

# EDGAR WALLACE

mystery magazine

EWMM

VOLUME 2

3/-

NUMBER 5

**EDGAR  
WALLACE**

Planetoid  
127

**PIERRE  
AUDEMARS**

Aces High

**WILLIAM H.  
FEAR**

Man on  
the Beat

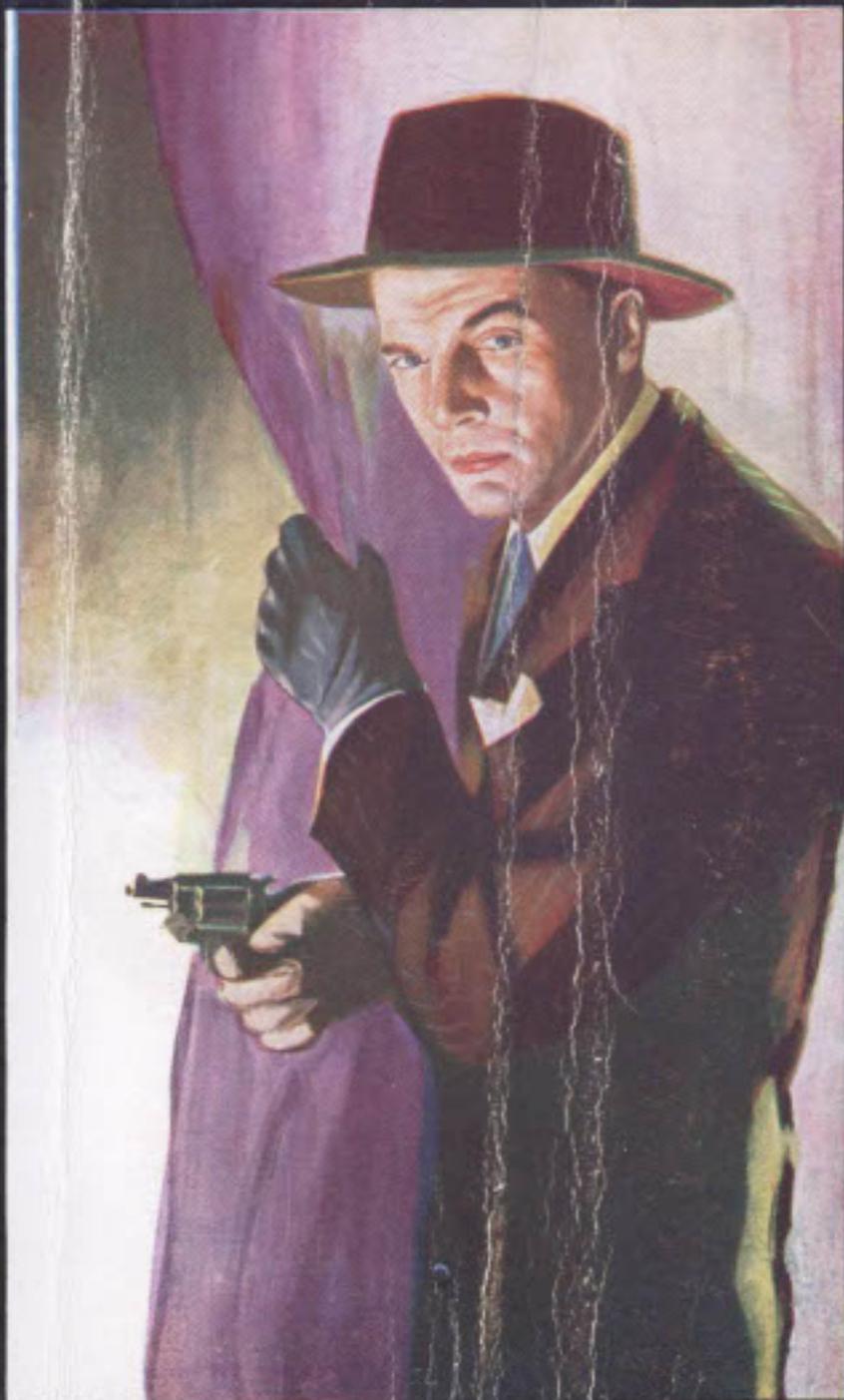
**VERN  
HANSEN**

The  
Knocker-man

★

**TRUE  
CRIME**

Murder by  
Gaslight





*Edgar Wallace*

BORN LONDON, 1875  
DIED HOLLYWOOD, 1932

# EDGAR WALLACE

## mystery magazine

---

**VOL. 2, No. 5**

**PRICE 2s. 6d.**

---

### CONTENTS

|                          |                         |     |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|-----|
| Planetoid 127            | <i>Edgar Wallace</i>    | 2   |
| You Can't Cheat the Rope | <i>William Shand</i>    | 47  |
| Man on the Beat          | <i>William H. Fear</i>  | 53  |
| The Knocker-man          | <i>Vern Hansen</i>      | 68  |
| Aces High                | <i>Pierre Audemars</i>  | 94  |
| Such a Lovely Day        | <i>Penelope Wallace</i> | 112 |
| Murder by Gaslight       | <i>True Crime</i>       | 115 |

Cover by *Chacopino*  
Sketches by *Eric Parker*

---

***Edited by Keith Chapman***

---

EDGAR WALLACE MYSTERY MAGAZINE is published by arrangement with Edgar Wallace Ltd. on the 1st of each month by Edgar Wallace Magazines Ltd., 4, Bradmore Road, Oxford. Printed in England at The Philips Park Press, Manchester. Distributed by Representation Services. Sole agents: Australia, Messrs. Gordon & Gotch (A/sia) Ltd.; New Zealand, Messrs. Gordon & Gotch (N.Z.) Ltd.; South Africa, Central News Agency Ltd.; Federation of Rhodesia, Zambia and Malawi, Messrs. Kingstons Ltd. © 1964 Edgar Wallace Magazines Ltd.

The Professor had made an amazing discovery. But his remarkable knowledge was worth millions and greedy men coveted his secret . . . men prepared to kill!

Edgar Wallace

## PLANETOID 127

This novelette was originally published in 1929, and last appeared in 1962 in an American science fiction magazine, where it was described as the first story to use the "twin worlds" theme.

### 1

#### *The Voice From Beyond*

CHAP WEST, who was never an enthusiast for work, laid down the long pole that had brought him from Bisham to the shade of a backwater west of Murley Lock, and dropped to the cushions at the bottom of the punt, groaning his relief. He was a lank youth, somewhat short-sighted, and the huge horn-rimmed spectacles which decorated his knobby face lent him an air of scholarship which his school record hardly endorsed.

Susan West opened her eyes took one glance at her surroundings and settled herself more comfortably.

"Light the stove and make some tea," she murmured.

"I'm finished for the day," grunted her brother. "The hooter sounded ten minutes ago; and cooking was never a hobby of mine."

"Light the stove and make tea," she said faintly.

Chap glared down at the reclining figure; then glared past her to where, paddle in hand, Tim Leonard was bringing the punt to the shore.

Tim was the same age as his old school friend, though he

looked younger. A good-looking young man, he had been head of the house which had had the honour of sheltering Chapston West. They had both been school prefects at Mildram and had entered and passed out on the same day.

Tim Leonard was looking disparagingly at the tangle of bush and high grass which fringed the wooded slope.

"Trespassers will be prosecuted," he read. "That seems almost an invitation. Can you see the house, Chap?"

Chap shook his head.

"No. I'll bet it's the most horrible shanty you can imagine."

Susan, roused by the bump of the punt side against the bank, sat up and stared at the unpromising landing-place.

"Why don't you go farther along?" she asked. "You can't make tea here without -"

"Woman, have you no thought before food?" demanded her brother sternly. "Don't you thrill at the thought that you are anchored to the sacred terrain of the learned Professor Colson, doctor of science, bug expert, performer on the isobar and other musical instruments and -"

"Chap, you talk too much - and I should love a cup of tea."



"We'll have tea with the professor," said Chap firmly.

"Having cut through the briars to his enchanted palace, we will be served in crystal cups reclining on couches of *lapis lazuli*."

She frowned up at the dark and unpromising woods.

"Does he really live here?" she asked Tim, and he nodded.

"He really lives here," he said. "At least, I think so. His driving directions were very explicit and I seem to remember that he said we might have some difficulty in finding the house - "

"He said, 'Keep on climbing until you come to the top,' " interrupted Chap.

"But how does *he* reach the house," asked the puzzled girl.

"By 'plane," said Chap, as he tied the punt to the thick root of a laurel bush. "Or maybe he comes on his magic carpet. Science masters carry a stock of 'em. Or perhaps he comes through a front gate from a prosaic road - there must be roads even in Berkshire."

Tim was laughing quietly.

"It's the sort of place old Colson would choose," he said. "You ought to meet him, Susan. He is the strangest man. Why he teaches at all I don't know, because he has tons of money, and he could get a much better job. I was on the science side at Mildram and it isn't his amazing gifts as a mathematician that are so astounding. The head told me that Colson is one of the greatest living astronomers. Of course, the stories they tell about his being able to foretell the future - "

"He can, too!"

Chap was lighting the stove for, in spite of his roseate anticipations, he wished to be on the safe side, and he was in need of refreshment after a strenuous afternoon's punting.

"He told the school the day the Asian war would end - to the very minute! And he foretold the big explosion in the gas works at Helwick - he was nearly pinched by the police for knowing so much about it. I asked him last year if he knew what was going to win the Grand National and he nearly bit my head off. He'd have told Timothy Titus, because Tim's his favourite child."

He helped the girl to land and made a brief survey of the bank. It was a wilderness of a place, and though his eyes roved around seeking a path through the jungle, his search was in vain. An ancient signboard warned all and sundry that the land was private property. But where they had tied up the punt, the bank had, at some remote period, been propped up.

"Do you want me to come with you?" asked Susan, obviously

not enamoured with the prospect of the forthcoming call. "Would you rather stay here?" asked Chap looking up from his stove.

She gave one glance along the gloomy backwater with its weedy bed and the overhanging osiers. A water-rat was swimming across the still water and this decided her.

"No. I think I will come with you," she said.

Chap poured out the tea and the girl was raising the cup to her lips when her eyes caught sight of the man who was watching them from between the trees.

"What is it?"

Tim had seen her face change and now, following the direction of her eyes, he, too, saw the stranger.

There was nothing that was in the slightest degree sinister about the man; he was indeed the most commonplace figure Tim had ever seen. He was short, stout, with a round and reddish face, which was decorated with a heavy ginger moustache; and his small eyes were watching the party.

"Hello!" said Tim as he walked towards the stranger. "We have permission to land here."

He thought the man was some sort of caretaker or bailiff of "Helmwood".

"Got permission?" he repeated. "Of course you have - which of you is Leonard?"

"That's my name," smiled Tim, and the man nodded.

"He is expecting you *and* West and Miss Susan West."

Tim's eyes opened wide in astonishment.

He had certainly promised the professor that he would call one day during vacation, but he had not intended taking Chap or his sister. It was only by accident he had met his school friend at Bisham that morning, and Chap had decided to come with him.

As though divining his thoughts, the stout man went on:

"He knows a lot of things. If he's not mad, he's a crook. Where did he get all his information from? Why, fifteen years ago he hadn't fifty pounds. This place cost him ten thousand, and the house cost another ten thousand; and he couldn't have got his instruments and things under about fifty thousand!"

Tim had been too much taken aback to interrupt.

"Information? I don't quite understand . . . ?"

"About stocks and things . . . he's made a hundred thousand this year out of cotton. How did *he* know that the boll-weevil was going to play the devil with the South, eh? How did he

know? And when I asked him just now to tell me about the corn market for a friend of mine, he talked to me like a dog!"

Chap had been listening open-mouthed.

"Are you a friend of Mr. Colson?" he asked.

"His cousin," was the reply. "Harry Dawes by name. His own aunt's child - and his only relation."

Suddenly he made a step towards them and his voice sank to a confidential tone.

"You young gentlemen know all about him - he's got delusions, hasn't he? Now, suppose I brought a couple of doctors to see him, maybe they'd like to ask you a few questions about him . . ."

Tim, the son of a barrister, and himself studying for the bar, saw the drift of the question and would have understood, even if he had not seen the avaricious gleam in the man's eyes.

"You'd put him into an asylum and control his estate?" he asked with a cold smile. "I'm afraid that you cannot rely on us for help."

The man went red.

"Not that exactly," he said awkwardly. "And listen, young fellow . . ." he paused. "When you see Colson, I'd take it as a favour if you didn't mention the fact that you've seen me . . . I'm going to walk down to the lock. You'll find your way up between those poplars . . . so long!"

And turning abruptly he went stumbling through the bushes and was almost at once out of sight.

"What a lad!" said Chap admiringly. "What a scheme! And to jump it at us straight away almost without an introduction!"

"How did Mr. Colson know I was coming?" asked Susan in wonder.

Tim was not prepared with an answer. After some difficulty they found the scarcely worn track that led up through the trees, and a quarter of an hour's stiff climb brought them to the crest and in view of the house.

Tim had expected to find a residence in harmony with the unkempt grounds. But the first view of "Helmwood" made him gasp.

A solid and handsome stone house stood behind a broad stretch of shaven lawn. Flower beds bright with the blooms of late summer surrounded the lawn and bordered the walls of the house itself. At the farther end, but attached to the building, was a stone tower, broad and squat, and on the top of this was erected a hollow structure - criss-crossed, without any apparent

order or method, with a network of wires which glittered in the sunlight.

"That's a new type of aerial, isn't it?" said Chap. "Gosh, Tim! Look at the telescope!"

By the side of the tower was the bell-roof of a big observatory. The roof was closed, so that Chap's "telescope" was largely imaginary.

"Great Moses!" said Chap awe-stricken. "Why, it's enormous!"

Tim was impressed and astounded. He had guessed that the old science master was in comfortable circumstances but he had never dreamt that the professor was a man wealthy enough to own a house like this and an observatory which must have cost thousands to equip.

"Look, it's turning!" whispered Susan.

The big, square superstructure on the tower was moving slowly, and then Tim saw two projecting cones of some crystalline material, for they glittered dazzlingly in the sunlight.

"That is certainly something new," he said.

As he stood there, he saw a long french window open and a bent figure come out on to the lawn.

Tim hastened towards the man of science, and in a few minutes Chap was introducing his sister.

"I hope you didn't mind my coming, sir," said Chap. "Leonard told me he was calling."

"You did well to come," said Professor Colson courteously. "And it is a pleasure to meet your sister."

Susan was observing him closely and her first impression was one of pleasant surprise. A thin, clean-shaven old man, with a mass of white hair that fell over his collar; and bushy eyebrows, beneath which twinkled eyes of deepest blue. There was a hint of good humour in his delicately-moulded face. He was not the traditionally untidy scientist. His linen was spotless, his neat black suit showed no speck of dust.

"You probably met a - er - relation of mine," he said gently. "A crude fellow - a very crude fellow. The uncouth in life jars me terribly. Will you come in, Miss West?"

They passed into a wide hall and down a long broad corridor which was lighted on one side by narrow windows through which the girl had a glimpse of a neatly flagged courtyard, also surrounded by gay flower-beds.

On the other side of the corridor, doors were set at intervals

and it was on the second of these that Tim, in passing, read an inscription. It was tidily painted in small, gold lettering:

PLANETOID 127

The professor saw the young man's puzzled glance and smiled. "A little conceit of mine," he said.

"Is that the number of an asteroid?" asked Tim.

"No - you may search the Year Book in vain for No. 127," said the professor as he opened the door of a large and airy library and ushered them in. "An asteroid, young lady, is one of those tiny planets which abound in the zone between Mars and Jupiter, and of which only Vesta can sometimes be seen with the naked eye. My Planetoid was discovered on a certain 12th of July - 12/7. And it was not an asteroid!"

He chuckled and rubbed his long white hands together.

The library with its walnut bookshelves, its deep chairs and faint fragrance of Russian leather, was a pleasant place, thought Susan. Huge china bowls laden with roses stood in every possible place where bowls could stand. Through the open windows came a gentle breeze laden with the perfume of flowers.

"Tea will be ready in a minute," said Professor Colson. "I ordered it when I saw you. Yes, I am interested in asteroids, too."

His eyes went mechanically to the cornice of the room above the stone fireplace and Tim, looking up, saw that there was a square black cavity in the oaken panelling and wondered what was its significance.

"They are more real and tangible to me than the great planetary masses. Jupiter - a vapour mass; Saturn - a freezing mass, yielding the secret of its rings to the spectroscope; Vulcan - no planet at all, but a myth and a dream of imaginative and romantic astronomers - there are no intra-mercurial planets, by which I mean" - he seemed to find it necessary to explain to Susan, for which Chap was grateful - "that between Mercury, which is the nearest planet to the sun, and the sun itself, there is no planetary body, though some foolish people think there is and have christened it Vulcan -"

An elderly servant had appeared in the doorway and the professor hurried across to him. There was a brief consultation (Susan suspected a domestic problem, and was right) and with a word of apology, he went out.

"He's a strange chap," began Chap and stopped dead.

From the black cavity above the fireplace came a thin whine

of sound and then a deafening splutter like exaggerated and intensified atmospherics.

"What is that?" whispered the girl.

Before Tim could answer, the spluttering ceased, and then a soft, sweet voice spoke:

"Lo . . . Col-son! *Jaize ga shil?* I speak you, Col-son . . . Planetoi' 127 . . . Big fire in my *zehba* . . . city . . . big fire . . ."

There was a click and the voice ceased abruptly, and at that moment Professor Colson came in.

He saw the amazed group staring at the square hole in the wall, and his lips twitched.

"You heard - ? I cut off the connection, though I'm afraid I may not get him again tonight."

"Who is he, sir?" asked Tim frowning. "Was that a transmission from any great distance?"

The professor did not answer at once. He glanced keenly and suspiciously at the girl, as though it was her intelligence he feared. And then:

"The man who spoke was a man named Colson," he said deliberately. "And he spoke from a distance of one hundred and eighty-six million miles!"

## 2

### *A Million-pound Secret*

THEY listened, dumbfounded. Was the old professor mad? The voice that had spoken to them was the voice of Colson?

"A hundred and eighty-six million miles?" said Tim incredulously. "But, Mr. Colson, that was not your voice I heard."

He smiled faintly and shook his head.

"That was literally my *alter ego* - my other self," he said; and it seemed that he was going to say something else, but he changed the subject abruptly.

"Let us have tea," he said, smiling at Susan.

Susan was fascinated by the old man and a little scared, too. She alone of that party realized that the reference he had made to the voice that came one hundred and eighty-six million miles was no jest on his part.

It was Chap who, in his awkward way, brought the conversation back to the subject of mysterious voices.

"They've had signals from Mars, sir," he said. "I saw it in this morning's papers."

Again the professor smiled.

"You think they were atmospheric?" suggested Susan and, to her surprise, Colson shook his head.

"No; they were not atmospheric," he said quietly, "but they were not from Mars. I doubt if there is any organic life on Mars, unless it be a lowly form of vegetation."

"The canals -" began Chap.

"That may be an optical illusion," said the science master. "Our own moon, seen at a distance of forty million miles, would appear to be intersected, very much as Mars seems to be."

"From Jupiter?" suggested Chap, now thoroughly interested.

Again Professor Colson smiled.

"A semi-molten mass on which life could not possibly exist. Nor could it come from Saturn," he went on tantalizingly, "nor from Venus."

"Then where on earth do these signals come from?" blurted Chap, and this time Colson laughed outright.

As they sat at tea, Susan glanced out admiringly upon the brilliant-hued garden that was visible through the long window. And then she saw something which filled her with astonishment.

Two men had come into view round the end of a square-cut hedge. One was the man they had seen half an hour previously - the commonplace little fellow who had claimed to be a relative of the professor. The second was taller and older. His long, hawk-like face was bent down towards his companion, and they were evidently talking on some weighty matter, to judge by the gesticulations of the stranger.

"Good heavens!" said Chap suddenly. "Isn't that Hildreth?"

Professor Colson looked up quickly. His keen blue eyes took in the scene at once.

"Yes, that is Charles Hildreth," he said quietly. "Do you know him?"

"Rather!" said Chap. "He has often been to our house. My father is on the stock exchange, and Mr. Hildreth is a big shot in the City."

Colson nodded.

"Yes, he is a very important person in the City," he said, with just a touch of sarcasm in his voice. "But he is not a very important person here, and I am wondering why he has come again."

He rose quickly and went out of the room, and presently Tim, who was watching the newcomers, saw them turn their heads as with one accord and walk out of sight, evidently towards the professor. When the old man came back there was a faint flush in his cheek and a light in his eye which Tim did not remember having seen before.

"They are returning in half an hour," he said, unnecessarily it seemed to Susan. She had an idea that the old man was in the habit of speaking his thoughts aloud, and here she was not far wrong. Once or twice she had the uncomfortable feeling that she was in the way, for she was a girl of quick intuitions, and though Professor Colson was a man of irreproachable manners, he could not wholly hide his anxiety for the meal to end.

"We're taking up your valuable time, Mr. Colson," she said with a dazzling smile, as she rose when tea was over and offered him a hand. "I think there's going to be a storm, so we had better get back. Are you coming now, too, Tim?"

"Why, surely he -" began Chap, but she interrupted him.

"Tim said he had an engagement near and was leaving us here," she said.

Tim had opened his mouth to deny having made any such statement, when a look from her silenced him. A little later, whilst Chap was blundering through his half-baked theories on the canals of Mars - Chap had theories on everything under and above the sun - she managed to speak with Tim alone.

"I'm quite sure Mr. Colson wants to speak to you," she said. "And if he does, you're not to worry about us. We can get back - it's down-stream all the way."

"But why on earth do you think that?"

"I don't know." She shook her head. "But I have that feeling. And I'm sure he didn't want to see you until those two men came."

How right she was, was soon proved. As they walked into the garden towards the path leading to the riverside, Colson took the arm of his favourite pupil and, waiting until the others were ahead, he said:

"Would it be possible for you to come back and spend the night here, Leonard?"

"Why, yes, sir," said Tim in astonishment.

In his heart of hearts he wanted to explore the place, to see some of the wonders of that great instrument-house which, up to now, Colson had made no offer to show them. What was in

the room marked "PLANETOID 127"? And the strange receiver on the square tower - that had some unusual significance, he was certain.

And, most of all, he wanted to discover whether the science master had been indulging in a little joke at the expense of the party when he claimed to have heard voices that had come to him from one hundred and eighty-six million miles away.

"Return when you can," said Colson in a low voice; "and the sooner the better. There are one or two things that I want to talk over with you. I waited an opportunity to do so last term, but it never arose. Can you get rid of your friends?"

Tim nodded.

"Very good, then. I will say good-bye to them."

Tim saw his companions on their way. When the punt had turned out of sight at the end of the backwater, he retraced his steps up the hill. He found the professor waiting for him, pacing up and down the garden, his head on his chest, his hands clasped behind him.

"Come back into the library, Leonard," he said; and then, with a note of anxiety in his voice: "You did not see those precious scoundrels?"

"Which precious scoundrels? You mean Dawes and Hildreth?"

"Those are the gentlemen," said the other. "You wouldn't imagine, from my appearance when I returned to you, that they had offered me no less than a million pounds?"

Tim stared in amazement at the master.

"A million pounds, sir?" he said incredulously, and for the first time began to doubt the other's reason.

"A million pounds," repeated Colson, quietly enjoying the sensation he had created. "You will be able to judge by your own ears whether I am insane, as I imagine you believe me to be, or whether this wretched relative of mine and his friend are similarly afflicted. And, by the way, you will be interested to learn that there have been three burglaries in this house during the last month."

Tim gasped. "But surely, sir, that's very serious?"

"It would have been very serious for the burglars if I had, on either occasion, the slightest suspicion that they were in the grounds," said Colson. "They would have been certainly electrified and possibly killed! But on every occasion when they arrived, it happened that I did not wish for a live electric current to surround the house. That would have been quite sufficient to

have thrown out of gear the delicate instruments I was using at the time."

He led the way into his library, and sank down with a weary sigh into the depths of a large armchair.

"If I had only known what I know now," he said, "I doubt very much whether, even in the interests of science, I would have subjected myself to the ordeal through which I have been passing during the last four years."

Tim did not answer, and Colson went on:

"There are moments when I doubt my own sanity – when I believe that I shall awake from a dream and find that all these amazing discoveries of mine, are figments of imagination due, in all probability, to an indiscreet supper at a very late hour of night!"

He chuckled softly at his own little joke.

"Leonard, I have a secret so profound that I have been obliged to follow the practice of the ancient astronomers."

He pointed through the window to a square stone that stood in the centre of the garden, a stone which the boy had noticed before, though he had dismissed it as a meaningless ornament.

"That stone?" he asked.

Colson nodded.

"Come, I will show it to you," he said, rising to his feet. He opened a door in what appeared to be the solid wall, and Tim followed him into the garden.

The stone stood upon an ornamental plinth and was carved with two columns of figures and letters:

|     |     |
|-----|-----|
| E 3 | O 2 |
| T 2 | D 2 |
| H 3 | L 1 |
| A 1 | N 3 |
| W 1 | U 1 |
| R 2 | B 1 |
| I 2 | S 2 |

"But what on earth does that mean?"

"It is a cryptogram," said Professor Colson quietly. "When Huygens made his discovery about Saturn's rings, he adopted this method to prevent himself from being forestalled in the discovery. I have done the same."

"But what does it mean?" asked the puzzled Tim.

"That you will one day learn," said the professor, as they walked back to the house.

His keen ears heard a sound and he looked at his watch.

"Our friends are here already," he said in a lower voice.

The attitude of the two newcomers was in remarkable contrast. Hildreth was self-assured, a man of the world to his fingertips, and greeted the professor as though he were his oldest friend and had come at his special invitation. Dawes, on the contrary, looked thoroughly uncomfortable.

Tim had a look at the great financier, and he was not impressed. There was something about those hard eyes which was almost repellent.

After perfunctory greetings had passed, there was an awkward pause, and the financier looked at Tim.

"My friend, Mr. Leonard, will be present at this interview," said Colson, interpreting the meaning of that glance.

"He is rather young to dabble in high finance, isn't he?"

"Young or old, he's staying," said Colson, and the man shrugged his shoulders.

"I hope this discussion will be carried on in a calm atmosphere," he said. "As your young friend probably knows, I have made you an offer of a million pounds, on the understanding that you will turn over to me all the information which comes to you by - er - a - " his lip curled - "mysterious method, into which we will not probe too deeply."

"You might have saved yourself the journey," said Colson calmly. "Indeed, I could have made my answer a little more final, if it were possible; but it was my wish that you should be refused in the presence of a trustworthy witness. I do not want your millions - I wish to have nothing whatever to do with you."

"Be reasonable," murmured Dawes, who took no important part in the conversation.

The old man ignored him, and stood waiting for the financier's reply.

"I'll put it very plainly to you, Colson," said Hildreth, sitting easily on the edge of the table. "You've cost me a lot of money. I don't know where you get your market 'tips' from, but you're most infernally right. You undercut my market a month ago, and took the greater part of a hundred thousand pounds out of my pocket. I offer to pay you to put me in touch with the source of your information. You have a powerful radio receiver here, and somewhere else in the world you have a miracle-man who seems

to be able to foretell the future – with disastrous consequences to myself. I may tell you – and this you will know, for some of your employees have not been incorruptible – that, but for the fact that your correspondent speaks in a peculiar language, I should have had your secret long ago. Now, Mr. Colson, are you going to be sensible?”

Colson smiled slowly.

“I’m afraid I shall not oblige you. I know that you have tried to listen-in – I know also that you have been baffled. I shall continue to operate in your or any other market, and I give you full liberty to go to the person who is my informant. He will be just as glad to tell you everything he knows, as he is to tell me.”

Hildreth took up his hat with an ugly smile.

“That is your last word?”

Colson nodded.

“My very last.”

The two men walked to the door, and turned.

“It is not mine,” said Hildreth, and there was no mistaking the ominous note in his tone.

They stood at the window watching the two men until they had gone out of sight, and then Tim turned to his host.

“What does he want really?”

Colson roused himself from his reverie with a start.

“What does he want? I will show you. The cause of all our burglaries, the cause of this visit. Come with me.”

They turned into the passage, and as the professor stopped before the door labelled “PLANETOID 127”, Tim’s heart began to beat faster. Colson opened the door with two keys and ushered Tim into the strangest room he had ever seen.

A confused picture of instruments, of wires that spun across the room like the web of a spider, of strange machines which seemed to be endowed with perpetual motion . . . these were his first impressions.

The room was lined with grey felt, except on one side, where there was a strip of fibrous panelling. The professor went towards this. Pushing aside a panel, he disclosed the circular door of a safe and, reaching in his hand, took out a small red-covered book.

“This is what the burglars want!” he said exultantly. “The Code! The Code of the Stars!”

## 3

*Death In The Night*

TIM LEONARD could only stare at the professor.

"I don't understand you, Mr. Colson," he said, puzzled. "You mean that book is a code . . . an ordinary commercial code?"

Colson shook his head.

"No, my boy," he said quietly. "That is something more than a code, it is a vocabulary - a vocabulary of six thousand words, the simplest and the most comprehensive language that humanity has ever known! That is why they are so infinitely more clever than we," he mused. "I have not yet learned the process by which this language was evolved, but it is certain that it is their universal tongue."

He turned with a smile to the bewildered boy.

"You speak English, probably French; you may have a smattering of German and Spanish and Italian. And when you have named these languages, you probably imagine that they are all that matter; that the highest expression of human speech is bound up in one or the other, or perhaps all, of these tongues. Yet there is a tribe on the Upper Congo which has a vocabulary of four thousand words with which to voice its hopes, its sufferings and its joys. And in those four thousand words lies the sum of their poetry, history, and science! If we were as intelligent as we think we are, we should adopt the language of the Upper Congolese as the universal speech."

Tim's head was swimming: codes, languages, Upper Congolese and the mysterious 'they' . . . Surely there must be something in Dawes' ominous hints, and this old man must be sick with over-much learning.

As though he realized what was passing through the boy's mind, Colson shook his head.

"No, I am not mad," he said, as he locked the book away in the safe and put the key in his pocket. "Unless this is a symptom of my dementia."

He waved his hand to the wire-laden room, and presently Tim, as in a dream, heard his companion explaining the functions of the various instruments with which the room was littered. For the most part it was Greek to him, for the professor had reached

that stage of mechanical knowledge where he outstripped his pupil's understanding. It was as though a professor of higher mathematics had strolled into the fourth form algebra class and lectured upon ultimate factors. Now and again Tim recognized some formula, or caught a mental glimpse of the other's meaning, but for the main part the old man was talking a language he did not comprehend.

"I'm afraid you're going a little beyond me, sir," he said, with a smile, and the old man nodded.

"Yes, there is much for you to learn," he said. "And it must be learned!"

He paused before a large glass case, which contained what looked to Tim to be a tiny model of a reciprocating engine, except that dozens of little pistons thrust out from unexpected cylinders, and all seemed to be working independent of the others, producing no central and general result.

"What's that, sir?"

Colson stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"I'm trying to bring the description within the scope of your understanding," he said. "It would not be *inexact* to describe this as a 'strainer of sound'. Yet neither would it be exact . . ."

He touched a switch and a dozen coloured lights gleamed and died amidst the whirling machinery. The hum which Tim had heard was broken into staccato dots and dashes of sound. He turned the switch again and the monotonous hum was resumed.

"Let us go back to the library," said the professor abruptly.

He came out of the room last, turned out the lights and double-locked the door, before he took his companion's arm and led him back to the library they had recently vacated.

"Do you realize, Leonard," he said as he closed the door, "that there are in this world sounds which never reach the human brain? The lower animals, more sensitive to vibratory waves, can hear noises which are never registered upon the human ear. The radio expert listened in at the approach of Mars to the earth, hoping to secure a message of some kind. But what did he expect? A similar clatter to that which he could pick up from some passing ship. And suppose somebody was signalling - not from Mars, because there is no analogy to human life on that planet, but from some - some other world, big or little - is it not possible that the sound may be of such a character that no instrument man has yet devised can translate it to an audible key?"

"Do you suggest, sir, that signals of that nature are coming

through from outer space?" asked Tim in surprise. And Professor Colson inclined his head.

"Undoubtedly. There are at least three worlds signalling to us," said the science master. "Sometimes the operators make some mechanical blunder, and there is an accidental emission of sound which is picked up on this earth and credited to Mars. One of the three comes from a system which is probably thousands of light-years away. In their words, from a planet that is part of a system beyond our ken. The most powerful telescope cannot even detect the sun around which this planet whirls! Another, and fainter, signal comes from an undetected planet beyond the orbit of Neptune."

"But life could not exist beyond the orbit of Neptune?" suggested Tim.

"Not life as we understand it," said the professor. "I admit that these signals are faint and unintelligible. But the third planet -"

"Is it your Planetoid 127?" asked Tim eagerly; and Colson nodded.

"I asked you to stay tonight," he said, "because I wanted to tell you something of vital interest to me, if not to science. I am an old man, Leonard, and it is unlikely that I shall live for many years longer. I wish somebody to share my secret - somebody who can carry on the work after I have gone into nothingness. I have given the matter a great deal of thought, passing under review the great scientists of the age. But they are mainly old men. It is necessary that I should have an assistant who has many years before him, and I have chosen you."

For a second, the horrible responsibility which the professor was putting upon him struck a chill to the boy's heart. And then the curiosity of youth, the adventurous spirit which is in every boy's heart, warmed him to enthusiasm.

"That would be wonderful, sir," he said. "Of course I don't know much about astronomy -"

"That does not matter," interrupted the professor. "I can teach you all that you need to know."

"I'm willing to learn," said Tim. "It was about Planetoid 127 you wanted to tell me?"

The professor nodded.

"Yes," he said, "it is about Planetoid 127. I have left nothing to chance. As I say, I am an old man and anything may happen. For the past few months I have been engaged in putting into writ-

ing the story of my extraordinary discovery: a discovery made possible by the years of unremitting thought and toil I have applied to perfecting the instruments which have placed me in contact with this strange and almost terrifying world."

It seemed as though he were going to continue, and Tim was listening eagerly, but in his definite way the old man changed the subject.

"You would like to see round the rest of the house?" he said; and the next hour was spent in strolling around the magnificent range of outhouses.

As Tim was shown from one point of interest to another, it began to dawn upon him that there was truth in Hildreth's accusation, that Colson was something of a speculator. The house and grounds must have cost thousands; the renovations which had been recently introduced, the erection of the telescope – when Colson mentioned the cost of this, the sum took his breath away – could only have been possible to a man of unlimited income. Yet it was the last thing in the world he would have imagined, for Professor Colson was of the dreamy, non-materialistic type, and it was difficult to associate him with a successful career in the Stock Exchange.

When Colson opened the gates of the big garage the boy expected to see something magnificent in the way of cars; but the building was empty except for his old motor-cycle, which was so familiar to the boys of Mildram.

"No, I do not drive a car," said Colson, in answer to his question. "I have so little time, and I find that a motor-cycle meets all my needs."

They dined at eight. Neither during the meal nor after it, did Professor Colson make any further references to his discoveries. At about ten he showed Tim to his room and the boy was in bed and nearly asleep when there came a tap at his door.

"Come in, sir," he said, and the professor entered. From his face Tim guessed that something had happened.

"Leonard," he said, and there was a sharp quality in his voice. "Do you remember somebody speaking . . . the radio voice? I was not in the library when the call came through, so I did not hear it distinctly."

Tim recalled the mysterious voice that had spoken in the library from the aperture above the fireplace.

"Yes, sir; you told me it was Colson –"

"I know, I know," said the professor impatiently. "But tell

me how he spoke?" His tone was almost querulous with anxiety. "I only heard the end. Was it a gruff voice, rather like mine?"

Tim shook his head.

"No, sir," he said in surprise. "It was a very thin voice, a sort of whine . . ."

"A whine?" The professor almost shouted the question.

"Yes, sir."

Colson was fingering his chin.

"That is strange," he said, speaking half to himself. "I have been trying to get him all the evening, and usually it is simple. I received his carrier wave . . . why should his assistant speak . . . ? I have not heard him for three days. What did he say?"

Tim told him, as far as he could remember, the gist of the message which had come through, and for a long time the professor was silent.

"He does not speak English very well - the assistant, I mean - and he would find a difficulty in putting into words . . . you see, our language is very complicated." And then, with a smile: "I interrupted your sleep."

He walked slowly to the door. "If anything should happen, you will find my account in the most obvious place." He smiled faintly. "I'm afraid I am not a very good amateur mason . . ."

With these cryptic words he took his departure.

Tim tossed from side to side and presently slept uneasily.

\* \* \*

Suddenly in the night there was a sharp crash of sound.

Tim Leonard sat up in bed, perspiration streaming from every pore. Something had wakened him. In an instant he had slipped out of bed and had raced out into the corridor. A deep silence reigned, broken only by the sound of an opening door and the tremulous voice of the butler.

"Is anything wrong, sir?"

"What did you hear?" asked Tim quickly.

"I thought I heard a shot."

Tim ran down the stairs, stumbling in the darkness, and presently came to the passage from which opened the doors of the library and the room of Planetoid 127.

The library was empty: two lights burned, accentuating the gloom. A quick glance told him that it was not here the professor was to be sought. He had no doubt that in his sleep he had heard

the cry of the old man. He turned on the light in the corridor and, trying the door of the Planetoid room, to his consternation found it was open.

The room was in darkness, but again memory served him. There were four light switches near the door and these he found. Even as he had opened the door he could detect the acrid smell of cordite, and when the light switched on he was not unprepared for the sight which met his eyes.

The little machine which Colson had described as the 'sound strainer' was a mass of tangled wreckage. Another instrument had been overturned; ends of cut wires dangled from roof and wall. But his eyes were for the moment concentrated upon the figure that lay beneath the open safe.

It was Professor Colson, and Tim knew instinctively that the old man was dead.

## 4

*Murderer's End*

COLSON was dead!

He had been shot at close quarters, for the hair about the wound was black and singed. Tim looked over his shoulder to the shivering butler who stood in the doorway. "Telephone the police," he said.

When the man had gone, Tim made a brief examination of the apartment.

The destruction which the unknown murderer had wrought, was hurried but thorough. Half a dozen delicate pieces of apparatus, the value and use of which Tim had no idea, had been smashed; two main wires leading from the room had been cut; but the safe had obviously been opened without violence, for the key was still in the lock. It was the shot which had awakened the boy, and he realized that the safe must have been opened after the murder.

One of the heavy shutters which covered the windows had been forced open and the casement window was ajar. Without hesitation Tim jumped through the window on to a garden bed. Which way had the murderer gone? Not to the high road, that was certain. There could only be one avenue of escape and that was the path which led down to the backwater.

He considered the situation rapidly: he was unarmed, and

even if the assassin no longer had his gun Tim knew that he would not be a match for a powerfully built man. He vaulted up to the window-sill as the shivering butler made his reappearance.

"I've telephoned the police. They're coming up at once," he said.

"Is there a gun in the house - any kind?" asked Leonard quickly.

"There's one in the hall cupboard, sir."

Tim ran along the corridor, wrenched open the door, found the shot-gun and, providentially, a box of cartridges. Stopping only to snatch a torch from the hall-stand, he sped into the grounds and made his way down the path to the river.

He had switched on the torch the moment he had left the house, and here he was at an advantage over the man he followed, who was working in the dark and dared not show a light for fear of detection.

As he approached the river, Tim heard the sound of stumbling footsteps. He challenged his quarry.

"Halt, or I'll shoot!"

The words were hardly out of his mouth when a pencil of flame quivered ahead in the darkness. Something whipped past his head and struck the bole of a tree with a thud. Instantly, Tim extinguished his light. The muzzle of his gun lifted, his finger on the trigger, he moved very cautiously in pursuit.

The man must be somewhere near the river now; the ground was falling more steeply.

There was no sound ahead until Tim heard a splash of water, and the hollow sound of feet striking the bottom of a boat. Then came the faint *chug-chug* of engines. A motor boat!

Even as Tim reached the waterside he saw the dark shape slipping out towards the river under cover of the trees. Raising his gun, he fired. Another shot came back at him. Tim fired again. He might not hit the assassin, but he would at any rate alarm the lock-keeper.

Then, as the little launch reached the opening which brought it to the river, Tim saw it slow and come almost to a standstill.

For a second Tim thought the man was returning, and then the explanation flashed upon him. The backwater was choked with weeds and the propeller of the launch must have caught them. If he could only find a boat! He flashed his torch vainly up and down the bank.

*Plop!*

The bullet just missed his head. Hastily extinguishing the light, he waited. Somebody was working frantically at the launch's propeller, and again raising his gun, he fired.

This time his shot struck home, for he heard a howl of fury and pain. But in another few seconds the launch was moving again and had disappeared into the open river.

And there was nothing for Tim to do but retrace his steps to the house.

\* \* \*

There were two police officers in the Planetoid room. One was kneeling by the side of the dead man; the other was surveying the damaged apparatus.

Tim came in hot, dishevelled, and with his pyjamas torn to ribbons by the brambles through which he had struggled.

In a few words he described what he had seen, and while one of the policemen telephoned a warning to the lock-keepers, he gave an account of the other events of that night so far as he knew them.

"There have been several burglaries here," said the sergeant. "I shouldn't be surprised if this is the same fellow that tried to do the other jobs. Do you know anything about this?"

He held a sheet of paper to the boy and Tim took it. It was covered with Colson's fine writing.

"It looks almost as though it were a message he'd been writing down. He'd been listening-in - the headphones are still on his ears," said the officer. "But who could tell him stuff like that?"

Tim read the message:

*"Colson was killed by robbers in the third part of the first division of the day. Nobody knows who did this, but the correctors are searching. Colson said there was a great earthquake in the island beyond the Yellow Sea. This happened in the sixth division of the day and many were killed. This place corresponds to Japan, but we call it the Island of the Yellow Sea. The great oil-fields of the Inland Sea have become very rich, and those who own the fields have made millions in the past few days. There will be -"*

Here the writing ended.

"What does he mean by 'Colson was killed in the third division' or whatever it is?" said the dumbfounded policeman. "He must have known he was going to be killed . . . it beats me."

"It beats me, too," said Tim sadly.

\* \* \*

At eleven o'clock came simultaneously Inspector Bennett from Scotland Yard, and Mr. Colson's lawyer - a stout, middle-aged man, who had some information to give.

"Poor Colson always expected such a death. He had made an enemy, a powerful enemy, and he told me only two days ago that this man would stop at nothing."

"Did he give his name?" asked the detective.

Tim waited breathlessly, expecting to hear Hildreth's name mentioned, but the lawyer shook his head.

"Why did you see him two days ago? On any particular business?"

"Yes," said Stamford, the lawyer. "I came here to make a will, by which this young gentleman was named as sole heir!"

"Me?" said Tim incredulously. "Surely you're mistaken?"

"No, Mr. Leonard. I don't mind admitting that, when he told me how he wished to dispose of his property, I urged him against leaving his money to one who, I understand, is a comparative stranger. But Mr. Colson had great faith in you, and said that he had made a study of your character and was satisfied that you could carry on his work. That was the one thing which worried him, the possibility of his life's work being broken off with no successor to take it up. There is a clause in the will which makes it possible for you to operate his property immediately."

Tim frowned.

"I don't know what 'operating his property' means," he said. And then, as a thought struck him: "Unless he refers to his speculations. The Stock Exchange is an unknown country to me. Has anything been found out about the man in the motor boat?"

Inspector Bennett nodded.

"The launch was found abandoned in a local reach of the Thames," he said. "The murderer must have landed and made his way on by foot. Incidentally, did you know he's wounded? We found traces of blood on the launch."

Tim nodded.

"I had an idea I winged him."

\* \* \*

Late that afternoon, there was a sensational discovery. The body of a man was found lying amidst the weeds three miles down the river. He had been shot dead with a revolver.

"He's our man undoubtedly," said the inspector, who brought the news. "There's a shot-wound in his shoulder."

"But I didn't use a revolver," said Tim puzzled.

"Somebody else did," said the Yard man grimly. "Dead men tell no tales."

"Where was he found?"

"Near Mr. Charles Hildreth's private landing stage."

"Hildreth?" Tim stared at him open-mouthed. "Has Hildreth got a property near here?"

"Oh yes - he has a big estate about three miles down the river." The detective was eyeing the boy keenly. "What do you know about Mr. Hildreth?"

In a few words Tim told of the interview which he had witnessed, and the detective frowned.

"It can only be a coincidence that the man was found on his estate," he said. "Mr. Hildreth's a very rich man and a Justice of the Peace."

Nevertheless, he did not speak with any great conviction; and Tim had the impression that Bennett's view of Hildreth was not such an exalted one as he made out.

Borrowing the professor's old motor-cycle, Tim rode over to Bisham and broke the news to Chap West and his sister. The girl was horrified.

"But, Tim, it doesn't seem possible!" she said. "Why should they do it? The poor old man!"

When Chap had recovered from the shock of the news, he advanced a dozen theories in rapid succession, each more wildly improbable than the last. But all his theorizing was silenced when Tim told him of Colson's will.

"I'm absolutely unfitted for the task he's set me," Tim said quietly. "But I'm determined to go on with his work, and I shall secure the best technical help I can to reconstitute the apparatus which has been destroyed."

"What do you think is behind it?" asked Chap.

Tim shook his head.

"Something beyond my understanding," he replied. "Mr. Colson made a discovery, but what that discovery was we've yet to learn. One of the last things he told me was that he'd written out a full account of his investigations. I'm starting an immediate

search for that manuscript. And then there's the stone in the grounds, with all those queer figures and letters which have to be deciphered."

"Have you any idea what the discovery was?" asked Chap.

Tim hesitated.

"Yes, I think I have," he said. "Mr. Colson was undoubtedly in communication with another planet!"

## 5

### *Tim Sets to Work*

"**T**HEN it was Mars!" cried Chap triumphantly.

"Of course it wasn't Mars," interrupted his sister scornfully. "Mr. Colson told us distinctly there was no life on Mars."

"Where is it, Tim?" he asked.

"I don't know." Tim shook his head. "I've been questioning his assistants - there were two at the house - but he never took them into his confidence. The only hint they can give me is that when he was listening-in to these mysterious voices he invariably had the receiving gear directed towards the sun. You know, of course, that he didn't use the ordinary aerial, but an apparatus shaped like a convex mirror."

"Towards the sun?" gasped Chap. "But there can't be any life on the sun! Dash it all, I don't profess to be a scientific expert but I know enough of physics to see that it's as impossible for life to exist on the sun as it would be to exist in a coke oven - only more so! Why, the temperature of the sun is umpteen thousand degrees centigrade . . . and anyway, nobody has ever seen the sun. You only see the photoscope. . . ."

"I know all this," said Tim, listening patiently, "but there's the fact: the receiving mirror wasn't only directed towards the sun, but it moved by clockwork so that it was directed to the sun at all hours of the day, even when the sky was overcast and the sun was invisible. I admit the whole thing sounds incredible, but Colson wasn't mad. That voice we heard was very distinct."

"But from what planet could it be?" insisted Chap. "Go over 'em all: eliminate Mars and the Sun, of course, and where is this new world? Venus, Mercury, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Pluto, Neptune - phew! You're not suggesting that it's one of the minor planets, are you? Ceres, Pallas, Juno, Vesta . . . ?"

Tim shook his head.

"I'm as much puzzled as you - but I'm going to spend my life looking for that world."

\* \* \*

Tim went back to "Helmwood". The body of the old man had been moved to a nearby hospital, and the place was alive with detectives. Stamford the lawyer was there when he returned, and gave him a number of names and addresses which he thought might be useful to the young man.

"I don't know that I want to know any stockbrokers," said Tim, looking at the list with a wry face.

"You never know," said Stamford. "After all, Mr. Colson expected you to carry on his work, and probably it will be part of your duties to continue his operations. I happen to know that he paid minute attention to the markets."

He indicated a number of financial newspapers that lay unopened on the table, and Tim took up one, opened it and glanced down the columns. In the main, the items of news were meaningless to him. All he saw were columns of intricate figures which were so much Greek, but presently his eye caught a headline:

**"BLACK SEA OIL SYNDICATE.  
CHARLES HILDRETH'S GLOOMY  
REPORT TO THE  
SHAREHOLDERS.**

"A meeting of the Black Sea Oil Syndicate was held at the Cannon Street Hotel yesterday afternoon, and Mr. Charles Hildreth, Chairman of the Company, presiding, said that he had very little news for the shareholders that was pleasant. A number of the wells had run dry, but borings were being made on a new part of the concession, though there was scarcely any hope that they would be successful."

Tim frowned. Black Sea Oil Syndicate . . . ? Hildreth? He put a question to the lawyer.

"Oh yes," said Stamford. "Hildreth is deep in the oil market. There's some talk of his rigging Black Seas."

"What do you mean by 'rigging'?" asked Tim.

"In this case the suggestion, which was made to me by a knowledgeable authority," said the lawyer, "is that Hildreth was depressing the shares by issuing unpromising reports which would induce shareholders to put their shares on the market at a

low figure. Of course, there may be nothing in it: Black Sea Oils are not a very prosperous concern. On the other hand, he may have secret information from his engineers."

"Such as - ?" suggested Tim.

"They may have struck oil in large quantities on another part of the property and may be keeping this fact dark, in which case they could buy up shares cheaply, and when the news was made known the scrip would go sky-high and they would make a fortune."

Tim read the report again.

"Do you think there's any chance of oil being found on this property?"

Stamford smiled.

"I'm a lawyer, not a magician," he said good-humouredly.

After he had gone, Tim found himself reading the paper: the paragraph fascinated him. Black Sea Oil . . .

Suddenly he leapt to his feet. That was the message which Professor Colson had written on the paper - the Oilfields of the Inland Sea!

He ran out of the room and went in search of Stamford.

"I'm going to buy Black Sea Oils," he said breathlessly. "Will you tell me what I have to do?"

In a few moments the telephone wire was busy.

\* \* \*

Charles Hildreth had not been to his office that day, and when he picked up the evening paper he opened the page mechanically to the Stock Exchange column and ran his eyes down the list of quotations. That morning Black Sea Oils had stood in the market at 3s. 3d., and almost the first note that reached his eye was in the stop-press column.

"Boom in Black Sea Oils. There have been heavy buyings in Black Sea Oil shares, which stood this morning in the neighbourhood of 3s., but which closed firm at 42s. 6d."

Hildreth's face went livid. His great coup had failed!

\* \* \*

In the weeks which followed the death and funeral of Professor Colson, Tim Leonard found every waking minute occupied. He

had enlisted the services of scientists and scientific engineers and from the shattered apparatus they were rebuilding the broken instruments.

Sir Charles Layman, one of the foremost scientists in England, had been called into consultation by the lawyer, and to him Tim had related as much as he knew of Professor Colson's secret.

"I knew Colson," said Sir Charles. "He was undoubtedly a genius. But this story you tell me takes us into the realm of fantasy. It isn't possible that life can exist on the sun; and really, young man, I can't help feeling that you've been deceived over these mysterious voices."

"Then three people were deceived," said Tim firmly. "My friend Chap West and his sister both heard the speaker. And Mr. Colson was not the kind of man who would descend to trickery."

Sir Charles pursed his lips and shook his head.

"It does seem most extraordinary. And frankly, I cannot understand the functions of these instruments. It is quite possible, as Colson said, that there are sounds come to this earth so fine, and pitched in such a key, that even if they were detected they would not be recognized as speech. And I am pretty sure that what he called a 'sound strainer' was more than an amplifier. But the mysterious world - where is it? Life in some form may exist on a planetoid, but it is almost certain that these small masses which whirl through space in the zone between Mars and Jupiter are barren globules of rock as dead as the moon and innocent of atmosphere. There are a thousand and one reasons why life could not exist on these planetoids; and, of course, the suggestion that there can be life on the sun is absolutely preposterous."

He walked up and down the library, smoothing his bushy white beard, his brows corrugated in a grimace of baffled wonder.

"Most scientists," he said at last, "work to the observations of some particular forerunner - did the Professor ever mention an astronomer whose calculations he was endeavouring to verify?"

Tim thought for a moment.

"Yes, sir, I remember he spoke once or twice of Professor Watson, an American. I remember once he was lecturing to our school on Kepler's Law, and he mentioned the discoveries of Mr. Watson."

"Watson?" said Sir Charles slowly. "Surely he was the fellow who thought he found Vulcan, a planet supposed by some people to revolve about the sun within the orbit of Mercury. As a matter of fact, what he saw, during an eclipse of the sun, were the two

stars, Theta and Zeta Cankri, which must have been somewhere in the position that Watson described on the day he made his discovery."

Then he asked, with sudden interest:

"Did Professor Colson believe in the existence of Vulcan?"

Tim shook his head.

"No, sir, he derided the idea."

"He was right," nodded Sir Charles. "Vulcan is a myth. There may be intra-Mercurial bodies revolving about the sun but it is extremely unlikely. You have found no data, no photographs?"

The word "photograph" reminded Tim.

"Yes, there's a book full of big enlargements, but mostly of a solar eclipse," he said.

"Would you get them for me?"

Tim went out and returned with a portfolio, which he opened on the table. Sir Charles turned picture after picture without speaking a word, then he laid half a dozen apparently similar photographs side by side and pored over them with the aid of a magnifying-glass.

They were the conventional type of astronomical photo: the black disc of the moon, the bubbling white edges of the corona – but evidently Sir Charles had seen something else, for presently he indicated a speck with a stylo.

"These photographs were taken by different cameras," he said. "And yet they all have this."

He pointed to the pin-point of white which had escaped Tim's observation. It was so much part of the flame of the corona that it seemed as though it were a spark thrown out by one of those gigantic eruptions of ignited gas that flame up from the sun's surface.

"Surely that's a speck of dust on the negative?" said Tim.

"But it's on all the negatives," said Sir Charles emphatically.

"No. I cannot be sure for the moment, but if that is not Theta or Zeta Cankri then we may be on the way to rediscovering Professor Colson's world!"

At his request, Tim left him while, with the aid of charts and almanacks, he plunged into intricate calculations.

When Tim closed the door and came into the corridor he saw the old butler waiting.

"Mr. Hildreth is here, sir. I've put him in the blue drawing-room. Will you see him, sir?"

Tim nodded and followed the servant.

Hildreth was standing by a window, looking out upon the lawn, his hands behind him, and he turned, with a quick, bird-like motion as he heard the sound of the turning handle.

"Mr. Leonard," he said, "I want a few words with you alone."

The young man dismissed the butler.

"Well, sir?" he asked quietly.

"I understand that you have engaged in a little speculation. You are rather young to dabble in high finance," drawled Hildreth.

"Do you mean Black Sea Oils?" asked Tim bluntly.

"I had that stock in mind. What made you buy, Mr. Leonard – or rather, what made your trustee buy, for I suppose that, as you're under age, you would hardly carry out the transaction yourself."

"I bought because I'm satisfied that Black Sea Oils will rise."

A slow smile dawned on Hildreth's hawk-like face.

"If you had come to me," he said coolly, "I could have saved you a great deal of money. Black Sea Oils today stand at fifty shillings: they are worth less than fivepence! You are little more than a boy," he went on suavely, "and I can well understand how the temptation to gamble may have overcome you. But I was a friend of Colson's, and I do not like the thought of your money being wasted. I will take all the stock off your hands, paying you at the price you paid for it."

"That's very generous of you," said Tim dryly. "But I'm not selling. And as for Mr. Colson being a friend of yours –"

"A very good friend," interrupted the other quickly. "And if you tell people that he and I were enemies it may cost you more than you bargain for!"

There was no mistaking the threat in his tone.

"Mr. Hildreth," Tim said quietly, "nobody knows better than you that you were on ill terms with Mr. Colson. He was constantly spoiling your market – you said as much. You believed that he was possessed of information which enabled him to operate to your detriment, and you knew this information came by radio, because your stooge had listened-in, without, however, understanding the language in which the messages came. You guessed there was a code, and I believe that you made one or two efforts to secure that code. Your last effort ended in the death of my friend!"

## 6

*Pursuit Into Danger*

HILDRETH'S face went white.

"Do you suggest that I am responsible for Colson's death?"

"You were responsible directly and indirectly," said Tim. "You sent a man here to steal the code-book - a man who has been identified this afternoon as a notorious criminal. Whether you told him to shoot, or whether he shot to save his skin, we shall never know. The burglar was killed - so that he couldn't talk!"

"By whom?" asked Hildreth steadily.

"You know best," was the curt reply.

Tim opened the door and stood waiting. The man had regained some of his composure and, with an easy laugh, walked into the corridor.

"You will hear from me again," he said.

"Thank you for the warning," was Tim's rejoinder.

After he had seen his unwelcome visitor off the premises, Tim went in search of Stamford who, with his two assistants, was working in the study getting out particulars of the old man's investments. The lawyer listened in silence while Tim narrated what had passed.

"He's a very dangerous man," said Mr. Stamford at last. "And, so far from being rich, I happen to know that he's on the verge of ruin. There are some queer stories about Hildreth. I have had a hint that he was once in an Australian prison, but, of course, there's no evidence to connect him with this crime. What are your immediate plans?"

"The 'sound strainer' has been reconstituted," said Tim. "The experts are making a test today, though I very much doubt whether they'll succeed in establishing communication."

A smile fluttered at the corner of the lawyer's mouth.

"Do you still believe that Mr. Colson was in communication with another planet?"

"I'm certain," said Tim emphatically.

He went back to the blue drawing room and had hardly entered before Sir Charles came in.

"It is as I thought," said the scientist. "Neither Zeta nor Theta! It is, in fact, a distinct body of some kind, and, in my judgment, well outside the orbit of the hypothetical Vulcan. If you look at the back of the photograph -"

He turned it over and Tim saw that, written in pencil in the microscopic calligraphy of the Professor, were a dozen lines of writing.

*"I knew, of course, that this was a dead world, without atmosphere or even water. There can be no life there. I made an enlargement by my new process, and this revealed a series of flat, rocky valleys."*

"What the deuce his new process was, heaven only knows!" said Sir Charles in despair. "Poor Colson must have been the most versatile genius the world has known. At any rate, that disposes of the suggestion that this is the planetary body whence come the signals – if they come at all."

Sir Charles waited until the experts had finished the work of reassembling two of the more complicated machines; but, though experimenting until midnight, they could not establish communication, and at last, with a sense of despair, Tim ordered the work to cease for the night.

The whole thing was becoming a nightmare to him.

\* \* \*

Chap and his sister came over in the morning to assist Tim in a search which had gone on ever since the death of Professor Colson.

"We can do no more," said Tim helplessly, "until we've seen the Professor's manuscript. Until then we don't know what we're looking for."

"What about that stone in the garden? Won't that tell you anything?" asked Chap. "I'd like to see it."

They went out into the courtyard together and stood before the stone in silence.

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| E | 3 | O | 2 |
| T | 2 | D | 2 |
| H | 3 | L | 1 |
| A | 1 | N | 3 |
| W | 1 | U | 1 |
| R | 2 | B | 1 |
| I | 2 | S | 2 |

"Of course, that isn't as difficult as it appears," said Chap, to whom cryptograms were a passion. "There's a sentence written

there, containing so many Es, so many Hs, etcetera, and perhaps, when we find the sentence, the mystery will be half solved."

He jotted the inscription down in a notebook, and throughout the day was puzzling over a solution. Night came and the two were on the point of departure, when Chap said suddenly:

"Do you think you were wise, Tim, to tell that reporter all you did?"

Earlier that day Tim had given an interview to a local newspaper which had described more fully than he had intended – more fully, indeed, than his evidence at the inquest – what had happened immediately preceding Colson's death.

"Because, y' know, it struck me," said Chap, "that the poor old Professor's manuscript would be very valuable to a certain person. Does it occur to you that our friend might also be searching for this narrative?"

This was a new idea to Tim.

"Why, yes," he said slowly. "I never thought of that. No; that didn't strike me. But I don't know where he would find it. We've taken out every likely stone in the building; I've had the cellars searched –"

"What makes you think it's behind a stone?" asked Chap.

"His reference to a mason. My guess – and I may not be far wide of the mark – is that Mr. Colson, having written his manuscript, hid it in one of the walls. But so far I've not been able to discover the hiding-place."

\* \* \*

After he had walked to the end of the drive to see his friends off, Tim returned to the study. He was alone in the house now, save for the servants. Sir Charles had gone back to town by the last train and Stamford had accompanied him.

He had taken up his quarters in a spare room immediately above the library, and for an hour after his visitors had departed he sat on the broad window-seat, looking down into the courtyard, now bathed in the faint radiance of the crescent moon. The light shone whitely upon the cryptogram stone, and absently he fixed his eyes upon this, the least of the old man's mysteries. And then – was his eye playing tricks with him? He could have sworn he saw a dark figure melt out of the darkness and move along the shadow of the box hedge.

He pushed open the casement window, but could see nothing.

"I'm getting jumpy," he said to himself and rose with a yawn.

Then he glanced out of the window again and started. Now he was sure: he could see the shapeless black shadow and it was moving towards the cryptogram stone.

His pulse beat a little quicker as he watched. There was no doubt about it now. In the moonlight the figure in the long black coat and the broad hat which shaded his face stood clearly revealed. It was touching the stone, and even as Tim looked the little obelisk fell with a crash.

In a second Tim was out of the room and speeding along the corridor. As he came into view of the figure it stooped and picked something from the ground.

The manuscript! What a fool he had been! That was where the old man had concealed the story of his discovery! But there was no time for regret: the mysterious visitor had already disappeared into the shadows. Was he making for the river?

Tim was uncertain. He was halfway down the slope before he realized that he had made a mistake. Behind him he heard the soft purr of a car engine and, racing up the slope, he saw a red tail-light as it disappeared down the broad drive towards the road.

The great iron gates were closed, and that would give him a momentary advantage, though he knew he could not reach the car before they were open.

Then he remembered Colson's motor-cycle: he had left it leaning against the wall and had forgotten to bring it in after the trip he had made to Bisham that morning. Yes, there it was!

He had hardly started the machine when he heard a crash. The unknown intruder had driven his car through the frail iron gates and was flying along the road to Maidenhead.

Tim came out in pursuit and put his machine all out. The car ahead gained until it came to the foot of a long and tiring hill, and then the gap between them closed. Once the driver looked back and a minute later something dropped in the road. Tim only just avoided the wrench which had been thrown out to trip him.

The car reached the crest of the hill as Tim came up to its rear and, heedless of danger, stretched out his hand, and catching hold of the hood, let the motor-cycle slip from between his knees.

For a second he held on desperately, his feet swinging in the air, and then, with an effort, he threw his leg over the side of the door and dropped breathlessly on to the seat behind the driver. At first the man at the wheel did not realize what had happened and then, with a yell of rage, he turned and struck blindly at the uninvited passenger.

The blow missed him by a fraction of an inch, and in another second his arm was around the driver's neck. The car swayed and slowed, and then an involuntary movement of the man revealed the whereabouts of the manuscript.

Tim thrust into the inside-pocket and his fingers touched a heavy roll of paper. In a flash the packet was in his hand, and then he saw the moonlight gleam on something which the man held.

The car was now almost at a standstill and, leaping out, Tim plunged into the hedge by the side of the road. As he did so, he heard the *zip!* of a bullet and the patter of leaves.

He ran on wildly, his breath coming in short gasps. To his ears came the blundering footfalls of his pursuer. He was out of breath and in no condition to meet the murderous onrush of his enemy.

*And then, as he felt he could not go a step farther, the ground opened underneath his feet and he went down, down, down.*

For a second, he lost consciousness. All that remained of his breath was knocked from his body, and he could only lie and gape at the starlit sky.

## 7

### *The Manuscript*

LOOKING up, Tim saw a head and shoulders come over the ledge of the quarry into which he had fallen. But apparently the man was not prepared to take the risk of following, for presently the sound of his footsteps died away and there was silence.

He lay for half an hour motionless, recovering his breath. Although his arm was bruised he could move it and no bones were broken. He rose cautiously to his knees and explored the position as far as it was revealed by the moonlight.

He had fallen twenty or thirty feet down a steep, chalky slope; but he was by no means at the bottom of the quarry face, and he had to move with the greatest care and circumspection. Presently, however, he found a rough path, which seemed to run interminably upwards.

It was nearly half an hour later when he came to the road. The car had gone, and he walked back the way he had come, hoping that he would be able to retrieve his motor-cycle intact, though he had his doubts whether it would be usable. When he found the machine he discovered to his delight that it had suffered little damage other than twisted handlebars.

His run home was without event.

Apparently his hasty exit had been heard, for the house was aroused and two menservants were searching the grounds when he came in.

"I heard the crash at the gate, sir," said the butler. "Lord! I'm glad to see you back. Somebody's thrown over that stone in the courtyard . . ."

He babbled on and Tim was so glad to hear the sound of a human voice that he did not interrupt him.

There was no sleep for him that night. With successive cups of strong coffee, brought in at intervals, he sat poring over the manuscript, page by page, almost incredulous of his own eyes and senses.

The sunlight poured in through the windows of the study and found Tim still sitting, his chin on his palms, the manuscript before him. He had read it again and again until he knew almost every word. Then, locking the papers away in the safe, he walked slowly to the instrument room, and gazed in awe at this evidence of the dead man's genius.

Something within him told him that never in the future would human speech pulsate through this network of wires; never again would that strange little instrument bring within human hearing and understanding the thin sounds of space. Even the code was gone: that vocabulary, reduced with such labour to a dictionary of six thousand words.

He turned the switch and set the machine working; saw the multi-coloured lights gleam and glow. This much the mechanics had succeeded in doing. But the words that filtered through light and charcoal would, he thought, be dead for everlasting. He turned another switch and set something working which Sir Charles had described as a miniature air pump, and stood watching absentmindedly as the piston thrust in and out. If he only had one tenth of Colson's genius!

His hand had gone out to turn the switch that stopped the machine, when:

*"Oh, Colson, why do you not speak to me?"*

The voice came from the very centre of the machine. There was no visible speaker apparatus. It was as though the lights and the whirling wheels had become endowed with a voice. Tim's heart nearly stopped beating.

"Oh, Colson," wailed the voice, "they are breaking the machines. I have come to tell you this before they arrive. He is dead -

he, the master, the wizard, the wonderful man . . .”

The servant! Mr. Colson had told him that it was the servant who had spoken. The astral Colson was dead. How should he reply?

“Where are you?” he asked hoarsely, but there was no answer, and soon he understood why.

Presently:

“I will wait for you to speak. When I hear you I will answer. Speak to me, Colson! In a thousand seconds . . .”

A thousand seconds! But then he was a hundred and eighty million miles away, and a thousand seconds must pass – nearly seventeen minutes – before his voice could reach through space to the man who was listening.

How had he made the machine work? Perhaps the mechanism had succeeded before, but there had been nobody at the other end – wherever the other end might be. And then:

“Oh, Colson, they are here . . . goodbye!”

There came to him the sound of a queer *tap-tap-tap* and then a crackle as though of splintered glass; and then a scream, so shrill, so full of pain and horror, that involuntarily he stepped back. Then came a crash, and silence. He waited, hardly daring to breathe, but no sound came.

At the end of an hour he turned off the switch and went slowly up to his room.

\* \* \*

He awoke to find a youth sitting on the edge of his bed. He was so weary and dulled that he did not recognize Chap, even after he spoke.

“Wake up! I’ve got some news for you, dear old boy,” said Chap, staring owlshly through his thick, heavy glasses. “There’s a Nemesis in this business – you may have heard of the lady – Miss Nemesis of Nowhere. First the burglar man is killed and then his boss is smashed to smithereens!”

Tim struggled up.

“Who?” he asked. “Not Hildreth?”

Chap nodded.

“He was found just outside Maidenhead, his car broken to bits – they think his steering went wrong when he was doing sixty. At any rate, he smashed into a tree, and all that’s left of his machine is hot iron!”

“Hildreth! Was he killed?”

Chap nodded.

"Com-pletely," he said callously. "And perhaps it's as well for him, for Bennett was waiting at his house to arrest him. They've got proof that he hired that burglar. Do you know what time it is? It's two o'clock, you lazy so-and-so and Sir Charles and Stamford are waiting to see you. Sir Charles has a theory -"

Tim swung out of bed and walked to the window, blinking into the sunlit garden.

"All the theories in the world are going to evaporate before the facts," he said. Putting his hand under his pillow, he took out the Professor's manuscript. "I'll read something to you this afternoon. Is Susan here?"

Chap nodded.

"I'll be down in half an hour," he said.

His breakfast was also his luncheon, but it was not until after the meal was over and they had adjourned to the library, that he told them what had happened in the night. Inspector Bennett, who arrived soon after, was able to fill in some of the gaps in the story.

"Hildreth," he said, "in spite of his wealth and security, was a crook of crooks. It's perfectly true that he was tried in Australia and sent to penal servitude. He had installed a big radio receiver in his house, and there's no doubt that for many years he had made large sums of money by picking up commercial messages that have been sent by radio and decoding and using them to his own purpose. In this way he must have learnt something about Mr. Colson's correspondent - he was under the impression that Colson received messages in code and was anxious to get the code-book. By the way, we found the charred remnants of that book in the car. It was burnt out, as you probably know. That alone would have been sufficient to convict Hildreth of complicity in the murder. Fortunately, we have been saved the trouble of a trial."

"None of the code remains?" asked Tim anxiously.

The detective shook his head.

"No, sir, none. There are one or two words - for instance, 'Zelith' means 'the Parliamentary system of the third decade', whatever that may mean. It seems a queer sort of code."

"That's very unfortunate," said Tim. "I had hoped to devote my time to telling the history of this strange people, and the book would have been invaluable."

"Which people is this?" asked Sir Charles, puzzled. "Did our friend get into communication with one of the lost tribes?"

Tim laughed, in spite of himself.

"No, sir. I think the best explanation I can offer you is to read Mr. Colson's manuscript, which I discovered last night. It's one of the most remarkable stories that has ever been told, and I'll be glad to have you here, Sir Charles, so that you may supply explanations which do not occur to me."

"Is it about the planet?" asked Sir Charles quickly, and Tim nodded.

"Then you have discovered it! It is a planetoid -"

Tim shook his head.

"No, sir," he said quietly. "It is a world as big as ours."

The scientist looked at him open-mouthed.

"A world as big as ours, and never been discovered by our astronomers? How far away?"

"At its nearest, a hundred and eighty million miles," said Tim.

"Impossible!" cried Sir Charles scornfully. "It would have been detected years ago. It is absolutely impossible!"

"It has never been detected because it's invisible," said Tim.

"Invisible? How can a planet be invisible? Neptune is much farther distant from the sun -"

"Nevertheless, it is invisible," said Tim. "And now," he said, as he took the manuscript from his pocket, "if you will give me your attention, I will tell you the story of Neo. Incidentally, the cryptogram on the stone reads: 'Behind the sun is another world!'"

## 8

### *The Other World*

**T**IM turned the flyleaf of the manuscript and began reading in an even tone.

#### "THE STORY OF NEO

"My name" (the manuscript began) "is Charles Royton Colson. I am a Master of Arts of the University of Cambridge, science lecturer to Mildram School, and I have for many years been engaged in the study of the Hertzian waves, and that branch of science commonly known as radiology and I claim in all modesty to have made useful contributions in this field. I am a mathematician and have written several textbooks upon astronomy. I am also the author of a well-known monograph on the

subject of the Inclinations of the Planetary Orbits; and my treatise on the star Oyonis is familiar to most astronomers.

"For many years I engaged myself in studying the alterations of ellipses following the calculations and reasonings of Lagrange, who to my mind was considerably less of a genius than Professor Adams, to whom the credit for the discovery of Neptune should be given . . ."

[Here followed a long and learned examination of the incidence of Neptune's orbit, as influenced by Uranus.]

"... My astronomical and radiological studies were practically carried on at the same time. Twelve years ago my attention was called to a statement made by the Superintendent of the great radio station outside Berlin, that he had on three separate occasions taken what he described as 'slurred receptions' from an unknown station. He gave excellent technical reasons why these receptions could not have come from any known station and he expressed the opinion, which was generally scoffed at, that the messages he had taken came from some extra-terrestrial source. There immediately followed a suggestion that these mysterious dashes and dots had come from Mars. The following year the same German engineer stated that he had received a distinct message of a similar character but there was no confirmation from other sources and no credence was given to his story.

"A year later, the radio station at Cape Cod also reported signals, as did a private station in Connecticut; whilst the Government station at Rio de Janeiro reported that it had heard a sound like 'a flattened voice'. It was obvious that these stories were not inventions, and I set to work on an experimental station which I had been allowed to set up at the school. After about six months of hard toil I succeeded in fashioning an instrument which enabled me to test my theories. My main theory was that, if the sound came from another world, it would in all probability be pitched in a key that would be inaudible to human ears. For example, there is a dog-whistle which makes no sound that we can detect, but which is audible to every dog. My rough 'sound strainer' had not been operating for a week when I began to pick up scraps of signals and scraps of words - unintelligible to me, but obviously human speech. Not only was I able to hear, but I was able to make myself heard; and the first startling discovery I made was that it took my voice a thousand and seven seconds to reach the person who was speaking to me.

"I was satisfied now that I was talking to the inhabitants of

another world, though, for my reputation's sake, I dared not make my discovery known. After hard experimental work, I succeeded in clarifying the voices, and evidently the person at the other end was as anxious as I to make himself understood and to understand the nature of his unknown correspondent's speech.

"You may imagine what a heart-breaking business it was, with no common vocabulary, invisible to one another, and living possibly in conditions widely different, to make our meaning clear to one another. We made a start with the cardinal numbers, and after a week's interchange we had mastered these. I was then struck with the idea of pouring a glass of water from a tumbler near to my microphone, and using the word 'water'. In half an hour I heard the sound of falling water from the other end and the equivalent word, which will be found in the vocabulary. I then clapped my hands together, and used the word 'hand'. With these little illustrations, which took a great deal of time, began the formation of the dictionary. In the Neo language there are practically no verbs and few adjectives. Very much is indicated by a certain inflexion of voice; even the tenses are similarly expressed; and yet, in spite of this, the Neothians to whom I spoke had no very great difficulty, once I had learnt the art of the inflexion, in supplying the English equivalent.

"All the time I was searching the heavens in the vain endeavour to discover the exact location of this world, which was, from the description I had, exactly the same size as ours, and therefore should have been visible. I had maps of the southern hemispheres, reports from the astronomers of Capetown and Brisbane, but they could offer me no assistance. It was certain that there was in the heavens no visible planetary body as big as Neo.

"The chief difficulty I had lay in the fact that the voices invariably came from the direction of the sun; and it was as certain as anything could be that life could not exist on that great golden mass. Notwithstanding this, unless my mirror was turned to the sun, I received no message whatever.

"Then came the great eclipse and, as you know, I went to the South Sea Islands to make observations. It was our good fortune to have fine weather, and at the moment of total eclipse I took several particularly excellent photographs, some of which you will find in the portfolio marked 'L'. In these and photographs taken by other astronomers, you will see, if you make a careful observation, close to the corona, a tiny speck of light, which at first I thought was my world, but which afterwards I discovered was a

dead mass of material upon which it was impossible for life to exist.

“One night, when I was turning over the matter in my mind, and examining each photograph in the study of my house on the Thames, the solution flashed on me. This tiny speck, which was not a star, and was certainly not Vulcan, was the satellite of another world, and that world was moving on the same orbit as our own earth, following exactly the same course, but being, as it was, immediately opposite to us behind the sun, was never visible! On whatever part of the ellipse we might be, the sun hid our sister world from us, and that was why the voice apparently came from the sun, for it was through the solar centre that the waves must pass. Two earths chasing one another along the same path, never overtaking, never being overtaken, balancing one another perfectly! It was a stupendous thought!

“I conveyed this to my unknown friend, who called himself Colson, though I am under the impression that that was due to a misconception on his part as to what Colson meant – he probably thought that ‘Colson’ was the English word for ‘scientist’ – and I asked him to make observations. These he sent to me after a few days, confirming my theory. It was after we had begun to talk a little more freely, and my acquaintance with the language had increased so that I could express myself clearly, that it occurred to me there was an extraordinary similarity both in our lives and our environment. And this is the part of my narrative which you will find difficult to believe – I discovered that these two worlds were not only geographically exact, but that the incidents of life ran along on parallel lines. There were great wars in Neo, great disasters, which were invariably duplicated on our earth, generally from two to three days before or after they had happened in this new world. Nor was it only the convulsions of nature that were so faithfully reproduced. Men and women were doing in that world exactly as we were doing in ours. There were Stock Exchanges and street cars, railways, airplanes, as though twin worlds had produced twin identities; twin inspirations.

“I learnt this first when my friend told me that he had been seeking me for some time. He said that he had had a broken knee some five years ago, and during his enforced leisure he had wondered about the possibility of his having another identity. He said he was frequently feeling that the person he met for the first time was one in reality whom he had seen before; and he was conscious that the thing he did today, he had done a week before.

That is a sensation which I also have had, and which every human being has experienced.

“But to go back to the story of his having been laid up with a broken knee. He had no sooner told me this than I realized that I also had had a broken knee – I had a spill on my motor-cycle – and that I had spent the hours of my leisure pondering the possibility of there being another inhabited planet! There is a vulgar expression, frequently met with amongst neurotic people, that they have twin souls. In very truth this man was my twin soul: was me, had lived my life, thought my thoughts, performed every action which I performed. The discovery staggered me, and I began to fear for my reason; so I went to London and consulted an eminent Harley Street specialist. He assured me that I was perfectly normal and sane; and offered me the conventional advice that I should go away for a holiday.

“Then one day my astral friend, Colson, incidentally mentioned that there was great excitement in his town because a man had bought some steel stock which had since risen considerably in price – he mentioned the name – and, glancing through a newspaper, I saw the name of a stock which sounded very similar to that of which he had told me. Moreover, the price was very much as he had mentioned it; and the wild idea occurred to me that if happenings were actually duplicated, I might possibly benefit by my knowledge. With great trepidation I invested the whole of my savings, which were not very considerable, in these shares, and a few days later had the gratification of selling out at a colossal profit. I explained to my friend at the next opportunity what I had done, and he was considerably amused, and afterwards took an almost childish delight in advising me as to the violent fluctuations in various stocks. For years I have bought and sold with considerable benefit to myself. Not only that, but I have been able to warn Governments of impending disasters. I informed the Turkish Government of the great earthquake, and warned the Lamborn Shipping Company of the terrible disaster which overtook one of their largest liners – though I was not thanked for my pains.

“After this had been going on for some years, I was prepared to learn that my friend had incurred the enmity of a rich man, whom he called Frez on his side, and that this had been brought about unwittingly through me. For this is a curious fact: not everything on this new world is three days in advance of ours. Often it happened that the earth was in advance and I was able, in our exchanges, to tell him things that were happening here which had

not yet occurred in Neo, with the result that he followed my example, and in the space of a year had become a very rich man.

"Colson, as I called him, had a servant, whose name I have never learnt; he was called the equivalent to 'helper', and I guess, rather than know, that he is a much younger man than my double, for he said that he had been to school as a pupil of Colson's. He, too, learnt quickly; and if there is any difference in the two worlds, it is a keener intelligence: they are more receptive, quicker to grasp essentials.

"There are necessarily certain differences in their methods of government, but these differences are not vital. In Neo men are taught the use of arms, and receive their guerdon of citizenship (which I presume is the vote) only on production of a certificate of proficiency. But in the main their lives run parallel with ours. The very character of their streets, their systems of transportation, even their prison system, are replicas of those on this earth. The main difference, of course, is that their one language is universal. I intend at a later date writing at greater length on the institutions of Neo, but for the moment it is most necessary that I should get down particulars of the machines and apparatus employed by me in communicating with our neighbours . . ."

Here followed twenty closely-written pages of technical description. Tim folded the manuscript and looked around at the astonished faces. Stamford was the first to break the silence.

"Preposterous!" he spluttered. "Impossible! Absurd . . .! It's a nightmare! Another world - good God!"

"I believe every word of it." It was Sir Charles' quiet voice that stilled the agitated lawyer. "Of course, that is the speck by the side of the corona! Not the world which poor Colson found, but the moon of that world."

"But couldn't that world be visible at some time?"

Sir Charles shook his head.

"Not if it followed the exact orbit of the earth and was placed directly opposite - that is to say, immediately on the other side of the sun. It might overlap at periods, but in the glare of the sun it would be impossible to see so tiny an object. No, there is every possibility that Colson's story is stark truth."

He took the manuscript from Tim's hand and read rapidly through the technical description.

"With this," he said, touching the paper, "we shall be able to get into communication with these people. If we only had the vocabulary!" he groaned.

"I am afraid you will never hear from Neo again, sir," said Tim quietly, and told of that brief but poignant minute of conversation he had had before the cry of the dying servant, and the crash of broken instruments, had brought the voice to an abrupt end.

After the lawyer and the scientist had departed, he went with Susan into the instrument room and they gazed in silence upon the motionless apparatus.

"The link is broken," Tim said at last. "It can never be forged again, unless a new Colson arrives on both earths."

She slipped her arm in his.

"Aren't you glad?" she asked softly. "Do you want to know what will happen tomorrow or the next day?"

He shivered.

"No, I don't think so. But I should like to know what will happen in a few years' time, when I'm a little older and you're a little older."

"Perhaps we'll find a new world of our own," said Susan.

© Copyright 1964 by Edgar Wallace Ltd

***New and stimulating stories  
for today's reader . . .***

SF SF

**NEW WORLDS**

**SCIENCE FICTION**

The best SF writers appear regularly in

*NEW WORLDS SF*

All Stories Original

**2/6**

**THROUGH ANY DEALER**

---

All men have their doubles, so we are told. Kenneth Smythe's was a proven example. The grim evidence swung at the end of a hangman's rope . . .

**William  
Shand**

## **YOU CAN'T CHEAT THE ROPE**

Though he now lives in the South, William Shand was raised in the Midlands amid what he calls "a mixture of blustering industrialism and rural gentility." His favourite relaxations include walking, talking, and listening to classical music and jazz - he is equally at home with Mozart as with Charlie Parker.

---

**I**T was a gloomy little gathering outside the prison gates. Some shook their bent heads. Some shrugged and muttered. Others were as blank-faced as the grey walls. The scales of justice fall and are as relentless as written fate.

The people moved closer after the warder had gone, his wicket closed behind him with dull finality. They clustered in front of the short notice tacked on one gate - telling that death by hanging had been carried out, the proven murderer dutifully executed. In the background opponents of capital punishment marched solemnly, banners uplifted.

What was the murderer's name? They did not ask.

It was ordinary enough; could have been the name of your next-door neighbour. Kenneth Smythe. But it had been an unusually sordid crime.

What an ironic joke! The tall man at the edge of the crowd chuckled softly. Someone next to him might have thought he heard him sob. He was a long lean man in a black overcoat with turned-up collar, matching the jerked brim of a battered trilby to shadow his face. His wide streak of mouth was curling in derision. Curiously slatey eyes quickly read the curt official notice, then just as swiftly scanned the faces about him.

Strangers!

Little people! Curiosity-seekers, morbid sightseers, stupid rubbernecks, cranks, puritans, weaklings, sadists, fors and againts and don't-knows and couldn't-care-lesses.

Silly scum!

What would they do if they suddenly learned that Kenneth Smythe was here among them; that the real Smythe hadn't been hanged and was standing reading the notice with them - his own gruesome obituary.

Do? Why, they wouldn't do anything! They just wouldn't believe it. They wouldn't *want* to believe it, so, presto! it was not so. Which suited the real Kenneth Smythe right down to the ground.

. . . Standing there, living flesh and blood, brooding over his well-planned escape, the unbelievable audacity of it. These fools wouldn't believe that either - why should they?

He was all ready now for the next move in the sordid drama that, despite his escape, was not yet over.

The folks slowly dispersed. The marchers with their banners began to chant something. They ignored the rubbernecks and, strangely enough, the rubbernecks ignored them. Kenneth Smythe ignored them, too, not hearing their words. He blundered through them, almost knocking a banner from the grasp of a masculine-looking female who glared after him as if she'd like to follow him and beat him over the head with her pole.

But she saw that he was a cripple and most likely the near-collision had been accidental. He was like a tall black bird, grounded with a broken wing, hoppity-skipping along till he disappeared round a corner.

She could not have completely understood his crooked, wolfish grin. She might have thought, however, that here was one crippled in mind as well as body, getting enjoyment from the official murder of a fellow soul.

She would have been only partly right.

Kenneth Smythe's mind was on the next act of his own personal drama. He had pictured it so many times, gloated over it during his long months of hiding.

Time had set the stage. He had waited far too long.

He considered the breathtaking shock in store for his beautiful wife, Vera, when the supposedly sentenced and hanged husband appeared to claim her; her turf-accountant spouse who'd been accused of shooting his partner, Jeffrey Solomon, after a quarrel.

What would Vera's reactions be to this revelation, this vision? A month or so ago Kenneth Smythe was sure he knew the answer to this question. But certainty of this had since left him and now the only certainty was his glorious plan, to be carried through in every detail no matter what other things might transpire. A man returned from the dead must be prepared to find things changed.

\* \* \*

Kenneth Smythe could not allow himself uncertainties as he strode purposefully on. Again a leer split his shadowed face. He recalled the night of the shooting. Realizing he was the prime suspect, that he'd be arrested and charged, he had grabbed as much cash as he could lay his hands on and fled.

He had bought secondhand clothes and sold his own Savile Row apparel. Like a rat making for a hole he had taken refuge in an East End dosshouse and there he had stayed – except for a few carefully-planned secret meetings, all with the same person.

For there had been a loophole, and this person was that.

All men have their doubles, so we are told. Kenneth Smythe's was a proven example. Proven now ironically, terribly, and without doubt.

It was as if destiny had bided its time to slip in Smythe's counterpart, Bart Markham, a recent small-time betting client inflicted with slow, deadly paralysis. A fatal complaint had already given Markham a twisted leg, a dead ringer for Smythe's own hoppity gait. And their resemblance in every other way was uncanny: they might have been identical twins from the same aborted egg.

Markham worshipped his thin wife and their brood of hungry kids. He said he would do anything to insure that they were taken care of after he had gone. *Anything!* He, however, could not have possibly conceived anything as bizzare as Kenneth Smythe proposed.

He thought it mad.

But he listened.

All he needed, Smythe said, was a chance to prove his innocence, time to do this.

Anyway, the evidence, though damning, was purely circumstantial. There could even be a complete acquittal. But if not, and even if the end was the rope, well, Bart Markham hadn't long to live in any event.

The reasoning was garbled. But, for the sake of his wife and kids, Markham made himself believe it.

A trust fund was set up for his family; they were sent away.

"Okay, I'll risk it," Markham had said sardonically. "I'll step into your best shoes. I'll dress in your swagger clothes. Ain't we as alike as two chips off the same old block? I'll give myself up. I'll be Kenneth Smythe."

The bogus Kenneth Smythe had repudiated Vera Smythe, labelled her a two-timing bitch, refused to see her. Hadn't he taken her from a Soho strip-dive, hadn't he given her money and position and the kind of love and care that she had never had in her slum-ridden childhood and youth?

And what had she given him in return? Nothing! She had been all take, take, *take* . . .

They asked him for the gun with which he had killed Jeffrey Solomon. He said he had thrown it in the Thames; he couldn't remember exactly where.

Actually, the real gun, the murder weapon, had been hidden at home by the real Kenneth Smythe before he fled.

He was on his way to collect it now.

It was his own gun that had been stolen, used, wiped clean.

But by whom?

\* \* \*

It was now night after a day of waiting. The villa in St. John's Wood was ablaze with light. Music came through open french windows. Smythe hadn't expected this. Not on the day of his execution.

It was too blatant.

But perhaps Vera just hadn't wanted to be alone on the first night.

He let himself in through the dark kitchen. He moved into the hall and climbed the stairs. He paused, lit his cigarette lighter. He climbed the ladder to the tiny attic in the eaves. It was full of the same old junk. The broken musical box was still in the same place. He opened it and delved inside. He lifted the small sheet of plywood that had once hidden the mechanism but should now hold the gun.

The gun was not there.

"Are you looking for this, Kenneth?"

It was Vera's soft voice and it came from behind him.

He dropped the lighter and it spluttered out but, at the same

time, the attic light went on. Kenneth Smythe blinked in it as, still holding the musical box, he rose and turned slowly.

Vera stood facing him and in her hand was the gun.

"I knew about it all the time, Ken," she said. "And I knew about you. Bart Markham came to me as soon as you had broached your scheme to him. I doubled your offer – which was the kind of blackmail he was after, of course. The man had a great passion for that skinny wife, and that bunch of snotty-nosed kids. He was more than willing to die for them. But it was his obsession to get as much money as he could for them first of all."

Kenneth stood with his mouth open, watching her as she spat a stream of words at him as if they had been bottled up too long and their release at last was a gushing and venomous orgasm.

She was even more beautiful than he remembered her. She was so evil. So unutterably evil! He had been too blinded by love to realise this before. Even during the long months of hiding, though he may have suspected all kinds of things – a liaison between Vera and the dead Jeffrey Solomon only the least of them – he had shut them from his mind.

But now the scales were forcibly removed from his eyes and they burned as he stared at this beautiful woman, his wife, his *ex-wife*, the most beautiful and maddeningly-desirable woman he had ever known. Sex personified. *Evil* personified.

"*You killed Jeffrey!*"

"Of course I killed Jeffrey," she said. "I'm surprised a clever man like you didn't realize it before. We were lovers, but he got too possessive. He also threatened to tell you. I was tired of him and he had ideas about blackmailing me. I was getting tired of you, too, my dear Kenneth. It was easy to pin the crime on you. I knew you'd blunder into the library, find Jeffrey's body and the gun, suspect somebody at the party. I knew you'd never suspect your ever-loving wife, Vera.

"All I wanted was your money. I guess that's all I ever wanted. This was the way to get it and get rid of you at the same time. You beat me then, though. You stayed alive and this morning that sick fool Markham died. But I knew you'd come back here, looking for the gun in your little hidey-hole – do you think I wouldn't find that, Kenneth? I knew I only had to wait. So I threw another party, a lovely cover-up. It's like history repeating itself isn't it, Ken?"

She shut up. She had talked herself out. She stared at him strangely. Obviously she had expected him to break down and

scream at her. His motionless silence puzzled and scared her.

\* \* \*

So this is the end of it, thought Kenneth Smythe. I worked so hard to save my neck from the rope. I swore I'd get the real killer. I've been living in a dream and now I'm awake. This is what I've been running for, this is what I've been running *away* from, and running *forward* to, all at the same time. This is the end, the *real* end . . .

He began to walk towards Vera.

She cried, "Get back! I'm going to shoot you! I thought you were a burglar, I caught you here in the darkness, didn't see you properly, didn't know who you were. Nobody'd blame me for shooting a burglar, for defending myself . . ."

She hardly seemed aware of what she was saying; she was becoming incoherent; spouting her plans at him like a mad woman.

As if he cared!

He kept on walking.

She fired at him and missed. She didn't know what she was doing any more. She screamed once before he got hold of her. Then his fingers closed on her throat.

Vera's wild friends were making so much noise downstairs that nobody heard the scream or the shot. Then a symmetrically-handsome small-part actor who had been enjoying Vera's favours of late missed her and went a-looking. He went upstairs and saw the light beneath the attic door and climbed this narrow second flight of stairs.

He opened the door. He took one look inside and then he fled, his womanish screams calling forth the mob.

There was nothing anybody could do. The shocked questions were unanswerable. The dead woman crumpled at the door could not answer them. The man swinging gently from an attic-beam seemed to be about to speak. But it was only a trick of the pitiless light.

---

London's dockland in 1920 . . .  
 A tough beat for a young  
 policeman with courage and  
 unorthodox methods . . .

## William H. Fear

# MAN ON THE BEAT

William H. Fear, who lives in Somerset, is 36, married, and has an eight-year-old-son, Marcus — “He is already trying his hand at story writing when he is able to get his hands on my typewriter.” Excluding girls’ and women’s stories, Fear has written most types of popular fiction. Crime, Science Fiction, Western, Boys’ Adventure, War and Foreign Legion novels and stories have all been successful products of his busy imagination.

---

“WELL, lad,” said the inspector, “you’ve been with the division three months now. D’you know the beats? Have you been studying ’em on duty and off, the way you should?” He glowered out from under shaggy brows at the young constable standing on the other side of the desk.

Police Constable K941 Robert Parker, only three months out of the Metropolitan Police Training School at Peel House, straightened himself visibly, answered stiffly: “Yes sir, I think I know them all pretty well by now.”

“You think you know?” snapped Inspector Lane harshly. “What kind of answer is that, lad? A policeman is definite with his answers at all times!”

“Sorry, sir.” Bob Parker flushed down to where the tight collar of his tunic encircled his neck. “Yes, sir, I do know the beats.”

“That’s better,” the inspector grunted. “Because you’ll be getting your own beat tonight, lad. Yes, you’re on night duty from now on. Report to Sergeant Hoskins at 9.30 p.m. in the parade shed. That’s all, dismiss!”

“Yes, sir; thank you, sir.”

Bob turned smartly on his heel, and marched out of the inspector’s office.

That night in the parade shed Bob was one of thirty-two blue-uniformed, young and not-so-young police constables standing round in small groups talking and laughing together, making the most of the last few minutes before the section sergeants came in to call them on parade.

This was a big moment in Bob Parker's life. He was fully conscious of that. His period of training was over. The iron-hard discipline of Peel House was behind him; his probationary period in the division, when he was never out of the station unless in the company of an experienced officer, had come to an end. From tonight he was on his own . . . Police Constable K941 Parker out on his own beat with the full responsibility for maintaining the law of the land on that beat on his own two broad shoulders.

It wasn't going to be easy. The division was an East End one close to the waterfront, peopled by foreign seamen, dockers, and all the riff-raff that seemed to congregate wherever ships from far-distant countries tied up and turned their crews ashore with money in their pockets.

London's dockland in 1920 was not the easiest of districts for a young policeman to begin his career.

The low drone of conversation died away when the three section sergeants came into the parade shed, and the constables were called on parade. Then the station officer made a swift but searching inspection and announced himself satisfied.

But before he turned the parade over to the three sergeants he made a brief but shattering announcement.

"Constable Manning was last night attacked on his beat in Hobbs Row. You all know that the Hobbs Row beat is one of the toughest, and that two constables have already been savagely attacked from behind there at night without being able to identify their assailant or assailants afterwards. Manning makes the third. At present he is in hospital unconscious, with a policeman at his bedside. This time I hope we'll be able to catch the dirty scoundrel who's doing this. It all depends on Manning when he recovers consciousness. Sergeant Hoskins, one of your men will take over the hospital watch tonight. Detail one constable for the job. He can report to me, and I'll fill him in on the details!"

"Yes, sir!" As the inspector left the shed Sergeant Hoskins' eagle eye swept the double rank of constables, and eventually came to rest on Bob Parker. "Parker, I'm afraid your introduction to a beat of your own is postponed. Double along to Inspector Lane at once!"

"Yes, sergeant." Bob Parker didn't know whether to feel disappointed or not. He had been looking forward to his own beat tonight. On the other hand it was important to keep a watch on Jim Manning, to be with him when he came round in case he was able to remember anything about the swine who'd beat him up in Hobbs Row last night.

Three coppers attacked on one beat, eh? Sounded as though somebody didn't like the police force down that way.

\* \* \*

With his helmet resting on his knee, Bob Parker sat in a cane-bottomed chair in a small, private ward at the hospital. In the bed beside him Constable Jim Manning lay on his back with his eyes shut, breathing so softly that it looked as though he wasn't breathing at all. The unconscious policeman's head was swathed in a wide bandage on the side of which was a dark brown stain. His face was badly bruised and cut, and he looked in a bad way.

As he watched the unconscious man, Bob felt the anger rising like a ball of fire in his breast. Jim Manning was a married man with a couple of kids. All right, so it was part of his job to take risks, but those risks shouldn't include being beaten up so bad that he had to be taken to hospital - battered senseless by some crazy lout who just had it in for coppers.

And what would they do with the cur if the law ever caught up with him? Probably a fine, possibly a few weeks in jail if the judge was feeling liverish. It wasn't fair on blokes like Jim Manning, or on his wife and kids!

Later on Bob slept in the chair. There was nothing against that. Just so that he was on hand if and when Manning came round.

\* \* \*

He woke with a sudden start. What had woken him like that? He pulled out his watch, looked at it with sleepy eyes. Ten to three. He'd been asleep for close on two hours. Bob yawned, rubbed the sleep from his eyes, and looked down at Manning's bed. Then he gave a visible start, and half rose to his feet. For Jim Manning was awake. The constable's eyes were wide open, staring up at the ceiling with a kind of faint bewilderment.

Bob touched Manning's arm gently, and asked: "How you feeling, Mr. Manning?"

"Huh?" Manning tried to turn his head, winced, then saw Bob beside him. "It - it's young Parker, isn't it?"

Bob grinned, nodded his head.

"That's right, Mr. Manning. Don't try to move for Pete's sake. You're in hospital. They brought you in here last night. You were found unconscious in Hobbs Row. You'd been beaten up."

Constable Manning groaned at the recollection.

"I remember now," he whispered hoarsely. Then: "Hadn't you better get on to the station, young Parker? That's what they sent you here for, isn't it?"

"Yes, of course. I'm glad you're okay, Mr. Manning." At the door Bob turned and asked: "Did you see who hit you? Could you identify him?"

Manning pursed his lips.

"No luck, youngster," he told the eager constable. "I never knew what happened to me. Just the same as with the others. I was going down Hobbs Row when something hit me hard on the back of the head. After that - nothing. Now you cut along, and get on the 'phone. The C.I.D. will be wanting my statement, such as it is."

\* \* \*

Once again nothing. A complete blank. Three policemen brutally attacked on the same beat in dockland, and not a clue to go on. At divisional headquarters the super was shouting for some action, threatening the loss of stripes, forecasting the pounding of beats by feet long since grown soft under office desks.

\* \* \*

In the parade shed three nights later, Section sergeant Hoskins stood in front of Bob with his hands behind his back, and his square chin thrust aggressively forward.

"I'm changing your beat, Parker," he announced without any preamble. "You think you could manage Number Five?"

Bob's lips curled slightly with an inner satisfaction. Five was the beat that included Hobbs Row. The pad where coppers were beaten up by unknown assailants.

"I can manage it, sergeant," he said gently.

Sergeant Hoskins nodded. His eyes travelled over Bob's large frame taking in the wide shoulders under the blue tunic, the bulg-

ing neck muscles, the large knotted hands.

"Yes, I think you can, son," he said.

In single file the ten constables followed Sergeant Hoskins through the gaslit streets, and one by one they dropped off at their allotted beats where they would be relieved at six the next morning.

On the corner of Merrill's Wharf Bob left his place in the line, looked at the light in his bullseye lantern, squared his shoulders, and walked off along the pavement at the regulation pace in the direction of Jackson Street and the Portugal Arms.

It was Saturday night and the pubs were turning out. For the next hour or so there would be plenty of people about making their way home, singing and shouting to each other. No harm in any of them. But it was as well to be on hand in case a fight developed as it often did on Saturday night after turning out time.

Although he was new to the beat most of the people he passed gave him a cheery word of goodnight. They were good folk down here in the East End, the very salt of the earth. Bob knew that. He had been brought up among them, and worked among them until he went into the army in 1918, and then joined the police force when he came out.

"G'night, officer!"

"Good night, sir!"

"Sweet dreams, son!"

"And to you, ma!"

That's the way it was; the way it should be. And yet, somewhere out there in the blackness of the night was a brute, a maniac who attacked coppers from behind, and beat them half to death.

The crowd was thinning now. It was close to eleven. Bob walked slowly along Jackson Street trying the shop doors, flashing his lantern into recessed doorways. At the far end of the street, the end of his beat, he turned, crossed the road for the walk back the opposite side.

He could hear a bus coming along John Street. Soon it would turn into Jackson Street for the run down to Bow. A woman was walking unsteadily towards him now. Looked as though she had had too much to drink at the Portugal. She'd be hocking the family silver at uncle's on Monday morning, thought Bob with a wry grin, to keep body and soul together until next pay-day.

The gaily-lit bus was turning the corner into Jackson Street, and on its upper deck the young policeman could hear the mournful strain of "Nellie Dean". Bob grinned broadly. He didn't envy the

conductor his job of trying to collect the fares from that irresponsible crowd of roisterers.

The grin suddenly faded from the constable's good-natured face. His mouth opened wide to shout a warning as the old Cockney lady who had been weaving her way along Jackson Street stepped off the pavement and into the path of the oncoming bus!

Bob moved without conscious thought. Throwing himself into the gaslit road, he grabbed the old dear round the waist while the towering mass of the bus loomed over them, and leaped with her in his strong grasp to the far pavement where they both rolled over in a heap on the damp cobbles.

The bus by this time had screeched to a stop in the middle of the road, and the white-faced driver was leaning out of his window, yelling at the young man in the blue uniform who was picking himself out of the gutter.

"Swelp me, guv, I didn't ruddy well see 'er, honest I didn't. She was right in front afore I could do anyfink abaht it!"

Bob readjusted his helmet, waved his hand reassuringly.

"Don't worry about it, mate. It wasn't your fault. Anyway, there's no damage done. You can carry on!"

As the bus trundled forward down the street, Bob turned to the old lady with a stern look on his face.

"Now then, ma, that was a damn silly thing to do, wasn't it? You might have got yourself killed, and it was all your own fault. Don't you ever go stepping into the road again before making sure there's nothing coming!"

The old lady, remarkably sobered up now by her terrifying experience, adjusted her fruit-adorned hat on her grey head, and tried to brush the dirt from the front of Bob's tunic.

"Look son, yuh got your uniform all grubby." She sniffed and added: "I'm sorry, honest I am, son. It's the bloody strong ale wot does it. I ain't gonna touch the stuff again, swelp me if I do!"

Bob grinned, his happy nature reasserting itself.

"All right, ma, I believe you where thousands wouldn't. Now you think you can get home under your own steam?"

"Course I can, son. Blimey I do it every Saturday night." She turned away, paused, then said over her shoulder: "You're a nice boy fer a copper. New, ain't yuh? Lemme give yuh a word of advice, son. Watch out fer Alfie Hogan!"

Bob frowned, turned, and came back. He stared down from his great height at the old lady, and said in a low voice: "Why should I watch out for Alfie Hogan, ma?"

The old lady licked dry lips, sighed, and went on: "Ordinary like I don't snitch ter the coppers. But I reckon this is different. You saved my life ternight, son, and one good turn deserves anuvver. Alfie's a tough case. He only come outa nick free months ago, an' he swore he'd git even wiv the coppers fer the six months the beak give 'im. He don't like coppers Alfie don't, so watch out, son, and allus make sure yuh got a wall behind yuh when you're standin' around."

*Alfie Hogan.* The name meant nothing to Bob Parker yet, but it might mean a hell of a lot as far as the senseless attacks on policemen on this beat were concerned.

"Listen, ma," he said urgently. "This Hogan, where does he live? What does - ?"

The old lady waved a calloused hand in front of her.

"I've said enuff," she told Bob. "Alfie's cock of the walk rahnd this part of Limehouse. He's a docker, an' he's big - bigger than you even, son. Everybody's scared of Alfie dahn 'ere and that means me, too. I ain't sayin' nuffin' more. So g'night t' yer son, and look after yerself."

Sober now, the old dear disappeared into the gaslit night of Jackson Street leaving Bob alone with his thoughts. Alfie Hogan, eh? The name might be worth remembering - and if he was the yellow-gutted bastard who'd bashed up three policemen from behind on this beat Bob Parker was going to be ready for him.

For the moment the young constable decided he'd say nothing of this encounter down at the station. After all, there wasn't any proof, and an arrest couldn't be made on an old lady's friendly warning.

\* \* \*

During the weeks that followed Bob Parker made a point of listening closely when people talked as they came out of the pubs on his beat. Listening was the only way, for whenever he happened to mention the name Alfie Hogan round Merrill's Wharf, Jackson or John Street, usually garrulous East Enders shut up like clams.

Piece by piece, Bob gradually built up a store of information on the aggressive Mr. Hogan. Hogan was a docker, a big six-foot bruiser who ruled the roost in this part of the East End. Nearly a year ago he'd half beaten a Lascar seaman to death, and the law got him for it. He'd served six months inside, and when he came out he was a confirmed cop hater. Upon checking with records

Bob discovered that the attacks on the constables on Number Five beat had been taking place only since Hogan was released from prison.

It was all beginning to tie up nicely in Bob's mind, but there was no proof. None of the assaulted constables had been able to identify their attacker, and until he was actually apprehended in an attack on the law, nothing could be done.

Bob pursed his lips thoughtfully. And what if he was caught? Another six months inside? Something else to boast about when he was freed to his fawning cronies?

Bob shook his head sadly. He didn't like bullying in any form, and thinking of Hogan pushing the decent little people of Limehouse around made his gorge rise. No, a spell in prison wouldn't alter Hogan in that respect. A swine like that had to be knocked off his pedestal; he had to be humbled before the honest folks he terrorized.

\* \* \*

Pushing himself into a deep recess of the wall at the back of Merrill's Wharf, Bob Parker pulled out his packet of sandwiches from his pocket, and opened them up. It was past midnight, and the sergeant had made his round of inspection an hour ago. He wouldn't be showing his face for another few hours, and it was safe to have a bite or two.

The cheese sandwich was halfway to his mouth when he heard the noisy approach of men from the end of Jackson Street. They were talking together loudly, and doing a lot of swearing. Every so often one of their number made a remark in a deep voice and the others cackled and roared with appreciation.

Stuffing the sandwiches back into his pocket Bob adjusted his chin strap, and moved out onto the pavement as the group came up to him. There were four of them, rough-looking characters, unshaven, and obviously drunk.

Bob noted that three of them were the usual run-of-the-mill bad hats to be found down around the docks any day of the week, and who'd run like scared rabbits at the mere sound of a policeman's voice.

The fourth man was something different. Bob himself was a big man, broad and over six feet in his socks, but this man dwarfed even him. He had the face of a prize-fighter, all broken nose and cauliflower ears, and an old knife scar down one cheek gave the

corner of his mouth a permanent sneering twist. A very ugly man in every way was Bob's silent opinion.

The quartet stopped as Bob stepped in front of them, and they stood undecided as the young constable shone his bullseye lantern into their faces.

"It's late, and you're kicking up a lot of noise," Bob told them quietly. "Why don't you all go home and sleep it off?"

The three rats were silent but the big scarfaced bruiser took a pace forward, and leered at Bob. Then he spat deliberately on the pavement at the constable's feet. Bob heard one of the others give out with a half nervous laugh.

"Yew talkin' ter me, copper?" the big man asked. The way he said the word "copper" it sounded like an obscenity.

Bob nodded coolly.

"Yes, I'm talking to you as well. Now move along before I run you in!"

The big man laughed, a nasty laugh, coarse and obscene like the way he twisted his words out.

"Nobody don't talk ter Alfie Hogan like that - not even a ruddy bluebottle!"

As the big man named himself the blood in Bob's veins ran faster. So this was Alfie Hogan, the man he had been trying to trace for the past three weeks. Hogan the bully, the jail-bird, the cop hater.

"I'm telling you to move on!"

Hogan grinned over his shoulder at his companions, winked his eye, then came back at Bob with: "Yew better shove orf, copper, afore yuh gits hurt. I don't like coppers." He was slamming a ham-like fist into the palm of his other hand; his mouth was twisted into a dirty sneer.

All this time Bob was thinking hard. What would happen now if he called this bully's bluff? A fight obviously, four against one, and no holds barred. An arrest in a day or two, and another jail sentence for Alfie Hogan. Then he'd come out again, and be a bigger menace than he ever was to the good people it was Bob's job to watch over.

No, now wasn't the time to try conclusions with the uncrowned king of Jackson Street.

Bob said gently: "I'm going on now. I'll be back this way in half an hour. You'd better be gone by then."

Deliberately he turned his back and sauntered off down the dark road. The four men called after him, jeering, cursing so that

his young cheeks burned with anger, his fists clenched tight so that his fingernails dug deep into his palms bringing the blood to the surface. It was all he could do to force himself to keep moving, and not to tear back into that knot of drunkards and wipe the floor up with them.

\* \* \*

Bad news spreads fast, and within a day or two it was all round Jackson Street, John Street and Merrill's Wharf that Police Constable K941 Parker had played the coward when confronted by Alfie Hogan. People who spoke to him before ignored him now, and even the kids on their early morning paper rounds just before he went off duty, instead of shouting "mornin' mister" called out after him when they passed, "rozzer", "bluebottle", and other uncomplimentary titles.

Bob Parker stuck it although he didn't like it. He was playing a lone hand against a bully, a savage brute who attacked policemen on their beats at night, and put them in hospital.

It was an unorthodox game, too. One of which the authorities would never approve officially. A law breaker must be punished, yes, but punished according to the law.

The news of his backing down from Hogan reached the station, too. Inspector Lane was for taking the young constable off Number Five beat at once, bringing him into the station for a time, but Sergeant Hoskins was against it.

"Young Parker's no coward, sir," he told the glowering inspector confidently. "He wouldn't have come as far as he has without guts. Leave him where he is, sir, that's my advice. Whatever's happening I think Parker can sort it out on his own."

Inspector Lane chewed savagely on his moustache, tapped his desk top with his pencil.

"I hope you're right, sergeant. You damn well better be. Even the men here on the station are giving Parker the cold shoulder, so I'm told. I don't want a coward in my sub-division!"

"Give him time, sir," smiled tough Sergeant Hoskins. "Just give him time."

\* \* \*

It was true about the other constables. They believed their newest addition to be lacking in moral fibre. Well, what else

could they think when a constable on his own pad walked away from a few beery thugs, leaving them shouting insults after him?

Bob stuck it out without complaint. It hurt deep inside to know that his brother constables looked upon him as yellow. When they gave him the cold shoulder in the canteen and in the sleeping quarters, he longed to be able to tell them the truth, to explain his conduct. But he couldn't. Not if he wanted to finish Alfie Hogan for good and all as the Jackson Street bully.

\* \* \*

It was Saturday night again. A miserable Saturday night with a fine drizzle of rain beating down on the wet pavements, and the grey tendrils of mist curling up from the river like the ghosts of long dead sailormen.

The flickering gas jets in the lamps overhead, far from helping to disperse the scene of gloom in Jackson Street, only seemed to add to it, picking out the falling rain streaks in the air, and the heavy grey haze about the second storey windows.

Standing across from the door of the Portugal Arms, Bob Parker listened to the singing and shouting inside the yellow-lighted bar. He took out his watch and glanced at the face. Ten minutes to closing time. This was the night he had been waiting for. The Portugal Arms was full tonight, packed to capacity with Saturday night revellers.

Alfie Hogan was in there. Drinking heavily of beer supplied by his cronies, and others too scared to refuse when he demanded they should buy him a pint.

Bob flexed his fingers, and waited, waited . . .

He stood under the nearest lamp as the happy crowd poured out of the saloon bar, and when he saw Hogan surrounded as usual by a crowd of hangers-on he called to him in a loud voice.

"Hogan, I want a word with you!"

Half a hundred voices died away to nothingness in the wet air. The opening words of "There's a tavern in the town" ended almost before they got started. A hundred eyes stared in amazement at the lone figure of the young constable standing under the lamp standard with the pale yellow light gleaming fitfully on his helmet plate and the numerals on his tunic collar.

Alfie Hogan was about to light a cigarette supplied by somebody else. The lighted match paused in mid-air as he blinked in the direction of the constable.

Slowly he recognized him. His evil face twisted into the usual sneer, and he bawled to everyone within hearing distance: "Blimey, if it ain't our yellow-bellied copper in person. G'wan, run, copper, before I belt yuh one in the puss!"

Bob walked across the street to where Hogan was standing. The crowd moved back along the pavement in anticipation of what was to come. The old dear Bob had rescued from the bus clucked her tongue sadly.

Bob stood a couple of paces in front of Bully Hogan now. His eyes flickered over the leering cronies crowding their hero.

"Push off," he said coldly.

They moved away. Bob and Hogan stood alone in front of the pub while the crowd watched with bated breath.

Hogan laughed shortly.

"Gettin' bloody brave all of a sudden, ain't yuh, copper?" he snarled. "Who the hell yuh think you are orderin' my mates about, eh?"

"Hogan," said Bob coolly. "You're a really nasty type. I think you've lorded it over the people who live here long enough. They're scared to death of you; you know it, and you terrorize them. I believe it was you who was responsible for the cowardly attacks on three constables but I can't prove it. But you're just the sort of lousy scum who would sneak up on a man from behind and lay him out before he had a chance to defend himself. Tonight I am going to hammer you until you beg for mercy, until these good folk realize just what sort of a yellow-bellied rat you really are!"

Crumbling the cigarette in his fist, Hogan said chokingly: "I'll kill you fer that, copper. I'll pound yer stinkin' face ter mush!"

Bob laughed softly.

"You couldn't, Hogan," he told him. "The only time you'll fight is when your man's got his back to you, and you have a club in your fist. You are a stinking, yellow bastard, Hogan."

"Watch it, copper!" screamed Hogan almost beyond control.

"A stinking yellow bastard," repeated Bob softly, "and lower than the belly of a snake."

"I'll kill yuh!" Hogan screeched.

He threw himself forward, fists clenched. Bob laughed gently, stepped back a pace and to one side. As the bully passed him in his rush, Bob, brought his clenched fist down hard on the back of Hogan's neck. Hogan fell flat on his face in the gutter, and a ripple of admiration went up from the assembled crowd. Never before had they ever seen Alfie Hogan put down by an adversary.

Bob stirred the panting Hogan with the toe of his boot.

"Get up before I kick your ribs in!" he snarled. "This fight's only just started, Hogan!"

Needing no further encouragement, Hogan bounced to his feet, lowered his head, and rammed it into Bob's stomach. The buckle of his belt absorbed most of the blow but even so the young constable went staggering into the street, and immediately Hogan was after him with both fists flailing. His first blow caught Bob high on the side of the face, the second flush on the nose.

Bob tasted the salt warmth of blood trickling over his upper lip into his mouth, and then his shoulders hit the wet wall on the far side of the street, bringing him up with a jerk.

True to his own dirty brand of fighting, Hogan brought his foot up with the speed of lightning in the direction of the policeman's crotch, but a second before it connected Bob's hands clamped round the bully's ankle above his boot. He twisted violently without releasing, and with a high-pitched scream of pain Hogan went over sideways. His bullet head hit the road with a crack, and blood poured down the side of his face.

Bob reached downward, caught at Hogan by the front of his greasy jacket, and began hauling him to his feet. Hogan's fingers raked at the young constable's face, tearing his chin-strap open, knocking his helmet to the ground.

Somewhere in the crowd a voice shouted encouragingly: "G'wan, orficer, smash th' bleeder's face in!"

Hauling Hogan to his feet Bob ran him backwards against the wall. Cursing obscenely, Hogan hit his enemy in the nose for the second time, and the renewed flow of blood cascaded over Bob's chin and throat, runneling round the collar of his tunic before soaking into the thick cloth.

Lifting his hold to Hogan's throat, Bob gritted his strong teeth hard together, and slammed the bully's head back against the solid brickwork. Again and again he repeated the process whilst Hogan's ineffectual attempts to break the terrible hold became weaker and weaker.

By this time the onlookers were shouting loud encouragement to the constable. For the first time in his life Alfie Hogan was getting a taste of his own medicine and it was proving most unpalatable.

"Okay," he gasped weakly. "I've had enough, copper!"

Eyes blazing, Bob released one of his hands from the bully's throat, clenched his fist, and slammed it full into Hogan's teeth

with battering ram force. Hogan screamed, and blood bubbled between his lips.

"That was for Constable Smithers, Hogan!" Bob snapped.

Hogan's head dropped, and Bob used his free hand to jerk it back up by the hair. He surveyed the battered countenance for a moment then delivered a second shattering blow to the middle of Hogan's face.

"That was for Constable Jones, Hogan!"

He released his hold, and Hogan buckled at the knees. He slid down the wall, and lay in a heap at Bob Parker's feet.

Mercilessly Bob hauled him upright again, clenched his fist, and delivered a final devastating blow to Hogan's unshaven jaw.

"And that was for Constable Manning in Hobbs Row!"

The crowd stood in the falling rain in silent awe. The second storey windows were packed with eager sightseers in nightgowns and nightshirts. Bob, blood covered, his uniform filthy and torn at one shoulder, dragged Hogan to the middle of the road, pulled him half upright, and clenched his fist again.

Hogan was indeed a sight to behold. His entire face was a mess of wet blood. One eye was completely closed, the other soon would be. His lips were crushed and his front teeth missing or broken off at the gums.

"I reckon you can take some more, Hogan," Bob said through his clenched teeth.

Hogan raised an arm feebly.

"No - no more, mister. I - I've had - enuff. Please - no more."

Bob dropped his limp burden and stood over it bareheaded and bloody. To the assembled populace he said, panting heavily: "There's your high and mighty Alfie Hogan, my friends. Like - like most bullies in this world he was a coward with feet of clay."

He turned on his heel, and went to pick up his helmet from the gutter. Without a backward glance at Hogan's inert figure slumped in the road, the crowd quietly dispersed to their homes.

\* \* \*

The following day Hogan left Jackson Street, and never came back. Rumour had it he signed aboard a Panamanian cargo ship outward bound for South America. No one mourned his passing. Jackson Street was a happier place without him and his kind.

Of course, Bob Parker was the hero of the hour, everyone wanted to speak to him on the beat, to congratulate him. At the station

his brother police officers gave him a quiet pat on the back when they heard about it – and said nothing.

Inspector Lane was a little perplexed. What Constable Parker had done was highly illegal. Police officers just couldn't go around beating up citizens whenever they felt like it.

But as Sergeant Hoskins tried to explain to his superior Alfie Hogan just wasn't a citizen. He was a bully and worse. The sergeant was now convinced that Hogan had been behind those assaults on the constables on the beat.

"That young Parker, I reckon he's a bit of a student of human nature, sir. He knew that to have picked up Hogan that first night would have meant another short jail sentence, then he'd have been out again to terrorize the district like he's always done. Young Parker didn't wait to get hit on the back of the head like Manning and the others did. He took the fight to Hogan's corner, beat him up in front of all the people he was running rough shod over, and made 'em see what kind of man he really was.

"I hear Hogan's left the district, sir. Shipped out aboard some foreign ship, and I don't reckon Jackson Street will ever see his ugly mug again – thank goodness."

The inspector bit his moustache, then crossed over to the window of his office. From here he could look down into the yard where the night patrol was just coming off duty from the parade shed.

He spied Bob Parker's tall, wide-shouldered figure making his way to the canteen in the main building for some breakfast. He shook his head uncertainly.

"Well," he observed at length. "If unorthodox methods are able to take a man forward in the Force, sergeant, young Parker should go far. In all my years of service he is the most unorthodox constable I've ever known."

---

It was all a terrible mistake. But how could Ernest make them believe they'd got the wrong man?

## Vern Hansen

# THE KNOCKER-MAN

Vern Hansen has been earning from his pen since his teens, and says he has lost count of his many pen names.

In between spells of full-time authorship he has taken on all kinds of jobs: running a bookshop, a jazz club, a typing agency; working as a progress chaser, a commercial traveller, a pleasure-ground attendant, a general dogsbody in advertising . . . His experiences have been invaluable as back-grounds in his writing.

---

"THIS looks like good territory, Ern-boy," said Smithers. "Plenty of posh carpets an' upholstery, eh? Get in there, boy!"

"Right-o," said Ernest Platter-More in a bright tough salesman's voice.

He reached over into the back seat and lugged forth his case. Smithers reached past him and opened the car-door and Ernest backed out, dragging the case after him until it fell with a heavy thud on the kerb.

"Watch those frigg'n bottles, Ern," said Smithers in an aggrieved voice.

"They're all right," said Ernest automatically.

"Okay. Don't forget to use the extra-large-sample speil."

"You don't have to keep reminding me."

"No offence meant, Ern-boy. What time shall I pick you up at the caff?"

Ernest glanced at his pride and joy, his heavy gold wrist-watch that impressed the customers so much.

"How about two?"

"Okay, Ern-boy. See you. Get in there now!"

Smithers closed the door. He grinned out. Pug face, wavy hair, common as mud. He drew the car away from the kerb.

"Get in there," mimicked Ernest in a tiny voice, turning away. He knew that Smithers

would stick his hand out and wave before turning the corner. So Ernest purposely did not look back.

He picked up the case. He stood surveying the ground, the case hanging loosely and heavily at the end of his long arm. He found that he was assessing things with the sharp eye of the high-pressure boy, the small-time con-man of the doorstep and picket fence, the 'knocker-man'.

Large new contemporary-style houses with long picture windows. Eight or ten large rooms probably. Long gardens on an open plan. Cream and green and pastel. Large garages. A few cars standing around. Not all big ones. But all of them shiny and new, appearing to be in very good nick. (Though he didn't use the vernacular aloud, Ernest quite frequently found himself thinking in it.)

Smithers knew how to pick the property, he'd say that for him. This lot for instance. Bank managers. Advertising executives. Assorted business people. Most of them living above their income maybe, but doing it with panache. Comfortable. Settled. Mainly fortyish, fiftyish. With here and there a younger couple, the son of



the firm, Mister George, Mister Tony, Mister Simon. Yes, he'd met 'em!

The bitterness and resentment rose in him as he began to walk. But he stifled it. He was tall, straight, jaunty. Small moustache, lean jaw, tanned face, quietly but smartly dressed; hatless, dark hair cut short and brushed down hard, gleaming in the morning sunlight.

The soles of his shoes were thin and the pavement hurt his feet. He'd had a bad day yesterday. Pavement-pounding for platters as Smithers had once called it in an unguarded confidential moment.

But this lot looked better. Ernest's lips quirked sardonically at his own optimism. You needed it on this lark - by George, you certainly did, Ern-boy!

*Ern-boy!*

If his brother-officers could only see him now! Captain Ernest Plater-Moore. Ern-boy!

Plain Ern he was used to by now, and at times the camaraderie of 'the road', meeting the boys at the day's end, totting up the score, shooting a line, reminded him of old days in the mess . . .

But he didn't think he would ever get used to being called Ern-boy!

That Smithers! He was a common, ignorant, foul-mouthed, glib-talking oaf. But he had taught Ernest the business. He was also the finest salesman Ernest had ever seen.

This was Smithers' kind of territory. Women with time on their hands opening the door avidly, then freezing up when they saw the man with his sample case. "Not today, thank you."

And Smithers with his coarse cockney voice and his florid gestures and his lewd grin, going into his pitch. And the woman's reserve crumbling as she opened the door a bit more, softening, listening, perhaps smiling tentatively.

It wasn't only that Smithers seemed to have a good 'line', a sort of personality; he also seemed to believe every word he said about the fabulous all-purpose upholstery and carpet cleaner known as 'Nu-Shine'.

\* \* \*

A man came out of one of the houses just ahead, gave Ernest a hard glance. Burly. Well-fed. Bowler hat; yellow briefcase and gloves. Natty dark suit. Curling, greying hair.

"I'll get to *your* missus, mate," said Ernest from between clenched teeth, just the way Smithers said it sometimes.

His first call was on a busty middle-ageing female in a peasant blouse and unbecoming toreador pants. At first sight of him her plump self-indulgent face crumpled in suspicion. But his 'educated' voice soon won her over and he made a sale. Two bottles.

She smoothed her hands with their chipped red polish over her bulging hips and asked him if he'd like a cup of tea. She pouted when he thanked her prettily; but no thanks, he had just had coffee.

"Perhaps another time," she said.

"Why not indeed?" he said as he moved away.

A good start. Had he had a door-slammer for his first one it would've spoiled him for the rest of the day. He really wasn't cut out for this game. But what else could he do?

After that thing that had happened to him . . .

What else . . . ?

At the second door there was no reply. He found his way round to the back, starting a little dog yapping indoors, but nothing else.

He tried the back door. It was locked.

He went back to the front and then along to the next house, the one from which he had seen the bowler-hatted man appear. Again, when Ernest rang the doorbell there was no reply.

Ernest remembered how when he first started on this job quiet streets like this one used to scare the pants off him. He used to imagine that hundreds of pairs of eyes were watching him from behind the prissy curtains.

Now he looked about him before making his way round to the back, which was easy to do, most of these places being built on an open plan with no side gate.

There was a wide cool lawn fringed by small trees and flowering shrubs. No dog barked this time when he knocked the back door. He realized that the door was a tiny bit ajar but he knocked again and waited before he pushed it wider and stuck his head in.

"Anybody at home?" he called softly. "Madam - did you know your door was open?"

It was always wise to add that last bit. But there was no answer this time, no hurried footsteps, no pretty flushed bride or buxom matron tripping worriedly forward.

Ernest crossed the spacious kitchen. There was a serving hatch but this was closed. And the kitchen led straight into the main room, a cool wide place done out with pastel-coloured fabrics and smooth bamboo.

The woman lay flat, face-upwards on the pastel-orange carpeting at the foot of the pale green studio couch. As if she had been having a nap and had rolled from the couch.

Ernest wanted to turn and run, But a horrible fascination drew him nearer.

She was young. Probably not more than thirty anyway. She was beautiful. Her breasts, without support or confinement were round and firm, the nipples pointing tautly upwards. Her tummy was flat, except for the distinct pelvic bulge. Her hips were narrow, almost boyish, but smooth, as her legs were, and long. Her blonde hair was loose around her shoulders.

It appeared that blonde was her natural colouring, though there would have been no clue about this from her staring discoloured eyes.

She was stark naked except for her nylons. One of these encased her left leg tightly and smoothly, neatly rolled about a foot and a half above her knee. The other one was around her throat, had been knotted there and pulled very, very tightly.

## 2

**H**E chose to go the front way because it was the only way he knew.

It was no choice really: he took the path briskly, but not running.

He was at the end of the drive (there were no gates, just two squat pillars) when the police car drew up.

Both blue-coated flat-capped men got out and grabbed hold of him. He struggled a bit as he babbled his story.

They took him back into the house and one of them held him tightly while the other got down on his haunches and examined the body without touching it. This one used the 'phone; then all three waited. Ernest kept talking until the one holding him hit him hard in the kidneys, making him sink, gasping, to his knees in the deep soft pile of the carpeting.

Then they both picked him up and slammed him into an arm-chair and threatened to break his neck if he didn't keep his mouth shut.

They were just pink-cheeked boys. But they looked dangerous. So Ernest became silent. While his horror grew, his stultifying awareness of the inevitability of it all.

Heel-segs rang on the path outside. Then there was the sound of the kitchen door opening.

Four men came into the room. Three in plainclothes, one in uniform. Ernest stared at the one who was slightly ahead of the others. Blocky in a thin off-white mac. With a pasty, pudgy face and eyes black and round and expressionless as if two grapes had been pressed into the fatty flesh of the sockets.

Ernest rose slowly to his feet and nobody touched him. The smallest of the four men, in rumpled suit and pince-nez went past without looking at him, went to the body. Doctor, thought Ernest absently, noting that this little man carried a black bag.

The uniformed constable and the other man in civvy clothes moved to positions one on each side of the first one. And the two young coppers who had picked Ernest up waited expectantly.

The first man said, "Hallo, Mister Plater-More."

He stressed the 'mister' in a sardonic way.

"Inspector Billings," said Ernest. "Inspector - I think they got the wrong impression. Your men I mean. I saw the husband. He -"

The inspector interrupted him. "Wait a minute. Save it." He had a soft jeering sort of voice. Going on, monotonously:

"We had a phone call, you see. Reporting a prowler in these parts . . ."

"It wasn't me. I just -"

"All right. All right." Billings waved a large white hand.

He went past Ernest and Ernest revolved slowly on his heels and watched him. The taller, thinner plainclothesman had opened Ernest's case and was examining one of the gaudily-labelled bottles.

Inspector Billings had a short confab with the medico. Then he turned to Ernest again and he said:

"Well, you really did it this time, didn't you, Plater-More?"

\* \* \*

Two plainclothes detectives and two uniformed constables called for Reggie Muldoon at his office. To the consternation of his partner Lionel Bratt, his secretary Miss Tring, and the rest of the office staff and odd bods at Muldoon-Bratt Publicity.

One of the plainclothes men stayed behind talking discreetly to Lionel Bratt and Miss Tring.

By this time, back at the station, Ernest Plater-More was at the

point of tears; though strictly in the best stiff-upper-lip tradition: a strong man broken on the wheel of circumstance.

Inspector Billings did not let on; he was nothing but thorough; he was waiting for the murdered woman's husband to turn up.

She had been an ex-beauty queen called Mabel Ligman. She had married Reggie Muldoon, the tennis-player, who had retired from the game and with another ex-tennis ace called Lionel Bratt had started a publicity agency. The slug-like Billings had a mind that picked up all kinds of trifles and filed them haphazardly away for further use if need be.

He remembered things about Ernest Plater-More, too; they had actually met before more than once.

Ernest himself couldn't help bemoaning the fact that out of all the coppers in this Midland city, Billings should be the one he picked once more from the grab-bag. Oh, why hadn't he left the place and gone back down South the way he had originally planned?

"You don't like me," he said. "It's all a put-up job. I'm no prowler. No murderer either. Ask . . . ask the woman next-door-but-one."

"I'll do just that," said Billings. "Now stop talking such cock, will you?"

Ernest didn't seem to hear him.

"You don't like me!"

Billings' lean sergeant, Grimes, stuck his head around the door, nodded and said, "He's here."

Ernest heard that all right, and drew his own conclusions. He started to his feet. "Ask him where he was," he cried. "Ask him!"

"Sure," said the inspector. "Right."

He rose to his feet. "And you'll stay here."

He made a motion to the constable near Ernest, who grabbed the prisoner by the shoulder and pushed him back into his seat.

\* \* \*

Billings was away about fifteen minutes. Ernest was allowed to smoke; but he ground three beneath his heel, one after the other, before they were half-finished. He didn't talk anymore. He looked at the floor and waited for Billings.

Then, when the inspector returned he sprang to his feet, evading the constable's restraining hand.

Billings said: "I want you to come into the next room and take

a look at this man. I don't want you to say anything, just nod your head or shake it."

"Yes," said Ernest. "Yes."

Everything was going to be all right now. He was a little surprised at Billings.

When the inspector opened the other door Ernest looked around. But apart from a uniformed officer there was only one man in the room. Lean, early fortyish, handsome in an old-fashioned matinee-idol sort of way. Crinkly dark hair brushed with distinguished grey. A face that looked broken and sad. A ham actor.

But not the right man.

Ernest shook his head mechanically from side to side.

Once back in the other room with his prisoner, Billings ceased to be helpful anymore. He put the flat of his hand hard against Ernest's chest and pushed him back so hard in the chair that it rocked on its back legs.

He said: "Muldoon tells me he's never worn a bowler hat in his life and I'm prepared to believe him. He's got a cast-iron alibi for when his wife was killed. He's been in his office without a break since eight-thirty this morning and all his staff confirm this. Do you know what I think, Plater-More?"

Ernest shook his head mutely, a purely reflex gesture.

Billings loomed over him, put his pasty face closer, fixed him with those round expressionless black eyes.

"I don't think, Plater-More, that there was ever a man with a bowler hat, yellow gloves and yellow briefcase - I think there was only you and I think you tried your games with that woman and she got awkward and you did her in. Just like that."

"No!" screamed Ernest.

He charged upwards from the chair and ran full-tilt at Billings. The inspector was taken completely by surprise. So also was the constable, who had drawn away a little at the back to give his superior more room while he grilled the suspect.

Ernest's head rammied into the upper part of the inspector's belly.

Billings said "*Oof!*" He doubled in the middle, then went flat on his back. Ernest trampled all over him in a mad dive for the door.

Puffing and groaning, Billings was heaving himself to his feet when the constable yelled and charged forward. An arm flailed; a swinging fist caught the uniformed man in the groin. He whinnied

with pain and pulled up short, jack-knifed. By this time Ernest was in the corridor and still running.

They lost him outside.

## 3

THE day was getting warmer and Mrs. Valerie Lorimer's treader pants were too tight, bulging too much in the wrong places, and cutting into her. She went up to her bedroom to change.

She stood nude in front of the long mirror and regarded herself with disfavour. She used to be so slim. She tried to tell herself that now she was just healthily-plump, comfortable. But it wouldn't work.

She was fat.

In the early days of their marriage her husband George had said, more than once and quite vehemently, that he couldn't stand fat women.

He was coming home later and later from the office in the evenings. And he never, never slipped home for lunch as he used to do in the old days.

Now the two boys were away at school - George had insisted on this - Valerie Lorimer was a very, very lonely woman.

Today she felt more lonely and bored than usual. A shopping expedition might help, she thought, if she could work up the necessary energy. There wasn't anything she particularly needed, though. It didn't seem worth the trouble. The walking, the bus, the carrying. If only George wasn't so mean and had bought her that Mini when she asked him. Most of the folks in the road had two cars. A family *needed* two cars.

It was time she fixed herself a bit of lunch. But, looking at herself again in the mirror, she thought, well, perhaps not. She ate too much, didn't get enough exercise. Picking at things. Sweets, biscuits, bits of this and that from the larder. Wandering about the house, chewing discontentedly.

But she felt peckish now. Gassy.

To take her mind off food she turned briskly away from the mirror and marched across to the wardrobe. She felt her hips wobbling and vibrating like some kind of pulpy rubber. *Ugh!*

She had only her panties on and was leafing her way through summer dresses when the doorbell rang. She swore. She hesitated,

a sunburst flower dress hanging over her arm. Then she shrugged her shoulders and tossed the garment on the bed. She took her dressing robe from behind the door and put it on, tying the sash as she tripped barefoot down the stairs.

It was the soldierly-looking man who had sold her the two bottles of cleaning fluid. He looked somewhat harassed and he didn't have his sample case.

He smiled at her and said in his beautiful voice, "I wondered if I might now take you up on your offer of a cup of tea."

Cheeky thing, she thought. But this reaction was slight and fleeting.

"I'm glad you remembered," she said. "I was just going to make one. Come in."

He seemed surprised that she had agreed so readily. He hesitated momentarily before going past her.

"To the right there," she said.

Why had he come back, she wondered. Why had he *really* come back? She felt a little thrill of anticipation as she followed him. She was very conscious of her naked flesh beneath the robe.

"Sit down, please, Mister . . ."

"Plater-More," he said. "Ernest Plater-More."

"Mr. Plater-More," she said.

She watched him until he was comfortably seated, noting that he chose the opulent chaise-longue. He didn't look so smart as she had first imagined. He looked a bit seedy, in fact, though in quite a gentlemanly way. She began to feel sorry for him, soft towards him.

"I'll put the kettle on," she said.

She softly hummed a tune as she went into the kitchen, and put on her spare slippers from under the dresser.

The small side window of the kitchen looked out upon the street. Glancing out she saw that there were two policemen at the gate of the Muldoon's house next door but one. Three cars were pulled up at the kerb. Perhaps there had been an accident.

A little further down the street five people were standing talking, glancing back from time to time towards the policemen. Valerie recognized the three women but not the two men with them.

She wondered if anything had happened to blonde Mrs. Muldoon. Who knew about her? Stuck-up bitch! Just because she had once been a beauty queen.

She wondered whether Mister Whatsisname - Plater-More -

knew anything. Nobody knew what was going on around here half the time. Mrs. Muldoon wasn't the only stuck-up one. Not by a long chalk. Kippers and curtains . . .

It was only as Valerie was carrying the steaming pot, the crockery and the biscuit barrel into the other room that she thought Plater-More might even be involved in this thing. Whatever it was! He had seemed agitated. He had lost his sample case, or left it somewhere.

A premonition? But she didn't feel the least bit frightened. Such a charming man! Gay dogs, these travellers! She was very conscious of her own opulent body, the soft robe caressing it as she walked.

Mr. Plater-More was still sitting where she had left him. He seemed composed now, more poised.

She placed the tray on the low table beside the chaise-longue and bent to pour, knowing this was a revealing position, not caring.

"Sugar," she asked brightly.

"Yes, please. Medium."

She gave him his cup of tea and took her own. She sat at the other end of the chaise-longue, pulling her robe around her knees. She said:

"There are some policemen down the street. Outside the Muldoon house next door but one. She's a blonde woman. Sort of skinny. Nice-looking though. Maybe you saw her."

She was watching him and she saw a kind of film come over his eyes. He was turned towards her politely, his cup and saucer in his hand. The tea was hot and he had only sipped it so far.

He said in a dead monotone:

"Mrs. Muldoon has been murdered. I found her. They think I did it. That's why I came here . . . I wanted you to tell them that I . . ."

She dropped her tea and it splashed all over her, scalding her across the lap and thighs. She sprang to her feet, beating at herself with her hands and screaming shrilly.

He rose and placed his cup and saucer carefully on the table.

"Don't," he said. "Don't!"

She flung open her robe. Still screaming. As he moved towards her she swung at him with her fist. The blow caught him in the corner of his left eye, bringing sharp pain and momentary blackness on that side. She backed around the side of the chaise-longue, still screaming.

Her screaming became words.

"Get away from me! Don't touch me! Get away from me!"

A shrill plaint, shrieking in his head, awakening an old horror. He could only see her through one eye. White writhing flesh. *Shrieking*. He went after her again and she picked up a fancy brass poker from the hearth and flailed out at him with it.

She gave him a painful crack on the shoulder before he was able to wrest the weapon from her. And she seemed to be trying to envelope him in her soft white flesh even while she fought him at the same time, her cries rising so that everything for him became a soft, shrieking trap. He struck out with the poker and she was silent. But he kept hitting her to make sure.

Then he dropped the poker and stood looking down at her. The white was red now. But the shrieking was starting up again inside his own head and he ran to escape from it.

\* \* \*

Despite the warmth of the day, Ernest's body as he moved along was clammy with cold sweat, icy. He moved with a sort of hop, skip and jump, his eyes staring straight in front of him, unseeing, a set half-smile, half-grimace on his face. The face was pale and filmed with the sweat that covered the rest of him and he grinned inanely at the world as if to placate it.

He walked with his right shoulder slightly lower than the left as he was wont to do when he carried the heavy sample case, using his right arm mainly because his left was weaker due to a youthful disability.

He turned a corner to get away from what had happened.

He might have turned yet another one or two – he didn't know – before the car began to cruise along the kerb beside him and a deep voice called:

"Hi, there, sport!"

It wasn't a police car. Too small. It was black and rather battered and completely nondescript.

The face that stared out at him from behind the wheel had nothing menacing about it. It was plump and purple-jowled beneath a rakish felt hat and its friendly grin revealed a mouthful of badly-fitting, very white, very artificial teeth.

"You look pooped, sport," said the toothy face. "Get in. We'll give you a lift."

Like an automaton responding to certain familiar vibrations, Ernest did as he was told, a con-robot conned.

Not until he was seated beside the driver did he realize there was a passenger in the back seat, who did not move or speak. So Ernest turned and looked at him.

He was a burly middle-aged man, prosperous-looking and strangely sedate in his neat dark suit and shiny bowler, curling, greying hair escaping from beneath it. Ernest recognized him immediately.

"You!" he said. "Why did you . . .?"

His voice tailed off then. For he saw that the burly man was not at all sedate: his strangely pale blue eyes had something about them that made Ernest's tongue cling suddenly to the roof of his mouth. But even then, and though the car was gathering speed he tried for the door. And that was when the bowler-hatted man's arm came up and over, the meaty fist swinging a cosh.

Ernest tried to duck, making the driver curse. But nothing helped. And then Ernest's skull seemed to reverberate with the impact and split apart. Flame exploded and seared and then there was blackness and he pitched into its oblivion.

#### 4

**E**VEN with the indefatigable Billings leading them this time, again the police were too late to prevent the butchery. And it was real butchery this time, a clumsy messy job, not the stocking around the throat routine.

Billings's pale moon-face did not change its expression, but his voice trembled a little when he spoke.

"This must have been the woman he was talking about, the woman we were supposed to ask. I had a hunch. Then I thought, no, he wouldn't. But he did. And, no doubt, he asked her. He told her. And she wouldn't buy it.

"If I - if we'd got here earlier . . ."

His voice tailed off. Then broke out again, more normal now, toneless, the latent savagery only in the words themselves.

"The cheeky bastard. Coming back like this. And those two dopes down the road didn't even see him. God, he must've moved fast. But I'll have their effing heads.

"Come on!"

But they had lost Plater-More again.

Some old gent a block away said he'd seen a man answering to that description get into a car. Ordinary car. Black, he thought. He couldn't really describe it. Smallish. Scruffy, like.

Billings tried to justify himself to the superintendent later. But he couldn't even justify himself to himself. He had had a dangerous killer in his fingers and had let him escape; from right here in the station, too. And he had killed again. And he had vanished into thin air. Every copper in town was looking for him.

*Nothing!*

"He must've had accomplices," said the superintendent.

Billings said: "Why would a crazy man like that have accomplices, sir? For jobs like those two as well. No rhyme or reason about 'em as far as we can see, not even robbery or rape, though maybe that's the way the first one started. But it didn't come off . . ."

"Neither of the two women were sexually assaulted then?"

"No, sir. And that's Plater-More's gimmick, if you can call it that."

"You're waffling, man. Explain yourself!"

"I thought perhaps you would've remembered, sir. Plater-More did eighteen months for assaulting a high school girl on Rushlawn Common. He's only been out about nine months. He scratched the girl up quite a bit. I would've liked to get him for attempted murder; loopy; got him put away. But it wouldn't wash. It'll wash now though, by God it will. I . . ."

"I remember it now," put in the superintendent. "Yes! I was on holiday, though."

"Yes, I believe you were, sir," said Billings.

Not all the time though, he thought - the two-faced old bastard, he's got a head like a bucket!

"And he's been working as a door-to-door canvasser you say, this man?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why, that's monstrous!"

"Yes, sir. It was the only kind of job he *could* get I suppose, sir. Ironic isn't it? A man who should've been put away instead of being allowed to roam among innocent folks. A man knocking at doors, anywhere, any time during the day. Meeting lonely women with time on their hands. A man like that!

"But some of these canvassing firms, sir, the small-time fly-by-night boys, why, they'll hire anybody. No questions asked, nothing. They can't get their people otherwise you see, commission

on sales only, that's how they work it. Not even expenses most times. They're not losing a thing . . ."

"If this man had accomplices," put in the superintendent who had a plodding one-track mind, "they could've been more of these canvassing boys. That car . . ."

"An old man told us, sir. Doddering almost. Could easily have been mistaken."

How did this stupid nit get his job – how in hell?

"Where is your killer then," said the superintendent. "Where's he vanished to?"

He had a point there; Billings had to hand him that. Here was a question Billings just could not answer.

"Look into that canvassing firm thoroughly, inspector!"

"Yes, sir, that's on the anvil right now . . . But bear with me, sir, there are other things about this case I haven't got to yet."

"Go on then, man!"

"I've just had the doc's report on the first victim, sir. Mrs. Muldoon. There was a contusion on the back of her head. As if she had been sapped, the doc said. And sapped quite expertly, too. So the killer could throttle her at his leisure, so to speak. Like a professional job, sir, a gang killing. Set up."

"There's also the fact that although the woman was completely naked except for her stockings – and one o' them was around her neck – she hadn't been interfered with either before or after. That doesn't sound like the work of a sex-killer does it?"

"No. But the other woman hadn't been interfered with either, you said that."

"Yes, sir. The Lorimer woman. But that was just a straightforward bashing . . ."

"What do you mean – straightforward?"

"Well, no, perhaps that isn't the right word to use in this case. It was frenzied, messy, and, I'd say, unpremeditated. Then the man got out – quick! But, you see, sir, the Muldoon job doesn't seem to be that way at all . . ."

"Are you trying to tell me there are two killers on the loose?"

"I don't know, sir. I'm waiting for full reports from the forensic boys. We've got two cases now instead of one, and the work on the first one wasn't completed when the other one happened . . . I want to get that damned tennis-player Reggie Muldoon in here again and give him a good grilling . . ."

Billings paused momentarily. Then he said: "There's something else, sir."

"Well? What's that?"

"Two other people in that road saw through their windows a bowler-hatted man come out of the Muldoon house and walk briskly away round a corner. One of them moved away from the window then and didn't see Plater-More go in. But the other one did - and a little time *after* the bowler-hatted character had gone away.

"Our informant, an old bat who seems to spend most of her day peering around curtains said she saw Plater-More come out, too. Walking briskly she said, but no faster than the bowler-hatted bloke had been. Certainly not running. She saw us pick Plater-More up, but this doesn't seem to have prejudiced her in the least. She's a nosey old character, but alert with it, nothing narrow-minded about her. A good witness."

"And did she see Plater-More go into the other house later?"

"The Lorimer place? No, sir. I'm afraid she hasn't got such a good view of the Lorimer place."

"And nobody else saw him it seems, not even our own men!"

"No, sir, I'm afraid not, sir. They thought they heard cries. But by the time they got there . . ." Billings broke off, spread his hands in a rueful gesture.

There seemed to be nothing more to be said. The superintendent was obviously containing himself with difficulty.

"Carry on, Billings," he barked. "See me again as soon as you have anything to report. I've got to finish with this Air Ministry case, you know, before I can give you a hand."

"Yes, sir," said Billings and made good his escape.

Thank God for the Air Ministry, he thought as he went down the stairs to his own office.

There another shock awaited him.

Lanky Sergeant Grimes stood waiting, his long face even more lugubrious than usual.

"Muldoon's vanished, sir," he said. "Nobody knows where he's gone. I've got men looking all over the place."

"Oh, Christ!" said Billings and his normally expressionless white face crumpled like that of an infant about to burst into tears.

"I did find out one or two more things about Muldoon though, sir," went on Grimes hurriedly.

Billings sank into his chair behind the desk.

"All right! Go on!"

"I had to lean on the other partner a bit. Lionel Bratt. But

Muldoon's mysterious disappearance has scared him, and it didn't take much for him to tell me what he knew . . ."

"All right! So what did he tell you?"

"That Muldoon and his missus had been at loggerheads the last few weeks. Muldoon told Bratt that he thought his missus had another man, but he didn't know what to do about it. Another bone of contention between them it seems is that she was up to her eyebrows in debt - to the bookies no less. Bratt doesn't know who the bookies, or bookie, is who's concerned . . ."

The door was rapped and a uniformed man appeared. He put a typed report on the inspector's desk and at the latter's grunt took his leave.

Billings read quickly, then he looked up at Grimes.

"The man who killed Mrs. Muldoon wore gloves. It looks as if he took great care not to leave fingerprints. He may have had the gloves off for a bit during the time he was there, though, for the whole place seems to have been carefully wiped over. There were fingerprints on the phone but those belong to one of the constables who found the body - he didn't use his head. His are the *only* dabs. Interesting, huh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was there anything else you had to tell me?"

"No, sir. Lionel Bratt and that secretary, Miss Tring, said they'd phone if either of them thought of anything else that might help us."

"Good for them," said Billings sardonically.

The door was knocked and a constable came in.

"Mr. Lorimer's here, sir."

Well, that was something. The husband of the second murdered woman, no less. Pity it wasn't the hubby of the first one instead. This one wouldn't be able to tell him much, poor devil . . .

"All right. Show him in."

## 5

IT was late afternoon and heavy clouds had obscured the sun. Grimes had had to switch the office light on. A tearful Mr. George Lorimer had come and gone and now the sergeant and his chief were wolfing sandwiches - a much belated lunch - and drinking lukewarm tea.

Lorimer hadn't been any help. He'd never heard of Ernest

Plater-More. He couldn't understand why his wife would receive a stranger in only a robe and a pair of gossamer panties. The man was mad – that was all George could say – he must have caught Valerie by surprise.

No, he hadn't stolen anything.

No, George Lorimer didn't know Reggie and Mabel Muldoon very well – *hadn't* known Mabel Muldoon. Just to pass the time of day with, that was all. Reggie always seemed affable enough, but Valerie had always said Mrs. Muldoon was a jumped-up little snob . . . But he didn't want to speak ill of the dead . . .

Billings had pressed him for more about Mrs. Muldoon, even gossip. But, although he was openly weeping by then, conversationally speaking he was all dried up. And the inspector let him go.

Now Billings knocked crumbs from his shirt front with an impatient gesture and rose to his feet.

"Well," he said. "If blonde Mrs. Muldoon was playing around somebody in that area might have seen her fancy man. It could've been our bowler-hatted friend, though somehow he doesn't sound like her type . . ."

"It's surprising what peculiar types some really beautiful women *will* go for," put in Grimes round a mouthful of food.

"Well, that nosey old dame saw old bowler-hat leave the house. She didn't see him go in before that – nipped off to make herself a cup of coffee – but somebody else might have done. I want you to see her. And I want men to canvass all the houses for half-a-mile round there and in the vicinity where Plater-More was supposed to have vanished in a mysterious, unidentifiable car . . ."

"I've got men –"

"Get more men then! I'll . . ."

The inspector broke off as the phone rang. He lifted the receiver.

"Yes," he said. He bent over, leaned his elbow on the desk, listening intently. He grabbed a pencil and scribbled on a nearby scratch-pad.

He hung up. "That was Miss Tring, the Muldoon-Bratt secretary. She says she walked in on Muldoon a few days ago when he was having a blazing row with somebody over the phone. He told her to get out, but not before she had heard him call the man on the other end – she assumed it was a man – Loverman or Loberman or something like that . . ."

"Jimmy Lobermann the bookie," said Grimes, his lugubrious visage lighting up like a halloween mask.

He looked disappointed when his superior said, "I'll go and see Jimmy, you carry on like I said."

"Yes, sir. Right, sir."

Outside the office they separated.

\* \* \*

Now that his business was all open and above board – outwardly anyway – Jimmy Lobermann had a luxurious office-cum-flat above his main set-up in the high street.

A burly man in the garish, neon-lit betting shop tried to prevent Billings going through the "private" door. Billings nudged him slyly and with spiteful force in his ample bread-basket and said: "Remember me, Spud?"

Gasping, his sparring-block face twisted in pain, Spud said: "Oh, I'm sorry, inspector, I swear I didn't recognize you."

Billings climbed the lushly-carpeted stairs beneath the discreet lighting. He rang the bell at the frosted-glass door with its elaborate wrought-iron lining.

The door was opened by an opulent redhead in a revealing pale-green negligée. Billings hadn't seen this one before. Jimmy Lobermann, fifty-year-old bachelor, ran through women like a maggot through cheese, and with the same kind of effect.

"Inspector Billings, C.I.D.," said Billings curtly. "I'd like to see Jimmy."

She gave way before him, unspeaking, her mouth open a little, the plump lower lip red and moist. Then Lobermann himself came into the hall, a plump, powerful-looking little man with an ingratiating grin.

"Mr. Billings," he said. "To what do I owe this unexpected honour? Come in. Have a drink."

"I don't know whether I've got time or not, Jimmy. I've come to ask you some questions about a customer of yours and I want some fast answers."

But the inspector did stay for a drink; and he got better answers than he had expected. For, it seemed, he wasn't the first man to call on Jimmy Lobermann that evening with the same kind of questions.

Billings wouldn't have dreamed of using force on Jimmy. The little bookie, though as bent as a horseshoe, was always wholeheartedly co-operative when he knew he had to be. The previous caller, on the other hand, had threatened violence to Jimmy and to

Poppy – this was the redhead. So Jimmy had told him what he wanted to know.

“It wasn’t for me, you see, Inspector. I might’ve handled him had I been alone. But there was Poppy. He threatened to carve Poppy with a razor.”

“How did he get up here? What was Spud doing downstairs?”

“He’d slipped out for a cup of coffee – or so he said. I swear I’ll kick his arse right out of here yet . . .”

“Let’s not waste time,” said Billings; and he wasn’t bothered about an ex-pug called Spud now. His round black eyes bored into Jimmy Lobermann. Jimmy knew that if he had or had not been co-operative before, he would have to be so now, and right to the hilt.

He talked a lot more, and fast – as Billings’ eyes held him like the jaws of a bulldog, worrying him, until they finally let go.

## 6

ASKING to see Lenny Zenith, the man pushed his way into the flat. Elvira Coles liked the look of him. He was handsome and well set up. His clothes were good and he talked with a cultured accent. All her life Elvira had been waiting for a man like this, so different to Lenny and his sort.

But even so she went through the motions. She didn’t want this gent to think she was easy.

She pulled her tattered robe closer across her magnificent breasts. With a regal gesture, she threw back her long blue-black hair, so that the strange dark green eyes in her grimy patrician face could better see the visitor.

“You get out of here,” she said, “or I’ll yell for help. I told you – Lenny ain’t here and I don’t know where he is.”

The man took a razor from his pocket and opened it.

“You’d better be more co-operative than that, miss,” he said. “And you’d better not yell, unless you want your throat cut.”

She stared at him in disbelief. “You sure fooled me,” she said.

The razor winked in the light of the unshaded bulb in the smelly hovel which Elvira called a flat. The caller might have marvelled that such beauty could reign in such squalor. But he did not notice such things. His eyes were glazed as they fixed themselves on the woman: to him she was just the means to an end.

The razor held steadily in front of him, he moved towards her.

She backed until her legs hit the settee and she collapsed on this, her legs sprawled out revealingly. She left them like that and tried to be coquettish as she looked up at him and said:

"Let's not be too hasty, huh? Let's have a drink and get acquainted. You and I could -"

"Don't waste my time," he interrupted harshly, making a gleaming feint in the air with the razor.

Then he bent towards her and the light winked again on the blade as it trembled a little in his hand. She saw that his face was filmed with sweat.

It came to her that he wasn't one of the boys after all but just a desperate man, an ordinary law-abiding citizen driven to an extremity.

What could that swine, Lenny Zenith, have done to him to make him like this?

"Lenny'll kill me if I split on him," she said huskily. "Besides, I don't rightly know where he is. Another bloke picked him up in a car. He told me he wouldn't be back yet awhile."

"Who was the other bloke? Where's he live?"

"His name's Brodie. They call him 'Tug'. He has a little cottage on the far side of Rushlawn Common, where it's wild and lonely. I don't know the number, but you can't miss it. It's got a thatched roof an' it's not far from that old pub called The Green Feathers."

"I hope you're telling me the truth."

"I swear . . ."

"Get in there." He made a motion with the razor towards the bedroom.

She wriggled from the settee, keeping as far away from the razor as she could. He backed her into the bedroom and locked her in.

"Don't start yelling," he called through the panels. "Or I'm liable to come back and carve you up."

She heard something in his voice then that she hadn't noticed before. A quality of sheer misery!

That filthy, cold, sneering swine, Lenny Zenith! As he called himself! Why had she ever fallen for him in the first place, let him get his power over her?

Inspector Billings let her out of the bedroom and she babbled her story, describing the man with the razor, reviling Lenny's name for what he had brought about for her. Why, she could have been murdered, easily!

Billings used her phone, got through to the station.

Elvira heard him mention Lenny Zenith's name, and Tug

Brodie's. And another one she didn't recognize but which he had to repeat, impatiently.

"Muldoon, yes, I said Muldoon. Clean your ears out, man. Reginald Muldoon. Watch him. He's carrying a razor . . . Yes, I'm on my way there right now . . ."

He hung up.

"Stay put, you!" he said to Elvira.

Then he left her.

\* \* \*

Ernest Plater-More had climbed up the cellar steps from the damp darkness below and had his ear pressed to the rough, coal-smelling wood of the door.

He had found a crack not wide enough to let him see through – but by straining his ears he could hear something of what was going on in the kitchen.

The two men were having a blazing argument. The bowler-hatted one wanted to kill Ernest and dump his body out in the country.

The other man's voice rose passionately; reiterating . . .

"I want no part of murder! I've told you! I didn't know there was anything like that in it. I thought you wanted to pick that bloke up to question him . . ."

The other man's voice came now. Softer; but Ernest managed to catch most of it.

"I've murdered already. You'll read about it in the papers. I've got to shut that character's mouth for good, too, 'cos he can identify me . . ."

"Murdered who?" The plump man was off again. "You bloody maniac! You lying cow! You told me a pack of lies. You're using my place for . . ."

The voice became almost inaudible, as if its owner had moved. Then both voices broke out together in a murderous shouting match, though no actual words were audible to Ernest.

He heard the sounds of a scuffle, the clatter of furniture, the cries and the grunts. And then suddenly there was dead silence.

Ernest's mind was in turmoil. His head ached where the bowler-hatted man had struck him. Tears began to well from his eyes and run down his cheeks.

That was the man who had killed the blonde woman, as Ernest had suspected all the time – as he had tried to tell Inspector Billings!

But memory now was a tangled and a horrible thing. That man had killed the blonde one; but he hadn't killed the other one, the one who had screamed and screamed, fat and holding and soft, shrieking . . . But he was to blame for it all, really, that man. *He* was to blame!

Sobbing, Ernest turned and moved back down the gritty stone steps into the gloom.

His eyes were accustomed to the darkness now. He quartered the cellar again, his eyes searching the floor. But the place was empty except for packing straw and a few small sticks of firewood. There was nothing he could use as a weapon.

He began to sob louder with frustration. If the bowler-hatted man came down after him now he was caught like a rat in a trap.

Then he spotted the brick protruding a little way from the wall. He ran to it, grabbed it so hard he broke a couple of nails and scratched his finger-ends. He ignored the pain as he tore at the brick.

It wobbled. But it was not yet loose enough to be removed.

Ernest dug at the crumbling plaster with his fingernails, feeling the stickiness of his own blood. The brick came out like a cork from a bottle. Ernest lost his hold on it and it fell at his feet.

He bent and picked the weapon up. Grasping it tightly – he padded back up the steps.

\* \* \*

When Lenny Zenith, cosh in hand, appeared at the unlocked and opened door, Ernest hit him squarely across the temple with the brick, knocking him back into the kitchen. Then, bending over he kept hitting him until he was perfectly still.

When Reggie Muldoon entered the kitchen without knocking, everything was quiet and Reggie let go of his razor before taking his hand out of his pocket.

There was nothing to fight here.

The quest for vengeance was at end and everything was empty.

Lenny Zenith, whom Reggie had seen before, lay flat on his back, his face a bloody and mutilated mess. There was another man huddled at the other side of the kitchen. His face was turned away from Reggie so it could not be determined from a glance whether he was dead or merely unconscious. He was plump and hirsute. Probably the man called Tug.

Midway between these two another man sat upright on a hard

kitchen chair. Were he standing it might have been thought he was on sentry duty, so ramrod-straight was his back. He had dark neat hair and a trim moustache. Reggie remembered seeing him fleetingly at the police station.

At his feet lay a dirty bloodstained brick.

His eyes were vacant and child-like as he looked up at Reggie. They were puffy and damp as if he had recently been crying.

"Hallo," he said gently.

"Hallo, old chap," said Reggie.

They were sitting opposite each other and Reggie was talking softly when Billings and the rest of the police arrived.

## 7

**B**ILLINGS sat on the other side of the superintendent's desk and smoked one of his superior's natty little cheroots. He didn't like them much, but the fact that he had been offered one at all was a sure sign that he was back in favour. And why not indeed?

"Zenith is as dead as a doornail, sir. Pity! I should have liked to hear what he had to say for himself. But Plater-More made sure of him.

"Plater-More himself is completely gone, can't get any sense out of him at all. Tug's all right, though he can't tell us much. Zenith tried to strangle him, probably thought he had made a job of it, too. But Tug's as hard as old leather."

"Can we get Jimmy Lobermann on anything?" said the superintendent.

"We can try," said Billings. "He hired Zenith as a collector about two months ago. He must have known the man had a record of violence as long as your arm. Mabel Muldoon owed Jimmy pots of money and he sent Zenith to her. She agreed to pay at so much a week and Zenith was to collect."

"Sergeant Grimes has discovered that a few people in the road had spotted a bowler-hatted man calling at the Muldoons'. But they hadn't paid him no mind, of course, taking him for an insurance agent or something."

"Mrs. Muldoon started to have an affair with Zenith. Perhaps his suave sort of brutality appealed to her - who knows with a woman like that?"

"During one of their playtimes Zenith slugged her, gave her a black eye. Her husband had been suspecting something was going on – Zenith wasn't the first fancy man she'd had, it seemed, though they had both kept the fact dark and she'd sworn she was being completely faithful to him recently. I got all this from Muldoon, of course. Even if nobody else wasn't talking, that poor mutt certainly did. He almost became a killer, too. What a woman can drive a man to . . ."

"Get on with it," said the superintendent, though without heat. There was even a smile on his slightly-bovine visage.

"Yes, sir . . . Well, Muldoon says that when he came right out and tackled his missus about the other man, she admitted it, told him who it was, where he came from, all about it. At first she was brazen about it, but then she admitted she was becoming a little scared of Zenith.

"She had wanted something different. Thrills, roughness – kicks as they call it. But with that boy she had bitten off more than she could chew.

"Muldoon phoned Jimmy Lobermann and told him to call his boy off. That was two days ago – the secretary, Miss Tring heard the tail-end of Muldoon's part in that conversation. But Zenith, it seems, wasn't having any. He called again. He wanted the woman . . ."

Billings paused, spread his hands, lifted his shoulders in a little shrug.

"What actually happened we'll never really know. Only Zenith or the woman could have told us that. Perhaps he wanted her to go away with him, perhaps she threatened to scream the place down or call us. Perhaps she told him she didn't want anything else to do with him – even that might've been enough for a ghoulish Zenith. He was used to having his women kow-tow to him like slaves, his current mistress, Elvira Coles would tell you that . . ."

"And the other man," put in the superintendent. "Plater-More? He just walked into it. At first."

"Yes! At first! And what was I to think . . . ?"

"Poor devil, he kept saying I didn't like him, that it was a put-up job. Then – then he got out.

"He didn't know which way to turn. He thought the Lorimer woman would help him, back him up. But, of course, she wouldn't. Perhaps she tried to grab him . . . She screamed. He panicked. He had to shut her up.

"He might be able to tell us all about it later . . . He kept saying

it was all *his* fault. Zenith's fault I suppose he meant, sir ..."  
Inspector Billings let his voice tail off again.  
Not my fault, he was thinking, surely not *my* fault.  
"Carry on, inspector," said the superintendent.

© Copyright 1964 by Vern Hansen

---

*If you are interested in* **TRUE CRIME**  
*you should be reading*

# **CRIMINOLOGY**

**THE INTERNATIONAL CRIME MAGAZINE**

**CRIMINOLOGY**, published every two months at 2s. 6d., presents authentic and vividly-told **FACTUAL** articles on crime and espionage written by **EXPERTS**.

**CRIMINOLOGY** is not just another crime magazine. It is unique in its field.

**IF YOU** would like to see a sample copy of **CRIMINOLOGY**, the International Crime Magazine, send 1s. 6d. (stamps or postal order), to:

**SENTINEL PRESS, CHURCH ROAD, HARTLEY,  
DARTFORD, KENT, ENGLAND**

**READERS** outside Great Britain and Eire may have a sample copy **FREE** on application.

---

---

Ed was an artist in crime. He took pride in his work — be it heartless blackmail, or the bloody execution of a perfect murder ...

## Pierre Audemars

# ACES HIGH

Unlike many of today's crime writers, Pierre Audemars is an author with a style all of his own. Leo Harris, in *Books and Bookmen*, has described it as "half-humorously intentional over-writing".

Pierre Audemars, born in London of Swiss parents, is a descendant of a family of Huguenots who left France for Switzerland in the reign of Louis XIV. He is probably best known for his novels featuring M. Pinaud of the Sureté. The latest — his fourteenth book — is *Fair Maids Missing*. (John Long, 13s. 6d.)

---

**I**F you play a hand, make sure you hold the cards. If you sit in a game, see that you have the aces. This was Ed's philosophy, and he applied it to everything he did. Even his love affairs.

It would happen — and it had happened many times — that Ed Salvo found himself madly and passionately in love with a beautiful girl.

The girl was invariably beautiful, for Ed was an artist. The girl would always be rich, for Ed moved in the right circles, and could afford to pick and choose. And the girl would inevitably be young and inexperienced, for Ed, amongst his other remarkable qualities, possessed a sound streak of commonsense.

The affair, aided by the fundamentally normal and yet delightfully fascinating physiological differences between the male and female bodies, would progress, to the mutual happiness of the protagonists.

And then business matters would intervene. Ed would have to take a trip, to look after his diverse and widely scattered business interests. This entailed the cruel separation of leaving his beloved. Ed would bid her farewell with heart-rending emotion. He would tear himself away.

But not even the cruelty of business could forbid him to

write. He promised faithfully that there would be a letter every day. He begged, he pleaded with tears in his liquid brown eyes (for Ed was also a consummate actor) for some word, some sentence, some phrase which would lighten the darkness of that desolation which was the world without his beloved.

Something of a poet, too, this gifted individual, as you will have gathered.

They parted. Ed kept his word. Usually his beloved answered his letters. No girl could have resisted the temptation to answer such charming and delightfully daring love letters. No girl, that is to say, who was human. And Ed was a very good judge of character. He knew how to pick them. He also enjoyed the exquisite tautology of proving his judgment correct.

Time passed. Ed would return from his business trip and fall into the arms of his beloved. They loved each other now more than ever before. If they were separated even for a day, they would write to each other.

\* \* \*

More time passed, as it always does.

Ed did not see his beloved quite so often. He was busy. He was vague. He was bothered. He had troubles. And then, cruelly and inevitably, the blow fell.

Ed would present himself with an air of deep despondency distorting and yet ennobling his smooth and distinguished countenance. What was the matter? What on earth could have happened? Was he ill? An accident, perhaps – had he been hurt?

She was soon to know. Ed had been thinking. He was an honourable man. He put his thoughts into words. The words were many; together they flowed in an unending and eloquent stream.

But they all meant only one thing.

Marriage would be a mistake – more, a tragedy. He was an older man, wise in the ways of the world. Youth and age did not mix. Oil and water could not mingle. Spring and autumn were incompatible.

And so on and so forth, with the tears of emotion glistening in his eyes. If the girl opened her mouth to point out the truly remarkable success this incompatibility had enjoyed in the past, with the aid of clean linen sheets, shaded lights and a spring-filled mattress, she had no chance to speak. It was all a mistake. A sad and terrible mistake. Let his beloved be brave and courageous. She was young and beautiful and had her life before her. Soon she would

meet the right young man, who would make her as happy as she deserved to be.

He would not stand in the way of her happiness. He had been selfish, blinded by her beauty and her kindness and generosity to a middle-aged man.

Let them kiss and remain good friends, but part they must. If ever he could do anything to help her – if ever she had need of him, she had only to send. Good-bye. He would always remember her beauty and her loveliness.

In other words, Ed backed out.

He begged her to destroy his letters. This the beloved had usually done, half-an-hour after they were received. They were not the kind of letters to leave lying about for her mother or junior to find.

He had already burnt hers, and part of his heart had burnt with them. But this was for the best. This was what they must do. Farewell.

\* \* \*

But Ed had not destroyed those letters – oh no, he was much too cunning for that!

Those letters were carefully kept in his safe, all neatly numbered and dated and indexed, and there they would remain while he continued his interesting, if somewhat arduous and exhausting career.

He had patience, our Ed. But always his patience was rewarded. His beloved sweethearts – who were now all unwittingly and unknowingly his beloved clients – after a period of time, depending entirely on their own health and natural commonsense, to say nothing of the precautions Ed always insisted on taking, recuperated after the tragedy and usually – since they were young and beautiful to say nothing of rich – found the right men to make them happy.

And happy they were, for Ed had picked them well, and Ed himself had ascertained (by painstaking and yet always exhilarating research) that they each one possessed all the qualities and attributes necessary to make a good wife and to keep a husband happy and healthy and contented.

Happy they were, until our Ed appeared on the scene with a letter in his slim and gold-edged pocket-book.

A great psychologist, our Ed, in addition to his other manifold talents. What woman, having gained at last her happiness – for is

not marriage the ultimate ambition of every healthy and right-minded girl – would not fight to keep it? What woman, having had the experience of an affair in her youth with such a one as Ed, would not appreciate the security and peace of her home, to say nothing of the trust and love and respect of her husband, and strive with all her might to keep these priceless things unspoiled and inviolate?

A clever guy, our Ed.

Not for one moment should she think, should she entertain the slightest suspicion that he had come to destroy that manifest happiness of which he was so envious and (in a not entirely unjustifiable way) so deservedly proud. Not at all. Nothing of the kind.

He just happened to have found a letter – obviously one which had been overlooked at the time he burnt the others – and he was convinced that his ex-beloved's husband would not like to know anything about the letter at all. Yes – it was the one about the various ways they had celebrated that birthday . . . He was equally certain that his ex-beloved herself would sleep sounder after it had been destroyed. Admittedly, they had both perhaps taken a little more wine than they should have done – after all, it was an occasion – but unfortunately these extenuating circumstances were not mentioned in the text. And that sketch – magnificent – superb – inspiring – but hardly to be left lying about. And so suggestive as to exclude any misinterpretation.

Now that was kind and chivalrous of him, was it not? Indubitably. He still kept his ideals, in spite of the difficult times. Very difficult indeed. In fact, thanks to that youngster in the White House, he was practically a ruined man.

What was that? A loan? Certainly not. He would not dream of such a thing. Well, a gift then, the ex-beloved might suggest, filled with a complexity of emotions amongst which were paramount terror and remorse, and desperation and shame . . . and gratitude for the nobility of his action.

Ed would draw himself up, as if insulted. For a moment there would be silence – a terrible silence, during which sometimes the ex-beloved tried desperately to remember some of the prayers she used to know before she grew up and realized she was beautiful and became busy with the spending of so much money . . .

Then Ed would relax and smile. His smile had always been a charming thing. His ex-beloved wanted that letter. At the same time, such was the fundamental kindness of her nature, she wanted to help him. Very well. She could gratify both her wishes.

He would sell the letter – a straightforward business transaction with respect and understanding on both sides.

\* \* \*

And so it went on. Ed found other letters. He made other calls. He continued to make love – with an ardour and a vigour and a virility the years seemed unable to impair – to other girls.

And all the letters were neatly docketed and indexed and filed, with comments meticulously inscribed beside the dated payments, as to how much the traffic would bear, and when to stop, and when to ask for more.

A methodical business-man, our Ed, you gather, in addition to his other admirable qualities.

And then one day when his bank-balance had grown to a sufficiently satisfactory size and the sight of three grey hairs in the mirror had given him a sleepless night, Ed Salvo decided to retire.

He was enough of a philosopher to realize that it could not go on for ever. There was enough of the artist in him to have enjoyed his work, every moment of it. And now that hard-headed and practical streak in him decided to leave it all, invest his money and settle down in the country in comfort and security.

Now at this juncture one may well be tempted to ask what dreadful fate befell this wicked man – since our childlike illusions that good and evil are rewarded and punished still persist, in spite of all the evidence in this world to the contrary.

Therefore it gives the author – to whom childhood illusions, *mirabile dictu*, are still dear and precious things – incredible pleasure to relate that, even as in the old-fashioned fairy tales of our youth, retribution came eventually to Ed Salvo.

It came first of all in the shape of a girl – the one he finally decided to make his wife.

She was beautiful, this one, and also intelligent. That is obvious, the smart reader will bellow, or else a character such as Ed would never have married her. But after he had been married for some little time, our Ed made the startling discovery which so many husbands have lamented before and after him: namely, that by marrying the woman they adored they irrevocably lost her, and found themselves, in some curious way, living with a pleasant and amiable but rather tiresome and sometimes wholly irritating stranger . . .

Yes. Our Ed came even to this. Although no-one could ever

deny that he loved his wife. He loved his Sadie with an ardour and a passion that only the truly experienced lover can know. He loved her all the more in that he had loved so many women before. He loved her so wonderfully and so incredibly that on the eve of his wedding he knelt down before his safe and took out all that were left of those infamous letters and solemnly and diligently burnt them.

Which, when you consider what one has endeavoured to depict of Ed's character does prove, beyond the shadow of all reasonable doubt, how much he was in love.

## 2

**I**N due course our Ed found a tranquil valley and a small town at one end, quaint and old-fashioned and unspoilt. And on the outskirts he found a lovely old house set in a beautiful garden – ill-used and neglected and forlorn, and yet whose exquisite proportions stood out bravely even beneath the dirt and the blisters and the grime.

His money waved a magic wand and the workmen wore clean overalls, spoke rarely and then with a slow drawl and took a pride in their work.

The house seemed to live and breathe again and took on a quality of its own. Ed never regretted the money he had spent. It was a fit setting for his wife – who would make this and all his other dreams glow with the perfection of unutterable happiness, in the way he had dreamed many years ago, when he was a thin little boy in a cheap suit and the only refuge from the older boys' bullying at school had been to retire into a dream world of his own.

Now his dreams had come true. Now he could sit in his magnificent garden for as long as he liked. Now he could contemplate his flowers and his trees. Now he could enjoy the fruits of so many years of such well-directed and forceful labour.

He should have been the happiest man in Huntersville.

But he was not.

\* \* \*

Now it would be tedious to detail in chronological order the complete sequence of all those annoying little habits and man-

nerisms whereby Sadie, the girl Ed had made his wife, drove him in a series of logical steps from surprise to irritation and from disgust to anger. To give a sample of one of their conversations will suffice.

In his new-found leisure Ed had become something of an amateur gardener in the true sense of the term; that is to say, he delighted in pottering about, accomplishing very little and yet finding his happiness in the very knowledge that his artistically ineffectual efforts did not really matter, and that whatever he did and however well he tried to do it, the roses would still bloom and the trees in the orchard still bear fruit. And, after all, he might be helping them to bud a little earlier or to bear a greater number of apples by his efforts. One never knew. One could never state categorically that his efforts had been in vain. That was the whole point. In that lay the fascination.

It was a charming occupation, worthy of a philosopher and a gentleman. There you have his hobby and the reason for it, in a nutshell.

But Sadie had other ideas. She was intensely practical.

When he was courting her, Ed thought this a most delightful characteristic, one which would blend most happily with his own artistic leanings. Many a young man has thought the same. He was not the first. Many a young man will do the same in the future – for how else could this world go on, if youth did not repeat the mistakes that age made when age was young, and age did not shake a reproving head and proffer good advice, and youth laugh in derision, and go on youth's own sweet way?

Ed and Sadie are in the garden.

"There now," says Sadie, "Isn't that much better?"

"What is much better?"

"Your fruit trees."

"What on earth have you done?"

"Now don't you get mad at me, Ed Salvo. I did nothing. But I phoned Dig Hollis – he's a nice guy – and he knows all about these things and he said –"

"Yes but –"

"Oh, I know you thought you were surely doing the right thing, but this is a case where expert knowledge –"

"I know but –"

"Dig Hollis agreed with me that you were doing the wrong thing –"

"But why should you –"

"He's a nice guy. He got in his pick-up and came right over. And when he saw what you had been doing he nearly had a fit - not only were you binding them wrongly -"

"Surely I am -"

"But also in the wrong places - you see how he has done them now in -"

"I do see but I think -"

"I do wish you wouldn't keep on interrupting me, Ed. Heaven knows it's hard enough for me to go to all this trouble on your account without you -"

"I am not -"

"There you go again. I declare I'm right out of breath arguing with you. Surely you admit that Dig Hollis has done them better than you could ever do. And besides, he's a nice guy and so obliging - always ready to give a hand."

Ed sat down and buried his face in his hands.

One should not sympathize with him, for he was a wicked man and deserved it all. And many a better and many a worthier man has found himself in the same position, without the world greatly caring, for the world is made that way. So why waste sympathy or pity on Ed?

But this was not the first occasion on which such a conversation or a similar one had ensued, nor was it the last. Were he to begin to prune his rose-trees, Dig Hollis would be called in, usually when he was out, to finish them. Were he to build a rockery in some quiet corner, Dig Hollis in his ancient and decrepit Dodge pick-up would tumble a gigantic pile of rocks on to his lawn. Were he to design a flower-bed - lo and behold, a different flower-bed would take shape before his eyes, under the indefatigable hands of the estimable Dig Hollis. Who was, as he had been so often told, a nice guy.

\* \* \*

It is difficult to say exactly at what point Ed's thoughts turned to murder. And really it does not matter.

Obviously he did not decide to murder his wife simply because she got on his nerves. His reasons were far more complex, and yet they all hinged on one fact of fundamental simplicity. Having attained the rich fulfilment of his boyhood's dreams, he now found the sweet savour as bitter and as harsh as ashes. Other men have had the same experience. Many become philosophical, and have the wisdom to set themselves another target.

Ed's nature was against him. Murder was the obvious conclusion to one of his character. Always in his life he had had his own way; always he had planned his own course of action, with a complete ruthlessness and an utter disregard for the feelings of others.

Indeed, it was almost with a sigh of satisfaction that he made up his mind to kill Sadie, and as he began to plan he felt something of the old exhilaration stealing through his veins, such as he had been wont to feel when he called for the first time to dispose of a letter in his pocket-book.

After all, marriage had been but a temporary aberration, brought on by the sight of a few grey hairs in the mirror, as much as by anything else. Now he felt that his life was resuming its normal course. Now the excitement of it all flowed through his veins with the stimulating effect of alcohol. Retirement was absurd to a man of his energies and capabilities. When a man has made his work his life, he finds it difficult to break entirely away.

And so, logically, he began to plan the murder.

Killing Sadie would be quite easy. Killing Sadie so that the murderer of Sadie would never be caught – that was another matter. That was a game where he needed the aces. That was a problem. That was something which needed thinking about, and in no light fashion. Here was creative work, something which appealed to the artist in him. And in the perfecting of his plan, it is a solemn thought, and yet nevertheless an incontrovertible fact, that he took the greatest of pleasure.

But it was not until Sadie reminded him that they were due to start for their annual visit to her parents on Friday that he felt he had made any progress. True, he had already decided on the broad outlines of the scheme, but it was the finer points – those finishing touches which are such a delight to the true craftsman – which had been missing.

Now, as he thought about her remark, the missing pieces seemed to fly together of their own accord, until suddenly he saw it all lying before him like a completed puzzle, and he knew that his plan was perfect.

## 3

ON the Thursday morning the telephone rang. It was a wrong number, but Ed stayed by the instrument, listening and answering, for quite a time. Then he went back to the breakfast room.

"That's a nuisance," he announced.

"What is it?" asked Sadie from behind the morning paper.

"It's that confounded lawyer Hamilton. He wants to see me either tonight or tomorrow night - just like him - can't say when."

"But surely - is it important?"

"I am afraid it is. He's leaving for Europe on Saturday and we have quite a lot to discuss - you know, that business of the Miami freehold."

For a moment he frowned in thought.

"It's no use phoning your mother - he may come tonight and then it would all be for nothing. Besides, she has been making preparations for this for weeks. The best thing is for you to take the train, if you don't mind, tomorrow evening, and if he does come, then I'll join you on Saturday. I'll have to keep the car to meet him at the station and to join you early on Saturday."

"You know I hate the train - "

"I'm sorry. I don't see what else - "

"Couldn't you have settled it on the phone?"

"No. You ought to know that. He has to bring documents and conveyances in his brief-case and I have to discuss them and sign them in his presence."

"Okay. I'll take the train. If you had got me that compact, there would be no problem."

Ed smiled and patted her head.

"Maybe next year. We've had a lot of expense just lately. Wait until I've sold that freehold."

Then he finished his breakfast with a hearty appetite, and lighting his pipe, went out happily to excavate the deep and narrow trench which was to take a new drain from the lawn and also to figure so prominently in his plan.

On that same Thursday evening, when it was dark, Ed went to the garage and backed out the gigantic Cadillac he had bought several years before with exactly one-fifth of the profit he had made from the neat little affair of the Colonel's daughter.

That the daughter had swallowed an overdose of tranquilizers, and that the Colonel had blown out his brains in one of the more secluded parking lots behind the Pentagon, did not mitigate in the slightest degree the infinite pleasure Ed always derived from driving his magnificent car; every time he held the wheel his delight and his satisfaction were reborn anew.

Then he climbed out and put his head round the back door.

"Just going to the station, Sadie - in case he's on the train."

"Okay. There's some cold ham if he wants to eat."

"Don't get it ready now. He may not be there. See you later."

He had set the hands of the hall clock forward, but even so he did not have much time. What he had to do, had to be done before the train arrived, as Sadie knew how long it took to drive back from the station.

What he had to do consisted in having a quick glass of beer in the bar of the George Hotel and establishing in the course of an idle conversation with the barman the fact of the unavoidable alteration in their plans. He would not mention his lawyer, who was an individual of integrity and would delight in telling the police the exact truth. He need only state that he had some work to clear up before the end of the month. This was something he could easily substantiate later.

All idle gossip, you will say, and not of paramount interest. But Ed knew his small town. Most of the inhabitants of Huntersville would know enough to provide him with an alibi when necessary.

Ed finished his beer and said goodnight.

Then he drove to the station, parked his car in the yard, nodded to the station-master and strolled idly to the far end of the platform, beyond the last light.

The train was just about due in, and he knew the station-master was busy, since that unfortunate individual combined his own duties with those of ticket-collector, porter and clerk.

As the engine's headlight gleamed through the darkness, he turned up his coat collar and pulled his hat brim low over his eyes. From his pocket he took a pair of dark glasses and a false moustache. Ed was thorough in everything he did.

The engine glided to a throbbing halt. Ed walked towards the cab and accosted the motorman.

"Can you use a hundred bucks?" he asked in a hoarse voice.

The motorman grinned.

"Try me, Mac."

Ed held out the bills.

"There's a deserted halt about six miles up the valley. Do you know where I mean?"

The man reached out an enormous and greasy hand.

"Yep - by the old quarry."

"That's the one. Tomorrow night you drive slowly until you get there and then stop - just for two minutes. You can easily make up time later. Even if you can't you'll be one hundred bucks the richer."

"Okay. Simple. No catch in it? No shooting?"

Ed shook his head.

"No. Nothing like that. Just a dame who's got a husband."

"Okay. I wouldn't want any trouble - not even for a hundred bucks."

"There'll be no trouble. You just earn your money."

"Right. Tomorrow night."

The whistle blew and Ed watched the engine glide away. Then he ripped off his disguise and went to find the station-master.

"Anyone ask for me?"

"No sir. Were you expecting somebody?"

"A friend of mine. He said he might make it tonight."

"No sir. Only half-a-dozen got off. I know them all."

"Thank you. Goodnight."

"Goodnight, sir."

#### 4

ON the Friday evening Ed drove his wife to the station. They arrived in good time, and followed the station-master as he carried her suitcase to the rear end of the platform.

"You'll be okay here, ma'm," that worthy declared. "The end coach is first-class and usually empty. Always plenty of room."

"Good."

Ed tipped him heavily and lit a cigarette with a feeling of satisfaction. The second part of his alibi was established.

"Have you got everything you want in there?" he asked.

"Yes - just for the night. You'll bring all the others tomorrow?"

"I'll put them in the boot as soon as I get back."

"You're waiting for him now?"

"Yes. The down one is due in a few minutes."

"He is a nuisance, that Hamilton. I hate these filthy trains."

"Never mind. It can't be helped. I'll see you for lunch tomorrow."

"Now don't forget to shut the house properly and see that Marty has all the keys and make sure that she checks the taps and the switches when she goes out and you had better give her another address to forward the letters - she is sure to have lost the old one - you know what an idiot she is - oh, and I nearly forgot to tell you - there's another thing -"

The approaching engine whistled at the same time that it took the loose sleeper on the level-crossing and drowned whatever she was going to say. But Sadie went on talking and Ed nodded wisely and with complete understanding. It saved such a lot of argument and needless repetition.

He saw Sadie safely into an empty first-class compartment at the rear of the train. It was essential to his plan that she should be in a compartment alone, but then he had known about that empty coach for a long time. Also he had known that Sadie did not like to travel near the engine.

It was necessary to know all these things if one was to plan the perfect murder. It was necessary to know that the line curved through the deserted halt, and that therefore, if one approached from the outside of the curve, even an inquisitive motorman would not be able to see what was happening by the last coach.

The character of this motorman had been the one unknown quantity, but Ed had decided to gamble on this by making the actual bribe far larger than his initial calculation had anticipated. It was like a game of chess; each move had to co-ordinate with the next and follow in a logical sequence. What one did not know, one had to foresee and anticipate.

He left the station without haste, making sure that he passed and said goodnight to the station-master, who would now be able to verify that he left the station alone. Just another small piece in the puzzle. Each piece had its place and had to fit.

But as soon as he was at the wheel of his car his pretence came to an end.

He swung the enormous bonnet round the station yard and shot

off down the main street of Huntersville at an unlawful speed. But then no-one would take any notice of that. The inhabitants of Huntersville were used to stepping out of the way of automobiles being driven at an unlawful speed; that was why they left the potholes at either end of the town – in the pious hope that the motorist, at the cost of a broken spring or a snapped shaft, might be induced to see the error of his misguided ways. They were certainly not going to teach those to him at the cost of a corpse. And besides, Mister Salvo always drove like that. What was the sense in owning such an automobile if one did not drive it at the speed for which it had been so competently designed?

Thus would reason the inhabitants of Huntersville, for they were the descendants of a most logical people. And thus had reasoned Ed when he made his plan. Besides, he knew all about the potholes and braked in time.

The halt lay on the north side of the town, so that he would have to pass through it in the usual way, as though he were driving back to his house. Ed Salvo, hurrying home to catch up on his work. That, too, had entered into his calculations.

But there was no time to lose. It was only six miles to the halt, but the motorman's character was still the unknown quantity. He might have conservative ideas as to what driving slowly meant. Especially a motorman intoxicated by the feel of an additional hundred bucks in his pocket.

Ed switched on his headlights, flattened the gas pedal to the floor, and felt the great car cling like a train to the crown of the road, while the grey dusty miles unrolled like a streaming silver ribbon beneath the pool of brilliant radiance.

\* \* \*

He arrived at the deserted halt with one minute to spare.

As the train glided to a stop, he jumped up on to the steps of the last coach and quickly opened the door of the end compartment. His wife looked up in amazement.

“Why, Ed – ”

But he gave her no chance to speak.

“Quick, Sadie,” he said. “Come down with me. I’ll take your bag. That swine Hamilton has taken me for a ride.”

“But what do you mean – what has happened?” she exclaimed, frightened at the urgency in his voice. A great actor was lost to the

stage when the thin little boy in the cheap suit was bullied in the playground of his school.

"Never mind now - I'll tell you all about it outside. Quick - the train is only stopping for a minute."

Dominated by his personality, she allowed herself to be persuaded. Holding her hand, he half led, half dragged her out on to the disused and weed-rotten platform. The train glided smoothly away into the darkness and they were alone.

Ed took the ten-inch spanner from his overcoat pocket, stepped calmly behind his wife, lifted his arm and struck once. Once was enough.

## 5

THE hardest part of it all was getting upstairs to the bathroom, but once Ed had set his mind to a task, whatever difficulties he encountered served only to make him the more determined to finish it. To that estimable quality he owed much of his success.

The next part, that one involving the use of the old-fashioned folding razor and the hacksaw, would surely have tried the nerve of a less determined man. But our Ed, as we have observed, was methodical. What he was doing - however horrible - had to be done. The trench was deep, but also it was narrow. It had to be narrow, since it had been dug to contain a drainpipe. It was messy, the aesthete in him was bound to admit, but it was necessary. Therefore it had to be done.

And indeed, as he worked on and on - since he was that type of man who is physically and mentally incapable of doing anything badly - he actually found himself taking a certain macabre pride in the efficient execution of his gruesome task . . . It was almost as if the artist in him could not be suborned, even at such a moment as this . . .

When he had finished, he turned both the bath taps on and washed his hands and arms, and cleaned the razor and hacksaw. He left the taps running while he went to fetch the canvas flour-bags he had carefully saved for this occasion.

Then, into the darkness which shrouded the sleeping garden, went our Ed, carrying carefully and fastidiously several tightly rolled canvas bags. There were quite a number of them and some were heavy. He had to make several journeys before they were all assembled on the lawn.

Quickly and yet carefully he put them into the trench, on top of the newly-laid drainpipe. Then he laboured with his shovel until far into the night, refilling the trench with earth and replacing the carefully cut sods of turf at exactly the same level as the remainder of the lawn.

Before he completely finished filling it in, he laid aside his shovel, went upstairs again and washed the bath meticulously, pausing frequently and scanning every part with unhurried and methodical care. Then he scrutinized the floor around the bath in the same slow and painstaking way. Then he took the cloth he had used to clean the bath, his wife's clothes, which he had folded neatly on a chair, together with her shoes, and his own jacket, shirt and trousers, and made them all into a bundle, which he took down into the garden. This he buried in the last corner of the trench, and then completed his returfing.

Then he went to bed and slept as peacefully as a child.

\* \* \*

The next morning Ed was driving his car slowly down the main street of Huntersville. His window was right down, for the morning was a beautiful one and the fresh tang of the invigorating air seemed to enhance the fragrance of the excellent and expensive cigar he was smoking.

He was feeling very pleased this morning, our Ed, not only with life in general, but also with himself. For it was undeniable that it was due to his own efforts that life had really begun to be so pleasant.

Every detail had been attended to. His own suitcases and Sadie's were in the boot of the car. There had been no need to clean that, although he had checked carefully. The jacket of her two-piece suit pulled up over her head had taken care of the little bleeding there was. The suitcase she had taken had been unpacked, the clothes restored to their proper places and the case put back in the cupboard with several others.

He was now on his way to see his mother-in-law, there to learn with consternation that his wife had not arrived. Holy smoke! That was incredible! He himself had put her on the train. It was fantastic. It was unthinkable. Here he would smite his brow. Then the agitation, supplanting the disbelief. Then the growing alarm and horror. Then the visit to the police. Then the search, the nation-wide hunt. No stone would be left unturned.

The artist in him visualized the whole superb scene, with himself as the protagonist, with himself as the pivot around which all activities must necessarily revolve – the long and fruitless search, the inquiries, the alibis, the witnesses, the growing sense of frustration and despair, the newspaper reporters – and finally, after a decent interval (a suitably long and in-in-the-best-of-taste interval) the brusque and grudging acceptance of the large cheque from the Insurance Company with whom he had had the foresight, long ago, to insure his beloved Sadie. He might have to wait a long time for that. Missing was not the same as dead. But eventually they would have to pay.

There would be no question of motive, even if some sharp-witted Homicide Captain should grow suspicious. He was a wealthy man in his own right. He did not need the money. And since he had taken out the insurance policy on their wedding day, years ago, was it logical to wait so long before taking steps which would enable him to claim it? If murder had been in his mind then, surely it would have come out long ago.

Besides, wouldn't all the inhabitants of Huntersville vouch for the devotion of the happy couple to each other?

Even if the motorman opened his mouth, which was unlikely, he had been effectively disguised. A dame who's got a husband. That might be repeated to the police. Which would only imply that Sadie might have had a lover, who had lured her to her death. How could they prove that Ed had not been at home that night?

At this juncture in his eminently satisfying thoughts, he became aware of the insistent tooting of an ancient klaxon horn.

Turning his head and looking out, he saw Dig Hollis, who had drawn up alongside in his aged and decrepit pick-up truck. Ed trod on the brake and Dig Hollis, removing his hand from the horn button, did the same. The two cars pulled up side by side. Huntersville's main is wide. No one worried.

"Glad t' ketch yew afore yew left, Mister Salvo."

"Why's that?" replied Ed politely, thinking with secret satisfaction that he could now well afford to be polite to the interfering old fool.

"Jest reckoned I'd tell yew we've started on th' job – got a man on it right now."

"What job?"

"Why – thet job yore Missis tole me t' do afore she went."

"What job?" whispered Ed again. An icy hand came to clutch

at his heart. Driven by an unaccountable fear, he let in the clutch timidly and slowly and the big car began to move.

Beside him, an agonizing sound told him Dig Hollis had pulled the ancient gear-lever back, and the truck jerked along parallel to the car.

"Relayin' thet drainpipe on yore lawn - she says yew never joint 'em proper. Ain't no call t' worry - we'll make a good job o' thet."

Ed's foot slammed down on the gas. The big car shot forward. Dig Hollis trod on his brake.

"Bye, Mister Salvo," he bawled. "Hev' a good holiday."

\* \* \*

Ed held all the aces. But he sat in the wrong game. The three grey sisters who weave our fates have never had the time to learn about cards. To them, with feminine logic, an ace is only one, and therefore lower than a deuce.

© Copyright 1964 by Pierre Audemars

---

***AN IMPORTANT  
ANNOUNCEMENT . . .***



***TURN NOW TO  
INSIDE BACK COVER***

---

**They said that my husband was well-insured; but that was not the reason at all, as you can imagine!**

## **SUCH A LOVELY DAY**

**Penelope Wallace**

**L**ITTLE TREDDINGTON is the prettiest village you could hope to see. It nestles in the Cotswolds and the guide books describe the Church of Saint Andrews as "a little gem", as indeed it is.

I well remember the first time I saw the village. My late husband, the Reverend Charles Framley, drove me down to see his new parish. The departing vicar, Mr. Wyland, showed us the Church and pointed out all the tourist attractions. (I am afraid that he was rather a worldly man!) He also showed us the postcards and booklets which were on sale in the church porch, but I could see that poor Charles did not approve, and so could Mr. Wyland, for he very tactfully led us across to the Vicarage. He was a bachelor but I must say that he provided a splendid tea and the house and garden were quite beautiful.

I so looked forward to living in this beautiful place and moving from the rather depressing Manchester suburb where Charles had his present parish. The thought of seeing, everyday, green fields and those neat golden cottages instead of dirt-grained houses, sustained me during the drive back to Manchester. It would almost be like going home; for I had been born and brought up in the soft lands of Surrey and to me the

North would always be "alien corn".

That was ten years ago.

We moved to Little Treddington in the Autumn and soon it was the Carol Service and Christmas and taking sherry with Lord and Lady Dawson at the Manor House; then Easter and Whitsun, and then every waking minute getting ready for the Church Fête. It was always held on the second Saturday in August and opened, of course, by Lady Dawson so it had to be between the time she returned from the Riviera and before they went to Scotland – Lord and Lady Dawson are both excellent shots. I remembered that the Vicar (Mr. Wyland that is, not my husband for he never made a joke!) had said Lady Dawson really chose that day to mark the last appearance of her second-day Royal Ascot hat! Fortunately Charles did not hear.

There was so much to be done for the Fête and so many little jealousies to be sorted out, but I do pride myself on being rather good with people, and really I felt I could take quite a lot of the credit when I looked around the Vicarage garden and saw so many happy faces behind the stalls and all the children – such a happy day for them – with their pennies and sixpences clutched in one hand while they threw coconuts or delved in the lucky dip, and Lady Dawson most beautifully dressed . . .

And then – quite without warning – down came the rain! I was sure that Lady Dawson's hat was quite ruined but she took it very well and we all ran as fast as we could into the Vicarage.

The rain stopped as suddenly as it had started and back we all went to the garden – except for Lady Dawson who had "called it a day" (as she put it) and driven home. Of course, it was rather muddy round the coconut shies and the bran in the lucky dip was a little squelchy and poor Mrs. Wills was very upset because young Millicent had left her "guess-the-weight cake" in the rain and all the icing colours had run! But there, I always say, "These little things are sent to try us."

Poor Charles is not so philosophical and he was most upset, and the following year he started to worry about the weather long before the Fête. That year there was no rain and I thought all would be well but it made no difference – sometimes it rained and sometimes it was fine – but every year for two weeks before our "D-Day" on the second Saturday in August, Charles would study the Weather Reports.

"Oh, I do hope it will be a fine day for the Fête," he would say (so gloomily too), and then for the last week before the Great Day

he would stand in the Vicarage doorway scanning the skies.

I remember once Dr. Brown (such an amusing man, but very irreligious I am afraid) asked him whether he was looking for rain clouds or a sign from the Almighty! My husband was not at all amused and when Dr. Brown went on, "The Devil sends sin and the Lord sends the weather and I should have thought He could have arranged one fine afternoon in return for all the work you do for Him," poor Charles was really most upset.

Of course I tried to do my best.

"Charles," I would say (I would never have called him Charley for I think these abbreviations are such a pity), "Charles, why do you worry so much about the weather? If it is wet we can always hold the Fête in the Village Hall." But his answer was always the same.

"No, Maude," he would say in his sad voice. "You know how that upsets Miss Gosling; she has such a job afterwards getting it ready for Sunday School the next morning." And indeed it was true that on the one occasion when we did use the Hall, Miss Gosling complained for weeks!

Even after Miss Gosling died, quite suddenly, at the end of July three years ago, it was as if her ghost haunted him for he still insisted that the Fête be held out of doors.

Day after day he would open *The Times* and read the Weather Report (before he'd even cracked his boiled egg). Day after day he would "Tut Tut" and say, "Oh, I do hope it will be a fine day for the Fête." Day after day he would scan the skies . . .

He died suddenly, last year – just four days before the Fête.

Dr. Brown was most surprised – but I cannot say that I was.

They tried to say that I was mad – wasn't that silly of them! I am glad to say that they didn't succeed. (And luckily no-one found out about poor Mother.)

Because, you see, there was Miss Gosling too; at the time they thought she was what they call "natural causes", but after my husband's death they dug her up! (Such a distasteful practice, I feel.)

They said that my husband was well-insured; but that was not the reason at all, as you can imagine!

Today is such a lovely day for a Fête – or a hanging.

# TRUE CRIME

**A charwoman saw him banging on the prostitute's door with his gold-tipped cane. She could see him clearly because he stood near a gas-jet. She remembered his peculiar crossed eyes and his heavy breathing . . .**

## MURDER BY GASLIGHT

**re-told by  
Arthur Kent**

**O**NE of the weirdest mass murderers who ever slunk through the gaslit streets of Victorian England and America was cross-eyed Dr. Thomas Neill Cream.

Dressed absurdly in top hat, tails and hefting a cane, Cream was the Phantom of the Opera, a comic Jack the Ripper with a cleaner method of disposing of his victims – and, coincidentally, a life-like facsimile of those famous fictional figures Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, from the famous novel by fellow Scot, Robert Louis Stevenson, born in the same year as Cream.

Son of a wealthy shipbuilder, Cream was born in Glasgow in 1850. Of average height and advanced intelligence, one peculiarity showed in the child. Fits of anger or excitement resulted in his two normally-spaced eyes snapping together and locking in a cross-eyed position until the emotion had abated.

Although he had many brothers and sisters, the young Cream was a child recluse, and became more markedly so when the family shifted to Canada. At the school in Quebec City the young Cream attended, he was known as “Mister Encyclopedia”. He eschewed sports and games, becoming instead a reader of books and an accomplished organist.

At the age of twelve he was short, dumpily broad, with an oversized head and thick glasses . . . with eyes which crossed suddenly when somebody annoyed him. In his teens he began to take an interest in religion, but changed his mind when he went to McGill University in Montreal and took up medicine instead.

At college he showed a keen interest in drugs and poisons and was said to have written brilliant essays on the subject. He also conducted Sunday School classes for children at a nearby church. Studious, remote, perhaps friendless, but certainly showing no signs of the murdering maniac to come.

Cream's first known brush with sex came when he was 24. She was a beautiful brunette slightly taller than himself, and when she told him she was pregnant Cream did the conventional thing. He married her. But Cream had been hoaxed. After taking too much to drink the bride confessed that she wasn't pregnant and that she had only married the insignificant-looking doctor because she knew he'd eventually inherit some of his father's wealth. One can only imagine the effect of this on the sensitive Cream – and on his eyes.

Soon afterwards he deserted her, going first to St. Thomas's Hospital in London – one day to be the area of his crimes against women – then to the Royal College in Edinburgh. Here the young Cream's eyes became worse. Just as the periods when the gentle Dr. Jekyll turned into the bestial Mr. Hyde lengthened, so Cream's eyes became locked crossed for longer periods – up to a day or two at a time.

Observant fellow students linked the affliction with sex. It was noticed Cream's eyes gave him trouble when he returned from London, where he boasted of his prowess with women.

When he was 26, Cream received news that his estranged wife had died of consumption in Canada and promptly wrote to the bereaved father demanding one thousand dollars – claiming it was owed to him. Jubilantly, he returned to Canada and practised as a G.P. in various cities.

Cream had been dabbling in petty crime for some time. Before he graduated from McGill he had put the bite on an insurance company for one thousand dollars for a fire he had cooked up in his quarters. The company couldn't prove a thing, and settled for a third. Certainly he was doing the odd abortion now – and he was to eventually kill at least three women in this illegal practice. But it is known that at this time his fellow doctors neither liked nor trusted him.

They, too, noticed the affliction of the locking crossed eyes and also ascribed it to a psychological sex problem. Whenever Cream had had a night out on the town with a good-time girl, his eyes remained locked at surgery next morning. Colleagues wondered how he operated like that, for they were sure he couldn't see properly. Ugly rumour went the rounds and Cream lost patients.

Loathe to cut back on his expensive nocturnal activities, the cross-eyed doctor went in for abortion in a big way. For a time he made money – and prospered, and became known as a prolific wencher and generous spender in the city's night haunts. But the hazard of the abortion business eventually came Cream's way. A girl died in Cream's surgery, and the doctor promptly packed his bags, left her there, and headed for the United States.

\* \* \*

Cream now set up practice in Chicago, and one wonders how he got away with it, since he was being hunted by the Canadian authorities for murder. One can only put it down to a laxness on the part of the Canadian and American medical authorities of the times and the fact that the exchange of news and information wasn't as developed as it is now.

At about this time – Cream was now 30 – he also discovered he had a strange hypnotic power in his eyes.

It came about in this way. A patient arrived with his six-year-old daughter and wanted Cream to try and cure her of epileptic fits. Cream spoke to the child for a time, and she suddenly told her father that she felt much better – and tingling all over. There were more visits and finally the child was completely cured.

Cream began to use his hypnotic powers on other patients. He made more amazing cures and the news spread. The American Medical Association watched him in action and reported that, although they couldn't explain Cream's success, he certainly was no crank or quack.

One morning, a small tubby man of 55 arrived at Cream's office, escorting a beautiful blonde, his wife. Cream looked the girl up and down, and had the couple taken into his office ahead of other patients. Presumably his eyes began to cross as he watched the girl sink into a chair.

The callers were Mr. Daniel Scott, and his wife Mabel, and the husband's problem was that he was having spasmodic outbursts

of spasms, which was disastrous in his job – he was a telegraphist on the Chicago and Northwestern Railway.

The records don't tell us if Cream managed to take the stammer out of the telegraphist's key hand, but the supposition is that he did not. He was too busy working his wicked hypnotic will on Mabel. In a very short time she became his mistress.

Mabel was more than a passing fancy for the now permanently cross-eyed Cream, and one night he whispered to her, "Mabel, I have a brilliant idea. We'll get married. I'll poison Daniel first, of course."

It was as easy done as said. Cream himself signed the death certificate, ascribing heart failure, and was much in evidence for the next few weeks, hustling into the house to console the widow.

When Mabel announced to a neighbour four weeks after her husband's death that she was going to marry Dr. Cream however, she received the retort, "God, not that funny little dwarf with the crossed orbs."

A violent quarrel followed and the neighbour reported to the police that she thought Mabel Scott, aided by Cream, had done away with the spasmic telegraphist. The police did what the medical authorities had not done: checked back on the Scots Canadian's past and uncovered the little matter of deaths by abortion in Canada.

\* \* \*

Even here, the matter might have rested, without an exhumation, had Cream himself not interfered, for the neighbour had no facts to go on, and the police saw her statements only as spite.

But there was Cream – stirring it up. He was determined to get some publicity, and he wrote to the coroner claiming the druggist who had made up Mr. Scott's prescription had mistakenly put too much strychnine in it. Cream wasn't taking out insurance here in case the body was exhumed, for there had been no fuss. He wanted Scott exhumed, the strychnine discovered, so that through Mrs. Scott he could sue for a million dollars.

The coroner decided not to act, but there was no stopping Cream. He became such a nuisance around the district attorney that the harassed man signed the order to get Cream off his back. Pathologists found enough strychnine in Scott to kill half a dozen spasmic telegraphists, and as a result Mabel and Cream stood trial for murder.

Mrs. Scott turned state evidence, claiming she had seen Cream putting some white powder in her husband's medicine three days before his death. So for the second time in his short life, Cream had been crossed by a woman for whom his eyes had crossed with undying love.

\* \* \*

Cream served ten years of his life imprisonment. He did good work in Joliet for his fellow inmates and the State decided to pardon him.

Cream's father had died and there was £5,000 awaiting him. He embarked for England, and no sooner off the ship, on 1st October, 1891, he was making friends with street women around Ludgate Circus and the Waterloo Road.

The seedier areas of London were just recovering after the horrific attacks of Jack the Ripper of three short years before, and Cream showed great interest in the activities of Jack. It is certain, too, that he read and was greatly influenced by Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. The monster of the book became his hero, and certainly he saw the parallel between the gentle doctor of the day who was the depraved monster of the night, and himself. Cream was certainly highly regarded for his skill and intelligence if many of his colleagues thought him an oddball.

From his lodgings at 103 Lambeth Palace Road, where lived medical people from nearby St. Thomas's Hospital, Cream would sneak out, dressed in topper and tails, to talk with the street girls – and eventually give them poisoned pills. Thus he met Matilda Clover, 27, who lived at 27 Lambeth Road.

Cream made an appointment to see her on another night, pressing a sovereign upon her in part payment, when a florin would have sufficed.

Apart from his dress on his nocturnal activities, Cream had an appearance and personality which wasn't hard to forget – along with the crossing eyes. He was tall, heavily built, almost bald, and had a thick ginger moustache. His lower jaw was massive and aggressive, his head too large, and the squint in his sunken eyes was noticeable behind his gold rimmed spectacles.

He wore flashy rings, rarely laughed or smiled, was always nervous in company, smoked or chewed gum, and drank gin like a washerwoman. His voice was soft and persuasive with a marked American accent.

Matilda Clover was watching for Cream on the appointed night.

She saw him all right, but another harpie had caught him before he could reach her door. She saw him go by with Ellen Donworth, 19, and forgot about it. It was just one of the hazards of the business – poaching.

Cream visited Ellen regularly. He possibly wrote to her as he did to other street girls, always demanding that they save him the letter so that he could take it away with him. Ellen boasted of her “posh gent”. He always kissed her hand, wore topper and tails. “There’s only one fang wrong wiv ’im,” she said: “Lord Fred,” as she called him, had crossed eyes.

And friends were to remember that Lord Fred was the last client to see Ellen alive. Only two or three days after they had first met, Ellen was found dying on the Thames Embankment, her face twitching uncontrollably, her limbs convulsing.

She was taken first to her lodgings in Duke Street, then to St. Thomas’s Hospital, where Cream was a frequent visitor.

Asked what she had taken, she managed to say, in moments of lucidity, “A tall gentleman . . . with crossed eyes, a silk hat and bushy whiskers . . . gave me white stuff out of a bottle.”

She died soon after her arrival.

One of the first visitors to the mortuary at the hospital next morning was Dr. Cream. He indicated the corpse of the girl. “And who is this?” he asked the attendant.

“Just a prostitute, sir.”

“What did she die of?”

“Dr. Kelloch says strychnine. He reckons it is suicide.”

“Shame, I suppose,” replied Cream. “What a pity.”

Returning to his lodgings, Cream rubbed his hands. Now for the next one. But the Ellen Donworth affair wasn’t finished yet. He could still have some more fun at the dead girl’s expense.

While the 19-year-old girl was being buried in a pauper’s grave, Cream was penning letters. One went to Scotland Yard, signed A. O’Brien, detective, and addressed to the coroner. It stated that the girl had been murdered and that A. O’Brien was willing to investigate the matter, if the police failed, for a fee . . . say £300,000! The letter was judged to be from a crank.

Another Cream letter went to W. H. Smith, the newsagents and stationers, saying that one of their employees had murdered the girl – but not to matter. He, H. Bayne, barrister, would defend the man.

Two nights later, on the 15th October, only fifteen days after he returned from Canada, Cream went after Matilda Clover. A charwoman working in the passage saw him banging on the girl's door with his gold-tipped cane. She could see him clearly because he stood near a gas jet. She remembered his peculiar crossed eyes and the fact that he was breathing heavily.

He passed into her room and shortly afterwards, in agony, Matilda Clover passed from life. Cream stayed an hour and the charwoman – a slow worker perhaps – was still busy in the small corridor when he left. Soon afterwards she heard shrieks from the girl's room. Before she died Matilda managed to say, "Fred gave me some white capsules."

This statement and Ellen Donworth's, and the similarity in their deaths, was overlooked by the authorities. Matilda was known to be a heavy drinker, so the authorities decided she had died of alcoholic poisoning.

But Cream was busy. He didn't want the deaths forgotten, or the fact that they might have been murdered, either. Off went letters. One, to the distinguished physician, Dr. William Broadbent, accused him of the murder, and demanded £2,500 or he would be exposed. The signature was M. Malone. Another went to the Countess Russell, staying at the Savoy, saying that her husband, Lord Russell, had murdered Matilda with strychnine.

Rumours persisted. If the police were ready to drop the matter, the unfortunate girls weren't, and the word went across London not to take pills from a well-dressed gentleman.

Cream made a short visit to Canada. There he had 500 circulars printed saying that the murderer of Ellen Donworth worked at the Metropole Hotel, London, which he intended to distribute to the guests on his return. He also ordered 500 strychnine tablets from a Canadian firm, and offered to act as their salesman in England, where there was a great future for the drug.

While drinking in Quebec he showed a bottle of drugs to a commercial salesman. "That's poison," he said. "I give it to women." He also showed the man false whiskers. "I wear these while I do it to prevent identification."

He returned to England on 9th April, and struck twice, lethally, on the 12th. The delay was occasioned by the fact that Cream naturally had to visit his fiancée on his return. He rushed out to Berkhamstead, to see his beloved, Laura Sabbatini, who lived there with her mother.

Although the murders of last October were almost forgotten Cream was doing his best to keep the matter alive. There had been a few sensational newspaper stories about the deaths in which a man with crossing eyes had been mentioned as giving pills to the girls.

And Cream would bring up the matter, challenging his colleagues and lodgers to see the resemblance between him and the wanted man.

One or two people did remark on the similarity, and Cream only chuckled, "Wouldn't it be funny if you were drinking with a maniacal doctor."

\* \* \*

Cream had a poetic parting with his fiancée, and returned to London. In the early hours of the following morning, Constable George Cumley saw a gentleman being let out of 118 Stamford Street by a street girl named Emma Shrivell. He noted the tall silk hat, the cane, the large moustache, and got a distinct impression the man was cross-eyed behind his glasses.

Less than an hour later, two girls in the house were dying painfully, their screams bringing the other occupants to their rooms. The street girls, Emma Shrivell, 18, and Alice Marsh, 21, managed to stutter that a gentleman visitor had given them white pills. They also described him as being cross-eyed.

A doctor diagnosed ptomaine poisoning, presumably from a tin of salmon. But Cumley wasn't satisfied and carried the matter to his authorities, reminding them of the ugly rumours surrounding the deaths of Ellen Donworth and Matilda Clover the previous October.

No one was more disgusted than Cream when the story of the double poisoning broke in the newspapers. He conferred with his landlady's daughter, a Miss Sleaper, confiding in her that he thought the murderer lodged in this very house!

His suspect was a young medical student, W. J. Harper, who lived there. Cream immediately wrote to Harper's father using the name W. H. Murray, saying that one of his operatives had indisputable evidence that his son had murdered the girls. He wrote, "I am willing to give you said evidence (so you can suppress it) for £1,500."

Cream also called on a police sergeant he knew with a letter, he said, which had gone to the two girls, telling them to beware of a

medical student named Harper. The letter added that Harper had killed Clover, Donworth and Lou Harvey.

This was the first mention of Lou Harvey and the police became interested in Lou Harvey – and in Cream. The police searched for Miss Harvey, who had a very damaging story to tell.

She had met Cream and he had given her some pills which, he said, would *permanently* clear pimples from her face. She had found Cream distinctly odd on a previous meeting, so she had brought her lover, a painter, with her at the next meeting.

Cream had given her a pill, which she had quickly switched to her other hand and then pretended to swallow. Cream had insisted on looking at her hand to check whether she had taken it. Satisfied she had, he left her, and she had heard him chuckling loudly and insanely to himself as he hurried away into the night.

Cream made no attempt to follow up his letter to the senior Harper for the money, for he was writing in other directions. A letter went to the coroner blaming the young Harper for the crimes.

But the net was finally closing. Clover was exhumed, and a tail was put on Cream. A friend of the doctor's, noticing a policeman following him, warned him, adding that he should go to the police with all he knew. Cream was quite casual in his reply: "They are watching young Harper – not me."

On 17th May, Cream visited a woman called Violet Beverley near Kennington Road. He told her he was a drug salesman and mixed her "an American drink", which wisely she didn't taste.

When finally the police talked to Cream directly, he expressed deep anger at being shadowed. Yes, he admitted he had strychnine tablets, as did all doctors and chemists.

When detectives called on Dr. Joseph Harper at Barnstaple, he showed them the letter, in Cream's handwriting, demanding money to suppress evidence. The detectives saw this as an opportunity and Dr. Harper agreed to press charges against Cream for threatening blackmail.

Cream had become worried, and booked passage to America, but before he could go aboard he was arrested. "You have apprehended the wrong man," he declared loudly.

Cream stood trial for murder for the third time in his life – besides Daniel Scott, there had been Julia Faulkner who died from abortion in Chicago – on 17th October, 1892, a little over a year after he had returned to Britain.

Most damaging against him were the letters he had written to

Countess Russell and Dr. Broadbent, for how could he have known that the girls had been murdered with strychnine when he wrote them? He had no defence, and was hanged for the murder of Matilda Clover on 15th November, 1892.

There is little doubt that Dr. Cream was a drug addict, and this must have led to his near insanity and moral degeneration. But nobody can be sure how many people he killed in his medical career, or what really were his motives. He went to the gallows with his lips sealed, denying his guilt.

© Copyright 1964 by Arthur Kent

---

## Next issue of **EWMM**

**EDGAR WALLACE**

"The Haunted Room"

**NIGEL MORLAND**

"The Devil Horse"

**WILLIAM H. FEAR**

"No Code for Killers"

**TRUE CRIME**

"The Wife Stealers"



**EDGAR WALLACE MYSTERY MAGAZINE No. 6**  
is now in preparation. For further details see  
inside back cover.

---

# NEW BOOKS

---

CIVIL servants who feel that their sense of humour has been lacking sufficient exercise to enable them to cope with their predicament, would do well to take a refreshing dip into the latest Mr. Holmes story by BBC Television's Parliamentary Correspondent, **Conrad Voss Bark**.

With undertones of satire, **Mr. Holmes and the Love Bank** is both an amazing fantasy and a gripping adventure story. It will, of course, suit many tastes besides those of frustrated government employees.

What was the explanation of the "sea serpent" sighted in mid-Atlantic? And was the manifestation connected with a heat-damaged submarine, cod which had been scalded to death, and Russian trawlers where nobody ever went fishing? The beginnings of a strange affair indeed, but nothing – absolutely nothing – could daunt the unusual sleuth from No. 10 Downing Street. And that is what this astounding story goes on to prove. (Macdonald, 15s.)

Time will prove John Creasey's Gideon books his most significant contribution to Britain's (and the World's) crime fiction heritage. When the Toff, the Baron, Dr. Palfrey and the rest have been forgotten, Gideon will march on in Holmesian manner as one of the "greats".

Coinciding with the new Gideon television series starring John Gregson, the book publishers issue **The Gideon Omnibus** by **J. J. Marric**. If the early Gideon titles are not on *your* bookshelves, this attractively bound, sturdy 576-page volume is a must and a bargain. (Hodder & Stoughton, 25s.)

Captain Merton Heimrich of the New York State Police plods on his thorough and painstaking way in the pages of **The Distant Clue**.

Two old men are found shot dead. One of them had been working on a history of local families. Does the explanation for their deaths lie in this?

The latest mystery novel by **Francis Richards** will surely take a high place on the reading lists of discerning whodunit fans. (John Long, 13s. 6d.)

I did not enjoy reading **A Scream in the Sky** by **Neil McCallum**. This is a first-person novel narrated in the words of a professor of criminology, Peter Paterson. The Professor's manner borders on pretentiousness all too often, which for me makes his story indigestible.

I skip-read chapter after chapter and still found the going slow as Paterson (his gimmick's a .303 rifle disguised as a walking-stick) hunted down opium thieves in lieu of visiting the Edinburgh Festival. The style

in several places reminded me of a women's magazine columnist, and that is just not right for a crime thriller. (Cassell, 16s.)

Hodder issue the first paperback editions of *Take a Body* by Michael Halliday and *The Baron Goes East* by Anthony Morton; two good standard models which originally came off the amazing Creasey assembly line in the early fifties.

The Halliday novel is the story of two brothers and their crime writer father who become involved in a deep plot of robbery, blackmail, kidnap and murder.

The Baron's trip east is to Bombay where fifty-one blue diamonds lead the ex-cracksman detective into mystery and danger, as unknown enemies warn him to go home or else . . . (Hodder & Stoughton, 2s. 6d. each.)

Rightly or wrongly, the newspaper world, like show business, has Glamour.

Consequently, newspapers have always made fine backgrounds to stories, novels, films and television programmes. The journalist is seen as a hard-living live-wire adventurer and in this mould becomes an ideal hero of escapist fiction.

As literary editor of the *Cape Times*, Peter Harris not surprisingly has produced a very good first crime novel in *Letters of Discredit*. The newspaper background and news men characters are convincing in the way that so surely wins acclaim for new writers in the sixties, and the South African scene not only comes across well topographically, but is drawn with just the right amount of that social-political detail which holds so much interest today for the thoughtful British reader.

Geoff Brooks, a Cape Town sub-editor temporarily handling his paper's letters column, makes it his business to investigate the mysterious disappearance of a crime reporter colleague. He quickly finds a suspicious link between the missing man and a reader's letter signed "Errant Wife". Blackmail enters into the picture . . .

Peter Harris's writing is of the same school as that by EWMM's Arthur Kent. It is punchy and earthy, and never a word is wasted. I look forward to Mr. Harris's next novel. (John Long, 13s. 6d.)

---

## *Drop us a line . . .*

We should like to hear from our readers. Comments, criticisms, queries, requests - please do not hesitate to write to the Editor, Edgar Wallace Mystery Magazine, Edgar Wallace Magazines Ltd., 4, Bradmore Road, Oxford.

# LETTERS

---

## FORMIDABLE TEAM

Dear Sir,

I am very happy to learn that a successful effort has been made to cater for our taste, and welcome the new crime fiction magazine. I assure you of very wide readership in this part of the world. There is no doubt that you have a formidable team of writers with a long history of good writing. They are capable of making the best out of the new crime series and I harbour no doubt concerning your ability to deliver the goods.

I am glad you have made space available for readers' letters. If readers will make use of it to express their opinions, it will surely contribute to the progress of the magazine.

Thank you for your initiative.

*Mr. L. A. Adebisi, 49 Onitana Road, Surulere, New Lagos, Nigeria.*

## SUGGESTIONS

Dear Sir,

Mr. John Goode's letter in EWMM No. 3 had some interesting points in it. I am not qualified to comment on all of his remarks, but I would support him in his suggestion that you feature some Sanders stories.

In Margaret Lane's book on Edgar Wallace, published in 1938, mention is made of his autobiography, *People* (1926). Extracts from this would possibly interest readers of the magazine.

A society I would like to contact is the Sherlock Holmes Society of London. Please can any reader help?

*Mr. J. Best, 131 Dane Road, Stoke, Coventry, Warwickshire.*

## GLAMOUR

Dear Sir,

You have an excellent little band of authors, so the new magazine is not lacking in talent of top quality. I have read many of Jacques Penderower's articles in the glamour magazine, *Parade*, and he is a most interesting author.

It seems that in these days any magazine must be given glamour to survive. In so far as it is possible to combine it with the contents of a good-class crime novel, this, I think, must be done, otherwise I am very dubious about its survival.

*Mr. Walter Webb, 84 Park Road, Sparkhill, Birmingham 11.*

Thank you for your interesting advice, Mr. Webb. Assuming a magazine's contents please its readers, distribution, display and promotion are probably the deciding factors in its survival.

Dear Sir,

I do not think you could have been expected to put this magazine over without extensive advertising.

*Mr. J. T. Lang, Flat 3, 60 The Drive, Hove 3, Sussex.*

#### AN EDITOR'S OPINION

Dear Sir,

I find EWMM interesting and well-produced. I think you are on to a good thing, even though the fiction market is crowded.

Edgar Wallace still wears very well; his stories have something about them that makes one want to read them. I wish you the best of luck with EWMM and feel certain it will be a success.

*Mr. Michael Harman, Editor, "Criminology".*

#### A PUBLISHER'S OPINION

Dear Sir,

EWMM is a nice-looking job of production and I hope that your initial sales figures are encouraging.

*Mr. Gerald Austin, Director, John Long Ltd.*

#### THE BEST

Dear Sir,

Your magazine has the best appearance of publications of its type, and I hope it achieves the success it obviously so richly deserves. There is no doubt that it makes an important addition to the field.

Incidentally, I have yet to see a copy of the magazine on a shop counter or bookstall in this area.

*Miss Jean Cross, 16 Balmoral Road, Freezywater, Enfield, Middlesex.*

#### FRUTTLess SEARCH

Dear Sir,

To date I have been unable to secure a copy of your magazine in this area.

*Mr. Hugh Munro, Ealasaid, 21 Eglinton Street, Saltcoats, Ayrshire.*

#### NO EWMM IN THIS CITY

Dear Sir,

I enquired for EWMM at a dozen newsagents over a five-mile radius, but drew a blank. Only one had even heard of it. It is a bad thing that a city of half-a-million people so far has been denied a glimpse of this splendid magazine.

*Mr. T. H. Martin, 3 Colebrook Road, Kingswood, Bristol.*



# DON'T MISS!

You can make sure of obtaining your monthly copy of **EDGAR WALLACE MYSTERY MAGAZINE** either by taking out a subscription or by placing a firm order with your usual newsagent.

Don't miss next month's issue - fill in one of these two forms without delay!

A year's subscription (12 issues) costs 36/-; a half-year's (6 issues), 18/-. Remittance should be included with order.

**To the Publisher:**

Please send **EDGAR WALLACE MYSTERY MAGAZINE** for twelve/six months to:

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

(Please write in block letters)

Commence with Issue No. ....

Subscription Dept., Edgar Wallace Magazines Ltd., 4 Bradmore Road, Oxford.

**To the Newsagent:**

Please obtain and hold/deliver for me every month **EDGAR WALLACE MYSTERY MAGAZINE**.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

(Please write in block letters)

**EDGAR WALLACE MYSTERY MAGAZINE** is distributed by Representation Services, 1 Tressillian Road, London, S.E.4.

