to the brigadiere. "What did that butcher Mastrantonio tell you when you showed him the basket and the knife you found near Don Marco's body? He explained to you, as though it were the most natural thing in the world, that he needed the head, that the Mayor refused to tell him where the head was, so he just decided that the head of the Mayor was the thing, because it would show the killer... There is a tragic boastfulness in these maniacs, they love to horrify their audience."

"Allow me to say," the pharmacist interrupted, "that superstition —the numbers he mentioned, and the stars... The agent told us that the crowd in the shop asked him to give them the numbers—you see, they are all crazy for numbers, they didn't want him to be taken away before he could give them the numbers."

"As far as I'm concerned," the brigadiere smiled humbly, "it's a

case of sex perversion. When I was in Rome at the school of criminology I read the works of an Englishman who... Anyway, there are people who chop heads off chickens or ducks to have.." He threw a glance at the priest who was listening attentively, and added, "You understand."

In the farthest corner of the the square Bastia was sitting on the handle of his hurdy-gurdy, talking softly to Pasqualino. "Take a look at the authorities," he was saying, "I bet they're swearing that the Mayor was a nice man, a great soul. Do you remember how many times I spat when I passed his villa? There were always German cars in front of his villa, he was entertaining those bastards... Oh, the authorities don't believe the story that Mastrantonio tried to tell them on his way to jail. It's so easy not to believe a scoundrel like Mastrantonio who used to go around telling the farmers that the Mayor would keep their cattle in his barn, and protect it from the Germans with his own authority!"

On the balcony the Chief of Police looked at the brigadiere with severity and put an end to his description of other sexual perversions.

"When I make my report to Rome," the Chief announced solemnly, "I shall stress the fact that there is a deliberate attempt in this case to distort a common crime into a political reprisal, and to exploit the favor—whether it be right or wrong is not for me to judge —which the partisans enjoy. In fact, everyone knows that the Mayor—and I may say, all of us—have always regarded the partisans with favor..."

"Pay attention, Pasqualino, instead of trying to scratch your back," Bastia said impatiently. "Mastrantonio slaughtered the cattle and everything was beautifully arranged for the Germans to arrive in the middle of the night and pretend to be looting the countryside, so that the Mayor would appear to be a victim. They had offered him more than one million lire for that cattle. But that night the partisans showed up first, took the cattle, and left only a card for a receipt. The Germans could pay millions with the money taken from our people, but the partisans couldn't pay, you understand?"

"What a fantastic concoction of lies!" the Chief of Police was commenting, after having listened to the written report which the agent had prepared, "It is simply preposterous to make the Mayor kill a partisan who has escaped from the Germans, when the Mayor himself was supporting the families of those other three partisans who had been executed!"

"But you see, Pasqualino," Bastia went on, "the Mayor only pretended to help the partisans. He promised to send them other food,

to any locality they choose, as long as it was far from his farm, because certainly the Germans were suspicious. And when everything was planned and the night came to deliver the food, the barn where the partisans were waiting was surrounded by the Germans. Three partisans were killed and buried, but nobody suspected that a fourth one had escaped. That one was Luigi. Luigi came back and wanted to know why.... The Mayor killed him, and for the butchering he called Mastrantonio, who was already his accomplice in robbing the peasants of their cattle. The Mayor got rid of the head, Mastrantonio loaded the body on his cart, among quarters of beef, and later rolled it down the embarkment."

"Supper must be ready," the Chief of Police was saying, "I can smell the roast ... Have I made myself clear? No one can possibly make a coherent story out of the butcher's statements. This incoherence justifies our only—I insist, our only—possible deduction: that this Mastrantonio is guilty of both crimes and that he is mentally deficient."

"But wait a minute," said the brigadiere, "I forgot to tell you something." He smiled and was on the brink of saying that the Mayor had shown a queer cocksuredness in betting that the head would never be found; but at the same time he remembered that his forthcoming promotion depended on a relative of the Mayor; so he stopped talking and meekly followed the Chief of Police down the stairs.

Bastia shoved his finger between the bars of the cage and let Pasqualino perch on it—such a gentle, good little creature.

"Yes, Pasqualino," he whispered, "if Mastrantonio had gone to look for justice at the police station he would merely have been thrown into jail as a murderer and slanderer who starved his farmhands and they protect each other, and if Don Marco were still alive they would certainly give him a banquet—yes, even now. And so I had to teach Mastrantonio the rule of Cassiopeia, I had to confuse him into linking the numbers together with his own hands. But don't think I'm so smart—it was you who gave me the real hint.

"When you picked up Luigi's Partisan Card a thought crossed the sky, quick and clear as a shooting star: Don Marco, the landowner who starved his farmhands and entertained the Germans, and then rushed to welcome the Americans and made that speech for the liberation, and began to send money to the families of those three partisans who had been killed and buried ... Why should such a bastard send money to the partisans' families? Only if he were scared!

"So the attractions that keep the world moving started to work again, and the Mayor Don Marco

had to be added to Luigi and the butcher. The butcher lived in Castelnuovo, the same town in which the Mayor had his estate, and probably he did his slaughtering for him. That's why I went to see Mastrantonio's cabala book—I was sure 72 was the Mayor. But the cabala didn't tell me anything; I had to use my own judgment.

"You remember when I asked Mastrantonio to trace the streaks on the marble? Well, when I explained that the yellow steak led to a landowner, his finger became stiff—it stopped moving as suddenly as though it were stuck in a splotch of tar. Then I had no more doubts, and I forced the rule of Cassiopeia into his brain: The head shows the killer, the killer shows the head....I meant the head of Luigi, but anyway no other head could have shown the killer better than the head of Don Marco himself."

Bastia opened the drawer of his hurdy-gurdy and patted Luigi's boots with sympathy. Then he gave Pasqualino a chestnut, and he put three in his mouth, because no one had bought his fortune cards and he was broke again. But he had seen Cassiopeia peeping above the belfry in the first shadow of night, and he was dreaming of a jug of wine and a bed. The right numbers would come up, now that justice was done: 15, *the patriot*—41, *the traitor*—67, *the accomplice*. Three thousand five hundred times twenty lire...He was calm and confident.

When the people rushed to the window of the post office, Bastia pushed his hurdy-gurdy through the square, climbed onto the handle, and strained his eyes to see. Not one of his three numbers had been drawn.

He felt so weak that he almost dropped to the ground. Slowly an idea began to creep behind his forehead. But it was too difficult to be told in words; he pointed at the sky and drew a circle with a sweep of his arm, an all-embracing circle.

"You see, Pasqualino," he said, "there are rules for the numbers and there are rules for the stars.. There are so many things in the universe, more than the cabala can list, and all of them turn with the sky and group together in constantly new patterns.....If a man could know the rules of the universe, he wouldn't be playing the lottery."

"Why?" Pasqualino asked.

***from* FRANCE**

a *NEW* Inspector Maigret story by

GEORGES SIMENON

first publication in the United States

A case so puzzling that Maigret "could not make up his mind to take action" ... Was it because of Mr. Monday, the old beggar "shuffling along with a calm philosophical air, smiling at life, tasting its minutes, treasuring every crumb"?—so different from the moody, pessimistic Inspector himself! Or was it the perplexing business of the two weekly eclairs from the Bigoreau patisserie? One of Inspector Maigret's oddest cases ....

INSPECTOR MAIGRET HESITATES

by GEORGES SIMENON

INSPECTOR MAIGRET STOOD STILL for a moment in front of the black-iron railings separating him from the garden. The enamel plate bore the number 47B.

It was five o'clock in the evening, and totally dark. Behind him a branch of the Seine flowed sullenly round the long unfrequented island of Puteaux, with its waste ground, coppices, and tall poplars.

In front of him, by way of contrast, on the other side of the railings was a small modern property of Neuilly, the Bois de Boulogne district, all comfort and elegance, and, just now, carpeted with autumn leaves.

Number 47B stood at the corner of the Boulevard de la Seine and the Rue Maxime-Baes. Lights were on in the second-floor rooms, and Maigret, standing with hunched shoulders under the rain, decided to press the electric bell set in the garden gate.

It is always embarrassing to dis-

turb a quiet house, particularly on a winter's evening, when it is snugly self-contained and full of intimate warmth, and especially when the intruder has come from Police Headquarters with his pockets full of unpleasant documents.

A light appeared on the ground floor, the front door opened, and a manservant peered out, trying to see the visitor before crossing the garden in the rain.

"What is it?" he asked through the railings.

"Dr. Barion, please?"

Maigret could see that hall of the house was elegant, so he automatically stuffed his pipe into his pocket.

"Who shall I say?"

"You must be Martin Vignolet, the chauffeur?" asked the Inspector, to the great surprise of his questioner.

At the same time Maigret slipped his visiting card into an envelope, which he sealed.

Vignolet was a rawboned, thick-haired fellow of between forty-five and fifty, quite clearly a countryman.

He went up to the first floor and came back a few minutes later.

Maigret followed him up, past a child's stroller.

"Come in, won't you?" said Dr. Armand Barion, opening the door of his consulting room.

He had the pale face and dark-ringed eyes of a man who has not slept for several nights.

As Maigret was about to speak he caught the sound of children's voices at play, coming from the ground floor ...

Even before he went into the house the Inspector had already known what the household consisted of.

Dr. Barion, a specialist in tuberculosis, and a former student of Laennec Hospital, had been living at Neuilly only three years, and, while taking private patients, he still carried on his laboratory research.

He was married, with three children—a boy of seven, a girl of five, and a baby of a few months, whose stroller Maigret had noticed.

The domestic staff consisted of Martin Vignolet, who was both chauffeur and manservant, his wife Eugenie the cook, and finally—until three weeks ago—an eighteen-year-old Breton girl, Olga Boulanger ...

"I suppose you know what I have come about, Doctor? As a result of the post-mortem, Miss Boulanger's parents, on their lawyer's advice, have decided to bring an action, and it is my duty .. "

His whole attitude seemed to express apology and, in fact, Maigret felt a certain reluctance at tackling this case.

Three weeks before, Olga Boulanger had died in a rather mysterious way, but the doctor who

was called in had, nevertheless, signed the death certificate.

The girl's parents had come up from Brittany for the funeral, a pair of typical hard, wary countryfolk, and they had discovered, heaven knows how, that their daughter was four months pregnant.

Somehow they had got in touch with Barthet, one of the most ruthless of lawyers. And on his advice, a week later, they had demanded the exhumation and an autopsy of the body.

"I've got the report with me," Maigret sighed, with a gesture toward his pocket.

"You needn't bother! I know all about it, particularly as I got permission to assist the police surgeon."

The doctor was calm, although he looked weary and even feverish. Dressed in his lab coat, he stood with his face under the light, looking Maigret in the eyes without trying to avert his own.

"Of course I was expecting you, Inspector."

A photograph of his wife stood on his desk in a silver frame, a pretty young woman of barely thirty, with a delicate appearance.

"Since you've got Dr. Paul's report with you, you must be aware that we found the poor girl's intestine riddled with minute perforations which must have induced rapid blood poisoning. You know, too, that after intensive research we succeeded in determining the cause of these perforations, which had puzzled my learned colleague and myself.

"It had puzzled us so much that we felt bound to appeal for help to a Colonial doctor to whom we owe the answer to the riddle."

Maigret was nodding restlessly and Barion seemed to guess what he wanted, for he broke off to say, "Please smoke, by all means. I don't smoke myself, for my patients are mostly children. A cigar? No? Then I'll go on.

"The method used to kill my maid—for there's no question that she was killed—is current, so it seems, in Malaya and the New Hebrides. The victim is induced to swallow a certain quantity of those fine bristles, as sharp as needles, that are found on some ears of grain, such as rye.

"These bristles remain in the intestine, the walls of which they gradually pierce, which inevitably causes—"

"Excuse me." Maigret sighed. "The post-mortem also confirmed that Olga Boulanger was four months pregnant. Is she known to have associated with anyone?"

"No. She seldom if ever went out. She was a rather awkward little thing with a freckled face . . ."

And the doctor hurriedly went back to his story.

"I must confess, Inspector, that

since that post-mortem ten days ago I've been entirely taken up by this business. I've no ill-feeling toward the girl's parents, who are simple people and who obviously consider me responsible.

"But it would be an absolute tragedy for me if I did not succeed in finding out the truth. Fortunately, I've already done so to some extent."

Maigret found it hard to conceal his surprise. He had come to investigate a problem, only to find himself confronted, so to speak, with a ready-made investigation and faced by a calm, clear-headed man making a full statement.

"What day is it today?" said the doctor. "Thursday? Well, since last Monday, Inspector, I've had material proof that poor Olga was not the intended victim.

"How did I find out? In the simplest possible way. I had to discover in what article of food she could have swallowed the rye bristles. As she would never have thought of killing herself, particularly in such an unusual and extremely painful way, clearly some outside cause was indicated."

"Do you think perhaps your chauffeur Martin was involved with her?"

"He was. I know it for a fact," agreed Dr. Barion. "I questioned him on the subject and he eventually admitted it."

"Has he ever lived in the colonies?"

"Only in Algeria. But I can assure you right away that you're on the wrong track.

"Patiently, with the help of my wife and the cook, I drew up a list of all the foodstuffs we have had in the house lately and I even analyzed some of them.

"On Monday, when I had almost given up hope of getting any results, as I was sitting here in the consulting room my attention was caught by the sound of footsteps on the gravel and I saw an old man making his way toward the kitchen, as if he were a familiar visitor.

"It was old Mr. Monday, as we call him, whom I'd quite forgotten about."

"Mr. Monday?" echoed Maigret with a smile of amusement.

"It's the children's name for him because he comes every Monday. He's a beggar of the old-fashioned sort, clean and respectable, who goes on a different round every day.

"Here, it's on Monday. And it has gradually become a tradition with us to keep a whole meal ready for him, and it's always the same meal, for on Mondays we have chicken with rice, and he sits quietly in the kitchen eating his share.

"He amuses the children who go and chat to him.

"I had already noticed some time ago that he used to give each of them one of those cream

cakes they call eclairs, and I rather objected ..."

Maigret, who had been sitting still for too long, got up, and the doctor went on, "You know the way tradesmen have of giving presents out of their stock to the poor rather than money. I suspected that these eclairs came from a local pastry cook's and were probably stale. I said nothing to the old man for fear of hurting his feelings, but I told my boy and girl not to touch the eclairs."

"And the maid ate them instead?"

"Most probably."

"And it was in these eclairs ...?"

The doctor said, "This week Mr. Monday came as usual with his two eclairs wrapped up in white paper. After he had gone I examined the cakes, which I shall show you presently, and I found there enough rye bristles to have caused the damage that brought about Olga's death.

"Do you understand now? The intended victim was not that poor girl, but my children."

The children's voices could still be heard on the floor below. It was quiet and warm in the room; from time to time the swish of motor tires sounded on the asphalt of the embankment.

"I've not spoken to anyone yet. I was waiting for you."

"Do you suspect that old beggar?"

"Mr. Monday? Certainly not! In any case I've not told you the whole story and the rest of it will certainly clear the poor old fellow.

"Yesterday I went to the hospital and then I visited some of my colleagues. I wanted to know whether they had recently had to certify any cases similar to that of Olga Boulanger."

His voice was unemotional, but he passed his hand across his forehead.

"Now I have found out conclusively that at least two people have died in the same way—one nearly two months ago, the other only three weeks ago."

"Had they eaten any eclairs?"

"I couldn't find that out, for the doctors had unfortunately mistaken the cause of death and hadn't thought it necessary to demand an inquest.

"Well, there you are, Inspector. I know nothing more, but I've learned enough, as you see, to be terrified. Somewhere in Neuilly there's a lunatic who, I cannot think how, manages to put death into pastries ..."

"You said just now that you thought your children were the intended victims?"

"Yes—I'm convinced of it. I know what your question implies. How can the murderer have contrived things so that it's only Mr. Monday's eclairs that—"

"Particularly as there have been

at least two other cases!"

"I know. I can't understand it ..."

The doctor seemed sincere and yet Maigret could not help watching him surreptitiously.

"May I ask you a personal question?"

"By all means."

"Forgive me if it offends you. The Boulangers accuse you of having had an affair with their daughter."

The doctor hung his head and muttered, "I knew that would come out! I don't want to lie to you, Inspector. It's true, stupidly true. It all happened one Sunday when I was alone here with the girl ...

"I'd give everything in the world for my wife not to know, for it would distress her too much. On the other hand I can give you my word as a doctor that Olga had already become my chauffeur's mistress ..."

"So that the child—"

"Was not mine, I assure you. Anyhow, Olga was a good girl who'd never have dreamed of blackmailing me. You see—"

Maigret was anxious not to allow him time to collect himself.

"And you know nobody who ... Wait a minute. You spoke just now of some lunatic—"

"Of course! Only it's impossible—physically impossible! Mr. Monday never goes to *her* place before coming here! When he goes there afterward, she leaves him standing in the street and throws him a few coppers out of the window."

"Who are you talking about?"

"Miss Wilfur. You'll see that there's a certain justice in things! I adore my wife and yet there are two things I keep secret from her.

"You know the first already. The other is even more absurd. If it were still daylight you could see through this window a house where an Englishwoman of thirty-eight, Laura Wilfur, lives with her invalid mother.

"They are the daughter and widow of the late Colonel Wilfur of the colonial army.

"Over a year ago, when the two women came back from a long stay in the South of France, I was sent for one evening by the young woman, who was complaining of some pain or another.

"I was rather surprised, for one thing because I'm not in general practice, and for another, because I could find nothing wrong with the young woman. I was even more astonished to learn, in conversation with her, that she knew all about my movements, even my most trivial habits, and I only understood when I got back here and saw her window.

"To cut the story short, Inspector ... Absurd as it may seem, Miss Wilfur is in love with me—hysterically in love as only a wom-

an of her age is liable to be when she lives alone with an old invalid in a huge gloomy house.

"On two further occasions I let myself in for it. I went to see her and while I was examining her she suddenly seized my head and pressed her lips against mine.

"Next day I got a letter beginning: *My darling* ... And the worst of it is that Miss Wilfur seems convinced that we are lovers!

"I can assure you of the contrary. Since then I've avoided her. I have had to turn her out of this consulting room, where she came to badger me, and if I've never mentioned it to my wife it's been out of professional discretion and also to avoid arousing unfounded jealousy.

"I know nothing more. I've told you everything, as I had made up my mind to. I'm not accusing anyone! But I'd give ten years of my life to prevent my wife ..."

By now Maigret understood that the doctor's previous self-possession had been deliberate, prepared in advance, achieved by a great effort of will, and that the man was now almost on the verge of tears.

"Carry on with your inquiry, Inspector. I don't want to influence you."

As Maigret crossed the hall a door opened and two children, a small boy and an even smaller girl, ran past him laughing.

Martin the chauffeur followed behind Maigret and closed the garden gate.

That week, Maigret got to know the district until he was sick of it. With laborious obstinacy he spent hours at a time walking up and down the embankment in spite of the persistently rainy weather and in spite of the astonishment of some servants who had wondered if this suspicious-looking stranger wasn't up to some mischief.

Seen from the outside, Dr. Barion's house seemed an oasis of peace, professional activity, and quiet.

Several times Maigret caught sight of Mme. Barion pushing her youngest child in the stroller along the embankment. And during an interval between showers one morning he watched the two older children at play in the garden, where a swing had been put up.

As for Miss Wilfur, he saw her only once. She was tall and solidly built, quite devoid of grace, with large feet and a mannish walk.

Maigret followed her on the off-chance, but she merely went to change her books at the lending library in a nearby English bookshop.

Then Maigret gradually widened the circle of his wanderings and went as far as the Avenue de Neuilly, where he noticed two

pastry shops. The first, narrow and gloomy, with its facade painted an ugly yellow, would have fitted in quite well with the sinister story of the lethal eclairs.

But the Inspector scanned the window display in vain and inquired within. They never made eclairs.

The other was the smart *patisserie* of the neighborhood, with two or three small marble tables at which tea was served: *Patisserie Bigoreau*. Here everything was bright and fragrant and delicious.

A rosy-cheeked girl tripped gaily to and fro, while a distinguished-looking lady presided over the cashier's desk.

Was it possible? ... Maigret could not make up his mind to take action.

As time passed and his conversation with the doctor grew more remote, the doctor's accusations, re-examined as it were through a magnifying glass, became more and more insubstantial.

So much so that sometimes the Inspector really had the impression of some ridiculous nightmare, some story invented lock, stock, and barrel by a megalomaniac or a desperate man.

And yet the police doctor's report confirmed Barion's statement: poor freckle-faced Olga had really died as a result of swallowing bristles of rye!

And the following Monday's eclairs, brought by that mysterious figure, Mr. Monday, had also contained a considerable number of these bristles, inserted between the layers of pastry.

But couldn't they have been put in later?

To crown everything, although Olga's father had gone home to the village inn he kept in Finisterre, his wife, wearing deepest mourning, had stayed in Paris and hung about police headquarters for days, waiting in the anteroom to waylay Maigret and get news from him. Another believer in the almighty power of the police!

Once she got angry with him and he could almost hear her say with grim features and pinched lips, "When are you going to arrest him?"

Meaning the doctor obviously! Who knew if she wouldn't eventually accuse Maigret himself of some sinister complicity?

Maigret decided to wait until Monday, although he felt almost remorseful about this, particularly as he saw, every morning, a vast tray of eclairs covered with coffee icing in the window of the Bigoreau *patisserie*.

Could he be certain that these were not lethal, too, and that the girl who was carrying three of them away with such tender care, the boy devouring one on his way home from school, were not doomed to suffer Olga's fate?

By one o'clock on Monday he was at his post not far from the

cake shop, but it was two o'clock before he caught sight of an old man whom he recognised without ever having seen him.

This was surely Mr. Monday, shuffling along with a calm philosophical air, smiling at life, tasting its minutes, treasuring every crumb of them. With a gesture he was obviously used to making, he pushed open the door of the cake shop, and Maigret, from outside, could see Mme. Bigoreau and her daughter good-humoredly exchanging jokes with the old man.

They were pleased to see him, no doubt of that! His poverty was not of the depressing sort.

He was telling them something that made them laugh, till the plump girl at last remembered Monday's ritual. Leaning forward over the window display she chose two eclairs which with a professional gesture she wrapped in a twist of white paper.

Mr. Monday, without hurrying, went into the shoe-repair shop next door where he got nothing but a small coin, and then into the corner tobacconist's where he was given a pinch of snuff.

There was nothing unpredictable about his days—that was quite obvious. Monday's people here, Tuesday's people in another district, and Wednesday's people somewhere else—they could all set their watches by his visits. He soon reached the Boulevard de la Seine and his step grew livelier as he drew near the doctor's house.

That was the house he liked, the house where they gave him a real meal—the same meal the family had eaten a little while before; the house where he'd sit down at a table in a clean warm kitchen.

He went in through the back door, like someone who was used to the place, and Maigret rang at the front.

"I should like to see the doctor at once." Maigret told Martin, the chauffeur-houseservant.

He was taken upstairs.

"Would you have the two eclairs brought up at once? The old man's down below."

Old Monday ate his meal without suspecting that in the doctor's consulting room two men were examining the gift he had brought the children.

"Nothing!" Dr. Barion concluded after a close scrutiny.

So there were some weeks when the eclairs were filled with death, and others when they were harmless.

"Thank you," Maigret murmured.

"Where are you going?"

He was too late: Maigret was already halfway downstairs ...

"This way, monsieur."

Poor Mme. Bigoreau was panic-stricken at the thought that one of her customers might discover that a policeman was visiting her.

She took Maigret into a little parlor with leaded-glass windows, adjoining the shop. Tarts were laid out to cool on every available piece of furniture, even on the arms of the chairs.

"I'd like to ask, you why you always give two eclairs rather than any other cakes, to the old man who comes on Monday."

"That's simple enough, monsieur. To begin with, we used to give him anything we had—damaged pastries or stale cakes. Once or twice it happened to be eclairs. Then we gave him something different and I remember how on that occasion he insisted on buying two eclairs as well.

"'They bring me luck,' he said. So as he's a good old fellow, we fell into the habit—"

"One other question. Have you a customer by the name of Miss Wilfur?"

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, nothing. She's a nice person, isn't she?"

"Do you think so?"

And the tone of that "Do you think so?" encouraged Maigret to go on.

"Of course, she's a bit of an eccentric—"

"You're right there! An eccentric, as you said, who never knows what she wants! If there were many customers of her sort we'd need twice the staff!"

"Does she come here often?"

"Never! I don't believe I've ever seen her. But she telephones, half in French and half in English so that we're always making mistakes. Do sit down, monsieur. Forgive me for having left you standing."

"I've finished. And please forgive me, madame, for having troubled you."

Three little remarks—enough to explain everything—echoed in Maigret's head.

Hadn't the woman in the shop said about Miss Wilfur: "An eccentric who never knows what she wants."

And then: "If there were many customers of her sort we'd need twice the staff."

And a moment later she admitted that this woman whom she had never seen "telephones half in French and half in English."

Maigret had not wanted to make a point of it. It would be time enough for that when the official examination took place, elsewhere than in the rather sickly atmosphere of the pastry shop.

Apart from the fact that Mme. Bigoreau might quite likely recover her business woman's pride and refuse to speak, rather than admit that she allowed people to send pastries back ...

For that must be it! The three little remarks she had made couldn't mean anything else!

Maigret walked to Dr. Barion's house, his hands thrust deep in his pockets, and as he reached the

gate he almost collided with Mr. Monday coming out of it.

"Well, did you bring your two eclairs?" Maigret remarked gaily. And as the old man stood dumfounded: "I'm a friend of the Barions. I know that you bring the children some cakes every Monday. But I can't help wondering something: why are they always eclairs."

"Didn't you know? It's a very simple story! Once when I had been given some eclairs, I had them with me and the children saw them. They told me those were their favorite pastry. So, as they're the kindest people on earth who give me the same sort of meal they have themselves, with coffee and all, you understand . . ."

Next day, when Maigret presented himself with a warrant in his pocket to arrest Miss Laura Wilfur, she got on her high horse and threatened to appeal to her ambassador; then she defended herself inch by inch with remarkable coolness.

"Which is just another proof of her insanity!" said the psychiatrist who examined her.

As were her lies—for she insisted she had been the doctor's mistress for a long time. And when the house was closely inspected, a large number of beards of rye were discovered hidden in a desk.

And finally it was learned through her mother that Colonel Wilfur had died in the New Hebrides from multiple perforation of the intestine brought about by a native plot ...

Maigret saw Martin, the chauffeur, again at the last examination.

"What would you have done about the child?" he asked.

"I'd have gone off with Olga and we'd have opened a country inn somewhere."

"And your wife?"

He merely shrugged ...

Miss Laura Wilfur, who was so much in love with Dr. Barion that she had wanted to kill his children out of spite, had spied on all his movements, had poisoned the eclairs in her ferocious determination to attain her end—she had inserted the lethal beards of rye before telephoning Mme. Bigoreau, pretending there had been a mistake in her pastry order, and asking that the eclairs be picked up ... Miss Laura Wilfur, who had the inspired notion of using innocent Mr. Monday as her unsuspecting instrument, was confined for life in a mental institution.

And there for the past few years she has been telling her companions that she's about to become the mother of a son!

(*translated by Jean Stewart*)

from ENGLAND

a PARKER PYNE story by

AGATHA CHRISTIE

"Are you happy? If not, consult Mr. Parker Pyne"—that was the famous ad in the Agony Column of "The Times." Mr. Parker Pyne considered himself a heart specialist—in a romantic, not a medical, sense. But his knowledge of the human heart also made him another kind of specialist: people consulted him when they were afraid . . .

DEATH ON THE NILE

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

LADY GRAYLE WAS NERVOUS. FROM the moment of coming on board the *S. S. Fayoum* she complained of everything. She did not like her cabin. She could bear the morning sun, but not the afternoon sun. Pamela Grayle, her niece, obligingly gave up her cabin on the other side. Lady Grayle accepted it grudgingly.

She snapped at Miss MacNaughton, her nurse, for having given her the wrong scarf and for having packed her little pillow instead of leaving it out. She snapped at her husband, Sir George, for having just bought her the wrong string of beads. It was lapis she wanted, not carnelian. George was a fool!

Sir George said anxiously, "Sorry, me dear, sorry. I'll go back and change 'em. Plenty of time."

She did not snap at Basil West, her husband's private secretary, because nobody ever snapped at Basil. His smile disarmed you before you began.

But the worst of it fell assuredly to the dragoman—an imposing and richly dressed personage whom nothing could disturb. When Lady Grayle caught sight of a stranger

in a basket chair and realized that he was a fellow passenger, the vials of her wrath poured out.

"They told me distinctly at the office that we were the only passengers! It was the end of the season and there was no one else going!"

"That right, lady," said Mohammed, calmly. "Just you and party and one gentleman, that's all."

"But I was told that there would be only ourselves."

"That quite right, lady."

"It's not all right! It was a lie! What is that man doing there?"

"He come later, lady. After you take tickets. He only decide come this morning."

"It's an absolute swindle!"

"That's all right, lady; him very quiet gentleman, very nice."

"You're a fool! You know nothing about it. Miss MacNaughton, where are you? Oh, there you are. I've repeatedly asked you to stay near me. I might feel faint. Help me to my cabin and give me an aspirin, and don't let Mohammed come near me. He keeps on saying, 'That right, lady,' till I feel I could scream."

Miss MacNaughton proffered an arm without a word.

The nurse was a tall woman of about thirty-five, handsome in a quiet, dark way. She settled Lady Grayle in the cabin, propped her up with cushions, administered an aspirin, and listened to the flow of complaint.

Lady Grayle was forty-eight. She had suffered since she was sixteen from the complaint of having too much money. She had married that impoverished baronet, Sir George Grayle, ten years before.

She was a big woman, not bad-looking, but her face was fretful and lined, and the lavish makeup she applied only accentuated the blemishes of time and temper. Her hair had been in turn platinum-blonde and henna-red, and was looking tired in consequence. She was overdressed and wore too much jewelry.

"Tell Sir George," she finished, while the silent Miss MacNaughton waited with an expressionless face, "tell Sir George that he *must* get that man off the boat! I *must* have privacy. All I've gone through lately—" She shut her eyes.

"Yes, Lady Grayle," said Miss MacNaughton, and left the cabin.

The offending last-minute passenger was still sitting in the deck chair. He had his back to Luxor and was staring out across the Nile to where the distant hills showed golden above a line of dark green.

Miss MacNaughton gave him a swift, appraising glance as she passed.

She found Sir George in the lounge. He was holding a string of beads in his hand and looking at it doubtfully.

"Tell me, Miss MacNaughton, do you think these will be all right?"

Miss MacNaughton gave a swift glance at the lapis.

"Very nice indeed," she said.

"You think Lady Grayle will be pleased—eh?"

"Oh, no, I shouldn't say that, Sir George. You see, nothing *would* please her. That's the real truth of it. By the way, she sent me with a message. She wants you to get rid of this extra passenger."

Sir George's jaw dropped. "How can I? What could I say to the fellow?"

"Of course you can't." Elsie MacNaughton's voice was brisk and kindly. "Just say there was nothing to be done." She added encouragingly, "It will be all right."

"You think it will, eh?" His face was ludicrously pathetic.

Elsie MacNaughton's voice was still kinder as she said, "You really must not take these things to heart, Sir George. It's just her health, you know. Don't take it seriously."

"You think she's really bad, nurse?"

A shade crossed the nurse's face. There was something odd in her voice as she answered, "Yes, I—I don't quite like her condition. But please don't worry, Sir George. You mustn't. You really mustn't." She gave him a friendly smile and went out.

Pamela came in, very languid and cool in her white. "Hallo, Nunks."

"Hallo, Pam, me dear."

"What have you got there? Oh, nice!"

"Well, I'm glad you think so. Do you think your aunt will think so, too?"

"She's incapable of liking anything. I can't think why you married the woman, Nunks."

Sir George was silent. A confused panorama of unsuccessful racing, pressing creditors, and a handsome if domineering woman rose before his mental vision.

"Poor old dear," said Pamela. "I suppose you had to do it. But she does give us both rather hell, doesn't she?"

"Since she's been ill—" began Sir George.

Pamela interrupted him.

"She's not ill! Not really. She can always do anything she wants to. Why, while you were up at Assouan she was as merry as a—a cricket. I bet you Miss MacNaughton knows she's a fraud."

"I don't know what we'd do without Miss MacNaughton," said Sir George, with a sigh.

"She's an efficient creature," admitted Pamela. "I don't exactly dote on her as you do, though, Nunks. Oh, you do! Don't contradict. You think she's wonderful. So she is, in a way. But she's a dark horse. I never know what she's thinking. Still, she manages the old cat quite well."

"Look here, Pam, you mustn't speak of your aunt like that. Dash it all, she's very good to you."

"Yes, she pays all our bills, doesn't she? It's the hell of a life, though."

Sir George passed on to a less painful subject. "What are we to do about this fellow who's coming on the trip? Your aunt wants the boat to herself."

"Well, she can't have it," said Pamela coolly. "The man's quite presentable. His name's Parker Pyne. I should think he was a civil servant out of the Records Department—if there is such a thing. Funny thing is, I seem to have heard the name somewhere. Basil!" The secretary had just entered. "Where have I seen the name Parker Pyne?"

"Front page of *The Times*. Agony Column," replied the young man promptly. "'Are you happy? If not, consult Mr. Parker Pyne.'"

"How frightfully amusing! Let's tell him our troubles all the way to Cairo."

"I haven't any," said Basil West simply. "We're going to glide down the golden Nile and see temples" —he looked quickly at Sir George, who had picked up a paper—"together."

The last word was only just breathed, but Pamela caught it. Her eyes met his.

"You're right, Basil," she said lightly. "It's good to be alive."

Sir George got up and went out. Pamela's face clouded over.

"What's the matter, my sweet?"

"My detested aunt-by-marriage—"

"Don't worry," said Basil quickly. "What does it matter what she gets in her head? Don't contradict her. You see," he laughed, "it's good camouflage."

The benevolent figure of Mr. Parker Pyne entered the lounge. Behind him came the picturesque figure of Mohammed, prepared to say his piece.

"Lady, gentlemans, we start now. In a few minutes we pass temples of Karnak right-hand side. I tell you story now about little boy who went to buy a roasted lamb for his father . . ."

Mr. Parker Pyne mopped his forehead. He had just returned from a visit to the Temple of Dendera. Riding on a donkey was, he felt, an exercise ill suited to his figure. He was proceeding to remove his collar when a note propped up on the dressing table caught his attention. He opened it. It read:

DEAR SIR,—I should be obliged if you did not visit the Temple of Abydos, but would remain on the boat. I wish to consult you.

Yours truly,
ARIADNE GRAYLE

A smile creased Mr. Parker Pyne's large, bland face. He reached for a sheet of paper and unscrewed his fountain pen.

DEAR LADY GRAYLE, I am sorry to disappoint you, but I am at

present on holiday and am not doing any professional business.

He signed his name and dispatched the note by a steward. As he completed his change of clothes, another note was brought to him.

DEAR MR. PARKER PYNE,—I appreciate the fact that you are on holiday, but I am prepared to pay a fee of one hundred pounds for a consultation.

Yours truly,
ARIADNE GRAYLE

Mr. Parker Pyne's eyebrows rose. He tapped his teeth thoughtfully with his fountain pen. He wanted to see Abydos, but one hundred pounds was one hundred pounds. And Egypt had been even more wickedly expensive than he had imagined.

DEAR LADY GRAYLE,—I shall not visit the Temple of Abydos.

Yours faithfully,
PARKER PYNE

Mr. Parker Pyne's refusal to leave the boat was a source of great grief to Mohammed.

"Very nice temple. All my gentlemans like see that temple. I get you carriage. I get you chair and sailors carry you."

Mr. Parker Pyne refused all these tempting offers.

The others set off.

Mr. Parker Pyne waited on deck. Presently the door of Lady Grayle's cabin opened and the lady herself trailed out on deck.

"Such a hot afternoon," she observed graciously. "I see you have stayed behind, Mr. Pyne. Very wise of you. Shall we have some tea together in the lounge?"

Mr. Parker Pyne rose promptly and followed her. It cannot be denied that he was curious.

It seemed as though Lady Grayle felt some difficult in coming to the point. She fluttered from this subject to that. But finally she spoke in an altered voice.

"Mr. Pyne, what I am about to tell you is in the strictest confidence. You do understand that, don't you?"

"Naturally."

She paused, took a deep breath. Mr. Parker Pyne waited.

"I want to know whether or not my husband is poisoning me."

Whatever Mr. Parker Pyne had expected, it was not this. He showed his astonishment plainly. "That is a very serious accusation, Lady Grayle."

"Well, I'm not a fool and I wasn't born yesterday. I've had my suspicions for some time. Whenever George goes away I get better. My food doesn't disagree with me and I feel a different woman. There must be some reason for that."

"What you say is very serious, Lady Grayle. You must remember I am not a detective. I am, if you like to put it that way, a heart specialist—"

She interrupted him. "Eh—and don't you think it worries me, all this? It's not a policeman I want—

I can look after myself, thank you —it's certainty I want. I've got to *know*. I'm not a wicked woman, Mr. Pyne. I act fairly by those who act fairly by me. A bargain's a bargain. I've kept my side of it. I've paid my husband's debts and I've not stinted him in money."

Mr. Parker Pyne had a fleeting pang of pity for Sir George.

"And as for the girl, she's had clothes and parties and this, that, and the other. Common gratitude is all I ask."

"Gratitude is not a thing that can be produced to order, Lady Grayle."

"Nonsense!" said Lady Grayle. She went on, "Well, there it is. Find out the truth for me. Once I *know*—"

He looked at her curiously. "Once you know, what then, Lady Grayle?"

"That's my business." Her lips closed sharply.

Mr. Parker Pyne hesitated a minute, then he said, "You will excuse me, Lady Grayle, but I have the impression that you are not being entirely frank with me."

"That's absurd. I've told you exactly what I want you to find out."

"Yes, but not the reason *why?*"

Their eyes met. Hers fell first.

"I should think the reason was self-evident," she said.

"No, because I am in doubt on one point."

"What is that?"

"Do you want your suspicions proved right or wrong?"

"Really, Mr. Pyne!" The lady rose to her feet, quivering with indignation.

Mr. Parker Pyne nodded his head gently. "Yes, yes," he said. "But that doesn't answer my question, you know."

"Oh!" Words seemed to fail her. She swept out of the room.

Left alone, Mr. Parker Pyne became very thoughtful. He was so deep in his own thoughts that he started perceptibly when someone came in and sat down opposite him. It was Miss MacNaughton.

"Surely you're all back very soon," said Mr. Parker Pyne.

"The others aren't back. I said I had a headache and came back alone." She hesitated. "Where is Lady Grayle?"

"I should imagine lying down in her cabin."

"Oh, then that's all right. I don't want her to know I've come back."

"You didn't come back on her account, then?"

The nurse shook her head. "No, I came back to see you."

Mr. Parker Pyne was surprised. He would have said off-hand that Miss MacNaughton was eminently capable of looking after her troubles without seeking outside advice. It seemed that he was wrong.

"I've watched you since we all came on board. I think you're a person of wide experience and good judgment. And I want advice very badly."

"And yet—excuse me, Miss MacNaughton—but you're not the type that usually seeks advice. I should say that you were a person who was quite content to rely on her own judgment."

"Normally, yes. But I am in a very peculiar position." She hesitated a moment. "I do not usually talk about my cases. But in this instance I think it is necessary. Mr. Pyne, when I left England with Lady Grayle, she was a straightforward case. In plain language, there was nothing the matter with her. That's not quite true, perhaps. Too much leisure and too much money do produce a definite pathological condition. Having a few floors to scrub every day and five or six children to look after would have made Lady Grayle a perfectly healthy and a much happier woman."

Mr. Parker Pyne nodded.

"As a hospital nurse, one sees a lot of these nervous cases. Lady Grayle *enjoyed* her bad health. It was my part not to minimize her sufferings, to be as tactful as I could—and to enjoy the trip myself as much as possible."

"Very sensible," said Mr. Parker Pyne.

"But, Mr. Pyne, things are not as they were. The suffering that Lady Grayle complains of now is real and not imagined."

"You mean?"

"I have come to suspect that Lady Grayle is being poisoned."

"Since when have you suspected this?"

"For the past three weeks."

"Do you suspect any particular person?"

Her eyes dropped. For the first time her voice lacked sincerity. "No."

"I put it to you, Miss MacNaughton, that you do suspect one particular person, and that that person is Sir George Grayle."

"Oh, no, no, I can't believe it of him! He is so pathetic, so childlike. He couldn't be a cold-blooded poisoner." Her voice had an anguished note in it.

"And yet you have noticed that whenever Sir George is absent his wife is better and that her periods of illness correspond with his return."

She did not answer.

"What poison do you suspect? Arsenic?"

"Something of that kind. Arsenic or antimony."

"And what steps have you taken?"

"I have done my utmost to supervise what Lady Grayle eats and drinks."

Mr. Parker Pyne nodded. "Do you think Lady Grayle has any suspicion herself?"

"Oh, no, I'm sure she hasn't."

"There you are wrong," said Mr. Parker Pyne. "Lady Grayle *does* suspect."

Miss MacNaughton showed her astonishment.

"Lady Grayle is more capable of keeping a secret than you imagine," said Mr. Parker Pyne.

"That surprises me very much," said Miss MacNaughton slowly.

"I should like to ask you one more question, Miss MacNaughton. Do you think Lady Grayle likes you?"

"I've never thought about it."

They were interrupted. Mohammed came in, his face beaming, his robes flowing behind him.

"Lady, she hear you come back. She ask for you. She say why you not come to her?"

Elsie MacNaughton rose hurriedly. Mr. Parker Pyne rose also.

"Would a consultation early tomorrow morning suit you?" he asked.

"Yes, that would be the best time. Lady Grayle sleeps late. In the meantime I shall be very careful."

"I think Lady Grayle will be careful too."

Miss MacNaughton disappeared.

Mr. Parker Pyne did not see Lady Grayle till just before dinner. She was in the lounge smoking a cigarette and burning what seemed to be a letter. She took no notice at all of him, by which he gathered that she was still offended.

After dinner he played bridge with Sir George, Pamela, and Basil. Everyone seemed a little distrait, and the bridge game broke up early.

It was some hours later when Mr. Parker Pyne was roused. It was Mohammed who came to him.

"Old lady, she very ill. Nurse, she very frightened. I try to get doctor."

Mr. Parker Pyne hurried into some clothes. He reached the doorway of Lady Grayle's cabin at the same time as Basil West. Sir George and Pamela were inside. Elsie MacNaughton was working desperately over her patient. As Mr. Parker Pyne arrived, a final convulsion seized the poor lady. Her arched body writhed and stiffened. Then she fell back on her pillows.

Mr. Parker Pyne drew Pamela gently outside.

"How awful!" the girl was half-sobbing. "How awful! Is she, is she—?"

"Dead? Yes, I am afraid it is all over."

He put her into Basil's keeping. Sir George came out of the cabin, looking dazed.

"I never thought she was really ill," he was muttering. "Never thought it for a moment."

Mr. Parker Pyne pushed past him and entered the cabin.

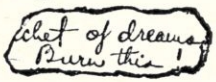
Elsie MacNaughton's face was white and drawn. "They have sent for a doctor?" she asked.

"Yes." Then he said, "Strychnine?"

"Yes. Those convulsions are unmistakable. Oh, I can't believe it!" She sank into a chair, weeping.

He patted her shoulder.

Then an idea seemed to strike him. He left the cabin hurriedly and went to the lounge. There was a little scrap of paper left unburnt in an ashtry. Just a few words were distinguishable:



"Now, that's interesting," said Mr. Parker Pyne.

Mr. Parker Pyne sat in the room of a prominent Cairo official. "So that's the evidence," he said thoughtfully.

"Yes, pretty complete. Man must have been a damned fool."

"I shouldn't call Sir George a brainy man."

"All the same!" The other recapitulated: "Lady Grayle wants a cup of Bovril. The nurse makes it for her. Then she must have sherry in it. Sir George produces the sherry. Two hours later, Lady Grayle dies with unmistakable signs of strychnine poisoning. A packet of strychnine is found in Sir George's cabin and another packet actually in the pocket of his dinner jacket."

"Very thorough," said Mr. Parker Pyne. "Where did the strychnine come from, by the way?"

"There's a little doubt over that. The nurse had some—in case Lady Grayle's heart troubled her—but she's contradicted herself once or twice. First she said her supply was intact, and now she says it isn't."

"Very unlike her not to be sure," was Mr. Parker Pyne's comment.

"They were in it together, in my opinion. They've got a weakness for each other, those two."

"Possibly; but if Miss MacNaughton had been planning murder, she'd have done it a good deal better. She's an efficient young woman."

"Well, there it is. In my opinion, Sir George is in for it. He hasn't a dog's chance."

"Well, well," said Mr. Parker Pyne, "I must see what I can do."

He sought out the pretty niece.

Pamela was white and indignant. "Nunks never did such a thing—never—never—never!"

"Then who did?" said Mr. Parker Pyne placidly.

Pamela came nearer. "Do you know what I think? *She did it herself.* She's been frightfully queer lately. She used to imagine things."

"What things?"

"Queer things. Basil, for instance. She was always hinting that Basil was in love with her. And Basil and I are—we are—"

"I realize that," said Mr. Parker Pyne, smiling.

"All that about Basil was pure imagination. I think she had a down on poor little Nunks, and I think she made up that story and told it to you, and then put the strychnine in his cabin and in his pocket and poisoned herself. People have done things like that,

haven't they?"

"They have," admitted Mr. Parker Pyne. "But I don't think Lady Grayle did. She wasn't, if you'll allow me to say so, the type."

"But the delusions?"

"Yes, I'd like to ask Mr. West about that."

He found the young man in his room. Basil answered his questions readily enough.

"I don't want to sound fatuous, but she took a fancy to me. That's why I daren't let her know about me and Pamela. She'd have had Sir George fire me."

"You think Miss Grayle's theory a likely one?"

"Well, it's possible, I suppose." The young man was doubtful.

"But not good enough," said Mr. Parker Pyne quietly. "No, we must find something better." He became lost in meditation for a minute. "A confession would be best," he said briskly. He unscrewed his fountain pen and produced a sheet of paper. "Just write it out, will you?"

Basil West stared at him in amazement. "Me? What on earth do you mean?"

"My dear young man"—Mr. Parker Pyne sounded almost paternal—"I know all about it. How you made love to the good lady. How she had scruples. How you fell in love with the pretty, penniless niece. How you arranged your plot. Slow poisoning. It might pass for natural death from gastro-enteritis—if not, it would be laid to Sir. George's doing, since you were careful to let the attacks coincide with his presence.

"Then your discovery that the lady was suspicious and had talked to me about the matter. Quick action! You abstracted some strychnine from Miss MacNaughton's supply. Planted some of it in Sir George's cabin, and some in his pocket, and put sufficient into a cachet which you enclosed with a note to the lady, telling her it was a 'cachet of dreams.'

"A romantic idea. She'd take it as soon as the nurse had left her, and no one would know anything about it. But you made one mistake, my young man. It is useless asking a lady to burn letters. They never do. I've got all that pretty correspondence, including the one about the cachet."

Basil West had turned pale. All his good looks had vanished. He looked like a trapped rat.

"Damn you!" he snarled. "So you know all about it. You damned interfering Nosey Parker."

Mr. Parker Pyne was saved from physical violence by the appearance of the witnesses he had thoughtfully arranged to have listening outside the half-closed door.

Mr. Parker Pyne was again discussing the case with his friend the high official.

"And I hadn't a shred of evi-

dence—only an almost indecipherable fragment, with *'Burn this!'* on it. I deduced the whole story and tried it on him. It worked. I'd stumbled on the truth. The letters did it. Lady Grayle had burned every scrap he wrote, but *he didn't know that.*

"She was really a very unusual woman. I was puzzled when she came to me. What she wanted was for me to tell her that her husband was poisoning her. In that case, she meant to go off with young West. But she wanted to act fairly. Curious character."

"That poor little girl is going to suffer," said the other.

"She'll get over it," said Mr. Parker Pyne callously. "She's young. I'm anxious that Sir George should get a little enjoyment before it's too late. He's been treated like a worm for ten years. Now, Elsie MacNaughton will be very kind to him."

He beamed. Then he sighed. "I am thinking of going incognito to Greece. I really *must* have a holiday!"

from SOUTH-WEST AFRICA

Like Iain Gallantry's story in this issue, "Hit in the Night—and Run" could happen only in Africa—indeed, in only a certain part of Africa. It is a tale of terrorists who are not only well trained in the use of modern weapons but also know the "fine points" of the violence, bloodshed, and mutilation inherent in a panga or an assegai...

The author, B. D. Peirce, is in his early thirties; he is perhaps the most prolific radio scriptwriter in South Africa—his average weekly output includes two daily quarter-hour serials, one half-hour program, more ambitious radio, TV, film, and stage plays, and short stories—to say nothing of working hard on his first novel. Much of his writing, he admits, is for "bread and butter"; but the writing he loves best—ah, there is the dream, and who among us does not need the richer sustenance of a dream? Verily, man cannot live by bread and butter alone...

HIT IN THE NIGHT — AND RUN

by B. D. PEIRCE

THERE ISN'T MUCH BETWEEN Tsumeb and Etosha. A lot of desert, scrub, scrawny trees, ant-hills, and heavy caked earth scorched hard by too much sun, too little rain. A few farmers claw out a living from country like this; several hundred Baruk-we tribesmen manage to exist, somehow. For years the policing of this area of South-West Africa has been relatively easy.

But now that's all changed.

Now the terrorists have been coming in over the Angola border. Bands of ten, fifteen men, well trained, well armed with Chinese or Russian weapons. Not for them the panga or assegai, although they, too, have their uses. A burp gun is fine for chopping down an irate farmer silhouetted some night in his doorway with a hunting rifle at the ready; but the panga is for the more subtle tricks to play on the house.

And the terrorists have been

well trained in *those* little games, as well.

On a hot, cracked-lip day in November, Sergeant John Venter, of the South-West African Police, was on a patrol thirty miles west of Tsumeb. There had been a report of cattle theft near Namutoni, but the details had been vague. Maybe a tribesman hadn't checked his stock too thoroughly. Maybe a neighbor had eyed a prize heifer with hungry eyes. Maybe a father of a bride-to-be hadn't felt like slaughtering one of his *own* cows for the wedding feast. Or maybe a pride of lion had come down on the prowl from the Etosha Pan. Maybe anything. Finding out might take an hour; it *could* take days. Particularly if lion had been responsible. That would mean tracking them down and either killing them or shooing them back up to the Pan. In South-West Africa a policeman has a lot more on his hands than merely crime prevention.

The Land Rover bristled and snorted over the open country. Sometimes a game path made the going fairly easy, but most often you found your own route, keeping to the flat plains, avoiding the eroded dongas and rocky outcrops. When there was no other way you slammed down into extra-low and bulldozed your way up a jagged climb. Anything other than a four-wheel-drive vehicle would have been useless.

Sergeant Venter relaxed in the passenger seat, rolling with the sway and lurch of the Land Rover. By now the movement had become automatic. Beside him Constable Kitwe Marusha held the steering wheel with light hands, guiding rather than pushing. When he grinned, his face split into a soundless, chortling caricature. Three teeth had been knocked out in a tribal fight years back. Marusha and Venter had had to handle it alone, and, in a case like that, you didn't walk in with a loud voice and drawn gun. You left the weapons covered and tried to talk fifty men out of the beer-inspired idea that it might be fun to crack a few skulls.

Marusha had muttered a quiet word to Venter, and the white man had nodded. Marusha had walked easily up to the red-eyed hulk of a man holding a rusty chopper in one hand, grinned, and taken it away from him. A friend had disliked the way it was done and flung a rock at the policeman. Three teeth were spat out, and for a very brief moment Marusha had known a flicker of madness. But only for a moment.

The crowd had hushed into an abrupt silence, waiting for the policeman to make his move. There wasn't much to it. Marusha had simply walked up to the stone thrower and dropped him with a single back-handed chop. When

the man had hit the ground, Marusha kicked him once at the back of the head, and then spat on him.

After that the crowd had lost interest. They broke up and went back to their kraals to sleep it off. In the morning there would undoubtedly be a few heads which the owners would gladly have preferred elsewhere, but that would be the total extent of the damage. There would be no corpses. And Sergeant Venter would be investigating no murders.

Now Marusha grunted and flicked his head to the right. Venter took in the scrub, grass, rock, and flat-topped trees that grew only as high as a man's shoulder. For a moment he saw nothing out of the ordinary, then there was a movement. Just a small heave, a ripple of brown, a sigh in the grass that wasn't a part of the normal picture.

Venter nodded, and Marusha swung the Land Rover across to the right.

A duiker lay on its side in the grass. As the men approached, it kicked and tried to get to its feet, but that only pulled the wire noose tighter around its neck. Already the wire was lost to view in the smooth hide of the animal, but it was doing its work. The buck couldn't escape. Its tongue was already gagging in its mouth. If it was lucky the buck would strangle itself before it died agonizingly without water; but that was all the luck it would get.

"Poachers," said Venter. It was a flat, unemotional word, but Venter didn't feel unemotional.

"Yes, sir," said Marusha. He carried the .375 rifle almost casually, but his eyes were alert and flicking in a wide sweep.

"Nobody out there, sir," he said. "Tomorrow morning they come and check the nooses. Too hot now. Now they sleep."

Venter unholstered the heavy .38 revolver. The explosion boomed heavily and reverberated across the veld. The duiker kicked once in death, but that was all.

"Put him in the back," said Venter. "We'll show the headman at the village. He'll say he knows nothing about it, but maybe he'll keep his men quiet for a few weeks."

Marusha unwound the wire noose from the trunk of the tree. Then he lifted the buck by the legs and carried it lightly back to the Land Rover. He climbed into the driver's seat and was reaching for the ignition key when the radio spluttered into life.

"Tsumeb to Venter. Come in, please."

Venter flipped down the switch and picked up the handset.

"Venter here," he said. "Receive you, Tsumeb."

"Give us your position, please."

"About thirty miles west of you.

Nearly at Namutoni."

"Head back to Otavi at once, please. Cronje's waiting for you there. There's been big trouble."

Venter's frown was another crease among many.

"What kind of trouble?" he said.

"Murder. Over and out."

Hennie Cronje had been farming in South-West Africa all his life. He was a huge man, with heavy, gnarled hands. It wasn't the easiest way to make a living, but for him there wasn't any other way. Talk to any farmer in South-West Africa. Talk about the droughts, about the scrawny cattle they breed, and the hardships of the desert. Talk about the blistering heat of day and the almost unbelievable cold of night. Then offer them another way of life. They'll look at you with disbelief in their eyes. And maybe even a hint of pity. You don't know, man. You just don't know.

He was sitting on the stoep of his home when the Land Rover kicked a dust trail up the road from the farm gate four miles back. He came down the single wooden step and shook hands with Venter before the policeman had even climbed down.

"Man, I'm glad to see you," he said.

"What's happened, Hennie?"

"Ag, it's bad. My boys brought in a man this morning. They found him out in the bush. Cut up by kaffirs out there."

"Is he alive?"

"Ja. But his wife isn't."

Venter wiped a hand down the dust creases on his face.

"What's the story?" he said.

"They were in a caravan. Pulled off the road between Otavi and Tsumeb for the night. These kaffirs attacked them. Opened up with guns, then chopped the man down when he came out. Seems he managed to crawl away, but they burned down the caravan. You know how it is, John."

"And the wife?"

"I went and had a look," said Cronje. His mouth pulled in a grimace. "They got to her before they set the caravan on fire."

"What's the man's name?"

"Bishop. Arthur Bishop. He's inside."

"All right," said Venter.

They went inside the house and Cronje took Venter to the guest bedroom. A paraffin lamp was burning on a bedside table. Under a kaross a man was lying in bandages, but he wasn't asleep. His eyes were wide and staring emptily at the ceiling.

"Mr. Bishop?" said Venter.

The man turned slow eyes to Venter, but he said nothing.

"I'm Sergeant Venter, South-West Police. Can you tell me what happened?"

For a long while the man simply stared at Venter. Then he

closed his eyes and shook his head in a slow, bitter helplessness.

"Jean wanted it this way," he said. "She wanted the caravan trip for the honeymoon. Two weeks, that's all. Now she's dead."

Venter looked at Cronje, and the big man shrugged.

"Dr. Muller came out from Otavi and fixed him up. He said the panga wounds would heal all right. Two quite deep ones in the left arm. Another one in the left leg, and two slashes on the forehead. But he says he can't do anything about the shock. The man was out all night, crawling around the bush, thinking the kaffirs were after him. What can you expect?"

Bishop hadn't opened his eyes while Cronje talked. Now he did, and he looked at the policeman.

"Find them," he said. "Find them and kill every last bloody one of them!"

"We'll find them," said Venter. "But you'll have to help us. Did you see them? How many were there?"

Bishop shook his head again. Then he breathed deeply.

"Night," he said. "Jean and I were in bed. Then we heard shots, machine guns. I pushed her onto the floor and went out. Didn't hear anything, see anything. Then one of them grabbed me. Fighting. Knives. Knocked out. When I looked again, the caravan was on fire. Crawled away—just kept moving. It was all I could do—just wanted to get away, that's all."

"That's the way they work," said Cronje. His hands were curled into tremendous, white-knuckled fists and his face was all granite and fury. "Like at the Hertzhog place last month. And the von Klisters. Hit in the night—and run."

"We'll find them," said Venter. "We caught four already. But it isn't easy. You know that, Hennie."

"Ja, I know it. But that doesn't help his wife, does it?"

Bishop closed his eyes again, and turned his head away from them to the wall.

"He was just lucky," said Cronje. "They must have thought he was dead, and went for his wife."

"Ja," said Venter. "He was lucky."

The lamp in the sitting room threw distorted shapes and shadows on the walls. Venter and Cronje sat across a table and talked. There wasn't much to the story. As soon as Bishop had been brought in, Cronje had forced him to lie down, and immediately sent for the nearest doctor. Dr. Muller had come from Otavi, twenty-five miles distant, and treated the patient. Then he'd returned with Cronje to where the caravan had been parked.

They had found what remained

of it, and the body of Jean Bishop. Both Cronje and Muller were hard men, not unaccustomed to violence, bloodshed, or mutilation. But both had blanched at the sight of Arthur Bishop's wife. Cronje had moved away and been violently sick. When he returned he did not apologize to Muller, nor had the doctor expected it.

There was nothing Muller could do for the woman except to have her body removed to Otavi. The undertaker in the village had taken care of things after that. Cronje left three farm laborers at the scene with orders to keep everybody away, and then he'd returned to the farm to await the arrival of Venter. In a land where only the very practical survived, Hennie Cronje had survived better than most.

Sergeant Venter left the farm well before dawn. He arrived at the scene of the tragedy to find the African laborers clustered around a fire. None of them had slept. They saluted him, and Venter left Marusha to talk to them while he inspected the burned-out caravan. It told him little. The metal shell was intact, buckled and twisted in the first-morning light. The framework had gone up fast, and all the combustible interior fittings had been reduced to ashes. The heavy American car that had pulled the caravan was no more than a skeleton.

Venter poked around in the ashes, but found nothing to help him. Marusha joined him.

"Well?" said Venter. "What do they know?"

Marusha shrugged. "They know nothing. Even if they did, they would not tell us. Their families would suffer, their crops would be burned, their cattle crippled. They saw nothing, they heard nothing."

"No terrorists been around their kraals? Nobody been asking for meat? Supplies? Women?"

"They say not. But who knows?"

Venter poked a stick among the ashes.

"Do you believe them?" he said.

Marusha pulled back the grin and his eyes were troubled.

"I think they speak the truth," he said.

Venter grunted. He glanced almost casually around the place and then narrowed his eyes.

"All right," he said. "Take the left. Keep your eyes open."

Venter moved off to the right into the bush, and Marusha took the left. They moved slowly, casting a few yards to either side of a predetermined path, and swept a wide circle around the camp. Venter was the first to find anything. When Marusha joined him again, Venter was carrying a compact Russian rapid-fire burp gun.

"They dropped this," he said. "Panic, maybe. Find anything?"

"This," said Marusha.

He held out his hand and gave Venter the beads. They were strung in a red, yellow, green, and blue pattern, forming a small neat triangle framed in white. One string dangled loose, as though the beads had snagged against something and fallen from the neck of the wearer. Venter slowly turned them over in his hands.

"Marriage beads?" he asked.

Marusha nodded.

"But not Barukwe?" said Venter.

Marusha shook his head.

"From the north," he said. "Maybe Kishai, maybe Nilwe."

Venter nodded.

"Angola tribes," he said. Then he stopped. A frown came gradually between his eyes. "That's funny," he said.

"Funny, sir?" said Marusha.

Venter tapped the beads slowly against the palm of his hand. Marusha watched the hardness come into his eyes. Venter got up and looked around at the gaunt black ribwork of the caravan.

"No," he said. "Not funny at all."

They walked back to the Land Rover. Venter picked up the radio handset. He switched on the transmission, sat for a moment, and then began talking ...

Dr. Heinrich Muller was small, wiry, and affected a neat white goatee. His movements were precise and without waste. He poured Venter a tall glass of iced beer and gave it to him.

"Now," he said "Your questions, Sergeant?"

Venter sipped the beer slowly, feeling the cold clean wash of it soothe his dust-parched throat. He put down the glass and leaned back in his chair.

"When the Hertzhogs were killed," he said, "and the von Klisters, you went out to the farm, didn't you? You examined the bodies?"

Muller nodded gravely. "What there was left of them."

"The injuries were consistent with what you had expected?"

Muller sighed. "I was in Kenya at the height of the Mau Mau trouble and I saw a great many such cases. I expected no less. Tribal oaths run to a pattern, and the terrorist oaths are different only in the degree of butchery."

He squinted at Venter over the top of his beer glass.

"You yourself know these things," he said. "Why ask me?"

"And Jean Bishop? How did she die?"

"The same way. Foully. The same things were done to her. It would be difficult to determine at which precise *point* she died. The ritual continues even after the victim has died."

Venter picked up his beer again and sipped at it.

"One more thing," he said. "You're sure this *was* the way she died? It couldn't have been any other way?"

Muller spread out his hands wearily.

"Sergeant," he said, "do you want me to *detail* the things they did to her?"

Venter put down the glass. Half the beer was unfinished.

"No," he said. "I don't think I've got the stomach for it."

It was almost evening when the Land Rover returned to Cronje's farm. Hennie Cronje was sitting out on the stoep, drinking a sundowner. Beside him, Arthur Bishop sat slumped and infinitely drained in a wooden-framed chair laced with riempie thongs. The day's heat was slipping away, and a cool breeze was beginning to hush in from the veld. Cronje got up when Venter climbed down from the Land Rover.

"Well, John?" he said. "What news?"

Venter stretched his arms, and then sat down on the railing of the stoep. His voice was tired.

"There were no tracks," he said. "Just rock, right up to the road. They could have gone either way."

Cronje grunted.

"But you've got more men out looking for them?" he said. "Now that you know they're in this district, I mean?"

Venter raised his eyes and looked at Cronje. Then the pale blue eyes shifted slowly to the slumped figure of Arthur Bishop.

"No," he said. "The same number of men. And they're not concentrating on this particular district, either."

"But why not?" said Cronje. "You *know* they're out there!"

"Are they?" said Venter. His eyes hadn't left Bishop. "Tell me something, Mr. Bishop. You ever had this sort of experience before?"

Bishop focused on Venter, as though seeing him for the first time.

"I've not been married before," he said.

"No," said Venter. "Not that. I mean, have you had any kind of experience with terrorists?"

There was an abrupt stiffening to the man in the chair.

"Terrorists?" he said.

"In the Congo," said Venter. "You served with Tshombe's white mercenaries for just over two years. The rebels specialized in terrorist tactics. Ever see the results?"

The weariness in Bishop had now gone. He leaned forward in his chair and stared at Venter.

"I saw them, yes," he said. "So what?"

"Your wife was killed in the same way," said Venter. "But there's a small difference. The terrorists didn't kill her."

Cronje lunged to his feet. His whole body trembled.

"Sit down, Hennie," said Venter. His eyes flicked back to Bishop, and they were hard and uncompromising.

"You killed her," he said.

The breath went out of Bishop in a long heavy escape. He shook his head.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said flatly.

"I'll tell you," said Venter. "Something puzzled me this morning, so I radioed back to Tsumeb. They made contact with the police in Johannesburg and asked them to check up on you. The report came back this afternoon."

"Report?" said Bishop. "On what?"

"An insurance policy, for one thing. Thirty thousand grand, payable to you, on the death of your wife. It was taken out two months ago. Then there was the record of your mercenary service in the Congo. That put me on the right track. You want me to tell you how you did it?"

Bishop leaned back in his chair and sneered.

"If it'll amuse you," he said.

"You read about the terrorist infiltration over the Angolan border, and the attacks on the farmers up here. The stories were in all the papers. No details, but you didn't need them. You'd seen plenty of the same sort of thing up in the Congo."

Bishop raised an eyebrow. A slow smile spread over his face.

"Now, you just might have a little difficulty in proving *that*."

"I don't need to," said Venter. "You took out the insurance policy and married your wife. Then you suggested the caravan trip honeymoon up here. Not *her*. *You* suggested it. Maybe she didn't agree right away, but you talked her into it. And that's all you needed. You waited for two weeks, until you reached just the right place to stop—a stretch just off the road with plenty of rock around, so there wouldn't be any tracks showing. Then you killed her. You butchered her, the same way the terrorists do. Then you fired the machine gun into the caravan and set it on fire."

"And conveniently had some African gentlemen hack *me* to bits with a panga? That too?"

"No. You didn't need anyone else. You did it yourself. All the injuries are on the left side, and you're right-handed. It wasn't all that difficult. Only two deep gashes on the arm. Less deep on the thigh. And two light cuts on the forehead."

"You're out of your mind," said Bishop.

"No. But I think you're pretty close to it. After that you threw away the machine gun. It would have been easy for a mercenary to lay his hands on one. Finally you crawled to this farm—which you'd

made sure was here in the first place!"

Bishop laughed. "Sergeant, you've got one hell of an imagination!"

Venter reached into a pocket and pulled out the wedding beads. He tossed them casually onto the table beside Bishop.

"Ever see these before?" he said.

The smile did not leave Bishop's face.

"Never," he said.

"That was point Number Three in the radio check. The police questioned every curio dealer in Johannesburg. A couple of months ago a man bought a set like this. He was very insistent that they be Kishai or Nilwe beads—Angolan tribes. The curio dealer swears he can identify that man, Bishop!"

Some of the color left Bishop's face.

"It doesn't prove a thing," he said.

"You know why you left them out there? To make us think the killers were Angolan terrorists. But you should have checked your facts a little more carefully."

"What facts?"

"The way the terrorists are sent out. Before they leave the training camp they're stripped—completely. Then they're given new uniforms and new guns. They're handed a food supply to last them two weeks, plus a pound of dagga and six packets of a drug called kalahashi. The drug is to make sure they have enough courage to go through with their orders.

"But that isn't the point, Bishop. Apart from all that, they carry *no* personal belonging of any kind. If they're captured or killed there's nothing to identify them—not a single thing. *Particularly* something like wedding beads. They're as good as identity cards!"

Venter lifted the beads.

"You left these around out there to strengthen your case," he said. "But it didn't work out that way."

He carefully put them back in his pocket.

"All they're going to do is hang you."

from AUSTRIA

FRANZ KAFKA

In his Introduction to SELECTED SHORT STORIES OF FRANZ KAFKA *(Modern Library edition), Philip Rahv wrote: "his name (Kafka's) is today firmly linked in the literary mind to such names as Joyce and Proust and Yeats and Rilke and Eliot—the 'sacred untouchables,' as they have been rightly called, of the modern creative line." Rahv also wrote: "Thus it is clear that if Kafka so compellingly arouses in us a sense of immediate relatedness, of strong even if uneasy identification, it is because of the profound quality of his feeling for the experience of human loss, estrangement, guilt and anxiety—an experience increasingly dominant in the modern age."*

Kafka could fully project this experience—"of human loss, estrangement, guilt and anxiety"—even in a story of less than 1000 words. In "A Fratricide"—hardly more than a Kafkan fragment —the author (again using Rahv's words) "combines within one framework the recognizable and mysterious."

True, this short-short perhaps raises more questions than it answers. "Unriddle the mysteries of human nature!" For example: Who is Julia? ... Wasn't it Gertrude Stein who, asked "What is the answer?" on her deathbed, replied, "What is the question?"

A FRATRICIDE

by FRANZ KAFKA

THE EVIDENCE SHOWS THAT THIS is how the murder was committed:

Schmar, the murderer, took up his post about nine o'clock one night in clear moonlight by the corner where Wese, his victim, had to turn from the street where his office was into the street he lived in.

The night air was shivering cold. Yet Schmar was wearing only a

thin blue suit; the jacket was unbuttoned, too. He felt no cold; besides, he was moving about all the time. His weapon, half a bayonet and half a kitchen knife, he kept firmly in his grasp, quite naked. He looked at the knife against the light of the moon; the blade glittered; not enough for Schmar; he struck it against the bricks of the pavement till the sparks flew; regretted that, perhaps; and to repair the damage drew it like a violin bow across his boot sole while he bent forward, standing on one leg, and listened both to the whetting of the knife on his boot and for any sound out of the fateful side street.

Why did Pallas, the private citizen who was watching it all from his window nearby in the second story, permit it to happen? Unriddle the mysteries of human nature! With his collar turned up, his dressing gown girt round his portly body, he stood looking down, shaking his head.

And five houses farther along, on the opposite side of the street, Mrs. Wese, with a fox-fur coat over her nightgown, peered out of a window to look for her husband who was lingering unusually late tonight.

At last there rang out the sound of the doorbell before Wese's office, too loud for a doorbell, right over the town and up to heaven, and Wese, the industrious nightworker, issued from the building, still invisible in that street, only heralded by the sound of the bell; at once the pavement registered his quiet footsteps

Pallas bent far forward; he dared not miss anything. Mrs. Wese, reassured by the bell, shut her window with a clatter. But Schmar knelt down; since he had no other parts of his body bare, he pressed only his face and his hands against the pavement; where everything else was freezing, Schmar was glowing hot.

At the very corner dividing the two streets Wese paused; only his walking stick came round into the other street to support him. A sudden whim. The night sky invited him, with its dark blue and its gold. Unknowing, he gazed up at it, unknowing he lifted his hat and stroked his hair; nothing up there drew together in a pattern to interpret the immediate future for him; everything stayed in its senseless, inscrutable place. In itself it was a highly reasonable action that Wese should walk on, but he walked on to Schmar's knife.

"Wese!" shrieked Schmar, standing on tiptoe, his arm outstretched, the knife sharply lowered, "Wese! You will never see Julia again!" And right into the throat and left into the throat and a third time deep into the belly stabbed Schmar's knife. Water rats, slit open, give out such a sound as came from Wese.

"Done," said Schmar and

pitched the knife, now superfluous bloodstained ballast, against the nearest house front. "The bliss of murder! The relief, the soaring ecstasy from the shedding of another's blood! Wese, old nightbird, friend, alehouse crony, you are oozing away into the dark earth below the street. Why aren't you simply a bladder of blood so that I could stamp on you and make you vanish into nothingness? Not all we want comes true, not all the dreams that blossomed have borne fruit; your solid remains lie here, already indifferent to every kick. What's the good of the dumb question you are asking?"

Pallas, choking on the poison in his body, stood at the double-leafed door of his house as it flew open. "Schmar! Schmar! I saw it all, I missed nothing" Pallas and Schmar scrutinized each other. The result of the scrutiny satisfied Pallas; Schmar came to no conclusion.

Mrs. Wese, with a crowd of people on either side, came rushing up, her face grown quite old with the shock. Her fur coat swung open, she collapsed on top of Wese; the nightgowned body belonged to Wese, the fur coat spreading over the couple like the smooth turf of a grave belonged to the crowd.

Schmar, fighting down with difficulty the last of his nausea, pressed his mouth against the shoulder of the policeman who, stepping lightly, led him away.

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE PAPERBACKS

(Continued from page 32)

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Scherf, Margaret	THE BANKER'S BONES	Popular Library	.60	4/15
Selmark, George	EYES AT THE WINDOW	Popular Library	.60	4/15
Waugh, Hillary	THE GON GAME	Popular Library	.60	4/15
Waugh, Hillary	PRISONER'S PLEA	Popular Library	.60	4/15

Titles and Data Supplied by the Publishers

DETECT THE INSPECTOR

by VERONICA M. S. KENNEDY

The 17 clues below—some puns, some definitions, in the style of the London *Times* Crossword Puzzles—will lead reader-sleuths to 17 famous fictional detectives who, at some point in their criminological careers, were Inspectors:

1. Fruit Insect
2. Pail
3. Wall Street Animal
4. Gregorian goes without Tea
5. Bier
6. Sole
7. Gallic
8. Biblical Champion
9. Abbreviated Oriental
10. Poorer Business
11. Sir Thomas' Bug
12. Nosey
13. Award-winning Musician
14. Two Monarchs
15. Waterfowl
16. Sam Weller's Synonyms for Strolling
17. Okay Direction

(*Answers on page 131*)

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Luck has been with us this time round; there need be no griping or critic's self-pity. Amid a host of indifferent items they have dealt me four winners, all new books: each employing a different technique or approach, each set against a different background, each moving towards a well contrived surprise finale, each charged with its own high-voltage power. And, though only the forth may be called a detective story of classic pattern, each follows the rules and plays fair.

These things being so, we may dispense with the little introductory sermon I so often inflict on you, and get down to business at once.

Hot Summer Killing, by Judson Philips (Dodd, Mead, $3.95) begins with the street-corner murder of a Negro playwright by four unidentified white assailants in downtown New York, and may end in a literal explosion that will destroy a whole segment of the city. To the Traffic Commissioner has come a note signed 'Black Power.' Unless Mayor Ramsay pays them ten million dollars by a given hour on a given date three weeks hence, threatens 'Black Power,' they will blow up Grand Central Station at the height of the commuter rush. And it is followed by an anonymous phone-call amplifying the threat.

A week later, evidently as proof of earnest, somebody plants under the Commodore Hotel a complex, powerful bomb which could have wrecked that entire neighborhood if the bomb had been equipped with a firing mechanism. Every twenty-four hours—at home, at his office, always at a different place—Traffic Commissioner Severance is pursued by phone-calls from the same untraceable source. And time grows shorter every hour.

Peter Styles, engaging *Newsview* columnist, is whirled into the action and almost whirled away. But Peter, with good reason to believe 'Black Power' may be only a mask for conspirators of a very different sort, struggles through sensational events to the still more sensational climax. You can't go wrong with **Hot Summer Killing.**

In an unnamed Midwestern city at Christmas, the background of **Mongo's Back in Town,** by E. Richard Johnson (Harper & Row, $4.95) we are flung at once into an underworld of hoods and broads even more sub-human than usual. Mongo Nash, professional killer, returns home to knock off a thirteenth victim if his brother, Mike

the Fence, will pay him enough for the contract. Of the two Nash brothers, Mongo and Mike, we are still wondering which is worse when the cops find Mike very horribly dead in his own bar, the recipient of a pint of acid in the face as well as three bullets in the chest. Who hit Mike the Fence? Who stole those counterfeit plates out of his safe?

Every line rings true, as it should. This is the author's second novel, his first being written when he was doing time in Minnesota. But don't let the casual brutality fool you. How carefully this story has been constructed, with every clue in plain sight, only the connoisseur will appreciate before Lee Gordon, special agent of the F.B.I. and one of the few good guys, disentangles the evidence at the end. Four stars and three cheers.

In **Dead Straight,** by Donald MacKenzie (Houghton Mifflin $4.95) 'Straight' is a surname which soon takes on sinister, ironic implications from the many puzzles attached to it. Macbeth Bain, that well-meaning young Canadian in London, tries hard to earn an honest penny after the one lapse that has drawn him a term in the nick; his loyal if overtalkative girl, Kirstie, serves as a vocal conscience to keep him at it. But jobs are hard to find until he sees the newspaper advertisement for "a man of resource and courage to act as companion," together with the promise (fulfilled) of an excellent salary.

Jessica Straight, an attractive blonde widow with a handsome house at Kingston Hill, wants to be protected from her insanely jealous husband, Mark, who has committed suicide six months ago but still persecutes her, she says, with phone-calls and other attentions from beyond the grave. Some alien presence, supernatural or not, has in fact been breathing menace from the shadows; death calls again at Kingston Hill; one plot-twist after another will drive the reader to three or four different theories before the roaring, racing finish.

Eilis Dillon's **Sent to His Account** (Walker. $4.50) propounds a classic-style riddle in murder against the beauty (we hear little about incessant rain) of the Irish countryside.

When aristocratic Miles de Cogan inherits the estate of his late uncle, he walks from poverty into riches amid characters who may be classified as both funny ha-ha and funny peculiar. They begin to seem less funny ha-ha even before overbearing Tom Reid lies poisoned in Miles's new home. Here are the real Irish, portrayed by an Irishwoman who knows and loves them; here is a well plotted mystery, solved by Miles and Inspector Henley of the *Garda*; here is a narrative that will charm you with every word.

from **ENGLAND**

TWO WOMEN LOOK AT LOVE AND...

Here are an out-of-the-ordinary pair of stories, both written by women, one English and one American. Both stories take an oddly romantic look at love, marriage, and certain resultant by-products, triangular and otherwise... As so often happens when two authors deal with a similar theme, the two stories add up to more than the sum of their parts; when read one after the other (as we hope you will read these), each story miraculously adds an extra dimension to the other ...

THE INCURABLE COMPLAINT

by GUY CULLINGFORD

KIND MRS. HART WOULDN'T HAVE known the difference between a placebo and a gazebo. But she knew a sick woman from a healthy one without even having to think —the more so as she had seen both conditions in the same person.

Mrs. Hart had been working for Miss Chisholm every morning of the week except Sundays and bank holidays for a little over a year when her lady sprang a surprise on her. Miss Chisholm was a highly nervous spinster of uncertain age but of certain income.

Miss Chisholm was going to be married.

"Shook me, it did," confided Mrs. Hart to her own mate that night from her side of the bed. "She can't have known him more'n a few months, if that. There he stood, bold as brass and 'This is my future husband, Mrs. Hart,' she says. I took one look and that was enough. He's not a boy but he don't match up to her in years or anything else. Sexy, but cruel, that's him!"

"Same as me," observed Bill Hart with a smirk.

His wife snorted. "Bumpy forehead, horn rims, and the kind of skin that comes from living out of

a frying pan," she said, resuming her list of attributes. "He's a research chemist down at them new labs, she told me. He may be clever but I'd sooner take up with an unknown virus."

"Where did she meet him?"

"Ask me another. Not at a 'Bring and Buy,' I can tell you."

"How soon is it coming off?"

"Friday fortnight at the Registry. Might have made it the 13th while they were about it."

"What do you reckon he earns?" asked Bill, who was apt to measure all mankind by this simple yardstick.

"More than you and less than the Prime Minister," retorted Mrs. H. smartly. "Well, I'm worried. You don't know what marriage'll do to you at her time of life."

"You won't lose your job, will you?"

"No. He's moving in with us. Nice for him."

"It's nothing to do with you, ducks. For all you know she may thrive on it. Look what she's been missing."

Mrs. Hart's expression would have pleased a candid-cameraman.

At first it seemed as if Mr. Hart might be right. Miss Chisholm blossomed out as Mrs. Miller. Perhaps blossomed is too strong a word. Anyway, she put out a few shoots. She went to the hairdresser a lot, shortened her tweed skirts, and bought several lacy jumpers. In spite of her daily-help's forebodings, she looked fit enough and was full of nervous energy, besides developing an air of coyness which ill became her.

As for the bridegroom, Mrs. Hart saw little of him as he continued to grace the laboratories, leaving in the morning before her arrival and returning after her departure. But there was evidence of masculine attentions in the presence of gifts—boxes of chocolates, florists' flowers, and the glossier women's journals. To have called him the master of the house would have been a misnomer. Mrs. Miller was still very much in control of the establishment, whatever the strength of her emotions.

The very gradual decline of these harmonious relations was scarcely noticeable until the end of October when Mrs. Miller's marriage began to go downhill at a breakneck pace, and Mrs. Miller with it. Mrs. Hart might be anxious about her employer but she wasn't fond of her. Miss Chisholm had been just in most matters, but never generous; Mrs. Miller was no different. The real object of Mrs. Hart's devotions was the furnishings of the house itself. At home anything with four legs passed as a chair or table, but she had a secret passion for what she called "nice things." Her lady had plenty of such.

"That's what brought *him* into the fold," reflected Mrs. Hart sav-

agely as she directed the rise of adrenaline in her bloodstream toward bringing up a yet more splendid polish on the lovely mellow patina of a serpentine Sheraton sideboard.

In Dr. Dean's office there wasn't a "nice thing" of any description, if you excluded the doctor himself. Mrs. Hart had waited to be the last patient, ceding her turn to another woman who had come in after her and who nearly died of shock as a result. With relief she watched the hem of the receptionist's white uniform disappearing into the dispensary. For what she had to say she wanted no more audience than one—the doctor himself.

"Hullo, Mrs. H. What can I do for you? You look bonny."

Dr. Dean, middle-aged, leaned back in his swivel chair, feeling relaxed as he always did at the end of office hours, forgetting that it all would have to be suffered again the next evening. He had seen Mrs. Hart's children through every distemper from teething to teen-age, never grudging a house visit even if it might prove to be a false alarm. In return, Mrs. Hart had obliged by helping his housekeeper with the spring cleaning. These two were old friends with a mutual respect based on association when life was at its worst.

"It's not for me," muttered Mrs. Hart uneasily.

"Now, look! If Bill's leg is troubling him again, he must bring it in himself. I don't treat patients by proxy. I've told you that before."

"Nor me husband either," countered Mrs. Hart with an air of defiance. "It's my lady. The one I work for reg'lar."

"Heavens above! I don't even know her name."

"Mrs. Miller. Up the hill. Staveley Place."

"She's no patient of mine." He yawned, stretched his legs, and added in a tone of idle curiosity, "What's up with her?"

"She's being poisoned, that's what," burst out Mrs. Hart. "By *him*."

"Good God, woman!" exclaimed the doctor, shocked out of his casual manner. "That's slander if ever I heard it."

"It's not slander if its true."

"If you want to make an accusation like that I'm not your man. You'd better go to the police."

"Not me. Bill would half slaughter me."

There was some truth in that, thought the doctor. Bill Hart had his prejudices and was known to be impulsive. Dr. Dean chose his next words with care.

"What makes you think there's anything wrong?"

"It's the turns she has."

"What sort of turns?"

"Tummy trouble."

"Huh! That might be due to

overeating—or laxatives. Or dieting with citrus fruits. Not all poison comes out of a bottle, believe me."

"I've had too many kids not to know the difference between an ordinary stomachache and what she has."

"Well then, it may be something serious. Could be a gastric ulcer. She should see her own doctor."

"She hasn't got one. When she had a rash on her forehead once, I caught her looking it up in a book. She's got a set, leather-bound."

"One of those, is she?"

"She never ailed to speak of before she married *him*. Nor after, until he began to keep late hours at the lab."

The doctor groaned. "Steady on, now! If you must out with it, take it slowly and stick to the facts. By *him*, you mean the husband."

"Who else?"

Dr. Dean dragged his scribbling pad toward him. "What did you say the name was?"

"Miller. He's a research chemist down at the Centre. Not one of the higher-ups."

Having noted the name, the doctor began to doodle until he found that he was doodling test tubes. Then he hastily scribbled them out.

"How long have they been married?"

"Ten months good as."

"It might be—"

"She's fifty if she's a day," pointed out Mrs. Hart scornfully. "And he'll be in his early thirties. Stands to reason it couldn't work."

"Um. Well, she brought it on herself."

"Not being poisoned she didn't."

"For God's sake keep your voice down," begged the doctor with a nervous glance toward his dispensary. "I wouldn't have let you get as far as you have if I didn't know you. Your best plan is to keep a still tongue in your head. Unless you like to put it to Mrs. Miller that she'd do better to seek proper medical advice on her condition rather than take a risk on what some old quack put into print in the reign of Victoria."

"Oh, but *he's* treating her now."

"Is he now?"

"Tablets in a bottle without a label on it," whispered Mrs. Hart in a conspiratorial tone which seemed to the doctor even more penetrating than her ordinary voice.

"Just a sedative, I expect," he hastened to assure her. "He shouldn't do it but if he's a chemist there's always the temptation. It's not criminal. Is she the nervy type?"

"A bit jumpy. More than a bit nowadays."

"There you are, then. You go home like a sensible woman and we'll both forget you've ever said anything. I can't help you, I'm afraid."

Mrs. Hart took a stance before him that reminded him of Queen

Victoria herself. Obstinate, yet somehow admirable. Her bottom lip jutted out.

"You'll let her die then?"

"It won't come to that."

"Oh, won't it? What about your Hypocritical oath?"

The doctor began to laugh, then checked his mirth in the face of her incomprehension.

"All right, Mrs. H. You win. Give me a tinkle next time she's taken bad. If she's really ill she won't object. I'll come along and see what's up."

"Thank you, Doctor."

Victory gained, Mrs. Hart took herself off content.

Dr. Dean sat on, no longer relaxed. For a hard-working family doctor a case of suspected slow poisoning is so much hell. Until he is absolutely sure of his ground he dare not move for obvious reasons. While he hesitates, an extra large dose may remove the doubt and the patient simultaneously. If medical knowledge advances, so do the toxic possibilities, thought the doctor. Along with some new diseases. Yet in these ambiguous cases there is always someone, well-intentioned or otherwise, to come forward with bright suggestions either before death or after it. And whether they are to be given serious consideration depends on the attendant circumstances almost as much as on the character of the person.

Take Mrs. Hart. The most reliable of women you might think. But hadn't her nose been put out of joint recently by the unexpected addition of a husband to the household? She might have lost some of her perquisites—found that there was more to do for two than for one—or had a row with Miller. In the ordinary way the doctor would have taken her ramblings with a fair-sized pinch of salt. But for one thing—quite unrelated. But was it unrelated?

Only that morning his had been the dubious pleasure of informing a newly acquired unmarried patient that her pregnancy test had proved positive.

She obviously didn't worry, so why should he?

The fact that on her previous visit she had revealed her name as Miss Hendricks and mentioned rather significantly that she was personal assistant to a Mr. Miller at the Research Centre may have had something to do with it.

He was sure that he wasn't lucky enough to have heard the last of Mrs. Miller's troubles and on the following day his pessimism was justified.

Mrs. Hart handled the telephone as if, as a means of communication, it had just been invented.

"Hullo ... hullo ... hullo," she shouted into the instrument. "Is that you, Doctor?"

He recognized her voice at once.

"What is it?" he demanded irritably, knowing only too well.

"It's Maud Hart here. She's bad again—you know who. I've been kept too busy to ring before."

"All right. I'll be with you as soon as I can. Get her to bed."

"She's already there."

But when he stood by the bedside, the paroxysm, or whatever it was, was over. Mrs. Miller, the color of sour cream and prostrated by weakness, stared up at him from her tumbled pillows and complained feebly, "I didn't send for you."

Dr. Dean shook a limp hand which lay outside the sheet and his own traveled on to feel her pulse.

"Mrs. Hart is an old patient of mine. I'm afraid she jumped the gun. My name is Dean. You need a doctor—if not me, another. I can't treat you if you don't agree to it, of course."

His tone was gentle. She was an unlovely sight but he was used to unlovely sights. And never, under any conditions, would this particular woman have been attractive. An elongated face under graying hair, sharp-featured and thin-lipped—a far remove from the obvious charms of Miss Hendricks.

"It might as well be you," she conceded ungraciously, "if it has to be anyone." Her voice dropped and so did her eyelids.

He probed with a few pertinent questions calling for "Yes" and "No" answers. Then he asked, "Have you always been subject to this sort of thing?"

She seemed to hesitate. "Only lately."

"What sparks off the attacks? Any idea?"

"No."

"You don't eat tinned food? Try out any fancy dishes?"

She didn't bother to speak, just moved her head from one side to the other in negation.

"Now, lie there quietly. I want to examine you." He remembered what had been said about her nerves and added, "Would you like Mrs. Hart to stand by?"

But that she didn't require. The thin lips tightened and he thought the poor Maud Hart was in for a reprimand by and by.

An antique commode by the side of her bed (twin, not double, he observed) held a reading lamp, a carriage clock, and a novel by Thackeray. No sign of any medicines and you wouldn't expect it in so immaculate a room.

"Are you in the habit of taking anything to help you?" he asked. "Tablets from the pharmacist, perhaps?"

The tiniest fraction of delay made her denial suspect.

"Then don't," he advised. "I'll tell Mrs. Hart to call at my office for a prescription and I'll look in again tomorrow. Now, go to sleep."

Arsenical poisoning is a rarity in these days of progress. The doctor had never come across it except in textbooks. Unless now. But how ridiculous! If Mrs. Hart had resorted to the use of poison, it might have been just her cup of tea; but to associate the idea with a research chemist seemed as ludicrous as expecting a spaceman to ride in a horse and buggy.

After washing his hands in the bathroom Dr. Dean risked a quick peep into the glass-fronted cabinet attached to the wall. Mouthwash, tooth paste—the usual things. And yes, a bottle of tablets minus a label and three-quarters full. Quick as thought he unscrewed the top and tipped two of the tablets into his palm. Then he dropped them into his pocket.

Mrs. Hart intercepted him on his way out and he gave her his instructions. "I'll come back and see to her," said Mrs. Hart. "Then I'll have to get off home. Is she all right to be left?"

"Oh, yes, I think so. She'll drop off. She's exhausted. Don't wake her if she's sleeping. Rest is more important than medicine."

"I've cleaned up everywhere." Mrs. Hart's hand flew to her mouth. "Oooh! I never thought. Did you want samples?"

"Say anything more like that and I'll slay you," threatened the doctor, extra-cross because the purloined tablets had made him her accomplice. This was unfair, he decided the moment after; so ashamed of himself he added, "Don't let your feelings run away with your good sense. Liking isn't everything."

"What makes you think I like her?" muttered Mrs. Hart. "I don't like either of them. Fair's fair, is all I say."

He made no move about the tablets as next day he called in to be received without enthusiasm by Mrs. Miller who was up and about again and apparently recovered. Suddenly a wave of this year's flu swept over the town and the doctor was busy coping. But he didn't forget her; actually the epidemic made him more uneasy on her behalf. The symptoms of the present scourge were near enough to Mrs. Miller's to suggest to anyone so minded that now was the time to float her out on the tide.

As he bucketed about in his car from one stricken household to the next, it came to him to wonder exactly what new drugs they were currently investigating at the Research Centre and if there was something which might produce toxic effects of arsenic without leaving its traces. Was Miller really dangerous? Had the cool and practical Miss Hendricks come to him for her pregnancy test, which she could equally well have obtained elsewhere, as a form of insurance? Why did she mention

Miller at all? It hadn't been necessary. If she felt that she needed protection from her lover—assuming that Mr. Miller stood in that relationship—how much more his unprepossessing but wealthy wife needed it! It was a nice point—but a nasty one.

The next S.O.S. came quickly and this time it was Mrs. Miller who did the telephoning. It must have been her last rational act before she succumbed and became a mere suffering body racked by intense pain and sickness. Dean rushed round to find her unattended as it was afternoon and outside Mrs. Hart's hours. It was lucky that the door was on the latch—Mrs. Miller was in no fit state to answer doors. Dean had to double as doctor and nurse and today he would have had no compunction in taking specimens, if there had been any opportunity for such refinements. On one of his numerous trips to the bathroom he did, however, possess himself of the bottle of tablets now down to its lower layers.

"And if anyone wonders where its gone, good luck to them," he thought savagely. "It'll take more than some damned chemist to get the better of me."

It didn t occur to him that he was now allying himself with Mrs. Hart with no further evidence, with no additional reason. Not until the attack let up in violence did he pull himself together and admit that the cause of Mrs. Miller's distress might have some deeper origin that would not be revealed by a routine bedside examination. In a comparatively lucid interval he rang up the Research Centre and asked for Miller, being finally put through by a voice he recognized as belonging to Miss Hendricks. He asked Miller to return home at once as his wife was very ill and could not be left unattended. By the time Miller's sports car had arrived, to lord it over the doctor's humbler vehicle, Mrs. Miller was over the worst and her medical attendant was free to turn his attention to the husband.

Dean wasted no words on an exchange of courtesies. He said at once that he wished to arrange for Mrs. Miller to go into the hospital for observation. To his surprise Miller immediately agreed.

"I've been urging it on her myself," he said, "The trouble is that my wife is allergic to doctors, probably because she has never needed one before. I seem to have been out whenever she has these upsets but they obviously need investigation. If you can persuade her to go in for a checkup I shall be more than grateful."

Smooth words, but their very smoothness provoked in the doctor a reaction opposite to the one intended. He took a sharp, diagnostic look at Mrs. Miller's husband

and, like Hart, he formed an unfavorable opinion. Good brain but no scruples, he thought. Odd . . . I've seen something like that face before. Why does it inevitably attract women? Crippen, the Brides in the Bath man—wasn't there something common to all of them in the matter of appearance?

"I'll fix it as soon as possible," he said abruptly. "Trouble is, they're full up with severe influenza cases. Never mind. I'll see what I can do."

"Have you spoken to my wife about it?"

"I'll do so now. She's been through far too unpleasant an experience to put up much of a fight," remarked the doctor grimly.

In the end the head nurse put up more resistance than Mrs. Miller. Beds were in short supply, nurses rushed off their feet—but Dr. Dean was a favorite of hers so . . .

Which was more than Mrs. Miller became. Mrs. Miller was given tests from A to Z and she protested every inch of the way. After the tests were completed she remained in the hospital for another fortnight, in accordance with the doctor's instructions. The hospital food was frightful and she had every excuse to be sick, but she never was. Mr. Miller did not visit (he obviously had more interesting things to do) but he sent offerings of fruit and candy, which were promptly confiscated under the doctor's orders. Dean had never forgotten that a poisoned fruit pie donated by a loving spouse had once accelerated the passing of a hospitalized patient somewhere or other. But the nurses devoured the gifts secretly and were none the worse for it. After all, that was all they hoped to receive for their attentions to Mrs. Miller apart from uncooperativeness and bouts of irritability, and they were not disappointed.

On the day before she was due to be discharged, the head nurse discussed the test reports with Dr. Dean and, fond of him as she was, couldn't forbear from making a few frank remarks.

"Organically she's as sound as a bell, much more so than most people her age. No excesses and she's obviously looked after herself. She eats everything put before her and although she complains bitterly, no one has ever seen the slightest tendency towards gastric upset. I think she's having you on, my lad."

"You don't think I should believe the evidence of my own eyes then?"

"She wouldn't be doing it herself, would she?"

"She was trying to conceal her attacks, not to exhibit them."

"Well, I don't know. She may be married but to me she's just another soured old spinster," said

the head nurse, a spinster herself but far from soured. "Nerves and change of life, they've a lot to answer for. But how relieved we are that she's going home! Send me that husband next time—he's the one who has my sympathy."

Am I right or am I wrong? the doctor asked himself and on the way out of the hospital grounds he changed his mind, reversed his car, and drove it toward the laboratory at the back of the building on a mission he had overlooked.

One of the lab assistants, white uniformed, hastened up to him.

"Oh, Doctor, I'm sorry. I meant to let you have a note on the analysis of those tablets. But we're short-staffed from this confounded flu. And you didn't say it was urgent and anyway—considering what they were—"

"What were they?"

The young man grinned. "Starch and lactose—just a placebo."

"Did you test every tablet?"

"Yes, just to make sure. I know they're not favorably regarded by some doctors but I never could see that they do any harm."

"Each man is entitled to his own opinion. They're all right in the controlled experiments for which they were intended. I've never used them on a patient yet."

"But surely there's not much difference between them and the traditional bottle of colored water? 'I shall please.' That's what placebo means, doesn't it?"

"It can do other things than please."

"You know best, sir. You're the doctor."

And you're a cheeky young laboratory assistant, thought the doctor, getting into his car again. Odd, how people seemed younger as one became older. He was even beginning to think of the head nurse as his own contemporary and she was due to retire next year. Racing toward the drive gates in an attempt to regain his lost youth, Dr. Dean nearly ran down Mrs. Hart who had just come through the gates carrying a large parcel. He trod on the brake hard and winding down his window apologized.

"Sorry about that, Mrs. H. You won't be allowed in. It isn't visiting hours and Mrs. Miller certainly isn't on the danger list."

"I only want to leave this parcel for her. It's some nighties I washed out."

"Save yourself a walk. She's going home tomorrow. Hop in and I'll drive you back."

"Well, that's nice," observed Mrs. Hart who always liked a ride in a car. "How is she?"

"Fine—as sweet-natured as ever. And you can stop worrying. I've got her case under control."

"That's good then. Everything's in apple-pie order. I haven't seen a sign of *him*."

Dr. Dean fell silent, apparently paying attention to his driving. But his mind was fully occupied. It

was all clear now. He felt as he did when he'd arrived at a true diagnosis of a puzzling illness, which indeed this had turned out to be.

Here was a woman who knew herself betrayed, realized that her life was the only thing which stood between her husband's inheritance and a new bride, and expected—yes, expected was the word—to be poisoned off simply because he was a chemist. Here was volume A to D of an out-of-date medical encyclopedia wherein was painstakingly elaborated the exact symptoms of arsenical poisoning for her nervous system to imitate. Arsenic? Probably the only poison that occurred to her.

And here was the real villain of the piece—a coldly calculating monster who had cashed in on a combination of circumstances, as he always would, and had set out to do murder with a bottle of perfectly innocuous tablets.

Murder? Would Mrs. Miller have died of her own sustained fear? Actually died? But isn't that how primitives die at the hands of witch doctors and ill-wishers. And wasn't Mrs. Miller in her way a primitive, in spite of all her "nice things?"

Well, he didn't propose to put it to the test. That really wouldn't have been in accordance with the Hippocratic oath. Yet one thing continued to puzzle him. Did Miller force the tablets on her? Did he hypnotize her into swallowing them as G. J. Smith was supposed to have hypnotized his lady wives?

Mrs. Hart might know and, after all, it was due to her that any action had been taken at all. Already she knew so much, so it couldn't hurt if she knew a little more.

He said on impulse, "Those tablets Miller was giving his wife. They were what we call a placebo—made of starch and milk—sugar. But she thought there might be something wrong with them and that was what made her ill. Nerves, you know—you said she was nervy. But tell me this. Why the heck did she take them if she thought they were harmful?"

"Same as I'd take anything Bill gave me even if I thought he'd been at the weed killer. It's trust, you see. Being a bachelor you wouldn't know. You can't get on in marriage without it."

The conscious trust, thought the doctor. But what about that old subconscious?

The day Mrs. Miller came home, Dr. Dean presented her with a bottle full of tablets. They were identical in every way with the ones he had appropriated, even to the lack of a label on the bottle. She looked from the tablets to him in a very peculiar way. He couldn't make her out.

"The moment you feel an attack coming on, down with one

of these in two dessertspoonfuls of plain water," he advised, solemn as an owl. "You take my word for it. They're the perfect antidote. Show them to your husband if you like. I expect he'll be anxious about you."

"Do you think you should have a word with him?"

"I don't think that's necessary as long as he knows how I'm treating you. As a chemist he'd naturally be interested. I'll look in again early next week."

You cart those off to your lab, my boy, he thought with wry amusement. You'll soon find I'm not the mug you took me for!

He didn't know what effect the tablets would have on Mrs. Miller, but he was sure they'd act as a powerful deterrent on Mr. Miller.

When he made his next call, he found Mrs. Miller wan but composed. She assured him that there had been no further attacks of sickness. But she had other news for him. "My husband has asked me to divorce him," she said regarding the doctor steadily.

He ventured a noncommittal "Oh?"

"He wants to be free to marry his secretary, a Miss Hendricks, who is with child by him."

An old-fashioned way of putting it, but after all, it was an old-fashioned predicament.

"Let him go," advised Dr. Dean vehemently. "He's no good for you and this is an easy way out."

Unprofessional conduct—but sometimes the blunt truth is best.

"I can't do it," she answered stiffly. The elongated face with its sharp features and prim lips became quite rigid with determination.

The doctor felt his own blood pressure rising. Checked in the first stages of a diabolical but completely unprovable crime, Miller had obviously abandoned his original intentions and, no doubt prodded by his mistress, was ready to settle for a release. And here was this silly woman, bound by convention and only partly aware of her husband's designs, bent on keeping him beside her until in desperation he thought up the next one.

"Why can't you?" demanded Dean, thoroughly exasperated.

The prim mouth opened and disgorged three words before closing again in the tight line of unshakeable conviction.

"I love him."

Dr. Dean shrugged and turned toward the door. There was no cure for that complaint. And if there were, which of us would ask for it?

***from* THE UNITED STATES**

a *NEW* crime story by

MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD

Now that you have finished Guy Cullingford's English tale of love and marriage, and some of its offshoots and consequences, read Miriam Allen deFord's American version of love and marriage, and some of its side effects and eventualities—what might be called the strange fruit and flower of romance . . .

Miss deFord's story reveals her well-known literary trademarks —"clarity of expression, special insight into human ways, and sound knowledge of abnormal psychology." But remember (for both stories): while "broken things can be mended . . . they always leave a crack."

THE CRACK

by MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD

EVERYBODY WARNED HER AGAINST him—her married brothers (their parents were dead), her best friend, even his sister—so of course she married him. The attacks made him only the more romantic and desirable.

And that could be understood if the things they said against him had been the ordinary ones —that he would be unfaithful, or cruel, or that he was an alcoholic. These at least are delinquencies which to a certain kind of girl might seem glamorous, or that might arouse in her a missionary fervor. But he was none of these things—which was why she loved him; he never looked at another woman, he was tenderness itself to her, and she never saw him intoxicated.

What they told her was that he was scheming and crooked and money-mad, whereas she thought of herself as rigidly honest and

aboveboard. But she married him just the same.

Two years later they were still in love. But she was beginning to understand him a little better—not to blame him, just to understand him. The things she had been taught and that had seemed ingrained—about right and wrong and honesty and cheating—had gradually sunk from the surface of her feeling, and when they raised their heads from the depths and reproached her she stifled them hastily in the name of loyalty to Brett. Perhaps she had already carried within herself a tiny seed of corruption. She got used to the idea that friends were fair game for exploitation, that except for their own inseparable bond there was nobody or nothing that mattered, that any kind of chicanery was justified if it resulted in his—or in their—benefit.

So she was not terribly surprised when one day—with that unmistakable look in his eyes that still made her heart plummet until she told it to be quiet, that Brett knew what he was doing—he said to her, "Honey, have you noticed that you've made a conquest?"

She smiled uncertainly. "What are you talking about?" she asked.

"Jim Potter."

"What nonsense!" But she knew he wasn't fooling—he never fooled.

Jim Potter—James Fordyce Potter, orphan, only child, inheritor of the immensely prosperous Potter Iron Works, at least 30 years their senior: a pleasant, dull, kindly man whom Brett had met somehow in one of the intricately tangled groups he seemed to drift into and out of, who seemed to have taken a fancy to amiable, ingratiating Brett, had at Brett's suggestion been asked to dinner, and from that time on had become a constant visitor and family friend.

Of course she knew very well, understanding Brett as she did by now, that there was nothing disinterested in his side of this sudden friendship. Potter was a good man but a ponderous bore, lonely because he had worn out the patience of all his acquaintances from childhood on—the kind of man whom only warm, affectionate relatives could stand too much of at a time; and he had no relatives nearer than cousins as rich as he and therefore free to leave poor old Jim out of any but the most obligatory family reunions. She and Brett seemed to be his only friends, which was pathetic, since the most she had been able to give him was polite sympathy; and Brett, of course, as she had known from the beginning, thought of him merely as a potential source of acquisition.

She waited for her husband to go on, the now familiar worried nausea eating at her.

"It's really sad," Brett said, smiling. "The poor old geezer has so obviously fallen head over heels in

love with you."

"Nonsense!" she said again faintly. "I'm only civil to him."

"As if any man with sense could *help* falling in love with you, my darling," he went on smoothly. And the odd thing was, she knew he meant it; she was the one weak spot in his otherwise impenetrable armor of self-regard. "But I'm not just theorizing. Yesterday, when you were downtown having your hair done, he dropped in without warning, as usual. We had a few drinks, and I think he'd had a few more before he came, to get his courage up. Anyway, all at once he just went to pieces.

"I can tell you, Gracia, it was most embarrassing. He began telling me how much our friendship meant to him, that this was the first time he'd ever felt really welcome, at home, really belonging somewhere with people who liked him for something besides his money—he's a fearful bore, poor guy, but he's not stupid. Then he began to blubber like a baby, and said he had to stop coming here, or seeing us, because of you, because—"

"Oh, no, how dreadful!" she cried, appalled.

" 'Gracia by name, and so gracious by nature, and so lovely!' I didn't know where to look. 'The only woman I have ever—if only I could have met her when I could have hoped—' That kind of thing."

"What did you—"

"What could I say? Except how decent it was of him to come right out with it, that we both knew him for a fine, upright, honorable man, and unless it gave him more pain than pleasure to see you, I knew you would understand and welcome him as you always had. Right?"

"I suppose so, but—"

Horrible words like "pimp" and "pander" flashed through her mind, to be rejected immediately and indignantly. How awful of her!

"I'll tell you why," Brett went on softly. "Because he told me something else. It won't be for long, Gracia. He said that, when I'd told him neither of us would want him to exile himself if it meant so much to him. He told me then that the doctors have given him six months more at the most."

"What's wrong with him?"

She spoke sharply. Brett had his dreamy tone—oh, she loved him, she still adored him, but—

"Heart—liver—I don't know. Nothing infectious, I'm sure of that, for he made a point of it that no physical harm could come to us by—er—association with him."

Then her own heart gave a frightened leap; for Brett went on in that same dreamy inflection.

"If only you *had* met him before we knew each other, darling!

Then you might have married him—you'd have pitied him and wanted to make his last months happy—and *then* we could have met and soon you'd be a rich young widow and neither of us would ever have to worry about money for the rest of our lives."

She shivered. This was leading up to something—something she didn't want to hear.

"But I didn't," she said firmly. "So all this is quite pointless."

"Not quite." She was sitting on a cushion beside Brett's big armchair. He leaned over and ran his fingers through her hair and down her cheek to her chin. "Gracia, my sweet," he murmured, "why can't we do something sensible to take advantage of this situation? Nothing to hurt Jim—of course not; but something to do all three of us a world of good."

She didn't answer. She couldn't; something hard was pressing against her heart and keeping her from breathing.

"I can't bear to think of losing one single day of life with you." She could hardly hear the soft ingratiating voice. "But if it would mean the assurance of long happy years together, it would be worth the sacrifice."

She sprang to her feet, shaking all over.

"Brett, what are you driving at?"

He pulled her into his lap.

"Now—now—don't be so upset, sweetheart. I was just daydreaming. It's quite impossible, of course. But it would be such a wonderful ploy!"

She shook her head violently. Then she looked around her at the shabby room with its worn furniture. Poor Brett! He was used to comfort, to luxury really; she knew how he must feel. But surely he could find something soon worth his considering, some position where they would know how to appreciate him properly. Or perhaps she, untrained as she was, could find some kind of job. And there was still a little left of her father's, and then her mother's, legacies.

"You see, kitten, there's something you don't know." Brett was whispering in her ear, holding her to him. She moved, but he held her tight. She never could say no to anything when his arms were around her and his dear hands caressed her.

"I meant you never to know, but this— I knew the minute I first saw you, darling, that I couldn't live without you, that nothing must stand in the way. I *had* to have you, no matter what. Gracia dearest, try to understand. You will—we love each other enough for nothing to come between us. But we aren't really married—not legally."

Then she did tear herself from him, and stood staring at him wild-eyed, feeling her face grow white.

"What!"

He looked away. His mouth convulsed, and to her horror she saw tears roll down his cheeks. Oh, no, that she could never bear! Whatever it was, he was her Brett whom she adored, and she must accept it.

"Don't!" she cried, back in his arms again, his stricken face against her breast. "Oh, my darling, don't! I can't stand it. Tell me. I'll understand."

"I have a wife somewhere," Brett said in a dead voice. "Alive or dead, I don't know. Not even my sister knows about it. We were a pair of kids. She left me. But we were never divorced—I've never had money enough."

Her sudden pallor woke him to alarm.

"Does it matter so much?" he begged. "This isn't 1870, you know!"

She pulled herself together, but it was hard to speak.

"Not that," she managed to say at last. "That doesn't matter—if you had told me I would have gone with you anyway. But it's the deception—"

"Oh, only that!" he cried relieved. And something broke in her.

Broken things can be mended. But they always leave a crack.

She loved him: so she told herself that he was immature, a child grabbing for what he wanted and oblivious of anything that got in the way of his obtaining it. The strong protective man she had dreamed of and tried to find in him had disappeared forever; but he had left behind him a grown-up boy who must never be allowed to know that her image of him had changed.

So with her new kind of love in her bruised and bleeding spirit, she said, "Why have you told me now, Brett? What has it to do with Jim Potter?"

He smiled triumphantly.

"That's my girl!" he cried, all briskness and good cheer again. "I knew you'd see the point."

"What point?"

He became absurdly businesslike. As if he were planning a sales campaign—well, wasn't he?—he outlined the scheme in detail, step by step.

"Potter's our—your good friend; he's an older man, with worldly experience. You trust him and know you can rely on him. Of course you have no idea he's in love with you—he's just a friend, something like a kind and understanding uncle. So you call him—you're upset, excited, maybe in tears—"

That wouldn't be hard, she thought. Her heart was sinking lower at every word.

"You tell him something dreadful has happened, and you need his advice. He'll ask if something's the matter with me, and you tell

him no, but it concerns me. When and where you can meet him and talk to him privately? Not here. And he's too much of a gentleman to suggest his own place—it will be a restaurant, probably, one of those places where they know him and he can have any secluded table he wants and a discreet waiter who will serve you and disappear.

"Then—reluctantly—you tell him what I've just told you.

"So, you ask him, what shall you do? You couldn't turn me in as a bigamist—you wouldn't, would you, Gracia?—or he either; he's too honorable for that." Brett's mouth twisted.

"But you can't just go on as if it hadn't happened. So you want his advice—he's the only friend you can trust. That puts him on his honor. I know him; I know exactly what he will say: you must go to Reno and divorce me. He'll insist on paying for everything."

"Oh, no!"

"You should anyway, Gracia, now that you know the truth. It isn't legally necessary, but it's the only way without revealing the actual situation. Of course you won't give the true reason—allege cruelty or whatever you want; I won't contest it. And I swear to you, darling, I'm going to find that woman I married and get free of her somehow. Then once we're both in the clear, we can be quietly remarried."

"But—"

"Now wait. You don't get the whole picture yet. Two things: it will cost me money too; I'll have to hire a detective to trace her. But Potter will be generous, and you'll be able to spare me enough for that. Then—"

"Brett, did you and your first wife—"

"Her name is Diane," he said dryly.

"Did you have any children?" she asked painfully.

"None that I know of."

But could she ever believe him again? The crack widened a little more.

"Let me go on. The other point: why should we do all this without profit? We'll have earned it, both of us. So when your divorce goes through—and it would never enter his head that it wasn't for keeps—

"Oh, I can hear him hemming and hawing—I know him like a book. He knows you don't love him, but nothing matters to him except you. Could you possibly make him the happiest man on earth for the few months he has left? For your own sake, would you do him the honor of marrying him so that he can take care of you and, after that, leave everything to you?"

"No—*no!*"

"But why not?" His arms were around her again. "Do you think I'd let you do it if there were any

danger of its being a real marriage? The old man's sick, kitten —and even if he weren't, people like Jim Potter would die rather than take advantage of a woman who had said honestly that pity and gratitude were all she felt."

"But it's cruel, Brett." It's a con game, her silent mentor said.

"Why? He'll mean it—you'll make his last months happy. He'll have you near him, bearing his name. Why, it would be cruel to deny him his dream! And remember—it's only for such a short time. It will take that long, anyway, for me to find Diane and get rid of her."

"Rid?"

"Persuade her to a divorce, naturally, Gracia. Did you think I was planning to murder her?" He laughed. "Of course, I know her only too well—she's a greedy bitch. It may cost plenty. But by then you'll be Mrs. Potter, with means to keep me supplied. We'll always keep in touch, even if it's secretly. And once it's all over—why, perhaps less than a year from now—we'll be remarried and live happily forever after—a rich couple with all our problems solved."

He answered every doubt, every objection, so glibly. But the crack was there now and always would be there, and she saw it as clearly as if it were an actual material flaw.

As if he guessed what she was thinking, he let her go and smiled —that dear, tender smile she loved so much.

"I've put you in a tizzy, haven't I?" he said gently. "Darling, if you don't want to, we'll forget the whole thing. Let's not talk about it any more now. Think about it and we'll discuss it again tomorrow."

She didn't sleep much that night. Brett dropped off easily, as always, but she lay motionless, staring at the dark ceiling—and the crack had grown just wide enough to let realizations ooze through it that before she had repressed into unconsciousness.

Brett wasn't even a little boy, but an arrested adolescent, self-indulgent, covetous, lazy. As much as he could love anyone except himself, he loved her. But never in this world would he settle down or become a responsible adult. Perhaps the only way to make life possible with him would be to surround him with comfort and affluence. And there was only one possible way she could do that.

It was a hare-brained scheme, but Brett, with his quick superficial understanding, had analyzed poor Jim Potter, his motives and his feelings and his inhibitions, so a T. Potter would believe her implicitly, never suspect a plot. And yes, underneath she had realized very well that this good, generous, bumbling, boring man was in love with her; no woman could mistake that sort of thing. She had

chosen to ignore it, as the kindest way out.

And *would* she be doing Potter any harm? Of course a real marriage was unthinkable; but if it was true—and knowing him, she was sure he would tell her as he had told Brett—that he was dying of some incurable disease, that danger could be avoided easily enough. And since he did love her, and since he had no kinfolk with claims upon him, he *would* want his fortune to go to her. (Then why couldn't he just leave his estate to her and Brett together? She suppressed that thought: it would have seemed too irregular a solution for him—one too irregular even to have occurred to Brett.) She would, in fact, be giving Potter great happiness, at the sacrifice of only a short period of her life. Wasn't it, however devious and even semi-criminal it might seem to others, actually her duty?

Life with Brett had begun to corrupt her. The corruption hadn't gone very far yet, but, unguessed by her, it was there. In the morning she woke Brett and said only, "All right."

It all went by clockwork, just as Brett had outlined it. Three months later, Gracia was Mrs. James Fordyce Potter.

And their marriage, except for one thing, was also just as she had predicted. Potter was kind, lavishly generous, doting, never wanting her out of his sight. After one painful discussion in which she had made it plain that Brett was still the man she loved, that she had had to leave him solely because she could not bring herself to participate knowingly in a bigamous union, Potter made no attempt to consummate the marriage. And he did tell her the doctors' verdict.

The exception was that, though he was obviously far from well, under constant medical treatment and gradually growing worse, his obscure circulatory disease (which he tried to explain to her but which she begged him not to talk about), though without cure and ultimately fatal, seemed likely now to go on keeping him half alive for some indefinite period beyond the six months he had been given and had believed in. A year passed, and he was still up and about, even able to lead a fairly normal life. Gracia tried hard never to think of it; she told herself how faithfully and tenderly she would care for him when he did become incapacitated, and fought back with shame and guilt the impatient calculations as to when that would be.

All this time, surreptitiously so as not to offend Jim's delicacy, she had kept in close communication with Brett. She seldom left Potter's side, but sometimes a shopping expedition meant a discreet luncheon meeting, or Brett would

phone her when Potter took his prescribed afternoon nap. Very seldom, when Potter had to spend hours in a doctor's office, they drove in her new car to an out-of-town motel. It would never have occurred to Jim Potter to question her mail, but Brett had an invincible disinclination to put anything in written form that could conceivably ever be used against him.

So it was directly by word of mouth that she knew when, with money supplied by her, he hired a private detective; she knew when Diane was located. She paid (she could never ask Jim for so much money, but she "lost" the most valuable jewelry he had given her, a ruby and diamond bracelet, and had to remain silent when unwittingly he cheated the insurance company out of its value and used the money to buy her another) for the settlement by which Diane agreed to an uncontested divorce. (A nasty thought crossed her mind —what proof had she that Diane had ever existed? Down! But the crack widened a little more.) All that, indeed, took longer than they had expected; but it was over at last and now nothing stood in the way of their reunion but the fact that James Potter was still alive.

It was on the day exactly a year and a half since she had left Brett, and over one too many cocktails before lunch, that he finally exploded.

"It's intolerable!" he cried. "Will that old buzzard never die?"

"Keep your voice down, Brett. And don't talk that way about Jim. Nobody could be—"

"Oh, yes, I know—he's perfect; he's a saint, and I'm the villain of the piece. But damn it, Gracia, I want my girl back. I want our real life together to begin."

And you want the money—the thought crept through her mind and was suppressed. All she said was, "I know, darling. I feel just as you do. But it isn't Jim's fault he hasn't died."

"No, but—" He gulped. "What kind of life is that for anyone? He's just dragging around, in pain all the time. I should think he'd be glad to have it over with. And it can't be any fun living with a woman you love and not daring to touch her. Unless you've been lying to me," he added viciously.

"You know better than that."

"Well, then, the greatest mercy anyone could show him would be to end his misery."

She shook her head as if her ears had betrayed her, and sat staring at him in silence.

"Be sensible, Gracia. He's had his reward—a year and a half of it. Under any decent social system he could go to his doctor and ask for a pill or something."

She wondered at her own lack of surprise. Subconsciously she had always known this would come.

"Not that I'd want him hurt—you know that—or that I'd ever let

you do anything that could mean the slightest danger for you. But the last thing anybody would have suspected is that he wouldn't have succumbed a year ago or more. No doctor would hesitate for a minute to sign the certificate."

Stop, please stop, her mind said. But she knew he would not stop; she was powerless. The crack gaped wide-open now, but still the substance held. This was the man she loved.

"A fellow I know," he said carelessly, "a guy who writes detective stories, was telling me the other day about a curious thing he'd run across. Combination of two common toilet articles; you'd never think of it. Neither of them's poisonous alone. But put six drops of the mixture into any liquid, and —poof! All over in about two minutes."

She sat staring at him. Her lips scarcely moving, she said, "What are they?"

Lowering his voice he told her.

When she could speak again, she asked, "Does it hurt?"

"Not a bit," he said. "You just go to sleep over your soup or wine or whatever, and never wake up again."

"I wouldn't know how to mix them."

"You don't need to. I'll take care of all that."

There was a long pause. Then: "How soon, Brett?"

"That's my girl! I knew you'd see the common sense of it. Best thing that could happen to him, poor old coot—saves him a long painful death. I'll phone you as soon as I've got it ready—better buy the stuff separately and out of town; there's really no risk but I wouldn't want it to be remembered where I'm known."

He glanced at the restaurant clock.

"Time for you to be getting back to your nursing job, dearest." He gazed at her with limpid eyes and her heart turned over as it always had. "Oh, sweetheart, it will be so wonderful to be together again! We'll have to wait a decent interval, of course—"

"It takes a year or more to settle an estate," she said harshly. He winced.

"That's not what I was thinking about, Gracia." His voice was hurt. And how could she bear to see that injured boyish face without kissing it to comfort it? She left abruptly.

A week later he phoned.

"I've got that package for you, Gracia," he said. "When can I deliver it?"

No one could listen in on the phone; the only extension was in Jim's bedroom, and he would never dream of eavesdropping. Nevertheless, she dropped her voice to a whisper.

"Find somewhere we've never been before, where no one knows us."

"Will do. Pick me up at the usual place." They set the time.

In the car on the way to the rendezvous he slipped the paper-wrapped little bottle to her. She put it in her coat pocket.

They ordered their cocktails, and before they were served she gave a sharp exclamation.

"Oh, my watch! The bracelet catch is broken and I was going to have it repaired. It must have fallen off in the car. We're parked right around the corner—would you mind awfully going to see if it's there? Here's the key."

"Can't it wait? The car's locked."

"Please, Brett—I'd be too nervous to eat. You know what that watch means to me."

He should—it was the only present he had ever given her. He gulped down his cocktail and took the key. She signaled the waiter and ordered a refill for him. "The gentleman will be right back and then we'll order."

The refill arrived. Nobody was looking. Her hand felt in the pocket of the coat she had kept on . . .

Brett came back with the car key and the watch that she would never wear again. No one could tell by looking that the catch wasn't broken at all.

"Oh, thank you!" She took a sip of her own drink as he sat down. Without looking at him she rose. "Don't wait for me—sorry: I'm for the ladies'. Order for us both—anything for me."

"Couldn't you have gone while I—" But she was already beyond the sound of his voice. Let him think that she was emotionally upset and wanted to hide it—she was.

Across from the Ladies' Room was the passageway to the bar, with its separate street entrance. She made herself walk slowly. Once she was outside she hurried to the corner and to the car. In two minutes she had unlocked it again and was on her way. She ordered herself not to think, not to feel, not to realize, until she was safe home again—home with her husband.

The crack had split wide open at last. There had been a limit after all to the number of blows it could take.

'O'

from THE NETHERLANDS

the first VAN DER VALK short by

NICOLAS FREELING

to appear in the United States

Inspector (now Commissaire) Van der Valk of the Amsterdam Police has been described as "a rather offbeat type of a Dutchman," but "the kind of detective you would love to play Dr. Watson to." You've met Van der Valk in QUESTION OF LOYALTY, DOUBLE BARREL, CRIMINAL CONVERSATION, THE DRESDEN GREEN, *or in* THE KING OF THE RAINY COUNTRY, *which won the MWA (Mystery Writers of America) award for the best mystery novel published in 1966.*

Mr. Freeling wrote a series of short-shorts for a London evening newspaper—he himself referred to them as "slight efforts—pastime for commuters going home—a few minutes' entertainment." Here is one of these "pastimes" ...

VAN DER VALK AND THE BEACH MURDER

by NICOLAS FREELING

IT IS A COAST OF ROCKS, ANCIENT and eroded, indented by tiny creeks, with minute sandy bays hidden from landward, and windsheltered nooks hidden from seaward where the softer, looser sand is full of dried cones and pine needles. All of it is overrun by tourists during the summer, but now in May is very pleasant, and so Van der Valk, in blue jeans but bare to the waist, was finding it; of the dry cones and driftwood he and his wife had built a tiny

fire and a "seawolf" was speared on bamboo to grill. Arlette in her bathing suit was collecting cones, and Noel, in a heavy sweater and slippers, as became a local man, had gone to the creek where the wine had been put to cool.

Why should Van der Valk have looked up? But one does feel the presence of a person, and he was not surprised to see Franciska standing on the rocks, very pretty in her plain black bathing suit; he knew her well—she was married to one of the boat skippers. He put up an arm to wave to her and she opened her mouth as though to speak—and in that second she fell forward as though she had been lassoed and crashed in a heap at his feet. He could not be sure he had heard a shot—Arlette was breaking sticks.

Everything happened quickly then. Van der Valk shouted, Noel came running, Arlette scrambled frantically down the gully; Van der Valk climbed as quickly as he could to the rock where the girl had stood.

A group of people was playing in the sea a hundred yards off—some family party, perhaps from Marseilles for the day; and over to the left was Fran's brother, whom he knew by sight, just coming out of the sea. All were well out of pistol range—yet he was sure the shot had come from seaward. He yelled.

"Pierre! Pierre!" The young man did not understand, but when he realized, he scrambled his towel into Fran's beachbag and came running, his legs still wet.

"What is it? Fran? What's happened? She fell off the rock? . . God, is she dead? Oh, what should we do? The car's parked up on the path—should I get a doctor?" Arlette had turned the girl's head and wiped sand off her mouth.

"She's unconscious—just breathing—but—"

"I'll run as quick as I can."

Noel had taken his cap off and was rubbing his head, perplexed. There seemed so little they could do. Very carefully Arlette straightened the girl's legs and eased the limp body, fragile as thistledown, to try and help the blood-choked breathing.

"Might save her. Lung shot." Very gently Van der Valk took his knife and cut the bathing suit to expose the point where the bullet had entered, while Noel watched. "Came from seaward—she was standing facing me."

"I don't get this, so help me," said Noel. "There's nobody there! I know those people—they come for the day sometimes. And Pierre was swimming with her, which is natural—he's her brother."

"He's from Paris, isn't he?" asked Van der Valk.

"Yes, works in some ministry. Civil servant. Nice boy—rich, you know—good family."

"How did they get on together, those two?"

"Very fond of each other always, I think. There was a hell of a row though when she married Victor. Family was raging—refused to come to the wedding."

"So? Married beneath her?"

"You know how the bourgeois can be," said Noel tolerantly. "Thought it injured their precious dignity to have a daughter marry a common fisherfolk boy. Funny thing. Shot might have come from a boat, but there's no boat. Nobody's going to tell me it was an accident either—what in hell could anyone be shooting at in May? And what least of all I don't get, where's the gun?"

"A pistol is easy enough to hide—if it was a pistol; but it would have made a hell of a long shot."

"Pistol!" Noel said in a sort of explosion. "Don't tell me that was a pistol. She tumbled off the rock too, you said?"

"Yes," Van der Valk replied thoughtfully. "As though she'd been pushed. You can't tell much though from an impact wound. *Could* have been a pistol."

Noel shrugged. "You're a policeman—you know something about pistols—good. But I tell you something, which is I'm a man of fifty, and I've been a shooter all my life, with a shotgun and with a carbine too—and if the doc doesn't find a .22 from a long rifle inside that poor kid I'll eat my rubber boots here and now."

"Long rifle means a carbine and you can't hide a carbine. Those people heard nothing—they're still there playing. Pierre didn't have one—he was in shorts, carrying a towel. And he'd have seen anyone else. He could have shot her, unlikely as it sounds—but where the hell did he hide the gun? Let's go over and look. I suppose a pistol's not a very likely thing for a civil servant to be carrying around with him on a beach."

"Whereas a rifle anyone can buy," muttered Noel.

It was easy to see where the two, brother and sister, had been; and there certainly was nothing hidden there in the sand. Van der Valk stood thinking. The family had disapproved of the girl's marrying—the brother was a civil servant in some ministry—he and his sister had always been fond of each other. Mmm—one would not say it was probable, and one would not say it was impossible either.

But it was not his business to go sniffing around. A job for the local police—but there were no local police for miles, except Noel, who wore a medal on his belt to show he was "sworn in" as local woods-and-beach guard.

Pierre had been carrying no more than Fran's beachbag, which was not even the length of his arm.

"Noel," Van der Valk said slow-

ly, "you get poachers here, don't you? In the woods?"

"Sure. All the locals. Not in summer though—only after August. Not that they get away with much when Noel's about. I know their tricks!"

"I was wondering if a carbine existed that you could take apart very quickly—one that a poacher could shove down his trouser leg if the guard happened along."

"You mean Pierre? But why shoot her there? You mean he couldn't see us, didn't even know we were there? By God there is one—you can unscrew it with a hand turn. Very small, very light—be no good for anyone but a poacher. I saw one once—Belgian gun—FN. That's it—a little FN carbine."

"He'll have dumped it by now," said Van der Valk dryly. "But while the doctor's busy with her we'll leave Arlette here and go take a look at what Pierre has in that beachbag."

Answers to

DETECT THE INSPECTOR

by VERONICA M. S. KENNEDY

1. Appleby (Michael Innes)
2. Bucket (Charles Dickens)
3. Bull (David Frome)
4. Chan (Earl Derr Biggers)
5. Coffin (Gwendoline Butler)
6. Dover (Joyce Porter)
7. French (Freeman Wills Crofts)
8. Gideon (J. J. Marric)
9. Japp (Agatha Christie)
10. Lestrade (Arthur Conan Doyle)
11. Moresby (Anthony Berkeley)
12. Parker (Dorothy L. Sayers)
13. Oscar Piper (Stuart Palmer)
14. Richard Queen (Ellery Queen)
15. Teale (Leslie Charteris)
16. Vander Valk (Nicolas Freeling)
17. Roger West (John Creasey)

A terrifying experience for the wife of the American Ambassador —and you will share every moment of it, poignantly, disturbingly, despairingly, as if you too were a Gift of God worth much food, many guns . . .

A distinguished crime story . . . The crime? Kidnaping? Espionage? Treason? Murder?

IN THE CAMP OF THE ENEMY

by JUDITH O'NEILL

SHE WAS DRIVING DOWN THE twisting, narrow mountain road intent on keeping the Volkswagen under control and she drove straight into them before she knew what was happening. They seemed to leap from nowhere out around the car, yelling and waving guns and shooting. The car was pushed into the brush at the side of the road and she was being dragged out, her shoulder and hip hitting the dirt road roughly, before she realized she had even come to a stop.

There seemed to be countless numbers of them, dark men dressed in ragged, nondescript clothes, each carrying a rifle. Rebels, she thought as soon as she was able to think anything.

They were more pleased with the car than with her. They gathered around it, poking at it, revving the engine, inspecting the motor in the back, knocking on the windshield. She lay in the road, forgotten for the moment. Then they noticed the diplomatic license plates, and they looked at her more carefully—a thin yellow-haired woman with frightened eyes. So, they realized, she was more than just a foreigner, she was with the diplomatic corps. And so, thinking she might be worth something, not knowing whom they had, they did not kill her immediately. They took the trouble to tie a dirty rag around her eyes and march her back to their camp.

Getting there was not easy. She was wearing heels and dressed in

a light cotton dress, her arms bare. It was what she always wore when visiting the schools. It seemed that she stumbled for hours, scratching her arms and legs and face in the brush, catching her hair in low branches. They seemed to be going upward most of the way. It was almost dark by the time they came to the camp. They had given her water, but no food, and she felt weak and exhausted and was trembling all over. This *couldn't* be happening to her.

The camp was obviously a temporary one. Crude shelters leaned here and there, and four brush huts stood in a ragged row on one side. They gave her a cup of strong sweet coffee, and she sank down beside one of the fires. The air was colder here, higher up, and darkness had brought a dampness. They gave her a dirty woolen blanket that she wouldn't have touched at home, but she wrapped it around her tightly.

The old man came first. Although he was dressed like the others, in rough-looking tan pants and jacket, he was apparently their leader. He stopped in front of her, looking down. They gave him her purse and he rummaged through it, finding the papers. He examined them slowly, one after the other—the official identification, the passport, the other cards and papers. He squatted down in front of her. She stared into a brown, very wrinkled face. He was short and chunky, but wiry-looking. His hair was gray, long and matted, his mouth a thin hard line. She could not tell his age, but it must have been well over 50, she thought. His eyes were gray and blank.

"Do you speak Spanish?" he asked slowly in Spanish, his voice hard.

She was numb. Would it be to her benefit to pretend that she didn't understand? She couldn't think.

"Yes," she said.

He nodded to the papers in his hand. "Who are you?" he asked. So he didn't know. He hadn't seen any papers quite like these before. Should she lie? Should she tell him the truth? She was too tired to see any advantage in lying. And I'm not very clever, she thought ruefully, certainly not clever enough to fool this seasoned face before her.

"I am the American Ambassador's wife," she said quietly.

The old man stared hard at her, his eyes never changing expression. He stood up slowly.

"*Dios mio,*" he said softly, "the American Ambassador's wife!"

He laughed a loud guttural laugh. He glanced again at the papers in his hand. "My God!"

The others crowded around, looking at her and then at the papers and then at the old man's face.

The younger man came forward then. He was barely taller than she. He had a thatch of dark hair, straight and thick, and was of a slim build. He was younger than she, in his mid-twenties, she thought. He wore old-looking jeans, with a dark jacket hanging loosely over his tan shirt. His face was thin, but the bones in his chin were thick and jutted forward. It was a strong face despite the slimness. And handsome.

The old man handed him the papers and he riffled through them with quick fingers. He grinned, his mouth stretching wide across his tanned face, and gave the papers back to the old man. He had perfect white teeth, she noticed, and then she forgot them, for looking straight at her were the strangest, maddest eyes she had ever seen.

They were brown, and large, and wild.

He put his hands in his pockets and stepped back, surveying her as she sat hunched in the blanket, the rough pottery cup clutched in her hands. She watched him. Her face, she knew, was dirty and her short hair tangled. She couldn't have cared less. She looked back at him, fighting for some semblance of composure.

"Rubia," he said, "blonde. *Pelo blanco,* white skin—um—very pretty, very pretty. But American women—always too skinny."

The old man spoke. "What were you doing, Ambassadora, up here in the mountains all by yourself?"

"I'm a teacher," she answered, her mouth dry. "I help in the *Departamento de Educacion.* I visit some of the schools in the" —she waved her hand—"mountains. I help the teachers—uh—teach."

"Alone? Always alone?" The old man leaned toward her.

She nodded.

"What do you teach them?" asked the young man. His voice was slightly taunting.

"Methods," she said, "how to teach, things like that."

"American methods?"

She shrugged, seeing clearly where the conversation was going. "Educational methods."

"American educational methods?"

Why should he bait her? she wondered. She looked up at him. "The methods which make it easier for your children to learn."

"Ah, ha," snorted the old man. "She is politician, all right." He slapped the young man on the shoulder affectionately. "Watch her, Paco."

Paco smiled. "A shame," he said, touching her hair lightly with his fingers, "to kill such a pretty one."

The old man looked at him. "Um," he said.

Paco turned to him. "Kill her now, get it over with." He mo-

tioned to the cup in her hand. "We waste precious coffee."

The old man did not answer. He looked at Paco quietly.

Paco stared back. "Well?" It was a question, the kind a subordinate asks his superior. She fixed her eyes on the old man. So he was the chief, the *jefe*.

"No fast decision," said the old man.

"What the hell?" said Paco impatiently. "What fast decision?"

"She is not just a prisoner," said the old man slowly, glancing at the passport in his hand.

"That, old man, is the point!" said Paco. "I say we kill her and send that yellow head in a big white box to her Embassy."

"You are a crazy one," the old man said. "Do you know who she is? Do you know what she's worth?"

"I know," said Paco. He spat on the ground.

The old man grunted. "To you, maybe. When I look at her I see the food she will bring, the guns. The winter is coming. She is a gift of God."

"Ah, do you hear that, lady?" said Paco, turning to her. "A gift of God to these poor starving rebels in the hills. A gift of God!" He looked her contemptuously up and down.

The old man gestured at Paco. "Play your silly games later," he said. "We talk business now."

Paco jerked around. "Kill her," he said angrily. "Kill her and show what we think of the damn Americans! Do you forget who gives the guns the Army kills us with? Do you forget who teaches the Army? Do you forget what money keeps that damn Government in the capital? Those trucks that hunt us out say U.S."

"I do not forget. But I want that money." The old man nodded toward the woman. "She is worth whatever we ask."

"She is a symbol," insisted Paco. "A symbol that says to hell with America! *This* to the Ambassador! *This* to his wife! *This* to her country!" He slashed his index finger across his throat three times. She caught her breath.

"An act of defiance!" shouted Paco.

The old man said, "We feed ourselves for two years on what she will bring, Paco."

Paco stared at him, breathing hard, then sat down. "Always the practical one, old man," he said quietly. He looked at the woman. She was gazing at them open-mouthed.

The old man sat down. He called to one of the others, "Bring soup—for the three of us."

Paco shrugged. "You waste precious soup," he said.

The old man laughed—a harsh, cutting sound with little humor in it. "Always the last word," he grunted. He paid no attention to the woman.

Paco turned to her. "Where do you learn Spanish?" he asked.

"In Mexico," she answered, her voice almost a whisper.

"What?"

"In Mexico," she repeated more loudly.

"Your husband was Ambassador there?"

"No, I was a student there for a while. My husband has never —this is his first Ambassador's post."

The old man turned to her. "How much are you worth?" he demanded.

She shook her head. "I don't know."

The soup came; they handed her a reddish clay bowl. The old man tipped his up to his mouth, watching her over the rim.

"She doesn't know," mimicked Paco. He turned to the old man. "She is worth one hell of a lot in morale," he said. "Never, never will we get a chance like this. Never! *Viejo,*" his voice was pleading; "old man, she is worth more than money to us. Money cannot buy her. My God," he shouted, all pleading gone; "can't you see? She is a symbol, a symbol!"

The old man swirled his bowl around, staring into it. "You read too many books," he said calmly.

"Son-of-a—," said Paco. "I know what I say! To men like us in all the world it is a great gesture, never forgotten. She is the American Ambassadora, not just some stupid tourist!"

"And these men like us in all the world," said the old man, "do they feed us this winter? Do they send us the guns we need?"

Paco spat viciously. "She is the chance we will *never* have again!"

The old man drank his soup. Paco looked at the woman. She bent her head toward her bowl and finished the hot soup. She put the bowl down in front of her. Her hands were trembling, but she could not stop them. The chill of the night began to invade the thin blanket and she wrapped it more closely around her, tucking her fingers inside. It was dark by now.

Can this be me? she thought weakly. This can't be me! Her mind leaped to the large white house in the capital, to the Embassy. To the tall man who would be finishing his work in the offices downstairs and be coming up for his supper. To the children. Her mind veered away from them as a pang went through her chest. Oh, no, she thought, the babies!

They would be waiting for her at the table—her husband, his hair slightly gray, the lines around his mouth and eyes. Wondering where she was, why she was so late. But not too worried yet—she had been late before. And Michael would chatter throughout the meal. He would be giving a

precise account, detail by detail, of a four-year-old's day. April would be watching her older brother and listening admiringly. She would be the first to show uneasiness. She would be glancing around the room. "Where's Mommy?"

The woman pulled her mind away from that tiny questioning face. No, she thought, I'm not dead yet. The face came again. "Where's Mommy?"

She jerked her eyes away from the fire and looked again at the arguing men. Paco was now gesturing violently, shouting even as he stuffed pieces of hard bread into his mouth. The old man was calm. They came with bread and more coffee for her and she took the food numbly, her eyes fixed on the old man. His face was unreadable. The coffee was tasteless and she realized suddenly that never, in all her life, had she been so afraid.

Paco stood up. He threw a threatening glance at her. "I take no responsibility," he said. "The men know who she is. If she lives the night it is a surprise." He turned and started away.

The old man turned his head. "Paco," he called flatly. Paco paused and looked back. "She lives," said the old man.

Paco stalked away. The old man watched until he disappeared in the dusk; then he returned to his coffee.

She sat silently. She felt suddenly very weak and realized she had been holding her breath. The old man drank and studied her papers, which he had spread out in front of him. The other men moved around the camp, some laughing, talking, and some were resting.

She began to shiver. The old man saw her shaking.

"Guillermo!" he shouted. A skinny man came to them quickly. "Take her to the hut at the end," the old man said. He meditated a second, staring into the fire. "Stay with her," he said. He smiled, a tight quick grin, almost toothless. "She is much gold, this one," he said. "We remember her this winter with happiness and full bellies."

She got up, her legs stiff, and followed Guillermo. The hut was the last in the straggling row. It had a wooden frame, threaded through with brush and long thick leaves. Inside she had to bend her head until she sat down. Guillermo quickly built a fire in the middle of the dirt floor, and she moved out of the damp corner to crouch near it. Guillermo studied her silently from the other side.

Now that death seemed at least postponed she began to think of other things. She was still frightened, her nerves jumpy, but nothing she thought of seemed as bad as death. There was no reason,

of course, for them to let her go at all. They could get the money for her and then kill her. That uncomfortable thought intruded into her mind, but the warmth of the fire and her own weariness began to lull her.

"Sleep," said Guillermo suddenly. She jerked her head up and stared at him. "Sleep," he commanded and pointed to the ground. She curled up in the blanket, her face away from the fire. She knew Guillermo remained on the other side of the fire, his back against the wall. She fell asleep almost instantly.

It was not a noise that woke her. It was a feeling. She stared into the half darkness for a second, watching the shadows that the fire threw against the matted, woven wall. Then she turned slowly on her back and looked up into the still face of Paco.

"Ah," he said. "You trust much in your Gods. It takes much trust to sleep in the camp of the enemy."

She sat up and flung the blanket violently away, searching wildly for Guillermo.

Paco sat down in front of her. "Guillermo needs coffee. Rest," he said.

He took a pack of cigarettes from his pocket. Her heart was thumping so loudly she could hardly hear his words. He was barely three feet from her, sitting cross-legged on the floor. He was not between her and the door, but the fire was. And she knew she would never be able to make it to the door before him. She could scream. Would that bring the old man? She glanced frantically at the door and opened her mouth.

"No one will come," said Paco quietly. "The old man is down the mountain"—he laughed bitterly— "trading with the enemy. I am *jefe* when he is gone."

She looked at his face and hope faded out of her. If the old man was away she was as good as dead. She looked back at the door desperately.

"Go ahead," he said, "scream."

She sat motionless, trying to organize some thought in her head. If she ran, where would she run to? If she screamed, there was no one to come. With a strength that surprised her she gathered her wits and looked at him. He offered her a cigarette and she took it. He lit it with a match. He put the cigarettes and the matches back into his jacket pocket.

"I am here to find out what you know," he said.

"Know?"

"Yes, why you travel these roads alone—an Ambassador's wife."

She sighed. "I was a teacher," she said, sorting out the Spanish words in her mind slowly. "Before I met my husband I taught in the States and in Puerto Rico. When we came here the *Depar-*

tamento was having a *cursillo,* a short training course for some of your rural teachers, and knowing of my experience they asked me to help." She waved her hand. "It's a small program. There are some five or six foreign wives who have taught elsewhere and we go out two days a week to visit the schools. I go to six. Today I was in Licey and farther up the mountain." She gestured vaguely.

"Where else do you go?"

"Oh, two schools near Licey, two around Sanchez and Guayubal, two schools outside of Bolivar."

"Do these teachers give you information about the men in the mountains?"

She saw the drift of the conversation too late. "Never," she said firmly. "What could they tell me? We all know you are here."

"Yes, but where? The Army would give much to know *where,* to know how many, to know which men in which village work with us."

Her heart sank. "Are you saying that I'm a spy?" she demanded, looking him straight in the eye. "Is that the excuse you're going to use to kill me?"

"Senora," he said, raising his dark eyebrows, "excuse? You come into the mountains two days a week, you mingle with the people. What Ambassador's wife has ever done that? Before *we* came into the mountains what American gave a damn about the people here? Why are the Americans so interested in the village people *now*?"

"It isn't Americans, plural, it's one American, me. *I* was interested. I wanted to help." She sighed. "I am not particularly interested in a life of going to parties, sitting around, being social. I wanted to *do* something." And you sure as hell have done something, she thought bitterly.

"Who are the teachers who report to you?" he asked.

"They don't *report* to me," she said grimly.

"What are their names, these teachers?"

Oh, no, she thought despairingly. In her mind she saw the shy, eagerly smiling faces of the rural teachers she worked with.

"You know damn well I'm not a spy!" she said.

He looked at her and laughed. "It will be easy to find out who they are," he said. He stood up. "The buildings contaminated by the C.I.A. agent will be easily burnt."

He walked to the door, glancing out into the night. She felt the anger inside her welling up. What the hell? What could she lose now? He was going to kill her anyway.

"When you burn them," she said to his back, "be sure the children I contaminated are all inside. You

want it to be as symbolic as you can make it."

He stood silently for a moment, then turned slowly and stared across the fire at her with slitted, glittering eyes.

"You?" he said quietly, taking a deep breath, "You talk to *me* of killing children?"

She threw the cigarette in the fire. Her face was hot with her own anger.

"What else do you know," she demanded, glaring up at him, "but destruction? What do you know but to tear down, to burn, to kill ... you and your kind." She spat the last four words contemptuously. "What do you know of building, of working together, of helping instead of hurting, of giving instead of taking, of justice?

"Blood in the streets! Blood in the streets! That's all you know. Blood and more blood—anybody's — innocent — guilty — anybody's." She began to falter. She covered her face with her hands as she started to sob.

He stood silently.

"You have much nerve," he said finally. She knew he didn't mean courage. He used the Spanish word for shamelessness. "You sit there, the American Ambassador's wife, and accuse *me* of these things? You tell *me* of destruction? Do you know nothing but what that damn Government in the capital feeds you? Do you hear nothing but what they say? Are you blind, deaf, and dumb?"

His voice rose to a shout. "You say I am here because I know nothing but to kill, to destroy, you rich American bitch? Do you know nothing of that stinking capital but your own back yard? What in hell do you look at when you run around these mountains? You never see the dirt and the death? The Government you support in my country, it does not destroy, burn, and tear down? Are you blind to that? Tell me, lovely American lady, you tell me how I can get those murdering thieves out of the capital? Your country is going to support *me?* Like hell! Yes, I burn and I kill. There is another way? You sit there and mouth at me of justice? *Justice?* Every judge in this country is bought. Paid for by the Army and the rich. You deny that? Justice!" he snorted.

He paused.

"For a teacher," he said softly, "you are very, very stupid."

She wiped her face with the edge of the blanket. "You'll never win," she said. "They are too many."

"Oh, no," he laughed shortly. "*We* are too many. The poor are many, many. And our time is coming, almost here now. We are not the practical ones like the old man. There is only one way to deal with the rich, now." He brought his hand up, slashing it

along his throat. She winced. He saw her and laughed. "Oh, yes," he said, "our time comes quickly."

"You are mad," she said, staring up at his bright eyes.

"I am mad? Yes, a little." He shrugged. "So? All of us from the *barrios* are a little mad. You live there on the garbage heap for all your life, you will be a little mad, too. Hunger and hate, they make you mad, Senora."

He became suddenly conversational. "They say to me, when I am young, 'Go, Paco, go get a job. You are strong, you can work.' And so I go. I work like hell. You don't know work, Ambassadora, until you work on the wharf. And so I come home with my money. The landlord sends his big collector to say, 'So, Paco, you are working now, earning money, then you can pay more rent for this lovely hovel. The rent went up last January, Paco, so you can pay back rent and that will be just what you have there in your hand.'"

He stopped, looking at her. "Private property," he said, "very sacred to you Americans. Anyway I tell the collector to go to hell and he gets very, very nasty. So I do the world a big favor and I kill him."

She watched him as he looked off into space. "It gives me great pleasure to kill that vermin. He comes from just down the valley, but he becomes big collector and then his own mother isn't safe he added reflectively.

"Only one way to deal with that kind," he went on, moving his hand up. She shivered and darted her eyes away from him.

"Blood in the streets," he said, laughing bitterly. "Is that what you hate? You Americans, so blind. And what of the blood in the *barrios* every day, every night? What of the thousands who starve in the *flavelas,* the slums? Or that's not the kind of blood that worries you? Only the rich man's blood you hate to see in the streets, right?

"Blood in the streets." He mused over the phrase. "What do you know of blood, anywhere? Do you see the children spitting it up? Do you see the tiny coffins going up the hill to the cemetery day after day? No! They don't pass by your house! Blood in the streets. There has always been blood in the streets, Senora —*our* blood!" He went to the door and laughed again, turning his bright, mad eyes on her. "Now, it is time for blood in the streets, yes. *Your* blood," he said, leaving.

She sat silently after he had gone, her hands cold in her lap. She slowly pulled the blanket up around her neck and lay down, staring into the glowing embers of what was left of the fire.

It isn't true, she cried inside herself. It isn't true what he says!

Killing and burning, they don't solve anything. They never have! They never have! She kept repeating it over and over to herself, intent on believing it.

She was still staring into the dead embers when the dawn came. The hut and the black ashes were cold in the gray light.

She heard the men getting up, some calling, swearing, splashing, some laughing. She lay still and cold. Is this the day I die? She thought. The smell of charcoal and then of coffee came to her.

Guillermo arrived suddenly with steaming black coffee and a chunk of hard bread. She sat up stiffly. She ran her fingers through her hair and stretched her legs by climbing slowly and painfully to her feet. She felt numb and empty. The tan shoes she had put on so calmly yesterday morning looked muddy, scuffed, and ridiculous. Her stockings were shredded with runs. The dress was wrinkled, dirty, and ripped around the hem. She wanted to cry, but she was too empty and tired even for that.

She walked slowly to the door and gazed out. The sun was not quite over the mountains yet. The air was fresh and chilly. She thought of her children asleep in their beds in the Embassy. She thought of April's silky hair tangled around her lovely little face.

She tore her mind away from that picture. She mustn't panic, she thought as she went back to wrap herself in the blanket and drink her coffee. She was surprised that she could get it down. She had not slept since Paco had gone. Her bones ached and her eyes burned and itched.

They came for her soon after she finished her coffee.

Guillermo called to her, and with a tightening throat she came out slowly to where the old man stood with Paco and three burros. The old man turned and looked at her. "You go with Guillermo and me," he said. "It is a long trip, so we start now. You will wear this blindfold and ride this burro." He pointed to the middle burro.

"Are you taking me home?" she asked.

"Part of the way," he said. "You will stay there and your people will come for you. Your people are very generous, Senora."

He smiled the tight mirthless smile.

"You are not lying?" she blurted, grabbing his arm. "You are not going to kill me? You do not lie?"

The old man turned his blank eyes on her. "Certainly I lie, Ambassadora," he said, "but not to a gift of God." He grinned at her. "God may send another gift some day, if this one returns home safely."

Paco watched them. "You are truly a fool, old man," he said.

"She will some day hang us both —she is surely a spy, and she is the chance we will never have again. Truly, you grow old."

The old man got on his burro. He motioned for the woman to get up onto the one behind him. Guillermo helped her and then stood, folding the blindfold again and again.

"When you are full of rice this winter, Paco," said the old man, "you call me fool again."

Paco's voice became insistent. "You trade with the enemy, old man," he growled. "That is treason."

The old man looked at Paco and laughed dryly. "Wait until you see the new guns, Paco. Then you forget the big words." He started his burro forward. Guillermo stepped toward the woman with the blindfold and she glanced once at Paco. He turned his eyes from the old man to her.

"So," he said lightly, flatly. "it is goodby, then. We meet again some day, perhaps—on your street, perhaps." He brought his hand up sharply and jerked it across his throat.

It was the last thing she saw before the blindfold covered her eyes, and she saw it in her mind all the way down the mountain.

***from* CANADA**

a *NEW* detective-riddle story by

JAMES POWELL

There are two things to say about James Powell that explain in part why he is one of the most promising new talents (if not the most promising) in the mystery field: he can take an old idea, a hoary chestnut that seemingly has been used too many times in the past, and give it a startling and extraordinary freshness; and he invests his stories with a charming humor, both in the manner and tone of his telling and in the shape and details of his plots.

Here, for example, is that real "oldie" about a fabulous diamond passed from person to person (remember Owen Johnson's "One Hundred in the Dark" more than fifty years ago, and Anna Katharine Green's story even before that), and lo—the diamond disappears! Well, read what James Powell does with this gambit . .

THE ALTDORF SYNDROME

by JAMES POWELL

THE GIRL AT THE HELICOPTER counter asked my name. "Philip McGrath," I said and almost added, "the recently appointed vice-president in charge of international sales for E. P. McGrath Distilleries." Instead I took a seat on a bench lined with travelers in coats and scarfs to await the next departure.

I had decided to make the trip between Chicago's two airports by helicopter for the simple reason that I had never flown in one before. It was part of a private little celebration I was having in honor of the fact that I would now spend a good part of my time away from the home office in Toronto, away from E. P. McGrath. Perhaps oth-

er bosses' sons have encountered other problems. But as for me, in the last few years I've found it harder and harder to keep a straight face in my father's presence.

To see him today you'd never believe that during Prohibition he'd been the first man to lay copper tubing under the Niagara River and pump whiskey from the Canadian side to the American. Or that once off Cape Hatteras he had had a rumrunning schooner sunk out from under him by the Coast Guard. In those days he was "Frenchy" McGrath; he talked out of the corner of his mouth and wore loud suits and a fedora. By the end of Prohibition he had made such a success of smuggling that he bought out his major supplier and became a respectable distillery owner. Canadians look to the United States for their image of a successful man, but their notion of respectability is decidedly English. So my father gave up his imitation of Al Capone and started acting like Colonel Blimp.

Spats Larkin, our chauffeur, who raised me on a diet of my father's Prohibition exploits, records the beginning of the transformation about the time my father started courting my mother. It was then he exchanged the Packard for the Rolls-Royce, stopped sitting up front, and started calling Spats "Joseph."

I don't blame my mother. At the breakfast table when E. P. starts sputtering from behind his newspaper about the decline of the homely virtues in our times my mother always murmurs in agreement; but sometimes a tired look crosses her face as if she wants to say, "Let's drop the act, dear. You're Frenchy McGrath, the rumrunner, remember?"

My mother could get away with it. But one slight reference to my father's past by me and he would turn a strangled purple and shout, "You are an impertinent puppy, sir! An impertinent young puppy!" And I'm afraid I would laugh out loud.

"Mr. McGrath?"

I looked up. A man in flight boots and a parka was reading my name off a clipboard. When I stood up, he motioned me through a door opening onto a runway. The others on the bench were waiting for something else. I was to be the only passenger.

Mr. Flight Boots took my suitcase and without a word trotted off across the floodlit runway. I trotted along behind. The helicopter sat on the edge of the concrete just beyond the floodlights. It was small, obviously quite old, and painted a dull black. Behind the pilot's cockpit were two compartments each with its own door, much like compartments in a British railway carriage.

Mr. Flight Boots closed the forward compartment door after me

and then went ahead to dispose of my suitcase under the cockpit. The walls of my dimly-lit compartment were trimmed with dark varnished wood and the two facing seats were upholstered in a furry material that I hadn't seen since I was a boy and had traveled to out-of-the-way summer camps on half-forgotten railway lines. No question about it, I was about to take a ride in an antique helicopter.

Flight Boots pounded with his palm on the cockpit window. The propeller began to turn and a few moments later the helicopter lifted off the ground, tilting slightly forward. That, plus the jogging motion of the flight, transformed the compartment into a stage coach. At any moment I expected either an Indian attack or a brace of pistols to come through the window, followed by a highwayman's "Stand and deliver!"

"Are you traveling far?"

I jerked back from the window. In the opposite corner I could make out a face partially concealed by what might have been a collar and a hat, though in the darkness I couldn't be sure. "Omaha," I said.

"Ah," came the reply.

"And yourself?"

"Blitzen," he said. "From Altdorf to Blitzen."

"Ah," I said, having no idea where either place was. "That's quite a trip."

"Ten leagues," he said. "Or about thirty miles, if you wish. I have been traveling since 1763."

I laughed. "Sounds like you've made some pretty bad connections."

He didn't laugh back. "Allow me to introduce myself. I am Baron Grindelwald, aide-de-camp to the Duke of Altdorf."

"Philip McGrath, recently appointed vice-president in charge of international sales for E. P. McGrath Distilleries."

"Whiskey," he said thoughtfully. "A pity. I'm afraid that isn't going to do you much good. But let us get down to cases. If what I am about to tell you sounds a bit mechanical, that is because I have told it many times before. You may, of course, interrupt at any time with questions. But I strongly advise you to keep them on the essential point. For example, I usually begin with the statement that I was born in 1725, which means I am either almost two hundred and fifty years old or a raving lunatic. I beg you not to waste what time you have left speculating about this. It is completely irrelevant to your situation."

"And what exactly is my situation?" I asked.

"That will become quite clear in a moment," he said. "But let us begin. Of all the petty states in Eighteenth Century Germany, the Duchy of Altdorf was by far the pettiest. It comprised less than fifty square miles and contained only

one town worthy of the name—Altdorf itself. The principal source of wealth for Karl Ludwig, the Duke, was his small army of five hundred men which he hired out to whoever could pay his price. In addition to the rental fee, if I may use that expression, the Duke was also compensated at an established rate for each wound his soldiers suffered and received a handsome bounty for any soldier who happened to get killed.

"My father, who had the foresight to lose an arm, a leg, and an eye leading his men in three separate battles before being fatally wounded in the fourth, was Duke Karl Ludwig's ideal of what a soldier should be. In my father's memory I was appointed the Duke's aide-de-camp.

"If Altdorf Castle was stark and medieval, the court itself could best be described as frugal and aging. The Duke's idea of hospitality was far from lavish. The entertainments he offered his guests were those that cost him nothing—a row on the moat, for example. The Duke attributed his longevity to regular exercise—more specifically to the fact that Oskar, his trusty manservant, rowed him around the castle several times each morning with the Duke's guests following along behind.

"The fact that the castle was defended by a veterans' guard, old grenadiers in black and yellow uniforms, increased the aura of old age about the court. It was always impressive to see these old soldiers, all over six feet tall and straight as ramrods, stamp their feet and come to attention as the Duke tottered down a hallway. Each soldier would shout in his wheezy voice, 'Here comes the Duke!' Then the next soldier would snap to attention. 'Here comes the Duke!' Being as old as they were, they frequently passed away on the job. I would always warn visitors to watch out for falling guards.

"But to make a long story short, there was a theft one evening at the castle. The Golden Star of Atldorf, the fourth largest diamond in Europe and the pride of the Duke's collection, was stolen. I was ordered to recover the diamond and discover the thief in twenty-four hours or face the gibbet. I failed and rather than take the consequences, as my oath of obedience to the Duke required, I slipped away and caught the diligence for Blitzen. I had the fondest memories of this little town just across the border. I had grown up there and except on feast days when the bell in the church tower would ring gaily, it was the most peaceful place I had ever known.

"For over two hundred years now, I have traveled without reaching my destination. I soon realized that my oath to the Duke and my own curiosity would prevent me from arriving at Blitzen

until I discovered the name of the thief and how the diamond eluded my most scrupulous searching.

"So far in my journey I believe I have used every means of transportation devised by man. I fall asleep on the Orient Express and when I awake I am in a dugout canoe up the Orinoco, or on a merry-go-round in an amusement park, or in a dog sled crossing an ice field. And always with a traveling companion to whom I can put my story: a polite Japanese naval officer in a midget submarine, perhaps, or a maharajah in a howdah on an elephant during a tiger hunt. Just before I awoke to find myself here, for example, I was in an aerial car on a cable between two Alpine peaks with a Herr Knapp, a Swiss chocolate merchant.

"Depending on your tastes, I imagine you find all this either quite insane or quite Gothic: a man cursed to travel across the years until he can unravel a two-hundred-year-old mystery, and so on. Personally, I find it rather tedious. I never enjoyed traveling very much. One is neither here nor there and time passes very slowly, telling the same story, hearing the same feeble explanations. I want to reach Blitzen very badly."

"It sounds like you've got yourself a real problem," I said.

"*We* have a problem Mr. McGrath," he insisted. "You see if you don't solve my mystery I will kill you." A small pistol appeared in the darkness, perhaps from inside his coat. "I'm sorry," he said. "This is a comparatively recent addition, but I'm afraid it is necessary. Back in the days when travel took longer, there was nothing like a mystery to make the time pass. But since the turn of the century my traveling companions seem to lose interest once they realize that an actual mental effort is expected of them. What should one attribute this to, Mr. McGrath—the rise of the popular press, movies, radio, television? So I have been forced to add an incentive and this"—he motioned with the pistol—"is it.

"At first I thought the threat alone would be enough. I remember very well the first and only time I tried that. I dozed and when I awoke I was up to my waist in water in a lifeboat off the *Titanic* with an elderly man in evening dress. I recall the moonlight on the ruby in his shirt front. I introduced myself, explained my situation, and said I would shoot him if he could not solve my mystery. I recall his hysterical laughter when I made my threat. I doubt if he heard a word of my story. All he could do was watch the waves wash over the gunwales and croon half-remembered hymns of his childhood in a cracked little voice.

"I realized then that my threat would lack conviction unless I was prepared to carry it out. So you

see, whether I am two hundred and fifty years old or a raving lunatic is irrelevant. In either case this gun is quite real and I assure you I will use it."

He spoke calmly and I had no reason to doubt his word. "Herr Knapp, the Swiss chocolate merchant?" I asked.

"Poor Herr Knapp," he said. "He kept insisting the diamond had been swallowed. I explained that this was impossible. But as his time drew to an end he became quite desperate and began swallowing coins and keys to prove that it could be done. He was trying to choke down his wrist watch when I shot him." Baron Grindelwald paused. "Well, shall I proceed with the story?"

"I don't have much of a choice," I answered.

"Good," he said. "I'm glad you understand. Now on the evening of the theft the Duke and his guests had dinner in the small dining room on the third floor of the castle. When the dishes had been removed, the Duke announced that we were going to play 'Find the Pin,' a very popular game in my day.

"One person is sent out of the room. A pin or some other small object is hidden. Then the person is called back and has to find the object while the rest drum with their hands on the table—harder and harder as he gets closer to the object, lighter and lighter as he moves away. The Duke liked to doze at the table after dinner and was greatly addicted to this game because the heavy drumming always woke him up for the final, more exciting moments.

"Oskar, the Duke's servant, came into the room carrying a strongbox. I knew what that meant. Unpredictably, once or twice a year, it tickled the Duke's fancy to play 'Find the Pin' with the Golden Star of Altdorf. It was his idea of entertaining his guests extravagantly at no cost to himself. Perhaps on this particular occasion he wished to impress his unexpected guest, Count Stockhorn, who had arrived that morning.

"The Duke unlocked the strongbox and with a loving cackle withdrew the priceless diamond. I should add that from this moment on until the theft was discovered no one entered or left the room.

"The Duke began by passing the diamond around the table to be admired. And as we follow the clockwise progress of the jewel, let me introduce you to the guests. I was seated on the Duke's left and having examined the diamond many times before, I quickly passed it on to Count Stockhorn. The Count was a wealthy patron of letters and, more recently, of science. When he had admired the diamond he gave it to Leonia von Hasleburg, a beautiful girl of eighteen. Leonia and her mother were constant guests at the castle.

I can say with some authority then that the girl was a complete ninny.

"After gushing over the jewel she passed it on to a certain Marquis of Carabas—or so he called himself. The week before, the Duke had been driving through the countryside when an insolent servant in boots threw himself across the road and stopped the coach. Stroking his mustaches, the servant told the Duke a preposterous story about how his master, the Marquis of Carabas, had gone swimming and someone had stolen his clothes. The Marquis of Carabas—a scoundrel if ever I saw one—had been staying at the castle in borrowed clothes ever since awaiting, so he said, certain letters of credit that would permit him to resume his travels.

"The Marquis passed the diamond across the table to Wolfgang Brunig, a pale threadbare young man from a respected but impoverished family. Brunig was a poet of some reputation but I understand that his doctors had advised him that without a prolonged stay in Italy he would never live to complete his major opus, a long poem about a young man who falls in love and goes mad. Brunig stared at the Golden Star as though it were the sun of Italy and then passed it to the Baroness von Hasleburg.

"I can only describe the Baroness as an avaricious old hag—in many ways the female counterpart of the Duke of Altdorf. Her supreme ambition was to trade Leonia's beauty for a wealthy husband who would add to the von Hasleburg fortune.

"The Baroness passed the jewel to the final guest, Captain McTavish, a Scottish officer in the Duke's army. Captain McTavish's father had forfeited his title and estates for supporting the Young Pretender in 1745. The Captain's burning ambition was to buy back the acres of heather which would otherwise have been his patrimony. I regret to say that he hoped to accomplish this by marrying the Baroness von Hasleburg. To use an expression I learned from a young man in a Stutz Bearcat who I later shot right through his raccoon coat, Captain McTavish had been making goo-goo eyes at the Baroness all through dinner. Reluctantly Captain McTavish returned the priceless diamond to the Duke.

"The Duke now slid the diamond down the table to Count Stockhorn. This meant the Count would be the first one to hide the jewel and would chose a person to find it. That person, I might add, would be sent into a curtained alcove while the diamond was being hidden, an alcove that opened only into the dining room. The Count admired the diamond once more and then looked around the table to decide whom he was going to send into the alcove. As

he did so, he began throwing the diamond up in the air and catching it in an absent-minded way. Perhaps he was enjoying the expressions on the guests' faces, for there wasn't one of them who didn't covet the priceless jewel, whether for base or worthy motives.

"Finally the Baroness von Hasleburg said, 'If you please, sir. You are making me nervous.'

"'Of course, madam,' said the Count. Ceasing to throw the diamond up in the air, he turned to the Duke and remarked that he had recently become quite interested in precious stones. The Duke cackled and offered to sell him the Golden Star for an astronomical sum. The Count declined politely and returned to the game, choosing the Baroness to leave the room.

"When she had stumped into the alcove with her cane, he hid the jewel in a drawer in a cabinet between two windows. I was disappointed at first in his lack of imagination. But obviously, as a gentleman, he didn't want to make it too difficult for the Baroness, who was quite myopic. Drumming on the table led the Baroness to the cabinet and when she opened the drawer we all applauded politely. But even then, because of her poor eyesight, it took her a moment to see the diamond. When she did she returned it to the Duke.

"Well, there you see how the game was played. I must say it was a bit more interesting with an object smaller than the Golden Star.

"The Duke next slid the diamond down to Brunig, the poet, who, with a blush, chose the beautiful Leonia to go into the alcove. He hid the diamond in the heart of a rose in a vase of flowers on the sideboard. Leonia had some trouble finding it, featherbrained creature that she was. However, I noted this: when she found the jewel she slipped something into the bodice of her gown.

"Let me add here that it was obvious to all of us that Brunig was smitten by Leonia and equally obvious that she had eyes only for the Marquis of Carabas. His resentment at Brunig's attentions to her may have provoked the incident that followed. As Leonia was returning the diamond to the Duke, Brunig drew his snuffbox out of his pocket, as he had done several times that evening. It was a cheap wooden snuffbox, battered and leaking snuff at every seam.

"Carabas sniffed and said with a sneer, 'What an elegant snuffbox, sir.' This from a scoundrel who didn't even own the clothes on his back. Brunig blushed with mortification.

"But Count Stockhorn turned to him at once and said, 'Sir, as an admirer of your poetry, I would be deeply honored to possess a snuffbox which I could say had

once belonged to Wolfgang Brunig. But since I would not presume to ask for it as a gift, let us exchange snuffboxes.' Count Stockhorn laid a silver snuffbox of most exquisite workmanship on the table.

"It was a magnificent gesture and the Count spoke with such sincerity that Brunig accepted. Then the Count added to his generous act without alluding to Brunig's poverty. 'Sir,' said the Count, 'you may perhaps find your new snuffbox too elaborate for your taste, as I must admit I have sometimes felt it was for mine. Yet for me it had a certain value, having been in my family for many years. Should you ever wish to dispose of it, I would be pleased to redeem it from you for its weight in gold.'

"You see, Mr. McGrath, Count Stockhorn was a gentleman, while Carabas was an impostor. Breeding always tells.

"But on with the game. The Duke next gave the diamond to me. As I sat there pondering a clever hiding place, I quite absently made several small scratches on the base of my wine glass with the diamond. Later I think you will find this fact important. In any case, I chose Captain McTavish to go into the alcove. I hid the diamond in Oskar's powdered wig, instructing him to go to the sideboard once or twice to confuse the Captain.

"I should explain that we were all drinking wine during the game, but only the Duke was served. The wine was kept on the sideboard in stone pitchers along with a plate of dried herring to be eaten with salt, pepper, and black bread. Oskar served the Duke from the sideboard. The rest of us left the table to help ourselves, the men serving the ladies. Carabas, by the way, claimed that the Duke's vile yellow wine was a fine vintage and drank it in quantity.

"Well, my ingenious little ruse quite confounded Captain McTavish for a time and added to the merriment. Finally the Captain realized why our drumming was not consistent and with a Scottish oath of some kind or another he discovered the jewel.

"Next the diamond went to the Baroness who sent me into the alcove. I quickly found it in the case of an ormolu clock. Carabas received the jewel next and chose Count Stockhorn to find it. With many remarks about his own cleverness, Carabas stood on a chair and hid the diamond among the crystals of the chandelier. But the Count was not taken in and found it in a matter of minutes.

"Next Leonia, with simple-minded symbolism, hid the diamond among some forget-me-nots in another vase of flowers. It was quickly found and returned to the Duke by the strutting Carabas. Next Captain McTavish slipped the dia-

mond into the padding of an upholstered chair where Brunig finally found it. Then the Duke gave the diamond to me. I chose Count Stockhorn to go into the alcove.

"Here, unfortunately, I had a bit of an accident. I had intended to hide the jewel in the heavy, silver salt shaker on the sideboard. But since there wasn't enough salt there to cover it, I dropped the diamond inside the pepper shaker instead. A cloud of pepper rose up in my face and I was caught in a fit of sneezing. The Count, of course, heard me and found the diamond at once. But he commended me on the cleverness of the hiding place and swore he would never have found the diamond if my nose hadn't betrayed me. The Count was a gentleman. Breeding always tells.

"But now to the discovery of the theft. The Duke slid the diamond down the table to the Baroness von Hasleburg. But the Baroness was slow in reaching out for it. The diamond slid off the table—and shattered to bits on the marble floor.

"Confusion swept the table. A diamond, of course, would not have shattered like that. Someone had substituted a paste imitation for the Golden Star of Altdorf. The Duke shouted, 'Grindelwald, take charge!' I immediately announced that everyone in the room would have to be searched. The Duke declared that since he was obliged to submit his guests to this indignity, he would allow his own person to be searched as well.

"I called in two guards from the hall, ordering them to see that the guests remained in their places. Then I took the Duke and Oskar into another room, where I searched the Duke from head to toe. 'Grindelwald,' said the Duke, 'recover my diamond and discover the thief. You have twenty-four hours. If you fail it means the gibbet.' The Duke was stark naked when he said that, but I knew he would carry out his threat.

"Next I searched Oskar, and then, in the Duke's presence, had Oskar search me. Then, while my wife, who had been summoned on my orders and whom I informed of the sentence I was under, searched the women in another room, I searched the male guests in turn.

"What did we find? Several things, but not the diamond. For example, I found hidden about Captain McTavish's person four of the Duke's silver spoons. Brunig, the poet, had stuffed one of his pockets with dried herring and the other with black bread. Petty thefts which under the circumstances I did not call to the Duke's attention. But on the ankles of the so-called Marquis of Carabas I found the scars of galley shackles and that was a more serious matter. Among the men, only Count Stockhorn

passed the search successfully. His pockets contained nothing but a handkerchief, a few coins, and some keys. This made me suspicious and I searched him again, but found nothing more.

"Meanwhile, my wife had discovered a secret compartment large enough to conceal the diamond in the head of Baroness von Hasleburg's cane. But the compartment was empty. On the person of Leonia she found two folded pieces of paper. One was a poem entitled 'To Leonia' in which Brunig compared her to the moon, a rose, and the first robin of spring. I understand that several years later this poem was set to music by Franz Schubert. The other paper was a message from Carabas referring to a previously made plan of elopement for that evening which urged her to bring whatever valuables she could lay her hands on so that they could lead a life devoted to love, unencumbered by the petty, material concerns of ordinary mortals. I need not tell you that it gave me the greatest satisfaction to see Carabas escorted to the dungeon where under the mildest of duress he quickly confessed to being a fraud, an itinerant tinker who had escaped from the galleys where he had been condemned for theft.

"As they were searched, the guests were sent to their rooms, accommodations in the castle being provided for Brunig and McTavish, who had only been invited to dinner. When I had searched the last of them I knew the diamond had to be in the dining room or the alcove. There was only one other possibility—the window in the curtained alcove. I assure you the dining-room windows had not been opened in the course of the evening. But suppose the thief had thrown the diamond into the moat from the alcove window? Suppose the Golden Star was lying on the bottom under fifteen feet of water or floating on the surface attached to or inside some light object waiting for the thief to recover it the next day during the Duke's rowing excursion?

"I dispatched a rider to Frankfurt-am-Main to hire a team of skilled divers and return as quickly as possible. Then I ordered the Captain of the Guard to send out men in rowboats with torches and bring me everything floating on the moat."

"Suppose the thief had an accomplice who had been waiting in a boat under the window and escaped before your men made their search?" I said.

"Perhaps you are thinking of Carabas' servant, the one in boots," said Baron Grindelwald. "He had spent the evening in the guard room fleecing some old soldiers with a marked deck of cards and quickly joined his master in the dungeon. No, there wasn't any possibility of an accomplice. There

were sentry boxes at close intervals all around the perimeter of the moat. Nothing pleased the Duke more than to condemn some sixty-year-old grenadier to run the gantlet for some minor dereliction of duty. So let me assure you that the veterans' guard, if old, was vigilant.

"In any event, having disposed of the guests and given my instructions about the moat, I returned to the dining room and searched it and the alcove thoroughly, square inch by square inch. And I found nothing. Nothing. I can assure you that the diamond was not there. But then where was it? Ah, you have a question, Mr. McGrath."

"I think you said the Duke only used the Golden Star for playing 'Find the Pin' once or twice a year on a whim," I said.

"Correct," said the Baron.

"Yet the theft must have been premeditated because someone had a paste imitation ready to be substituted."

"Correct again," said the Baron.

"Now if the compartment in the head of the Baroness von Hasleburg's cane was large enough to contain the Golden Star of Altdorf, it was also large enough to contain the imitation."

"Correct once more," he said. "And since the Baroness was a constant visitor at the castle, perhaps she had been carrying the imitation with her for some time, patiently waiting the opportunity to make the substitution. But surely the whole point of the substitution was to make the theft pass unnoticed, enabling the Baroness to leave at the end of the evening with the real diamond in her cane."

"Maybe she got rid of it some other way," I said. "Just in case the substitution was discovered by accident."

"That is not impossible," said Grindelwald. "But it leaves us to discover how she disposed of it and to account for one other interesting fact: I am positive that when the imitation was slid down to her that last time, the Baroness deliberately allowed it to fall and shatter on the floor. I am afraid that the secret compartment in her cane was probably for snuff, to which many women of her age were secretly addicted."

"All right, then," I said. "What about Count Stockhorn's silver snuffbox? The one he gave to Brunig."

"Yes," said the Baron. "The Count might well have hidden the diamond in the snuffbox and then proposed the exchange with Brunig along with the generous offer of redeeming it at a later date, an offer the poet could not but accept. If, however, the theft was discovered, then Brunig would run the risk of being caught as the thief. There are three things that contradict this: one, how could

the Count know the Golden Star was going to be used that night and thus come provided with a paste imitation? Two, I examined the silver snuffbox very carefully and there were no secret compartments. And three, at the time the snuffbox was given to Brunig the genuine Golden Star of Altdorf was still being used in the game. As I pointed out to you, I accidentally verified this by the scratches I made on the base of my wine glass."

I was starting to get desperate. "The wine then," I said. "To judge from its name, the Golden Star was yellow and so was the wine. You remarked that Carabas said he liked the wine. Suppose—"

But Grindelwald burst out laughing. "I knew you would say that sooner or later," he said. "Eventually everyone conceives of the solution to my mystery in terms of his own field of endeavor. I have encountered this so often I have come to call it the Altdorf Syndrome. Remember Herr Knapp, the Swiss chocolate merchant, who was sure the diamond had been swallowed like candy? Well, I have met cabinet makers who swore by secret compartments in the furniture, cobblers who were certain the diamond had slipped by me in a hollow shoe heel, and fishermen who insisted Brunig carried the diamond out in a dried herring.

"You are in the whiskey business, therefore you think of alcohol. The Altdorf Syndrome. But the wine really isn't a bad guess. The diamond, because of its coloring, would have been almost invisible in the wine. But the fact is, in searching the room I emptied every wine glass and pitcher through my fingers onto the floor. So I'm afraid, as I said in the beginning, the whiskey business isn't going to be of much help to you, unless you think the thief drank the diamond."

I started to speak but Grindelwald interrupted me. "Listen," he said. "Let me tell you what I did after I had searched the dining room and alcove and found nothing. I called the castle carpenter and had him bore a hole slightly less than the diameter of the Golden Star in an oak plank. Then I called in three trusted servants who, under my supervision, destroyed everything in the dining room and alcove—the table, the chairs, the sideboard, the chandeliers, the silver, the tapestries. Everything was hacked, cut, smashed, and beaten until the pieces would pass through that hole in the oak plank. When the Captain of the Guard arrived with the results of his search on the moat—four dead rats and a week's garbage—that too was forced through the hole.

"When dawn came I found myself alone in a completely bare room. There was not an object left

and I had not found the diamond." He paused. "Haven't you any questions to ask me, Mr. McGrath?" he said. "I hope for your own sake you haven't lost interest."

"I'm listening," I said. "I'm just trying to think something out."

"I sincerely hope you think of an answer," said Grindelwald, "for we seem to be losing altitude, which means your time is almost up. But to continue, only one hope stood between me and the gibbet —that the diamond was lying on the bottom of the moat. It was midmorning before the team of divers arrived. I sent them into the water with specific instructions to bring me anything on the bottom large enough to be or to contain the Golden Star.

"By now I was quite desperate. The Duke and his guests were out in rowboats circling around the castle and each time the Duke passed me he shouted grimly, 'Twenty-four hours, Grindelwald!' The guests, not realizing the sentence I was under, were preoccupied with their own affairs. Since the scoundrel Carabas had been thrown in irons, Brunig was rowing Leonia, whose beauty so hypnotized him that he ran into the side of the moat several times. Poor Captain McTavish was rowing the Baroness and making goo-goo eyes to win her withered hand. Count Stockhorn, in a boat by himself, invited me to join him but I refused.

"After five hours of searching the divers had found nothing. I paid them gold out of my own pocket to try again. At sundown, cold and exhausted, they dragged themselves out of the moat empty-handed. In the courtyard of the castle I could hear the hammering as they set up the gibbet. Sending a message to my wife to follow when she could, I caught the diligence from Altdorf to Blitzen. I have never reached my destination. But apparently you have reached yours. Unless you have solved my mystery."

Buildings and lights were rushing up at us. The helicopter settled down onto the edge of a runway, its motor stopped and the propeller began slowly to come to rest.

"What do you want to know first: who the thief was or how the diamond escaped you?" I asked.

Grindelwald laughed incredulously. "Let us save the best to last," he said. "First tell me the name of the thief."

"Count Stockhorn," I said.

"But then," said the Baron wearily, "you must expect me to believe that by some wild coincidence the Count just happened to bring a paste imitation of the Golden Star that evening."

"The paste stone wasn't his," I said. "The Baroness von Hasleburg brought it."

"Then why did she deliberately

allow it to shatter on the floor?"

"Because she wanted the theft to be discovered," I said. The Baron grunted with disbelief and raised the pistol. "Listen," I said, "before the game started the diamond was passed around the table. The Duke gave it to you. You gave it to Count Stockhorn who saw that it was the real diamond and passed it to Leonia. And so on all around the table and back to the Duke. The Duke then slid the diamond down the table to Count Stockhorn to begin the game.

"To his surprise Count Stockhorn discovered that the stone was now false. Obviously someone had made a substitution as the diamond was being passed around the table. Seeing a chance to obtain the Golden Star for himself, he said nothing. Instead, he began throwing the fake stone up in the air and catching it, studying the faces at the table at the same time. Only one other person knew that the stone was fake and might shatter if dropped.

"When the Baroness asked him to stop, Count Stockhorn knew he had found the thief. His little speech about his recent interest in jewels was to convince her that he had spotted the substitution. It did. When Count Stockhorn chose her to go into the alcove, the Baroness knew she had been discovered. She probably thought the Count was giving her an opportunity to return the Golden Star.

"Under the circumstances she had no choice. In the alcove she removed the real diamond from the compartment in her cane and brought it back into the dining room, prepared to make the exchange again. Your drumming led her to the drawer where you had all seen the Count hide the fake stone. Actually, he had palmed it. When the Baroness opened the drawer it was empty. It was then the Baroness realized that Count Stockhorn intended to steal the Golden Star himself. But since you were all applauding, she had no alternative but to produce the real diamond as if she had found it in the drawer and return it to the Duke. The game then resumed with the real diamond, as you proved yourself by scratching the base of your wine glass.

"Now let's consider the Count's situation. He had the fake stone but he couldn't make the substitution again until he had found a way of disposing of the Golden Star which in turn would result in a very intensive search such as the one you made of the guests, the dining room, alcove, and moat."

"I don't follow you," said the Baron. "He had no way of knowing that the fake stone would be smashed and the theft discovered."

"Ah," I said, "he knew that for a certainty. He knew that as soon as the Baroness suspected the substitution had been made and the fake stone was back in the game

she would shatter it the first opportunity she got, exposing the Count as the thief and revenging herself.

"Well, Count Stockhorn came up with a way of getting rid of the Golden Star, though it required a gamble on his part. It was only then he made the actual substitution. Remember when Carabas hid the diamond in the chandelier and the Count found it there? That was when the Count made the substitution and returned the fake stone to the Duke. From that moment he had to gamble on one thing—that he would be picked again to go into the alcove before the Baroness got her hands on the fake stone. With your help he won that gamble. You chose him to find the stone that time you hid it in the pepper shaker. While he was in the alcove he disposed of the Golden Star."

"How?" said Grindelwald. His voice was oddly strained. "How did he dispose of it so that I couldn't find it?"

"You always looked in the right place at the wrong time," I said. "Tell me again: what were the contents of Count Stockhorn's pockets when you searched him?"

"A handkerchief, a few gold coins, and some keys," said the Baron.

"But shouldn't there have been something else? Shouldn't there have been a cheap wooden snuffbox?"

"Yes," Grindelwald said thoughtfully. "Brunig's wooden snuffbox that the Count had exchanged for his own." The Baron gave an uneasy laugh. "But you can't be suggesting the Count put the diamond into the snuffbox and threw it in the moat. I examined everything on the surface of the water."

"When you were examining the surface the snuffbox was on the bottom, and when the divers were searching the bottom the snuffbox was back on the surface," I said. "Count Stockhorn—"

"Stop!" shouted Grindelwald. "One more word and I will kill you. I don't think I've ever been this close to Blitzen before. At this moment I can hear the church bell tolling there. A slow bell. A funeral. Whose funeral, Mr. McGrath?"

"Yours, Baron," I said.

"Yes, mine," he said quickly. "These last two hundred years have been a rather ragged kind of existence. Bits and pieces here and there. Not much of a life. But at least I was alive. Now suddenly I have decided that I don't want to reach Blitzen. I do not want my journey to end. That is why I say, one more word and I will kill you."

"You mustn't threaten me, Baron," I said. "My one word could kill you as quickly as a bullet."

I saw the pistol disappear. "I rather think it could," he said. "The church bell in Blitzen tells

me it probably could. So I won't threaten you. Now you will go your way and I will go mine as I have for more than two hundred years, presenting my little mystery to my traveling companions. Without the pistol, of course. The fewer incentives they have to solve it, the better."

A man in flight boots opened the compartment door, gave me a quick glance, and went up front to the cockpit. A moment later he reappeared with my suitcase and started off across the runway toward a well-lit door.

"Goodbye, Mr. McGrath," said the Baron. "Thank you for your company. I hope my little story has made the time pass quickly."

There seemed nothing more to say. I stood up. "Goodbye, Baron," I said, and stepped out through the door and onto the runway.

"Mr. McGrath." His voice made me turn. I looked back in through the door. He was completely invisible now, sitting in his dark corner. For a moment he didn't speak. Then he said, "It would be quite pointless and absurd, don't you agree, to spend the next two hundred years asking for the answer to a mystery I don't want solved? Blitzen, as I remember it from my childhood, was a peaceful place. Since every journey must come to an end, I think I'll end mine there. Please finish your explanation." I hesitated. "Please continue," he said.

"Do you remember why you hid the stone in the pepper shaker?" I said. "Because there wasn't enough salt in the salt shaker to cover it. On one of his visits to the sideboard the Count had partially filled the wooden snuffbox with salt. When you sent him into the alcove that last time, he put the Golden Star in the snuffbox and threw it into the moat. Weighed down by the salt, it sank to the bottom.

"But the snuffbox was far from watertight and as the salt slowly began to dissolve, the snuffbox became lighter. Count Stockhorn anticipated your searching the bottom of the moat as well as the surface. But he knew that divers would need daylight, while the surface could be searched at night by men with torches. As a patron of science it was easy enough for Count Stockhorn to calculate how much salt to put in the snuffbox so that it would bob back up to the surface about dawn. Even if they had arrived earlier than they did, your divers would probably have ignored something floating on the surface. As it was, I expect that the Count had already retrieved the snuffbox as he rowed around the moat with the Duke's party even before your divers got into the water."

The Baron sighed in the darkness. "So it was as simple as that." He paused and added, "One last question, Mr. McGrath. And I hope this will not offend you. But

in my travels I have met men whom I judge to be more analytical of mind than you and, quite frankly, more intelligent. But in the end my story always baffled them. How were you able to hit upon the answer?"

"Once I figured out how the diamond had been disposed of it wasn't too difficult to work back to who the thief was and how he must have operated," I said. "As for how the diamond was disposed of—the salt, the moat, the snuff-box—you yourself gave me the idea for that."

"I gave you the idea?"

"Remember when you laughed at my bad guess about the wine? You said that because I was in the whiskey business I thought the thief had drunk the diamond. The Altdorf Syndrome, you called it. But there are more things you can do with whiskey than drink it. You can also smuggle it. During Prohibition the smuggling schooners often weighted down their whiskey cases with rock salt. If they thought they were going to be stopped and searched, they'd dump the cargo overboard, mark the spot, and come back a day later just as the cases were bobbing back to the surface. It was a good trick. You see, my father invented it."

"Ah," said Grindelwald. "As I've said so many times, breeding always tells."

At that moment the headlights of a tractor bringing baggage from another part of the field lit up the inside of the helicopter and gave me my first good look at Baron Grindelwald. He wore a shabby black greatcoat with a high collar and a three-cornered hat with a wilted black and yellow cockade. He looked neither like a lunatic nor a man who was 250 years old. But his face was haggard, like the face of someone who had traveled a long distance.

He bowed slightly. "Thank you, Mr. McGrath," he said. Then he closed his eyes. But before I could tell whether his expression was one of peace or simple resignation, the baggage tractor changed direction and the inside of the helicopter went black.

I waited for a moment, wondering if I should call his name. Then I turned and headed across the runway toward the well-lit door that would take me to the next leg of my trip to Omaha.

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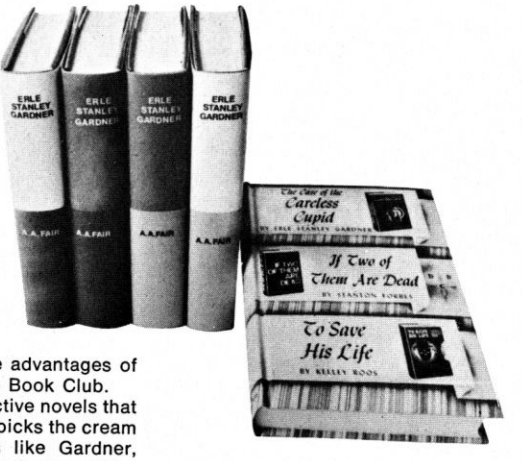

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