EDGAR WALLACE
mystery magazine

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VOLUME 2
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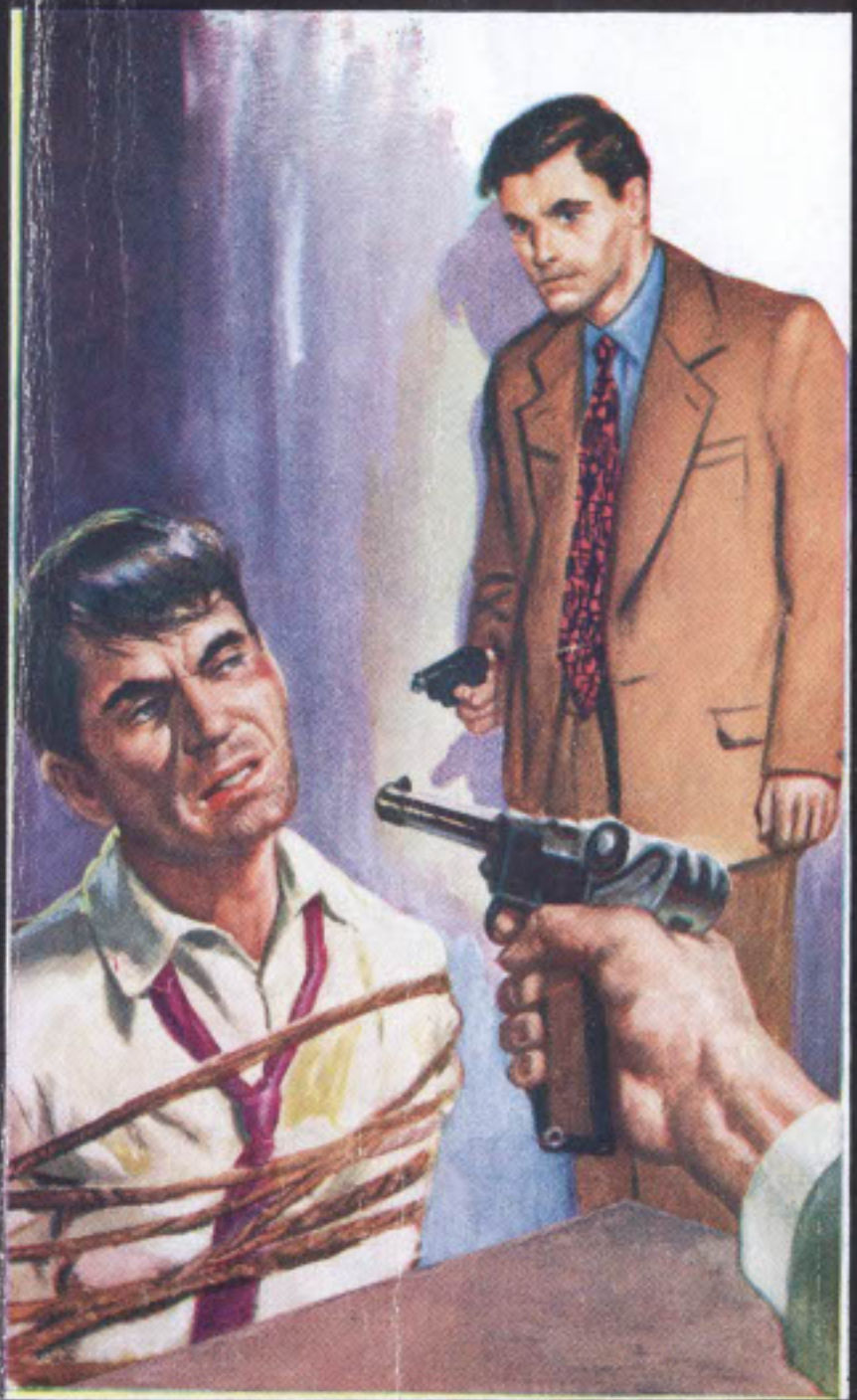
NUMBER 7

EDGAR WALLACE
★
MICHAEL GILBERT
★
NIGEL MORLAND
★
CHARLES FRANKLIN
★
AND MANY OTHER TOP WRITERS
★
A *NEW* COMPETITION



Edgar Wallace

Born London, 1875
Died Hollywood, 1932

EDGAR WALLACE

Mystery Magazine

Vol. II No. 7 February, 1965

Mystery, Crime, and Detection for the Aficionado

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NIGEL MORLAND, *Editor.*

NEW BROOMS tend to sweep clean, and in the frenzy of their zealous efficiency everything must be changed. The old order is dead – long live the new order, good, bad, or indifferent!

Moderate men with an eye for the greatest enjoyment of the greatest number generally achieve a reasonable compromise, making good use of an existing pattern. But that pattern comes to no harm if allied with brighter material and fresh ideas.

Briefly

Another thing, it is *EWMM*'s contention – which is obvious enough – that the aficionado of crime fiction is an adult, a reader who always wants good stories by good writers. Philip Guedalla was indeed correct when he stated that "the detective story is the recreation of noble minds".

In recent years detective fiction has grown up. Admitted there is still the wild thriller or the violent bang-them-all-on-the-head yarn to be met with, but in general standards have become very high.

The great names are truly great and, most of them, stylists as fine as anything to be found in modern "straight" fiction. And even if it is still the fashion in some very square circles to deride the crime novel, it remains a product of profound skill and intelligence. Let it never be forgotten that many of the new "straight" writers who come to excite the world with ideas but minute sales are given birth, and financially sustained, by a publisher's steady and profitable crime story sales.

Such stories are the miracle plays of these times where, nearly always, virtue triumphs and vice bites the dust. Trite, false, *also* square – depending on the audience – that moral is still one worth having. And, come to that, a liking for crime in the abstract, for grisly murders, for tremendous rascalities, has always been a trait peculiar to the peaceful, law-abiding Anglo-Saxon.

Thus, *EWMM* aims at giving the best possible material from every possible source. It aims, too, at belonging to the world we live in and to that end wants to make its readers articulate by seeking their letters and publishing those with a general appeal, whether for or against editorial views.

Crime does not pay, it has been said, but it seldom bores the innocent bystander.

Edgar Wallace

had a unique understanding of the small Cockney crook. This warm-hearted story is one of his best

the fall of sentimental simpson

ACCORDING TO certain signs, the Amateur Detective thought his French window had been forced by a left-handed man who wore square-toed boots, the muddy print of the latter against the enamel of the door seemed to prove this beyond doubt. The direction of the knife-cuts in the putty about the window-glass supported the left-handed view.

Another point:

Only a left-handed man would have thought of sawing through the left fold of the shutter.

The occupier of Wisteria Lodge explained all this to the real detective, who sat stolidly on the other side of the table in the occupier's dining-room at three o'clock in the morning, listening to the interesting hypothesis.

"I think if you look for a left-handed man with square-toed boots – or they may be shoes," said the householder quietly, even gently, "you will discover the robber".

"Ah," said the real detective, and swallowed his whisky deliberately.

"The curious thing about the burglary is this," the sufferer went on, "that although my cash-box was opened and contained over four hundred pounds, the money was untouched. The little tray on top had not been even lifted out. My dear wife kept a lock of hair of her pet poodle, Fifi – the poor little dear was poisoned last year by those horrible people at The Limes. I'm sure they did it – "

"What about this lock of hair?" asked the detective, suddenly interested.

"It was damp, quite damp," explained the householder. "Now, as I say, my theory is that the man wore square-toed boots and a mackintosh. He was undoubtedly left-handed."

"I see," said the real detective.

Then he went forth and took Sentimental Simpson out of his bed, not because he wore square-toed shoes (nor was he left-handed), but because there were certain tell-tale indications which pointed unmistakably to one man.

Mr. Simpson came blinking into the passage. He wore a shirt, and an appearance of profound surprise.

"Hullo, Mr. Button," he said. "Lor' bless me, you gave me quite a start. I went to bed early tonight with the toothache, an' when I heard you knock I says to myself – "

"Get your trousers on," said Detective-Sergeant Button.

Simpson hesitated for just a fraction of a second and then retired to his sleeping apartment. Mr. Button bent his head and listened attentively for the sound of a stealthily opened window.

But Simpson did not run.

"And your coat and shoes," said Button testily. "I'm surprised at you, Simpson – you never gave me this trouble before."

Simpson accepted the reproach with amazement.

"You don't mean to tell me that you want me?" he said incredulously, and added that if heaven in its anger deprived him of his life at that very moment, and on the spot, which he indicated with a grimy forefinger, he had been in bed since a quarter to ten.

"Don't let us have an argument," pleaded Mr. Button, and accompanied his guest to the police station.

On the day of the trial, whilst he was waiting in the corridor to go up the flight of stairs that leads to the dock, Simpson saw his captor.

"Mr. Button," he said, "I hope there is no ill-feeling between you and me?"

"None whatever, Simpson."

"I don't think you are going to get a conviction," said Simpson thoughtfully. He was a round-faced, small-eyed man with a gentle voice, and when he looked thoughtful his eyes had the appearance of having retreated a little farther into his head. "I bear no ill-will to you, Mr. Button – you've got your business and I've got mine. But who was the nose?"

Mr. Button shook his head. Anyway, the informer is a sacred

being; and in this case there was, unfortunately, no informer. Therefore, there was a double reason for his reticence.

"Now what is the good of being unreasonable?" he said reprovingly. "You ought to know better than to ask me a question like that."

"But what made you think it was me?" persisted Simpson, and the sergeant looked at him.

"Who got upset over a lock of hair?" he asked significantly, and the eyes of his prisoner grew moist.

"Hair was always a weakness of mine," he said, with a catch in his voice. "A relic of what you might call a loved one . . . somebody who has passed, Mr. Button, to . . . to the great beyond (if you'll forgive the expression). It sort of brings a . . . well, we've all got our feelings."

"We have," admitted Button kindly; "and talking about feelings, Simpson, what are my feelings going to be if I get a ticking off from the judge for bringing you up without sufficient evidence? I don't think you'll escape, mind you, but you know what juries are! Now, what about making a nice little statement? Just own up that you 'broke and entered' and I'll go into the box and say a good word for you. You don't want to make *me* look silly, do you?"

"I don't," confessed Simpson; "at the same time, I don't want to make myself look silly by owning up to a crime which, in a manner of speaking, is abhorrent to my nature."

"You read too many books," said his captor unpleasantly; "that's where you get all those crack-jaw words from. Think of what my poor wife will say if I get it in the neck from the judge . . . it'll break her heart . . ."

"Don't," gulped Mr. Simpson. "Don't do it . . . I can't stand it, Mr. Button."

*

What he might have done had the conversation been protracted is a matter for speculation. At that moment the warders haled him up the steps leading to the dock.

And such was the weakness of the evidence against him that the jury found him not guilty without leaving the box.

"I cannot congratulate the police on the conduct of this case," said the judge severely, and Simpson, looking upon the crestfallen face of Sergeant Button, thought of Mrs. Button's broken heart, and had to be assisted from the dock.

So Mr. Simpson went back to his little room in Castel Street. He had an uncomfortable feeling that he had failed a friend in the hour of his need, and strove vainly to banish from his mind the thought of the shattered harmony of Detective Button's household.

It drew him just a little farther from contact with the world in which he lived, for he was not a popular partner and had few friends. One by one they had fallen away in consequence of his degrading weakness. Lew Saffron, who had openly and publicly stated at the Nine Crowns that Simpson was the greatest artist that had ever smashed a safe. And had as publicly challenged the American lot to better Mr. Simpson's work in connection with the unauthorized opening of Epstein's Jewellery Emporium, but even Lew eventually dropped him after a disastrous partnership.

"It would have been a success and we'd have got away with the finest parcel of stones that ever was taken in one haul," he said, relative to a certain Hatton Garden job which he had worked with Simpson; "but what happened? He got the safe open and I was downstairs, watching the street for the copper, expecting him to come down with the stuff. I waited for ten minutes and then went up, and what did I see? This blank, blank Simpson sitting on the blank, blank floor, and crying his blank, blank eyes out over some old love-letters that Van Voss kept in his safe! Letters from a blank, blank typist that Van Voss had been in love with. He said they touched him to the core. He wanted to go and kill Van Voss, and by the time I'd got him quiet the street was full of law . . . we got away over the roof . . . no more Simpson for me, thank you!"

Mr. Simpson sighed as he realized his lonely state. Nevertheless his afternoon was not unprofitably spent, for there were six more chapters of *The Old Curiosity Shop* to be read before, red-eyed, he returned the book to the public library which he patronized.

He had an appointment that evening with Charles Valentino, keeper of a bar at Kennington and a man of some standing in the world-beneath-the-world.

He was a tall man, fattish of figure heavy and deliberate of speech. He greeted Mr. Simpson reproachfully and in his heaviest manner.

"What's this I hear about the job you did, Simpson? I couldn't believe my eyes when I read it in the newspaper. Got acquitted, too! You ought to have had ten years!"

Mr. Simpson looked uncomfortable.

"Left four hundred and thirty pounds in notes in a box you had opened, that wasn't even locked? What's the matter with you, Simpson?"

Charles Valentino's tone was one of amazement, incredulity and admonishment.

"I can't 'elp it, Mr. Valentino." Tears were in Sentimental Simpson's eyes. "When I saw that lock of 'air on the tray and thought perhaps that it was a lock of the 'air of 'is mother, treasured, so to speak – "

Here Mr. Simpson's voice failed him, and he had to swallow before he continued:

"It's my weakness, Mr. Valentino; I just couldn't go any farther."

Mr. Valentino puffed thoughtfully at his cigar.

"You owe me seventy pounds; I suppose you know that?" he asked unpleasantly. "Seventy pounds is seventy pounds."

Simpson nodded.

"It cost me thirty pounds for a mouthpiece," Valentino continued, and by mouthpiece he referred to the advocate who had pleaded Simpson's cause; "twenty-five pounds for that new lot of tools I got you, when you came out of stir last May; ten pounds I lent you to do that Manchester job, which you never paid me back – the so-called jewellery you brought down was all Birmingham stuff, nine carat, and not worth the freight charges – and here you had a chance of getting real money . . . well, I'm surprised at you, that's all I can say, Simpson."

Simpson shook his head unhappily.

Mr. Valentino, thinking that perhaps he had gone as far as was necessary, beckoned the Italian waiter – the conference took place at a little bar in Soho – and asked his companion:

"What will you have, Simpson?"

"Gin," said the wretched Simpson.

"Gin goes with tears." Mr. Valentino was firm. "Have a more manly drink."

"Beer," corrected Simpson despondently.

"Now I'll tell you what it is," said Mr. Valentino, when their needs had been satisfied. "Things can't go on as they are going. I am a commercial man, and I've got to make money. I don't mind taking a risk when there's loot at the end of it, but I tell you, Simpson, straight, that I'm going to chuck it unless some of you hooks pay more attention to business. Why," he went on indignantly, "in the old days I never had this kind of trouble with you

boys! Willie Topple never gave me, what I might term, a moment's uneasiness."

It was always serious when Mr. Valentino dragged Willie Topple from his grave in Exeter Gaol and set him up as a model of industry. Sentimental Simpson moved uncomfortably in his velvet chair.

"Willie was always on the spot, and if he did a job, there was the stuff all nicely packed up," said Mr. Valentino reminiscently. "He'd just step into the saloon bar, order a drink, and shove the stuff across the counter. 'You might keep this box of chocolates for me, Mr. Valentino,' that's what he'd say, and there it was, every article wrapped in tissue paper. I used to compare them with the list published in the police lists, and never once did Willie deliver short."

He sighed.

"Times have changed," he added bitterly. "Some of you boys have got so careless that my heart's in me mouth every time a split strolls into the bar. And what do I get out of it? Why, Willie Topple drew seventeen hundred pounds commission from me in one year – you owe me seventy!"

"I admit it's a risk, being a fence – " began Mr. Simpson.

"A what?" said the other sharply. "What was that word you used, Simpson?"

Mr. Simpson was silent.

"Never use that expression to me. A fence! Do you mean a receiver of stolen property? I *mind* things for people. I take a few articles, so to speak, in pawn for my customers. I'm surprised at you, Simpson."

He did not wait for Mr. Simpson to express his contrition, but bending forward over the table, lowered his voice until it was little more than a rumble of subterranean sound.

"There's a place in Park Crescent, No. 176," he said deliberately. "That's the very job for you, Simpson. Next Sunday night is the best time, because there will only be the kid in the house. There's lashings of jewellery, pearl necklaces, diamond brooches, and the father and mother are away at Brighton. They're going to a wedding. I've had the house cased, a window-cleaner it was, and he says all the stuff is kept in a little safe under the mother's bed. The best time is after eleven. They go to bed early . . . and a pantry window that you can reach from the back of the house, only a wall to climb, and that's in a mews. Now, what do you say, Simpson?"

Mr. Simpson scratched his chin.

"I'll 'ave a look round," he said cautiously. "I don't take much notice of these window-cleaners. One put me on to the job at Purley – "

"Let bygones be bygones," said Mr. Valentino. "I know all about that Purley business. You'd have made a profit if your dam' curiosity hadn't made you stop to read the funeral cards in the cook's bedroom. And after we'd got the cook called away to the north so that you should have no trouble and an empty house to work in! The question is, will you do this, or shall I put Harry Welting on to it? He is not as good a man as you, I admit, though he hasn't your failings."

"I'll do it," said Mr. Simpson, and the other nodded approvingly.

"If a fiver is any good to you . . .?" he said.

"It will be a lot of good to me," said Mr. Simpson fervently, and the money was passed.

*

It was midnight on the 26th June, and it was raining – according to Mr. Simpson's extravagant description – cats and dogs, when he turned into Park Mews, a deserted and glooomy thoroughfare devoted to the storage of mechanical vehicles. He had marked the little gate in the wall by daylight. The wall itself was eight feet in height and surmounted by spikes. Mr. Simpson favoured walls so guarded. The spikes, if they were not too old, served to attach the light rope he carried. In two minutes he was over the wall and was working scientifically at the pantry window. Ten minutes afterwards he was hanging up his wet mackintosh in the hall. He paused only to slip back the bolts of the door, unfasten the chain, and turn the key softly, before he mounted the thickiy carpeted stairs.

The house was in darkness. Only the slow tick of the hall clock broke the complete stillness, and Mr. Simpson walked up the stairs, keeping time to the clock, so that any accidental creak he made might be confounded by a listener with the rhythmic noise of the time-piece.

The first bedroom which he entered was without occupant. He gathered from the richness of the furnishings that this was the room occupied by the father and mother now participating in the Brighton festivities.

He made a thorough and professional examination of the

dressing-table, found and pocketed a small diamond brooch of no enormous value, choked at the silver-framed picture of a little girl that stood upon the dressing-table, but crushed down his emotions ruthlessly.

The second bedroom was less ornate, and like the other, untenanted. Here he drew blank. It was evidently a room reserved for visitors; the dressing-table was empty as also was the wardrobe. Then he remembered and went back to the room he had searched and flashed his torch under the bed. There was no sign of a safe. It may be in the third room, thought Mr. Simpson, and turned the handle of the door softly. He knew, the moment he stepped inside, that the big four-poster bed he could dimly see was occupied. He could hear the regular breathing of the sleeper and for a second hesitated, then stepping forward carefully, he moved to the side of the bed, listening again.

Yes, the breathing was regular. He dare not put his lamp upon the sleeper. This must be the child's room, he guessed, and contented himself with stooping and showing a beam of light beneath the bed. He gasped. There was the 'safe'! A squat, steel box. He put out the light and laid the torch gently upon the floor, then groping beneath the bed, he gripped the box and slid it toward him. It was very heavy, but not too heavy to carry.

Drawing the treasure clear of the bed, he slipped his torch in his pocket and lifted the box. If it had been the safe he had expected, his success would have been impossible of achievement. As it was, the weight of this repository taxed his strength. Presently he had it well gripped and began a slow retreat. He was half-way across the room when there was a click, and the room was flooded with light. In his natural agitation the box slipped from his fingers; he made a wild grab to recover his hold, and did succeed in putting it down without noise, but no more. And then he turned open-mouthed to the child who was watching him curiously from the bed.

Never in his life had Sentimental Simpson seen a child so ethereal in her loveliness. A mass of golden hair was tied back by a blue ribbon, and the big eyes that were fixed on him showed neither fear nor alarm. She sat up in bed, her thin white hands clasping the knees doubled beneath the coverlet, an interested and not unamused spectator of Mr. Simpson's embarrassment.

"Good evening, Mr. Burglar," she said softly, and smiled.

Simpson swallowed something.

"Good evening, miss," he said huskily. "I 'ope I 'aven't come

into the wrong 'ouse. A friend of mine told me to call and get a box 'e 'ad forgotten – "

"You're a burglar," she said, nodding wisely; "of course you're a burglar. I am awfully glad to see you. I have always wanted to meet a burglar."

Mr. Simpson, a prey to various emotions, could think of no suitable reply. He looked down at the box and he looked at the child; and then he blinked furiously.

"Come and sit here," she pointed to a chair by the side of the bed.

The dazed burglar obeyed.

"How long have you been a burglar?" she demanded.

"Oh, quite a long time, miss," said Mr. Simpson weakly.

"You should not have said that – you should have said that this was your first crime," she said. "When you were a little boy, were you a burglar?"

"No, miss," said the miserable Simpson.

"Didn't your mother ever tell you that you mustn't be a burglar?" asked the child, and Simpson broke down.

"My poor old mother!" he sobbed.

It is true to say that in her lifetime the late Mrs. Simpson had evoked no extravagant expressions of affection from her children, who had been rescued from her tender care at an early age and had been educated at the ratepayers' expense. But the word "mother" always affected Mr. Simpson that way.

"Poor man," said the child tenderly. She reached out her hand and laid it upon Mr. Simpson's bowed head. "Do your little children know that you are a burglar?" she asked.

"No, miss," sobbed Simpson.

He had no little children. He had never been married, but any reference to his children always brought a lump into his throat. By spiritual adoption he had secured quite a large family. Some times, in periods of temporary retirement from the activities and competition of life, he had brooded in his cell, his head in his hands, on how his darling little Joan would miss her daddy, and had in consequence enjoyed the most exquisite of mental tortures.

"Are you a burglar because you are hungry?"

Mr. Simpson nodded. He could not trust himself to speak.

"You should say – 'I'm starving, miss ' " she said gently. "Are you starving?"

Mr. Simpson nodded again.

"Poor burglar!"

Again her hand caressed his head, and now he could not restrain himself any more. He fell on his knees by the side of the bed and, burying his head in his arms, his shoulders heaved.

He heard her slip out of bed on the other side and the shuffle of her slippered feet as she crossed the room.

"I am going to get you some food, Mr. Burglar," she said softly.

*

All Mr. Simpson's ill spent life passed before his anguished eyes as he waited. He would reform, he swore. He would live an honest life. The influence of this sweet, innocent child should bear its fruit. Dear little soul, he thought, as he mopped his tear-stained face, she was down there in that dark, cold kitchen, getting him food. How brave she was! It was a long time before she came back bearing a tray that was all too heavy for her frail figure to support. He took it from her hands reverently and laid it on the table.

She was wearing a blue silk dressing gown that emphasized the purity of her delicate skin. He could only look at her in awe and wonder.

"You must eat, Mr. Burglar," she said gently.

"I couldn't eat a mouthful, miss," he protested, tearfully. "What you said to me has so upset me, miss, that if I eat a crumb, it will choke me."

He did not mention, perhaps he had forgotten, that an hour previous he had supped to repletion. She seemed to understand, and sat down on the edge of the bed, her grave eyes watching him.

"You must tell me about yourself," she said, "I should like to know about you, so that I can pray for you, Mr. Burglar."

"Don't, miss!" blubbered Mr. Simpson. "Don't do it! I can't stand it! I have been a terrible man. I used to be a lob crawler once. You don't know what a lob crawler is? I used to pinch tills. And then I used to do ladder work. You know, miss, I put ladders up against the windows whilst the family was in the dining-room and got away with the stuff. And then I did that job at Hoxton, the fur burglary. There was a lot about it in the papers – me and a fellow named Moses. He was a Hebrew gentleman," he added unnecessarily.

The girl nodded.

"But I am going to give it up, though, miss," said Simpson

huskily. "I am going to chuck Valentino, and if I owe him seventy pounds, why, I'll pay him out of the money I earn honestly."

"Who is Valentino?"

"He's a fence, miss; you wouldn't know what a fence is. He keeps the Bottle and Glass public house down Atherby Road, Kennington."

"Poor man," she said, shaking her head. "Poor burglar, I am so sorry for you."

Mr. Simpson choked.

"I think I'll go, miss, if you don't mind."

She nodded and held out her hand.

He took it in his and kissed it. He had seen such things done in films. Yet it was with a lightened heart, and with a knowledge of a great burden of crime and sin rolled away from his conscience that he walked down the stairs, his head erect, charged with a high purpose. He opened the door and walked out, literally and figuratively into the arms of Inspector John Coleman, X-Division; Sergeant Arthur John Welby of X-Division; and Detective-Sergeant Charles John Smith, also of X-Division.

"Bless my heart and soul," said the inspector, "if it isn't Simpson!"

Mr. Simpson said nothing for a moment, then:

"I have been visiting a friend."

"And now you are coming to stay with us. What a weekend you *are* having!" said Sergeant Smith.

*

At four o'clock in the morning, Mr. Simpson stirred uneasily on his wooden bed. A voice had disturbed him; it was a loud and an aggressive voice, and it came from the corridor outside his cell. He heard the click and clash of a turning lock.

"So far as I'm concerned," said the voice, "I'm a perfectly innocent man, and if any person has made a statement derogatory to my good name, I'll have the law on him, if there *is* a law."

"Oh, there's a law all right," said the voice of Detective Smith. "In you go, Valentino," and then the door was slammed.

Mr. Simpson sat up and took notice.

Valentino!

The next morning when he was conducted by the Assistant Gaoler to perform his ablutions, he caught a glimpse of that

respectable licensed victualler. It was the merest glimpse, for the grating in the cell-door is not a large one, but he heard Mr. Valentino's exclamation of annoyance, and when he returned, that worthy man hissed at him:

"So you're the nose, are you, Simpson, you dirty dog!"

"Don't say it, Mr. Valentino," said Simpson brokenly, for it hurt him that any man should think him guilty of so despicable an action.

That their crimes were associated was proved when they stepped into the dock together, with policemen between them – the constabulary having been inserted for the sake of peace and quietness. Yet, despite their position, Mr. Simpson was by no means depressed. His heart sang a song of joy at his reformation. Perhaps he would see the girl, that angel child, again; that was all he hoped.

Looking round the court eagerly, a wave of joy swept through his being, for he had seen her. That was enough. He would serve whatever sentence was passed, and tears of happiness fell from his eyes and splashed on the steel rail of the dock. The Assistant Gaoler thoughtfully wiped them off. Rust spots are very difficult to eradicate, unless they are dealt with immediately.

And then to his delight she came forward. A sweet figure of childhood, she seemed, as she stood in the witness stand. Her eyes rested on him for a second and she smiled . . .

"If you want to cry, cry on the floor!" hissed the Assistant Gaoler, and rubbed the rail savagely with his handkerchief.

A lawyer rose in the body of the court.

"Your name is Marie Wilson?" he said.

"Yes, sir," she replied in a voice of such pure harmony that a thrill ran through Simpson's system.

"You are professionally known as 'Baby Bellingham'?"

"Yes, sir," said the child.

"And you are at present engaged at the Hilarity Theatre in a play called *The Child and the Burglar*?"

"Yes, sir," she answered, with a proud glance at the dazzled Simpson.

"And I think I am stating the fact," said the lawyer, "that your experience last night was practically a repetition of the action of your play?"

"Yes, sir," said the child, "except that he wouldn't say his lines. I did try hard to make him."

The magistrate was looking at a paper on his desk.

"I see there is a report of this occurrence in this morning's newspaper," he said, and read the headline: " 'Child actress reduces hardened burglar to tears by her artistry'."

Miss Wilson nodded gravely.

"After I had gone downstairs to get him his supper and had rung up the police on the telephone," she said, "I also rang up my press agent. My father says that I must always ring up my press agent. Father says that two lines on the news pages are wôrth two columns amongst the advertisements. Father says – "

*

It was ten months after this when Mr. Simpson and Mr. Valentino met. They were loading coke into a large cart drawn by a famous old horse which is the pride of Dartmoor Gaol. The warder in charge of the party was at a sufficient distance to allow a free interchange of courtesies.

"And when I get out," said Mr. Valentino, tremulous with wrath, "I am going to make Kennington too hot to hold you, Simpson. A chicken-hearted fellow like you oughtn't to be in the business. To think that a respectable tradesman should be herded with common felons because a babbling, bat-eyed hook gets sloppy over a kid and gives away his friends – an actress, too . . . stringing you along, you poor turnip! Doing her play with you as the hero! My God, you're a disgrace to the profession!"

But Simpson was standing erect, leaning on his shovel and staring across the yard.

In the angle of two high walls was a mound of loose earth which had been brought in to treat the governor's garden, and on the face of the dun-coloured heap were vivid green shoots tipped with blue; they had come, it seemed, in a night, for this was the month of early spring.

"Bluebells!" quavered Mr. Simpson. His lip trembled and he wiped his eyes with the cuff of his coat.

Bluebells always made Mr. Simpson cry.

THE TEA PARTY

CHARLES FRANKLIN

A deft fictional reconstruction, immensely readable. If memory does not serve you well, read to the end . . .

WHEN HE looked at Kate's waxen image he was back again at that memorable tea party all those years ago, once more he heard her rich Irish voice that was always like music to the Cockney in him; he remembered how excited, even tense, she was that afternoon in Rose Gardens. She well had reason to be.

Kate was more like an aunt, or an elder sister to him then, a gangling 16. His mother and father had always liked her. Even though she had been to prison for stealing, her friends found that they could trust her, that she was kind and friendly.

Those were hard days just before the old Queen's Jubilee, and the Porters could not afford to be too fussy. His father and mother always made excuses for Kate, saying she had been born in famine times in Ireland when people were too hungry to know the difference between right and wrong. Her early years there had accustomed her to the grim side of life. What may have horrified the nice-minded would seem commonplace to Kate.

Bob had especial reason to remember her kindness, for when his father was away on the railway, and both he and his mother were down with the fever, Kate nursed them for weeks, day and night, with patience and devotion.

"You never know about people," his mother had said long afterwards. "And you should never judge."

*

Kate turned up at Rose Gardens that March afternoon in a splendid gown of green, wearing a gold watch and chain and carrying a black shopping bag made of American cloth.

She had always been as poor as a churchmouse, and the Porters looked at her in astonishment.

"Why, Kate! You look every inch a lady!" exclaimed Bob's mother.

"And sure enough that's how I feel," she answered.

"Bob, take Kate's bag," said Mrs. Porter.

But Kate would not let Bob touch it. She kept the bag in her hand. It obviously contained something precious.

Mrs. Porter pressed Kate to explain her sudden rise to opulence.

"Didn't I tell you about my aunt in Richmond?" asked Kate.

"No – never."

"To be sure I did. You must have forgotten. Well, she died, God rest her soul." Kate crossed herself. "And she left me her nice house and the contents."

"Well, that's a stroke of luck. No more than you deserve, Kate. You've had a hard life."

It was indeed a pleasant, even merry tea party, and one that the Porters were to remember for as long as they lived – remember with a shiver of horror and awe. Awe particularly of Kate.

How *could* she? And yet there was something sublime about her nerve and coolness, so that the horror of it was almost lost in long retrospect. The whole thing had passed into legend – a legend of which he was a living part.

And now he was the only one left who had been at that tea party all those years ago in that little house at Hammersmith.

He could remember it as though it was yesterday – the smell of the hot muffins, his father poking the glowing fire in the range, his mother smiling at Kate and telling her she looked like a duchess, and Kate preening herself in her unaccustomed finery and filling the room with her rich Irish accents and laughing quite a lot. She kept her shopping bag close to her feet underneath the table.

"I want to sell all the stuff in the house," she said to Bob's father. "The furniture, carpets, bed linen. Everything."

"Why, Kate, what will you have to sleep on?" asked Mrs. Porter.

"Faith, I'm going back home to Ireland. That's why I'm selling up."

"Back to the old country, eh?" said Mrs. Porter. "Can't

say I blame you, Kate. England hasn't treated you so good."

"I'm not saying it's not as much my fault," admitted Kate. "I haven't led the good life. Still, I'm not one to forget my friends."

"Anyway, I think I know someone who'll be interested in buying your things," said Bob's father.

And he was as good as his word. He introduced her to a publican named John Church, as a consequence of which came Kate's downfall.

*

It was dark when Kate went, and Bob was deputed to accompany her to Richmond and carry her bag – that mysterious bag which was curiously heavy, and which she only reluctantly allowed him to carry.

To Bob it was little more than a duty, although he liked Kate, who had an effect upon him, the same as she had on everyone else.

It was difficult to analyse the effect she had. He thought afterwards that it was more than her strange brown eyes, with that touch of wildness in them, and her beguiling accent. It was some sort of witchcraft perhaps, for there were certainly witches in Ireland. Kate had always told him so.

At Hammersmith Bridge she told Bob to wait for her, as she had to go and see a friend in Barnes and would only be a few minutes. She took the shopping bag with her and firmly refused Bob's offer to carry it any farther.

Kate was back in less time than it would have taken her to get to Barnes, and without the mysterious bag.

She had met her friend, she said, the other side of the bridge. That had saved her a walk.

It was, he had supposed, a man friend, which was why Bob's company was not required. He was old enough to be aware that men very often gave Kate those looks.

She was in a good humour now and as Bob accompanied her to her new home at Richmond, she told him stories about the devils of Kerry.

The next time he saw her was in court, when he had to give evidence.

They called Kate a ghoul and a fiend incarnate, a female Jack the Ripper, and they put her waxen likeness in the Chamber of Horrors.

The house at Richmond was not hers, but belonged to her mistress, old Mrs. Thomas, whom Kate had killed during a violent quarrel and whose body she had dismembered. It was through selling the contents of the house to John Church that she was found out.

Well, Kate might have been all those things they said she was. He supposed she must have been, to have done what she did.

But he could not forget the way she had nursed him and his mother that time when they were down with the fever.

He looked at Kate's waxen image once more, remembering the tea party – that unforgettable tea party. The way she sat there at the table, preening herself in her splendid clothes, with the black shopping bag of hers under the table. The thought of her nerve, her audacity, her cold-bloodedness even now, after all these years, made his flesh creep.

For that shopping bag had later been found in one of the reservoirs on the other side of Hammersmith Bridge. Inside it was Mrs. Thomas' head.

There is good and bad in all of us, his mother had said. Only in some of us the bad is very bad indeed.

. . . and see if you recalled her. She was, as Charles Franklin writes, a thoroughly bad lot, who deserved her death by hanging at Wandsworth Prison, July 29, 1879. But not a few people have admitted a fondness for her because she was so unrepentantly wicked, yet Kate Webster had a definitely likeable streak . . .

Lord Denning, Master of the Rolls, named the newspaper reporter as 'the watchdog of justice', and added:

"In darkness and secrecy, justice can have no place. When a judge sits on a case he himself is on trial to see that he does his work properly.

"If there is any misconduct on the part of the judge, any bias or prejudice, there is a reporter to keep an eye on him. If there is any unfairness, it is noted down.

"I am very proud of the Press of England. The fairness, the responsibility, and the accuracy with which they do their work is essential to the administration of justice."

NIGEL MORLAND

THE HAUNTING OF CRAIG TARA

Locked room mysteries never fail to fascinate, but they have all been told before . . . or is there something new?

THE CABLE has just arrived to tell me you will be delayed in New York.

It seems to me ironic that with flight faster than sound, the weather will not permit you to be with me, my son, in time to hear my last words. I don't feel this old heart will beat through another night.

So, since you will not be here until tomorrow, I must leave something for you – all that I am, and was, on a reel of tape!

It is comforting to think of the things you have achieved without my help, to realise you have made your way as a novelist with successes to your credit. The money I shall leave you is far more than you will need, but to whom else could I leave it except my only child? Perhaps, more valuable to you, will be this story, one I believe you will find quite fascinating. Forgive me if I am no stylist.

I have been lying here, looking down on the square, watching the people scurrying heads down against the cold wind, leaves falling like rain. I am happy to be dying with the year, for I feel too tired to meet another spring.

Nurse Williams glides in and out every so often, but she does not protest that I am tiring myself with all this talking. She probably realises the uncertainty of my seeing tomorrow.

Take care of yourself, always. If you ever make use of this story, I hope I shall be watching its publication from the Beyond we are always promised but which, I fear, good sense cannot accept.

We must go back a good many years. Other than myself and one exception, the men who shared the adventure are dead. The exception is Professor Shellan, who is too old to care.

There were five of us, seated round the club fire. Outside the wind moaned through the London streets on a day much like this one.

There was Lord Thameshire, that gaunt old wanderer into unknown places (which still existed in the 1920s), inhaling brandy over those moustaches of his. Professor Shellan nodded over his cigar, dreaming, I am sure, of archaeological triumphs in which he had shared. Lemmer sat across from me, every inch the successful editor, and in the middle, kinglike as always, was George Bakkus. Oh, George! You have heard of him, even in this these iconoclastic days. And I was sitting next to Thameshire, thinking of nothing.

George came up the hard way. He was a self-made man, a bumptious, overbearing fellow, yet he had an odd charm. But the ownership of Redland Oil had coarsened him. We were all old friends, though he and I had been near intimates for many years to the extent of there once even being ugly rumours about him and your dear Mother; you know how these things start.

As you know, Father had left me so much that I could afford to laugh at George, which he didn't like. He liked being the richest in our circle, and would have been if they hadn't found coal under my Cumberland property.

So we rivalled each other in a new sphere. Late in life George had discovered antiques – or, at least, he discovered my passion for them.

He just bought. He had agents everywhere. The sheer weight of money, and not taste, ensured him of a reasonable amount of gold in the dross he acquired.

Once or twice he tried to buy my Rameses Ninth jewels. He offered me twenty times their worth, which I refused. On the other hand, he had a T'ang horse, the loveliest example I had ever seen, a beautiful thing he didn't appreciate. I tried to buy *that* for twenty times its worth, so we were quits.

He was not a nice man. His private life was questionable, and

his loyalty to his friends dubious, and tainted with self interest. But I tolerated him as one tolerates a blundering, wilful, greedy dog. A form of pity, I suppose.

*

Out of nothing by that peaceful fire he suddenly snapped:

"Shellan, you'll have to pay me back soon, you know."

We were shaken by it. Even before friends one does not dun for money: we all knew Shellan owed George a few hundreds.

Thameshire coughed warningly, and Johnny Lemmer glared.

"Really, George! That's crude, even for you. Must you bring your blasted market-place into the club?"

"It's my money," George's face began to redden.

"I don't give a damn. Keep moneylender's tricks for the proper place." Lemmer's eyes were bleak. "Are *you* hard up, or something?"

Shellan waved in distress.

"Johnny, please. I think we might retire and discuss this, George, there's a good fellow."

"I do not!" The basic crudeness of the man came through, that trick of the very rich when, as it sometimes happens, a sum of money is not repaid by a poorer associate. "You borrowed on a friendly basis. We're all friends here – "

"Not if you go on like this," Johnny warned.

Thameshire grunted; I had said nothing, yet. I sensed an opportunity coming my way to manoeuvre George into a position where I could get something I wanted.

"You're a blustering ass, George," I said at last. It seemed the moment had come. "Leave Shellan alone. You're not going to bully him, here."

"Bully? Hang it, Harry, who's bullying?"

"You are. You've had too much brandy. You're a bully and a coward sometimes, George."

There was a silence; I had taken this into uglier spheres. But George soon recovered.

"I don't take that from any man, Harry. I've got as much nerve as you have, and you know it. Coward? I resent that remark."

"Right." I paused. "George, I'll bet you will not spend a night at Craig Tara."

"Eh?" He sat straight. The others grew attentive as Englishmen

will when an unusual bet promises. "That place of yours in Berkshire? Don't talk rot."

"It isn't rot. Craig Tara's haunted. Everybody knows that. George . . . look, George, I'll bet my Rameses jewels against your T'ang horse that you wouldn't spend a night there on my conditions."

In the ensuing quietness I could almost see George probing the bet to find its weak spot, which was his way. Shellan was forgotten.

"You mean, sleep there, and I get the jewels?"

"*If* you're still with us in the morning."

"Oh, bosh!"

"Craig Tara?" Thameshire looked at me. "Something happened there, didn't it, Harry?"

"That's so. Good many years ago. Chap had his throat cut in the still-room," I looked round at them all. "Nobody's ever lived there, since."

"Sounds interesting to me, Harry." Johnny Lemmer was intrigued. "Is there a story in it?"

"Might be, you old reporter." I turned to George. "Well?"

"What are your conditions?"

"Simple. You sleep in the still-room. Lemmer and I will be with you to avoid risks."

"*I'm* taking the risks," George snapped. "I don't trust you two; you might try funny business and I'd be out-numbered – "

"Are you suggesting we'd cheat?" Johnny demanded.

"No, but – "

"Just a moment." I spoke soothingly. "We're getting too personal. Why not let us have Thameshire and Shellan along, too? They could spend the night outside the door, after they've searched us and locked us in." I warmed to the notion. "Yes, we could buy new stuff to sleep in, and take every precaution . . . "

It became discussion. George was genuinely interested, and it was finally arranged to take place the following night.

*

The sun was well down in that cold winter sky when we reached Waltham St. Lawrence in Thameshire's enormous Rolls.

Craig Tara looked harmless enough, a well built house not over seventy years old. It had no basement. The construction was sensible if uninspired.

Inside, the floors were all *parqueterie* – you call it parquet today – laid by workmen brought from France, as was the custom. The walls were plainly painted as were the ceilings. It was empty of furniture.

Thameshire thought it looked somewhat like a hospital.

"And it doesn't feel haunted to me," Johnny Lemmer added. "Wrong atmosphere."

We went to see the still-room on the first floor, switching on the electrics as we did so. It was a small apartment, perhaps fifteen feet by twelve. The shelving had been removed long ago and there was nothing in it except the hanging cord which controlled the light.

George went forward importantly, and made a careful examination.

"H'm. No tricks here. Good floor, solid. No window and no fireplace. Walls and ceiling perfect. You know, Harry, you're an ass."

"I know Craig Tara," I told him, and waited while the others went into committee and diligently checked that still-room. It was passed as tighter than the veritable drum.

We went downstairs where the things we had brought with us were piled on the drawing-room floor. It was pleasantly warm, for I had already warned the woman in the village, who kept the house clean, that we were coming. She had made the place ready for us.

Thameshire took over, with Shellan to help him. With almost exasperating care the pair of them looked through the three camp-bed mattresses George, Johnny and I were to sleep on. They scrutinised every inch of our night wear and, when this was over, tied up the lot in a dust sheet and kept an eye on it while we had a picnic supper.

By the time we decided to go up, the committee was painfully vigilant. The gear for us was again searched and put into the still-room after *that* had been searched again: Shellan stood inside the door as guardian while Thameshire made us strip to the skin one by one and passed us into Shellan – after embarrassing thoroughness in checking us over – to put on our pyjamas.

Thameshire admitted himself satisfied, then chuckled when George pointed out that nobody had examined my beard. It raised a laugh, for I was fond of the thing, a square brown monstrosity that made me not unlike an old-time sailing captain. It was searched and passed as harmless.

It was agreed that Thameshire had gone over us and our possessions with the cold-eyed efficiency of an Army medical officer. We were, he announced, incapable of any monkey-business if such was intended.

We were bedded down for the night, George in the middle, and Johnny on his right and myself on his left. There were about three inches between each mattress.

"There we are," Thameshire said from the doorway. "If you knock or call out in the night, I'll be in – I'm sleeping on a camp-bed and it will be placed across the door." His homely face was suddenly smiling. "It's all rather damn-silly, you know, but it *is* a bet! As Harry is going to lose . . . ah, well, I mustn't anticipate."

We forgot the stuffiness that would come from three men sleeping in an unventilated room. It made sleep slow in arriving, but it was deep when we did get off at last.

*

It was Thameshire's yell of horror that woke me.

He was standing in the doorway, the morning sunlight behind him brilliantly lighting everything.

"Not a sound all night, and . . . " he pointed to George. Johnny and I stared at him.

He *looked* peacefully asleep, but his gashed throat presented a beastly and horrifying picture.

Thameshire never lost his head for a moment.

"It seems there *is* something in this disgusting room," he began. "But we're going to have no nonsense. I'm standing exactly here in this doorway, and here I shall stay while Shellan gets the Police."

Johnny and I naturally protested, but we had to wait by George until Shellan returned with a startled, highly competent inspector accompanied by a sergeant.

Inspector Garrick, as he introduced himself, was primed with all the facts. He obviously regarded us as good-for-nothing club-men, but Thameshire's fame and reputation kept things on a sensible level.

Garrick verified that George was dead and then, with Thameshire's nodding acquiescence, he said:

"I have no power to compel you, but if you gentlemen care to step out without clothes, Lord Thameshire can then examine you as he did last night."

"I think it's reasonable," Thameshire added. "It will also deflect any suspicion which might arise."

As each of us stepped naked into the hall, Thameshire – under the suspicious eyes of the two officers – searched us both with a unreticent pertinacity that missed nothing. He even looked at my beard and seemed surprised that I was not hiding a carving knife there!

When we had passed with flying colours, and were dressed in our clothes, the inspector came to see us in the drawing-room in the company of a bright-eyed, sparrow-like little man.

"It's inexplicable, gentlemen," Garrick began. "We're satisfied the still-room contains no form of weapon. Dr. Freddan, our surgeon, has found that the throat of Mr. Bakkus was cut with considerable violence. The weapon used appears to have been very sharp, and death must have been instantaneous."

*

When Johnny Lemmer had got through with it all in his newspaper, it became a first-class sensation. The standing of the men concerned, the impossibility of the crime's method, and the haunting of Craig Tara, aroused endless rumours. The beastly place became a pilgrimage for gaping crowds.

The inquest was a centre of attention, and every known theory was cited. Johnny or I, it was suggested, should have been marked with blood if either of us were guilty . . . oh, many remarkable suggestions were made.

But the Coroner, a man with a good mind, went over the evidence of Inspector Garrick with immense care, and put both Thameshire and Shellan through a patient questionnaire . . . in the end even the popular newspapers, anxious for any crumb of scandal, gave it up and began to talk quite seriously of the ghost of Craig Tara.

I sold the place in the end to a psychical research society for a moderate sum. Mrs. Bakkus rather decently sent me the T'ang horse, but I did not feel I could profit out of something that was basically my fault. I sent it to the Red Cross to be sold.

There it is. Make of it what you like. You can imagine, without my telling you, how all sorts of insane theories were given birth. Johnny, it was suggested, had never forgiven George for some rascality and had cut his throat; I had apparently done the same. Another school fancied the idea of Shellan creeping in and

committing the crime – in some cases it was suggested that Thameshire had done it. Even that ugly story of the affair your Mother was supposed to have had with George was given new life by the more vicious gossips.

Johnny and I were able to ignore what was said, for the facts were irrefutable . . . and finally it all faded gradually away, though enterprising young writers seeking to revitalise ancient sensations like to speculate on the haunting of Craig Tara.

*

But the story about your Mother, poor darling, was true. The haunting was an invention of mine. A murder without danger, and with freedom and safety for myself was my plan. A little strip of thick celluloid, given a razor-like edge, was the answer. *I* cut George's throat in the night.

He never knew what happened, for it was swift and clean. I removed the blood from my hand and the weapon with spittle, and used my beard as a towel. There was a chance that I might have left traces which the daylight would have revealed. But I was very, very thorough.

The weapon went out as it went into the still-room, attached to the sole of my bare foot with flesh-coloured adhesive strapping – it sounds incredible, but experiment will show you how very easily and undetectably it can be done.

Perhaps it is unkind of me to tell you all this. But you have no inhibitions, and no gods that I am aware of. Confession is proper for a dying man, and I know I have little time now.

I feel sure you have too much of your Mother's courage in you to be hurt by the truth, even though you are George's son.

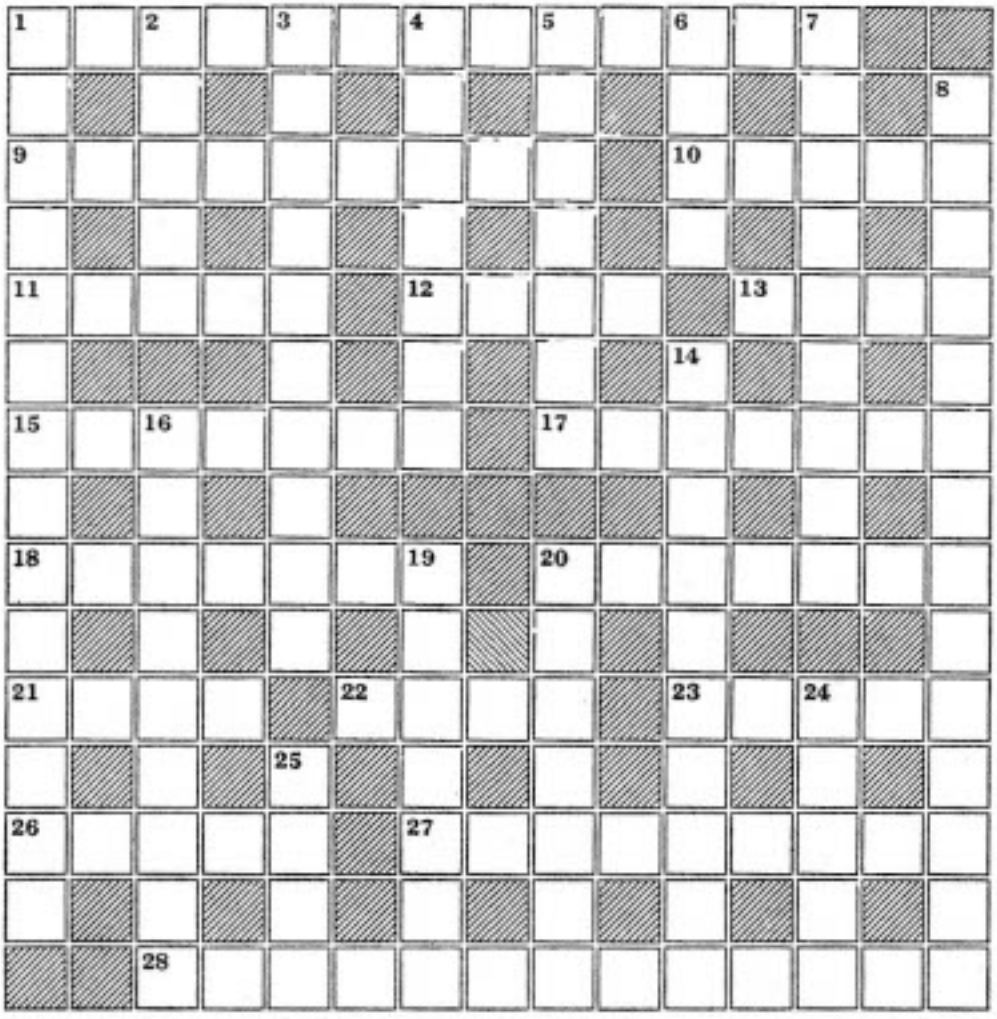
But to me, my beloved, very dear son in so many ways.

Good-bye. Think mercifully of me.

Public figures want to be in the news regularly, and to go unnoticed by a cartoonist is the unkindest cut of all. Policemen are very much public figures, and it is a measure of their standing in the community that cartoonists find them good material.

– *The Police Review.*

THE EWMM CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1. Refuge for a drug shipment? (7, 6)
9. Always fresh, like E.W. stories (9)
10. Hated, perhaps, the melody of it? (5)
11. Word of invitation (5)
12. Born copper! (4)
13. Sound of a shot (4)
15. The real stuff! (7)
17. Salt water-mark (7)
18. He went everywhere with Edgar (7)
20. Nearest form of Oriental (7)
21. Tone of distinction . . . (4)
22. . . . in this school! (4)
23. Out of range! (5)
26. Make some dough (5)
27. Not keeping a stiff upper lip? (9)
28. One acting as a relative at the scene of operations? (7, 6)

DOWN

1. Some cowardly creature in an E.W. title (3, 6, 5)
2. Foreign body? (5)
3. Nominal leader – as at No. 10? (10)
4. Whiter than white? (7)
5. The character of a commissioner (7)
6. Said to be helpful (4)
7. Create a scene – on stage? (9)
8. Alternative title for Robin Hood? (3, 5, 6)
14. Plea too good to be true? (5, 5)
16. Plot to be cultivated (9)
19. Put your faith in another (7)
20. Make Noel, Ben, a lord (7)
24. Shine of a weapon? (5)
25. This really is the limit (4)

(Solution on page 59).

MICHAEL GILBERT

The Double Take

Apart from the regular Edgar Wallace story and the 'period piece', EWMM usually offers new material. This is the occasional exception – far and away one of the finest Petrella adventures. We invite you to share our enthusiasm

"YOU'RE WANTED down at Central," said Gwilliam. "They want to have a little chat with you about your pension."

"My pension?" said Detective Sergeant Petrella. Being nearer twenty than thirty, pensions were not a thing which entered much into his thoughts. "You're sure it's not my holiday? I've been promised a holiday for eighteen months."

"Last time I saw the pensions officer," said Gwilliam, "he said to me, 'Sergeant Gwilliam, it's a dangerous job you're doing.' It was the time I was after that Catford dog-track shower and I said, 'You're right, there, my boy.' 'Do you realize, Sergeant,' he said to me, 'that every year for the past ten years one hundred and ninety policemen have left the force with collapsed arches? And this year we may pass the two hundred mark. We shall have to raise your insurance contributions.' "

Petrella went most of the way down to Westminster by bus. It was a beautiful morning, with spring breaking through all round. Having some time in hand he got off the bus at Piccadilly, walked down St. James's, and cut across the corner of the park.

It was a spring which was overdue. They had had a dismal winter. In the three years he had been in Q-Division, up at Highside, he could not remember anything like it. The devil seemed to have got among the pleasant people of North London. First, an outbreak of really nasty hooliganism; led, as he suspected, by

two boys of good family, but he hadn't been able to pin it on them. Then the silly business of the schoolgirl shop-lifting gang. Then the far-from-silly, the dangerous and tragic matter of Cora Gwynne.

Gwynne, was the oldest by several years of the Highside detectives, having come to them from the Palestine police. He was a quiet but well-liked man, and he had one daughter, Cora, who was seventeen. Six months before, Cora had gone. She had not disappeared; she had departed, leaving a note behind her saying that she wanted to live her own life. "Whatever that means," Gwynne had said to Haxtell.

"Let her run," Haxtell had replied. "She'll come back."

He was right. She came back at the end of the fifth month, in time to die. She was full of cocaine, and pregnant.

Petrella shook his head angrily as he thought about it. He stopped to look at the crocuses which were thick in the grass. A starved-looking sparrow was trying to bolt a piece of bread almost as large as itself. A pigeon sailed smoothly down and removed it. Petrella walked on, up the steps into King Charles Street, across Whitehall, and into New Scotland Yard.

He was directed to the office that dealt with pensions, allotted a wooden chair, and told to wait. At eleven o'clock a messenger brought in a filing tray with six cups of tea on it, and disappeared through a swing door in the partition. Since the tray was empty when he returned, Petrella deduced that there must be at least six people devoting attention to the pensions of the Metropolitan Police and he hoped that one of them would soon find time to devote some attention to him.

He became aware that the messenger had halted opposite him.

"You Sergeant Pirelli?" he said.

"That's right," said Petrella. He had long ago given up correcting people about it.

"C.I.D., Q-Division?"

"Ten out of ten."

"Whassat?"

"I said you're quite right."

"I'll tell 'em you're here," said the messenger.

Five minutes later a cheerful-looking girl arrived and said, "Sergeant Petrella? Would you come with me, please?"

His opinions of the Pensions Section became a good deal more favourable. Any department that employed a girl with legs like that must have some good in it.

So engrossed was he in this speculation that it did not, at first, occur to him to ask where they were going. When they reached, and pushed through, a certain swing door on the first floor, he stopped her.

"You've got it wrong," he said. "This is where the top brass works. If we don't look out we shall be busting in on the Assistant Commissioner."

"That's right," said the girl. She knocked on one of the doors on the south side of the corridor; opened it without waiting for an answer; said, "I have Sergeant Petrella here for you," and stood aside.

*

He advanced dazedly into the room. He had been there once before, and he knew that the grey-haired man behind the desk was Assistant Commissioner Romer, of the C.I.D.; a man who, unlike some of his predecessors, had not come to his office through the soft byways of the legal department, but had risen from the bottom-most rung of the ladder, making enemies at every step, until finally he had found himself at the top; when, there being no one left to fight, he had proved himself a departmental head of exceptional ability.

In a chair beside the window he noted Superintendent Costorphine, who specialized in all matters connected with narcotics. He had worked for him on two previous occasions and had admired him, although he could not love him.

Romer said, in a very friendly voice, "Sit down, will you, Sergeant. This is going to take some time. You know Costorphine, don't you? I'm sorry about this cloak-and-dagger stuff, but you'll understand better when I explain what it's about, and what we're going to ask you to do. And when I say 'ask' I mean just that. Nothing at all that's said this morning is anything approaching an order. It's a suggestion. If you turn it down, no one's going to think any the worse of you. In fact, Costorphine and myself will be the only people who will even know about it."

Assuming a cheerfulness which he was far from feeling, Petrella said, "You tell me what you want me to do, sir, then I can tell you if I want to run away."

Romer nodded at Costorphine, who said in his schoolmasterly voice, "Almost a year ago, we noted a new source of entry of cocaine into this country. Small packets of it were taken from

distributors *inside* the country. It was never found in large quantities, and we never found how it got in.

"Analysis showed it to be Egyptian in origin. It also showed quite appreciable deposits of copper. It is obviously not there as the result of any part of the process of manufacture, and it is reasonable to suppose that it came there during some stage in shipment or entry.

"Once the source had been identified, we analysed every sample we laid hands on, and it became clear – " Costorphine paused fractionally, not for effect, he was a man who had no use for effects, but because he wished to get certain figures clear in his own head – "that rather over half of the total intake of illicit cocaine coming into this country was coming under this head. And that the supply was increasing."

"And along with it," said Romer, "were increasing, at a rate of geometrical progression, most of the unpleasant elements of criminal activity with which we have to deal. Particularly among juveniles. I've had some figures from America which made my hair stand on end. We're not quite as bad as them yet, but we're learning."

Petrella could have said, "There's no need to tell me. I knew Cora Gwynne when she was a nice, friendly schoolgirl of fourteen, and I saw her just before she died." But he kept quiet.

Romer went on, "I suppose if youth thinks it may be blown to smithereens inside five or ten years by some impersonal force pressing a button, it's predisposed to experiment. I don't know. Anyway, you'll understand why we thought it worth bringing down a busy detective sergeant from Q-Division and wasting his morning for him.

"Now, I'm going to give you some facts. We'll start, as our investigators started about nine months ago, with a gentleman called Batson. Mr. Batson is on the board of the Consort Line, a company which owns and runs three small cargo steamers: the *Albert Consort*, the *William Consort*, and the *Edward Consort*: steamers which run between various Mediterranean ports Bordeaux, and London."

When Romer said, "Bordeaux," Petrella looked up at Costorphine who nodded.

"Bordeaux, but not the racket you're thinking of," he said. "We've checked that."

"Batson," went on Romer, "is not only on the board of the Consort Line. It has been suggested that he *is* the board. But one

thing about him is quite certain. Whatever his connection with this matter he, personally, takes no active part. He neither carries the stuff nor has any direct contact with the distributors. But I think that, at the end of the day, the profit goes to him.

"That being so, we looked carefully at his friends, and the one who caught our eye was Captain Cree. Ex-captain now, since he has retired from the services of the Consort Line, and lives in considerable affluence in a house at Greenwich. He maintains a financial interest in the *Consorts* through his friend, Mr. Batson, and acts as chandler and shore agent for them – finds them crews and cargoes, and buys their stores.

"All of which might add up, in cash, to a nice house at Greenwich, but wouldn't really account for – " Romer ticked them off on his fingers – "two personal motor cars, with a chauffeur body-servant to look after the same, a diesel-engined tender called *Clarissa* and based on Wapping, with a whole-time crew of three and, in addition to all these, a large number of charitable and philanthropic enterprises, chiefly among seamen and boys in the dockside area."

"He sounds perfectly terrible," said Petrella.

"Such a statement, made outside these four walls," said Romer, "would involve you in very heavy damages for defamation. Captain Cree is a respectable, and a respected, citizen. One of his fondest interests is the Sark Lane Mission."

"The Sark Lane – "

"The name is familiar to you? It should be. The Mission was one of the first in Dockland, and it was founded by your old school."

"Of course. I remember now. We used to have a voluntary subscription of five shillings taken off us on the first day of every term. I don't think anyone took any further interest in it."

"I should imagine that one of the troubles of the Sark Lane Mission is that people have not taken enough interest in it. The Missioner for the last twenty-five years has been a Mr. Jacobson. A very good man, in his way and, in his early years, energetic and successful. Jacobson finally retired last month, at the age of seventy-five.

"I should imagine that for the last ten years his appearances at the Mission have been perfunctory. The place has really been kept going by an old, ex-naval man called Batchelor – and by the regular munificence of Captain Cree."

"I see," said Petrella. He felt that there must be something more to it than that.

"The appointment of the Missioner lies with the School Governors, but they act on the recommendation of the Bishop of London. Sometimes the post is filled by a clergyman. Sometimes not. On this occasion, the recommended candidate was the Reverend Freebone."

"Philip Freebone!"

"The present incumbent of the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, Highside. You know him, I believe?"

"Very well indeed. He started up at Highside as curate, and when the incumbent died he was left in charge. I can't imagine anyone who would do the job better."

"I can," said Romer.

When he had got over the shock, Petrella did not pretend not to understand him.

"I don't think I could get away with it, sir," he said. "Not for any length of time. There'd be a hundred things I'd do wrong."

"I'm not suggesting that you should pose as a clergyman. You could go as Mr. Freebone. You've had some experience with youth clubs, I believe."

"For a few months before I joined the police, yes. I wasn't very successful."

"It may have been the wrong sort of club. I have a feeling you're going to be very successful in this one."

"Has Freebone been told?"

"He knows that he's got the job. He hasn't been told of the intended - er rearrangement."

"I think you may have some difficulty there. Phil's one of the most obstinate people I know."

"I will have a word with his Bishop."

"I am afraid clergymen do not always do what their Bishops tell them these days," remarked Costorphine.

"This isn't a job on which we can afford to make a second mistake," continued Romer.

Petrella looked up.

"We got a man into the Consort Line about six months ago. It took some doing but we managed it in the end, without, as far as we know, arousing any suspicions. He was engaged as an ordinary seaman, under the name of Mills. He made voyages on all three of the ships, and gave us very full but absolutely negative reports. He was on his way home a fortnight ago in the

Albert Consort, and was reported as having deserted ship at Marseilles."

"And hasn't been seen since?"

"He's been seen," said Romer. "The French police found him in the foothills behind Marseilles two days ago. What was left of him. He'd been tortured before he was killed."

"I see," said Petrella.

"I'm telling you this so that, if you go in at all, you go in with your eyes wide open. This is an international crowd, who are calculating their profits in millions. And who must be responsible, directly and indirectly, for hundreds of deaths a year. A single life is not of great importance."

"No," said Petrella. "I can quite see that . . ."

*

A fortnight later the new Missioner came to the Sark Lane Mission. This was a rambling, two-storey, yellow brick building in the style associated, through the East End, with temperance and good works.

The street doors opened into a small lobby, in which a notice said, in startling black letters, WIPE YOUR FEET. On the left of the lobby was a reception office, which was empty.

Beyond, you went straight into the main Mission room, which rose the full two-storey height of the building and looked like a drill hall half-heartedly decorated for a dance. Dispirited red and white streamers hung from the iron cross-bars which spanned the roof. A poster on the far wall bore the message, in cotton wool letters, "How will you spend Eternity?"

At the far end of the hall three boys were throwing darts into a board. Superficially they all looked alike, with their white town faces, their thick dark hair, and their general air of having been alive a lot longer than anyone else.

When, later, Mr. Freebone got to know them, he realized that there were differences. The smallest and fattest was a lazy but competent boy called Ben. The next in height and age was Colin, a dull boy of fifteen, who came to life only on the football field; but for football he had a remarkable talent, a talent which was already attracting the scouts from the big clubs, and was one day to put his name in the headlines. The oldest and tallest of the boys was called Humphrey. He had a long, solemn face with a nose which started straight and turned to the right at the

last moment, and a mouth like a crocodile's. It was not difficult to see that he was the leader of the three.

None of them took the slightest notice of Mr. Freebone, as he padded across the scarred plank flooring to watch them.

In the end he said, "You're making an awful mess of that, aren't you?" He addressed this remark to the fat boy. "If you want fifteen and end on a double, it's a waste of time going for one."

The boy gaped at him. Mr. Freebone took the darts from him, and threw them. First a single three; then, at the second attempt, a double six.

"There you are, Ben," said the tall boy. "I told you to go for three." He transferred his gaze to Mr. Freebone. "You want Batchy?" he said.

"Batchy?" said Mr. Freebone. "Now who, or what, would that be?"

"Batchy's Batchelor."

This was even more difficult, but in the end he made it out. "You mean the caretaker. Is his name Batchelor?"

"'Sright. You want him, you'll find him in his room." He jerked his head towards the door at the far end of the building.

"Making himself a nice cupper," said Ben. "I once counted up how many cuppers Batchy drinks in a day. Guess how many? Seventeen."

"I'll be having a word with him soon, I expect," said Mr. Freebone. "Just for the moment I'm more interested in you. I'd better introduce myself. My name's Freebone. I'm the new Missioner."

"What's happened to old Jake?" said Ben. "I thought we hadden seen him around for a bit. He dead?"

"Now that's not nice, Ben," said the tall boy. "You don't say, 'Is he dead?' Not when you're talking to a clergyman. You say, 'Has he gone before?' "

"Clergyman or not," said Mr. Freebone, "I shouldn't use a ghastly expression like that. If I meant dead, I'd say dead. And Mr. Jacobson's not dead, anyway. He's retired. And I've got his job. Now I've told you all about me, let's hear about you. First, what are your names?"

The boys regarded him warily. The man-to-man approach was not new to them. In their brief lives they had already met plenty of hearty young men who had expressed a desire to lead them onwards and upwards to better things.

In the end it was Humphrey who spoke. "I'm Humphrey," he said. "The thin one's Colin. The fat one's Ben. You like to partner Ben we'll play 301 up, double in, double out, for a bob a side."

"Middle for diddle," said Mr. Freebone.

At the end of the third game, at which point Mr. Freebone and Ben were each richer by three shillings, Humphrey announced without rancour that he was skinned and would have to go home and get some more money. The others decided to pack it up, too.

"I hope we'll see you here this evening," said the new Missioner genially, and went in search of the resident caretaker, Batchelor, whom he found, as predicted, brewing tea in his den at the back of the hall.

He greeted the new Missioner amiably enough.

"You got lodgings?" he said. "Mr. Jacobson lived up at Greenwich, and came down every day. Most days, that is."

"I'm going to do better than that," said Mr. Freebone. "I'm going to live here."

"*Live* here?"

"Why not? I'm told there are two rooms up there."

"Well, there *are* two rooms at the back. Gotter nice view of the factory. It's a long time since anyone lived in 'em."

"Here's someone going to start," said Mr. Freebone.

"There's a piler junk in 'em."

"If you'll lend me a hand, we'll move all the junk into one of the rooms for a start. I've got a camp bed with my luggage."

Batchelor gaped at him.

"You going to sleep here *tonight*?" he said.

"I'm going to sleep here tonight and every night," said Mr. Freebone happily. "I'm going to sleep here and eat here and live here, just as long as they'll have me."

*

The next week was a busy one.

As soon as Batchelor saw that the new Missioner was set in his intention and immovable in his madness, he made the best of it, and turned to and lent a hand.

Mr. Freebone scrubbed, and Batchelor scrubbed. Windows were opened which had not been opened in living memory. Paint and distemper arrived by the gallon.

Almost everyone fancies himself as a decorator, and as soon as the boys grasped that an ambitious programme of interior decoration was on foot, they threw themselves into it with zeal. One purchased a pot of yellow paint, and painted, before he could be stopped, the entire outside of the porch.

Another borrowed a machine from his employer without his employer's knowledge, and buffed up the planks of the main room so hard there was soon very little floor left. Another fell off the roof and broke his leg.

Thus was inaugurated Mr. Freebone's Mission at Sark Lane; a Mission which, in retrospect, grew into one of the oral traditions of the East End, until almost anything would be believed if it was prefaced with the words, "When ol' Freebone was at Sark Lane."

It was not, as his charges were quick to remark, that he was a particular pious man; although the East End is one of the few places where saintliness is estimated at its true worth. Nor that he interested himself, as other excellent Missioners had done, in the home life and commercial prospects of the boys in his care. It was simply that he lived in, with, and for the Mission. That, and a certain light-hearted ingenuity, allied to a curious thoroughness in the carrying out of his wilder plans.

The story will someday be told more fully of his Easter Scout Camp; a camp joined, on the first night, by three strange boys whose names had certainly not been on the original roll, and who turned out to be runaways from a Borstal Institution – to whose comforts they hastily returned after experiencing, for a night and a day, the vigorous hospitality of the Sark Lane Scout Troop.

Captain Cree turned up about a month after Mr. Freebone's arrival. The first intimation that he had a visitor was a hearty burst of bass laughter from the club room. Poking his head round the door he saw a big, heavy figure, the upper half encased in a double-breasted blue jacket with brass buttons, the lower half in chalk-striped flannel trousers. The face that slewed round as he approached had been tanned by the weather to a deep russet, and then transformed to a deeper red by some more cultivated alchemy.

"Mussen shock the parson," said Captain Cree genially. "Just showing the boys some pictures the Captain of the *William* picked up at Port Said on his last trip. You're Freebone, arnchew? I'm pleased to meet you."

He pushed out a big red hand, grasped Mr. Freebone's, and shook it heartily.

"I've heard a lot about you," said Mr. Freebone.

"Nothing to my credit, I bet," said Captain Cree, with a wink at the boys.

"I know that you're a very generous donor to the Mission," said Mr. Freebone, "and you're very welcome to come and go here as you like."

Captain Cree looked surprised. It had perhaps not occurred to him that he needed anyone's permission to come and go as he liked. He said, "Well, I call that handsome. I got a bit of stuff for you outside. The *William* picked it up for me in Alex. I've got it outside in the station wagon. You two nip out, and give my monkeys a hail, and we'll get it stowed."

Humphrey and Ben departed, and returned escorting two sailors, dressed in blue jerseys, with the word *Clarissa* in red stitching straggling across the front.

"Dump 'em in there, David," said Captain Cree to the young black-haired sailor. "There's a half gross of plimsolls, some running vests, a couple of footballs, and two pairs of foils. You put them down, Humphrey. I'm giving 'em to the Mission, not to you. Where'd you like 'em stowed?"

"In the back room, for the moment, I think," said Mr. Freebone. "Hey – Batchelor."

"Old Batchy still alive?" said Captain Cree. "I thought he'd have drunk himself to death long ago. How are you, Batchy?"

"Fine, Captain Cree, fine, thank you," said the old man, executing a sketchy naval salute.

"If you've finished stewing up tea for yourself, you might give a hand to get these things under hatches. You leave 'em out here a moment longer, they'll be gone. I know these boys."

When the Captain had departed, Mr. Freebone had a word with Humphrey and Ben who were now his first and second lieutenants in most club activities.

"He's given us a crate of stuff," said Humphrey.

"Crates and crates," agreed Ben. "Footballs, jerseys, dart boards. Once he brought us a couple of what's-its – those bamboo things – you know, with steel tips. You throw 'em."

"Javelins?"

"That's right. *They* didn't last long. Old Jake took 'em away after Colin threw one at young Arthur Whaley."

"Who were the sailors?"

"The big one, he's Ron Blanden. He used to be a boy round here. The other one's David," Ben explained. "He'd be off one

of the ships. Old Cree gets boys for his ships from round here, and when they've done a trip or two, maybe he gives 'em a job on the *Clarissa*. That's his own boat."

"I see," said Mr. Freebone.

"He offered to take me on, soon as I'm old enough," said Humphrey.

"Are you going to say yes?"

Humphrey's long face creased into a grin. "Not me," he said. "I'm keeping my feet dry. Besides, he's a crook."

"He's a what?"

"A crook."

"He can't just be *a* crook," said Mr. Freebone patiently. "He must be some sort of crook. What does he do?"

"I dunno," said Humphrey. "But it sticks out he's a crook, or he wouldn't have so much money. Eh, Ben?"

Ben agreed that this was correct. He usually agreed with Humphrey.

Later that night Mr. Freebone and Batchelor sorted out the new gifts. The foils were really nice pairs, complete with masks and gauntlets. Mr. Freebone, who was himself something of a swordsman, took them up to his own room to examine tham at leisure. The gym shoes were a good brand, with thick rubber soles. They should be very useful. Boys, in those parts, wore gym shoes almost all day.

"We usually wash out the vests and things," said Batchelor. "You know what foreigners are like."

Mr. Freebone approved the precaution. He said he knew what foreigners were like. Batchelor said he would wash them through next time he had a boil-up in his copper.

*

A fortnight later – that was, in the last week of May – the officer on the monitored telephone in the basement at New Scotland Yard received a call. The call came at six o'clock in the evening, precisely. The caller announced himself as Magnus.

The officer said, "Count five slowly, please. Then start talking." He put out his hand and pressed down the switch. The tape recorder whirred softly as the man at the other end spoke. Later that evening Romer came down to the Yard and listened to the play-back. The voice came, thin and resonant, but clear.

"Magnus here. This is my first report. I've settled into my

new job. I feel little real doubt that what we suspect is correct but it's difficult to see just how the trick is pulled.

"The *Clarissa* meets all incoming *Consorts*. She takes out miscellaneous stores, and usually fetches back a load of gear for the Mission. It must be the best equipped outfit in London. The Customs experts give the stuff the magic eye treatment before it's put on *Clarissa*, and I've managed to look through most of it myself. Once it's in the Mission, it's handed straight over to the boys, so it's a bit difficult to see how it could be used as a hiding-place.

"Cocaine's not bulky, I know, but I gather the quantities we're looking for are quite considerable. I have a feeling this line in sports goods might be a big red herring. Something to take our eye off the real job.

"Carter, the mate of *Clarissa*, is, I think, an ex-convict. His real name is Coster, and he's been down a number of times for larceny and aggravated assault. He carries a gun. Nothing known about the crew.

"Captain Cree – " here the tape gave a rasping scratch – "Sorry. That was me clearing my throat. As I was saying, Captain Cree's a smart operator. I should think he makes a good bit on the side out of his chandlering, but not nearly enough to account for the style he lives in. You'd imagine a man like him would keep a little woman tucked away somewhere, wouldn't you? But I never heard any whisper about the fair sex. A pity. We might get a woman to talk. That's all for now."

*

The weather was hot and dry that summer, and through July and August increasing supplies of illicit cocaine continued to dribble into London as water through a rotten sluice gate; and the casualty figures and the crime graphs climbed, hand in hand with the mercury in the thermometer. Superintendent Costorphine's face grew so long and so bleak that Romer took to avoiding him. For all the comfort he could give him was that things would probably get worse before they got better.

At Sark Lane Mr. Freebone was working an eighteen-hour day. Added to his other preoccupations was an outbreak of skin disease. The boys could not be prevented from bathing in the filthy reaches and inlets of the Thames below Tower Bridge.

When he could spare a minute from his routine work he

seemed to cultivate the company of the crew of the *Clarissa.* Carter was surly and unapproachable, but the boys were pleasant enough. Ron Blanden was a burly, fair-haired young man of twenty. He had ideas beyond the river, and talked of leaving *Clarissa* and joining the Merchant Navy.

David, the young black-haired one, seemed to be a natural idler, with few ideas beyond taking life easy, picking up as much money as he could, and dressing in his smartest clothes on his evenings off. He once told Mr. Freebone that he came from Scotland, but his eyes and hair suggested something more Mediterranean in origin. There was a theory that he had been in bad trouble once, in his early youth, and was now living it down.

Mr. Freebone had no difficulty, in time, in extracting the whole of the candid Ron Blanden's life story, but David, though friendly, kept his distance. All he would say – and this was a matter of record – was that he had made one trip on the *Albert Consort* that April, and had then been offered a job by Captain Cree which he had accepted.

"I don't like that David," said Batchelor one evening.

"Oh, why?" said Mr. Freebone.

"He's a bad sort of boy," said Batchelor. "I've caught him snooping round this place once or twice lately. Fiddling round with the sports kit. I soon sent him packing."

"Hm," said Mr. Freebone. He changed the subject somewhat abruptly. "By the way, Batchelor, there's something I've been meaning to ask you. How much do we pay you?"

"Four pounds a week, and keep."

"And what does Captain Cree add to that?"

The old man stirred in his chair, and blinked. "Who said he added anything?"

"I heard it."

"He pays me a pound or two, now and then. Nothing regular. I do jobs for him. Anything wrong with that?"

*

Magnus had fallen into the routine of reporting at the appointed hour on every second Wednesday. Towards the end of September his message was brief, and contained a request. "Could you check up on the old boy who acts as caretaker at the Mission? He calls himself Batchelor and claims to be ex-R.N. I don't believe that's his real name and I don't believe he was ever in the

Navy. Let me know through the usual channels and urgently."

Costorphine said to Romer, "Something's brewing down there. My contacts all tell me the same story. The suppliers are expecting a big autumn run."

Romer made a small, helpless gesture. "And are we going to be able to stop it?" he asked.

"We can always hope," said Costorphine. "I'll find out about that man Batchelor. Jacobson will know something about him. He took him on, I believe . . ."

It was a week later that Humphrey said to Mr. Freebone, apropos of nothing that had gone before, "He's a character, that David, all right."

"What's he up to now?" said Mr. Freebone, between gasps, for he was busy blowing up a batch of new footballs.

"Wanted to cut me in on a snide racket."

Mr. Freebone stopped what he was doing, put the football down, and said, "Come on. Let's have it."

"David told me he can get hold of plenty of fivers. Good-looking jobs, he said. The *Clarissa* picks 'em up from the Dutch and German boats. He had some story they were a lot the Gestapo had printed during the war. Is that right?"

"I believe they did," said Mr. Freebone. "But they'd be the old white sort."

"That's right. That's why he wanted help passing 'em. If he turned up with a lot of 'em, it'd look suspicious. But if some of us boys helped him – "

In a rage, Mr. Freebone sought out Captain Cree, who listened to him with surprising patience.

"Half those lads are crooks," he said, when the Missioner had finished. "You can't stop it."

"I'm not going to have your crew corrupting my boys," said Mr. Freebone. "And I look to you to help me stop it."

"What do you want me to do? Sack David?"

Mr. Freebone said, "I don't know that that'd do a lot of good. But he's not to come near the Mission."

"I'll sort him out," said the Captain. He added, "You know, what you want's a holiday. You've had a basinful of us since you came, and you haven't had a day off in six months that I can see."

"As a matter of fact," said Mr. Freebone, "I was thinking of taking a long weekend soon."

"You do that," said the Captain. "Tell me when you're going, and I'll keep an eye on the place for you myself."

He sounded almost paternal . . .

"This is report number thirteen," said the tape-recorded voice of Magnus. "I hope that doesn't make it unlucky. I had a narrow escape the other day, but managed to ride the Captain off. I'm bound to say that, in my view, things are coming to a head. Just how it's going to break I don't know, but some sort of job is being planned for next weekend. Cree and Carter have been thick as thieves about it.

"Talking about thieves, I was glad to hear that my hunch about Batchelor was correct, and that he had been inside. There's something about an old lag that never washes off. It was interesting, too, that he worked at one time in a chemist's shop, and had done a bit of dispensing in his youth. All he dispenses openly now are cups of vile tea. That's all for now. I hope to be on the air again in a fortnight's time with some real news for you."

Costorphine said, "That ties in with what I'd heard. A big consignment, quite soon."

"We'd better put the cover plan into operation," said Romer.

"You've got two police boats on call. Whistle them up now."

"A police launch would be a bit out-gunned by *Clarissa*. I've arranged a tie-up with the Navy. There's a launch standing by at Greenwich. We can have her up when we want her. Only we can't keep her hanging about for long – she's too conspicuous."

"I've got an uneasy feeling about this," said Romer. "They're not fools, the people we're dealing with. They wouldn't walk into anything obvious."

"Do you think Petrella – ?"

"You've got to admit he's been lucky," said Romer. "It was luck that the job was going, and luck that we managed to get it for him. And he's done very well, too. But luck can't last for ever. It only needs one person to recognize him – one criminal he's ever had to deal with, and he must have had hundreds through his hands in the last few years."

"He'll be all right," said Costorphine. "He's a smart lad."

"I'm superstitious," said Romer. "I don't mean about things like black cats and ladders. I mean about making bargains with fortune. You remember when we were talking about this thing in here, way back in March, I said something about a single life not being important. It might be true; but I wish I hadn't said it, all the same."

Costorphine confided to his wife that night, "It's the first time

I've ever seen the old man jumpy. Things must be bad. Perhaps the politicians are after him."

*

That Saturday night there were about two dozen boys in the club room of the Mission; and it says a lot for the enthusiasm engendered by Mr. Freebone, that there was anyone there at all, for if ever there was a night for fireside and television this was it. The wind had started to get up with the dusk, and was now blowing in great angry gusts, driving the rain in front of it.

At half past four Captain Cree, faithful to his promise, had come up to keep an eye on things in the Missioner's absence. There had been nothing much for him to do, and he had departed for the dock where *Clarissa* lay. Now, through the dark and the rain, he drove his big station wagon carefully back, once more, through the empty streets, and manoeuvred it into the unlighted cul-de-sac beside the Mission Hall.

Carter, a big, unlovely lump of a man, was sitting beside him, smoking one of an endless chain of cigarettes. This time Captain Cree did not trouble with the front entrance. There was a small side door, which gave on to a dark lobby. Out of the lobby, bare wooden stairs ran up to Mr. Freebone's bedroom; on the far side a door opened through to Batchelor's sanctum.

Captain Cree stood in the dark, empty lobby, his head bent. He was listening. Anyone glimpsing his good-natured red face at that particular moment might have been shocked by the expression on it.

At the end of a full minute he relaxed, went back to the street door, and signalled to Carter. The back of the station wagon was opened, and the first of four big bales was lifted out and humped indoors. The bolt of the outer door was shot.

Batchelor was waiting for them. Everything about him showed that he, too, knew that some crisis was impending.

"You locked the door?" said Captain Cree. He jerked his head at the door which led into the Mission Hall.

"Of course I locked it," said Batchelor. "We don't want a crowd of boys in here. How many have you got, for Chrissake?"

"Four," said Carter. He was the coolest of the three.

"We'll do 'em all now," said Captain Cree. "It'll take a bit of time, but we won't get a better chance than this. When's *he* coming back?" An upward jerk of his head indicated that he was talking about the occupant of the back attic.

"Sunday midday, he said. Unless he changed his mind."

"He'd better not change it," said Carter.

He helped Batchelor to strip the thick brown-paper wrapping from one of the bales. As the covering came away the contents could be seen to be woollens, half a gross of thick woollen vests. In the second there was half a gross of long pants. Grey socks in the third. Gloves and balaclava helmets and scarves in the fourth.

Carter waddled across to the enormous gas-operated copper in the corner, and lifted the lid. It was full of clean hot water.

What followed would have interested Superintendent Costorphine intensely. He would have realized how it is possible to bring cocaine into the country under the noses of the smartest customs officials; and he would have appreciated just why those samples might contain minute traces of copper.

The three men worked as a team, with the skill born of long practice. Carter dumped the woollens by handfuls in the copper. Captain Cree took them out, and wrung each one carefully into a curious contraption which Batchelor had pulled from a cupboard. Basically this was a funnel, with a drip tray underneath. But between funnel and tray was a fine linen gauze filter. And as the moisture was wrung from each garment, a greyish sediment formed on the filter.

When the filter was so full that it was in danger of becoming clogged the Captain called a halt. From a suitcase he extracted an outsize vacuum flask, and into it, with the greatest possible care, he deposited the grey sediment.

It took them over an hour to go through the first three packages. During this time the water in the copper had itself been emptied and filtered, and the copper refilled. Twice, during this time, a boy had rattled on the door that led into the hall, and Batchelor had shouted back that he was busy.

"Tip the last lot in," said the Captain, "and be quick about it." They were all three sweating. "We don't want anyone busting in on us now."

He had never handled such a quantity before. The third flask was in use. Two were already full. He had his back to the door leading to the lobby, and they none of them heard or saw it open.

"What on earth are you all up to?" said Mr. Freebone.

The three men swung round in one ugly, savage movement. The plastic cap of the flask fell from Captain Cree's hand and rolled across the floor.

"What is it – washing day?"

There was a silence of paralysis as he walked across the room, and peered down into the flask. "And what's this stuff?"

"What – where have you come from?" said Captain Cree hoarsely.

"I've been up in my room, writing," said Mr. Freebone. "I changed my mind, and came back. Do I have to ask your permission?" He extended one finger, touched the grey powder in the flask, and carried his finger to his lips.

Then Carter hit him. It was a savage blow, delivered from behind, with a leather-covered sap, a blow which Mr. Freebone neither saw nor heard.

They stared at him.

"You killed him?" said Batchelor.

"Don't be a damned fool," said Carter. He looked at Captain Cree. The same thought was in both their minds.

"We shall want some cord," he said. "Have you got any?"

"I don't know – "

"Go on. Get it."

It took five minutes to truss up Mr. Freebone. He was showing no signs of life, even while they manhandled him out and dumped him in the back of the station wagon.

Captain Cree seemed to have recovered his composure.

"You stay here and watch him," he said to Carter.

"Are we going to gag him?"

"I think that would be a mistake," said the Captain. "Leave too many traces." They looked at each other again. The thought was as clear now as if it had been spoken. "If he opens his mouth, hit him again."

Carter nodded, and the Captain disappeared into the building. In half an hour the job was finished, and he came out carrying a suitcase.

"Not a blink," said Carter.

The Captain placed the suitcase carefully in the back of the car, where it rested on the crumpled body of Mr. Freebone. Then he climbed into the driving seat, backed the car out, and started on the half-mile drive to Pagett's Wharf, where *Clarissa* lay.

The wind, risen almost to gale force, was flogging the empty streets with its lash, part rain, part hail, as the big car nosed its way slowly across the cobbles of the wharf.

Captain Cree turned off the lights and climbed out, followed

by Carter. Twenty yards away, in the howling wilderness of darkness, a single riding light showed where *Clarissa* bumped at her moorings. At their feet the river slid past, cold and black.

The Captain said into Carter's ear, "We'll take the cords off him first. I put 'em on over his clothes so they won't have left much mark. If he's found, what's to show he didn't slip, and knock his head going in?"

"*If* he's found," said Carter . . .

*

Back at the Mission, Batchelor was facing a mutiny.

"What've you been up to, locked in here all evening?" said Humphrey. "That was the Captain's car in the alley, wasn't it?"

"That's right," said Ben.

"And what've you done with Mr. Freebone?"

"He ent here," said Batchelor. "And you can get out of my room too, all of you."

"Where is he?"

"He went away for the weekend. He'll be back tomorrow."

As soon as he had said this, Batchelor realized his mistake.

"Don't be soft," said Humphrey. "He came back after tea. We saw him. Pop upstairs, Ben, and see if he's in his room."

"You've got no right – " said Batchelor. But they were past taking any notice of what he said.

"And what were you doing with all those clothes?" He pointed at the sodden pile in the corner. "Is this washing night, or something?"

Batchelor was saved answering by the reappearance of Ben. "He's been there," he said. "The light's on. And there's a letter on the table he was finishing writing. *And* his raincoat's there."

"He wouldn't go out without a coat," said Humphrey. "Not on a night like this. He's been took."

Here Batchelor made his second mistake. He broke for the door. Several pairs of hands caught him, and threw him back ungently into the chair. For the moment, after the scuffle, there was silence and stillness.

Then Humphrey said, "I guess they were up to something. And I guess Mr. Freebone came back when he wasn't expected. And I guess the Captain and Carter and that lot have picked him up."

"So that's all you can do, guess," said Batchelor viciously. But the fear in his voice could be felt.

"All right," said Humphrey calmly. "Maybe I'm wrong. You tell us." Batchelor stared at him. Humphrey said, "Is that water hot, Ben?"

Ben dipped the tip of his finger in, and took it out again quickly.

Humphrey said, "Either you talk, or we hold you head-down in that."

It took six of them to get him halfway across the floor. Batchelor stopped cursing and started to scream. When his nose was six inches away from the water he talked.

"Pagett's Wharf," said Humphrey. "All right. We'll lock him up in here. If he's lying to us, we'll come back and finish him off afterwards."

"How do we get there?" said one of the boys.

"Night like this," said Humphrey, "the quickest way to get anywhere's to run."

The pack streamed out into the howling darkness.

*

In the big foredeck cabin of the *Clarissa*, Captain Cree was giving some final instructions to Carter when he heard the shout. Carter jumped across to the cabin door and pulled it open.

"Who's out there?" said the Captain.

"Ron's on deck," said Carter. "David's ashore somewhere."

"Who was that shouted?"

"It sounded like Ron," said Carter.

This was as far as he got. The next moment a wave of boys seemed to rise out of the darkness. Carter had time to shout before something hit him, and he went down.

The attack passed into the cabin. Captain Cree got his hand to a gun, but had no time to fire it. Humphrey, swinging an iron bar which he had picked up on deck, broke Cree's arm with a vicious side swipe. The gun dropped from his fingers. "Pull him in," said Humphrey. "Both of them."

Captain Cree, his right arm swinging loosely in front of him, his red face mottled with white, held himself up with his sound hand on the table.

Carter lay on the floor at his feet, and Ben kicked him, as hard

and as thoughtlessly as you might kick a football. The boys had tasted violence and victory that night, and it had made them drunker than any strong drink.

"There's one thing can keep you alive," said Humphrey. "And that's Mr. Freebone. Where is he?"

For a count of ten there was silence. The Captain's mouth worked, but no sound came out of it.

Almost gently Humphrey said, "So you dropped him in the river. He's going to have three for company. Right?"

That was right. That was the way things were done in the land of violence and hot blood. Humphrey swung his iron bar delicately.

"You can't," said the Captain. "You can't do it. I'll tell you everything. I'll do what you like. There's ten thousand pounds' worth of cocaine in that suitcase. It's yours, for the taking."

"We'll pour it in after you," said Humphrey. "It'll be useful where you're going."

"You can't do it – "

"Who's stopping us?"

"I am," said a voice from behind them. The third member of *Clarissa*'s crew, David, stepped through the door into the cabin.

He was drenched with rain, dishevelled, and out of breath from running; but there was something about him which held all their eyes.

"How – "

"It'll save a lot of time and trouble," said David, "if I tell you that I'm a police officer. My name, not that it matters, is Petrella. I'm a sergeant in the plain-clothes branch, and I'm taking these three men into custody."

"But," said Humphrey, "they've killed Mr. Freebone."

"They meant to kill him," said Petrella. "No doubt of it. But there've been two police launches lying off this wharf ever since dusk, and one of them picked him up. He's at Leman Street Police Station, and from what he's told me, we've got more than enough to send both these men away for life. So don't let's spoil a good thing now."

There was a bump at the side of the boat as the River Police tender hitched on alongside. The first man into the cabin was Superintendent Costorphine, looking like a bedraggled crow. He pounced on the suitcase.

"Three months' supply for London," said Petrella. "It'll need a bit more drying-out, but it's all there . . ."

*

Later, Petrella found Philip Freebone propped up on pillows in St. George's Hospital, where he had been taken, under protest, and deposited for the night.

"There's nothing wrong with me," he said. "I'd just as soon be back in my bed at the Mission. There's a lot to do. I shall have to find a replacement for Batchelor."

"Are you going on with that job?"

Freebone looked surprised. "Of course I am," he said. "I've enjoyed it. I knew I should. That's why I wouldn't let you do it."

"The trouble is," said Petrella, "that you've set yourself too high a standard. The boys will never have another night like tonight as long as they live. Do you realize that if I hadn't turned up, they really were going to knock Captain Cree off and put him and Carter over the side?"

"Yes, I expect they would." Freebone thought about it, and added, "It's rather a compliment, really, isn't it? What are you going to do now, Patrick?"

"Take a holiday," said Detective Sergeant Petrella. "A good long holiday."

The Good Old Days

The Price of Hanging

Municipal documents from New Romney, Kent, reveal that in the year 1593 the price of hanging a man named Jeremy Whatlow was 10s. It cost 8s. to provide timber for the gallows, the setting up being 1s. 8d., and the rope, 4d.

The hangman, Edward Mitchell, received 5s. as his fee, and a special suit of clothes for the occasion cost 7s. 5d. To prevent any accidents he asked Father Gaskyn to stand by, and to him was paid 6d. The bell-ringers of St. Nicholas Church nearby were paid 1s. 6d. for tolling out the culprit as he was buried.

From the municipality's side the transaction was, in the end, profitable. Whatlow's goods were sold for £27 8s. which gave the good people of New Romney a gain of £26 3s. 7d.

The Forgery Acts

At a time when minor offences of many kinds were thought deserving of death, it was not until 1729 that an Act was passed making forgery a capital offence. This was done, as the Statute says, to check the increase of the 'pernicious and abominable crimes of forgery and perjury'. From that date the gallows in every assize town – and, of course, Tyburn Tree – were kept hard at work dispatching forgers who had been convicted, often on the most rudimentary evidence.

After 1821 the punishment for most cases of forgery was usually transportation for life, but it was not until 1837 that capital punishment was entirely abolished for this offence.

The Hanging King

The award for being the best patron the hangman ever had must go to Henry VIII. In his reign no less than 72,000 robbers, thieves, vagabonds and malefactors were thrust out of the world on the common gallows. This does not take account of those persons sentenced to death for their religious convictions.

But fairly close behind Henry VIII came Elizabeth I who, during the last part of her reign, was hanging no less than 350 criminals annually. Her executioners were also busily occupied in whipping vagabonds, and burning other offenders on the hand.

Juvenile Reformation

Our judicial forefathers had no time for psychiatric methods of improving juvenile offenders.

In 1840 the Common Serjeant at the Central Criminal Court sent a boy of 13 to transportation for seven years for stealing two cigars; two companions who were part of the mischief were discharged, after severe whipping.

Branding Criminals

The English Penal Code was first seen as containing the penalty of branding for crimes in the fourth year of the reign of Henry VII.

Persons pleading benefit of clergy were branded on the ball of the left thumb before the court rose. Later on, in the time of James I, women convicted of larceny could be 'whipped, burned in the hand, put into the stocks, or imprisoned for a year'.

William III had a more vicious outlook, and decided it would be a better deterrent for female thieves if their beauty was spoiled; this was done on their conviction by branding the letter 'M' on the left cheek. Queen Anne repealed the statute, but still permitted branding on the hand – and it so remained until wholly repealed in the reign of George III.

Criminal Marriages

The law had certain very defined views on marriage. For example, the Statute of Kilkenny, passed in 1367, ordained that any Englishman who married an Irishwoman should be mutilated in a revolting fashion and put to death – the law appears to be dictated by the fear that England might become Irish.

Henry VIII, by no means a gentle man, slightly modified the enactment in 1537 when he laid it down that no English man or woman should marry any person of Irish blood, even though the latter were naturalized, unless both had done homage to the King in Chancery, and were bound by recognisances with sureties to continue as loyal subjects to the Crown. For those who dared to break this law the gallows was instantly ordered for both persons.

The Worst Penalty

That virtuoso of horrible legal punishments, Henry VIII, devised a veritable shocker. A cook in the service of the Bishop of Rochester poisoned several people by putting hemlock in their soup. Alarmed for his own person, King Henry ordered that poisoners should be slowly boiled to death.

THE MAN WHO LOVED ANIMALS

the dogs bit Sam, but there was something worse to come . . .

PENELOPE WALLACE

"YES, MISS, I've always loved animals," he told me.

He took a long drink from his pint, set it carefully on the table and wiped his straggling moustache with a dirty blue handkerchief; then he took off his rimless glasses and tucked them in his top pocket.

"Blind as a bat without them," he confessed, "but it somehow makes it easier, talking. Not that I don't like talking, anyway. Yes," he repeated, "I've always loved animals and I could always get them to do anything for me."

"Please tell me about it," I asked – although I admit that I already knew, because John and Henry had told me about the man and that was why I was buying him a drink in a dingy pub off Commercial Road.

He told me of his reputation as 'Sam The Animal Man', of how he had worked the halls and of how he had tried the Circus, but the animals he tamed and trained by kindness were useless for anyone else.

"Did you never hit the animals?" I asked.

"'Course not! Any more than I'd beat my wife – if I had one."

He'd tried working in a zoo but the safety regulations irked him. It seemed incredible that there was no work for such a gifted man.

"I've tried most things, miss," he said. "Even been on the telly – from Willmouth Zoo and, would you believe it, everyone said it was faked!"

His faded blue eyes blinked over the past.

"Once I worked for a vet. I enjoyed that – helping with the animals . . ." He stopped abruptly. He had the most readable face I'd ever seen, and now there was a look of shame in his eyes.

"Did you ever fail?" I asked, bluntly.

He was silent for a while, then:

"I might as well tell you the whole story, though it's not often I do." He fortified himself with another drink of beer and went on:

"Yes I did have a failure, miss," he spoke slowly "when I was with the vet. Often there was animals – old you know, or ill that had to be put down. I knew it was the best for them; but one day a man brought in a dog – Alsatian it was – said it was vicious. Just not treated right, I reckon, and it was a beauty, young and full of life. All of a sudden I thought I shouldn't be doing this, it's wrong." He paused and I waited. "Well, I suppose I got sort of a fear, and the dog got it too – 'orrible bite I got and I couldn't stand any more. I packed the job in – not because of the bite but feeling I'd done wrong."

I could see by his face that it was something that still troubled him; that he'd let down an animal. He was fighting the sadness of the memory and he went on:

"That's about all about me, I reckon. What about you, miss? If you'll forgive me for asking, don't often see a pretty young face like yours in here."

The flattery was charming!

"I'm afraid my life story isn't nearly as interesting," I told him. "I work in an export firm, I had to come down to our warehouse to check some figures, and afterwards it was so hot that I felt I must have a cold drink. The cafés were full so I came here – and met you. You are here often?"

"Most evenings," he agreed. "The landlord lets 'em bring in their dogs – 'course it's good for business too; see one bloke'll tell another wot a fierce dog he's got, won't let nobody else speak to him even and the other bloke'll say 'Bet you a pint Sam'll have it eating out of 'is 'and in five minutes' and they bring it in 'ere." Sam chuckled. "Many's the time it's so pally it'd carry a burglar's tools anyway. Sometimes they bring 'em in to ask wot's wrong with 'em. Cats too, and budgies – mostly women that is."

It took me a moment to work out who brought what. He seemed surer on the past than the present. I was getting fond of Sam and hated to deceive him, but I wanted proof that he

actually had this ability with animals and when Henry walked into the bar I made no sign of recognition.

*

Henry had with him the meanest looking Alsatian I had ever seen. Above a thick leather muzzle, its eyes glowed yellow with hatred. The ears were laid back and as it passed my chair it bared two rows of sharp and hopeful teeth and made a very unpleasant noise in its throat.

I was terrified; I wondered where Henry had found it and whether he had made sure that the muzzle was as strong as it looked. I hoped that Sam wouldn't think it too much of a coincidence . . . Already Sam had forgotten me. He had taken out his glasses and was wiping them. I noticed that they were firmly in place before he said "Good evening, sir" to Henry. "Nice dog you've got. Mind if I talk to 'im?"

Already the brute was straining at his leash towards the old man.

"Well," said Henry dubiously, "he's not mine. I told a pal I'd look after him for the evening and I'm blowed if I'd have done it if I'd known what I was letting myself in for."

"Just you let me talk to 'im," the old man wheedled and the dog pulled Henry towards him.

"There, there, old boy . . ." Sam's voice was low, gentle, coaxing. Talking softly, he stroked the dog's head, its ears. The dog put a tentative paw on Sam's knee, and Sam took off the muzzle. The ears were upright now; the yellow look of hate had changed to one of adoration.

The dog swallowed, yawned and lay down at Sam's feet. The old man began to talk to Henry; still softly. He said that Henry should tell his friend that the dog needed affection, not a muzzle . . .

The barman leant over the bar. "Better than the telly, isn't it?"

Henry nodded, with a nice blend of admiration and surprise.

"It certainly is," I said and I meant it.

Soon afterwards I left, Sam and Henry bidding me goodnight.

The next morning I went to the house where Sam lived. Henry was very efficient but I did ask twice in the neighbourhood where I might find Sam the man who loved animals. I had a rather dejected little kitten in a basket to add point to the query.

When Sam opened the door to me he looked embarrassed –

prepared for flight. There was a miaow from the basket and I ceased to exist. He took the basket from me and led the way into a frowsty kitchen. Three sleek cats rubbed his legs – better fed than he was – as he put the basket on the table and examined the kitten.

"It seems tottery," I explained.

"Looks 'alf starved to me," there was accusation and disappointment in his voice. I hastened to explain that it was a stray that had come in that morning and didn't seem able to drink.

"It needs looking after," he said. "Can you do that, miss, being out to work and all, or do you want me . . .?"

"Yes, please, would you?"

"'Course I would, and pleased to."

I could see that his reference to my work had started a train of thought and I went on, "I've got three days off. I wanted to see you." I hesitated. "I need your help," I told him, the words tumbling out. "It's not just about the kitten. It's something else and it's desperately important. Please, Sam, please help me. I know you can. Please say you will."

My voice was shaking and he pulled out a chair for me.

"I'll put on the kettle and we'll 'ave a nice cuppa."

His voice was gentle – for a while at least he had identified me with the little lost kitten which sat in his hand.

"Now you tell me what I can do to 'elp you," he said.

I told him.

The next day I drove him into the country. We had to take the kitten with us so that Sam could feed it every four hours from a thermos of warm milk.

*

It was over a week before I saw Sam again.

He was in a side room of a gaunt ward of St. John's Hospital. Thick bandages swathed both arms and covered his neck, and long strips of plaster were on his face and head.

The blue eyes, without glasses, had a faraway look.

The man in Police uniform moved away from the bed as I sat down. I said, "Hullo Sam."

He peered at me closely. "Who is it?" he asked.

"The girl with the kitten."

"I thought it was, but you sound different, somehow, and you look different, too – older somehow. I suppose it's not 'aving my specs." His voice was faint and painful.

"What happened, Sam?" I asked gently.

"Well, you could say it started to go wrong when I broke my glasses. That was in the pub yesterday morning, some silly – silly fool bumped into me and they broke in my pocket. When I got 'ome I 'unted 'igh and low for my spare set. Don't know where they got to. Always keep 'em on the kitchen mantelpiece. 'Course, I couldn't tell you to put things off as you didn't give me no address; so I went off to this 'Adley 'All you showed me. The big gates was open like you said they'd be" he stopped and looked at me. I felt as though his unfocussed eyes could read my thoughts. "Tell me again, miss. Tell me what you told me the other day."

"I told you, Sam, that I had once foolishly had a lover who was very wealthy and quite unscrupulous, that he had proof that, equally foolishly, I'd once belonged to the Communist Party. I told you that I was marrying a wonderful boy, who would lose his job if it came to light that his wife had been a Communist. I told you that my fiancé knew where these documents were kept in the man's office and that he could get in all right but he couldn't deal with the dogs. So I asked you to go in and quieten them for him."

"Yes," he nodded slowly. "That's what you said. But it wasn't true, was it?"

"Part of it was," I told him. "Please, Sam, I can't stay long. Tell me what happened."

"Would you pass me the water, miss." I passed him the glass and held it while he drank.

"Beer 'ud be better," he said. "You want to know what happened? Well, I found the right door. Funny thing, it had a great notice on it. I couldn't read it but it looked big for Tradesman's Entrance, or anything like that. The door was open and I went in and there was these two great growling dogs. Of course we made friends quickly enough and I waited for your fiancé to show up. I thought 'e'd be watching for me to get in and then pop in the minute 'e 'eard the dogs quiet down. So I got curious and opened one of the doors. Big office it was, far as I could see. Then I opened another door and that was the same, and I started to think it was funny, even a wealthy bloke 'aving two offices the same like that, and I couldn't see why your boy friend didn't turn up. I'd 'ave been in quick enough if it'd been my girl I was trying to 'elp. I couldn't think what was keeping 'im."

I silently cursed John and his tardiness.

"Then I started to think about the notice on the door and the funny way one pair of specs was broken and the other lost. I

began to wonder if I was mixed up in something crooked and a little fear seemed to creep into me and it looked out at them dogs. I couldn't see 'em properly but I could feel it and I could feel their fear and not trusting me any more and I could hear as they began to snarl." Fear crossed his face as he relived those minutes. "Then they went for me," he finished simply.

"They say I'm lucky to be alive." He gave me a strange look. "They let me send a message to Mrs. Brown, next door, to look after the cats – and the kitten." He peered over my shoulder. "Is the policeman still there?"

"No. He went long ago." It was true, for the man in uniform who had given me his chair was John.

Sam spoke urgently. "I was right to be worried, wasn't I, miss? The police said it wasn't 'adley 'all – the place they found me. It was 'adley Research Establishment. That notice said to keep out. It's one of them secret places. You lied to me, didn't you, miss?"

"Yes, Sam, I did. I had to."

"And your job. Doesn't 'ave anything to do with exports, does it?"

"In a way it does." I had to explain something of what I felt. I owed it to him. "Believe me, Sam, I do what I do because it has to be done. Because I think it's right."

He seemed to accept this.

"I 'aven't told the police about you," he assured me.

I knew that was true because if he had they'd have found me by now – Henry and John had got safely away when they heard the dogs attacking – and I knew they wouldn't trace me from my present visit. If Sam had had his glasses, he still wouldn't have recognized me in the aged "wife" who sat by his bed.

We had been unsuccessful but we were safe – if Sam kept quiet.

"I didn't tell the police about you," Sam said yet again, "and I never will." His face was unafraid. "Will I, miss?"

"No Sam, you never will."

And I shot him.

SOLUTION TO *EWMM* CROSSWORD (PAGE 28)

ACROSS. 1, Traffic island. 9, Evergreen. 10, Death. 11, Enter. 12, Nee-D. 13, Bang. 15, Leather. 17, Sea-line. 18, Wallace. 20, Eastern. 21, Note. 22, Eton. 23, Anger. 26, Knead. 27, Un-British. 28, Theatre sister.

DOWN. 1, The Yellow Snake. 2, Agent. 3, Figure-head. 4, Cleaner. 5, Sanders. 6, Aids. 7, Dramatise. 8, The Green Archer. 14, False Alibi. 16, Allotment. 19, Entrust. 20, Ennoble. 24, Glint. 25, Edge.

What the Well-Dressed Murderer . . .

A straightforward whodunit which shows, like the Colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady, that India is still Kipling's India.

MAX MUNDY

I NEVER saw so much blood in my life. It had splashed everywhere – stained the blue-distempered walls already disfigured with damp patches from the monsoon rains; soaked into the cream rug; spattered the yellow cushions, the patterned curtains and the inside of the living-room door.

And there was blood on the framed photograph, the glass shattered over the glossy print taken by the ship's photographer, a quite unmistakable photograph of Lola and me boarding the liner at Naples.

"You don't deny this is a photograph of you, with the deceased?"

The deceased! A cold word to describe Lola. I looked down at the body on the floor, sprawled ungracefully on its side. The flimsy dressing-gown was open to reveal the naked torso, thicker and coarser now than when we'd first met, and made hideous by the dozens of gaping stab wounds. A swathe of dark hair half-concealed the ugly gash across her throat.

I shook my head slowly. Inspector Topiwalla's voice held a note of regretful surprise. We'd met quite a bit socially, and it must have been as difficult for him to believe the evidence there on the floor, as it was for me.

"And this letter – it *is* your signature?"

I hardly bothered to glance at the crumpled sheet of notepaper in his hand.

"Yes, it's mine all right. I sent it to her a couple of days ago."

"And you still deny you murdered her?"

"Good God, man, of course I deny it! I haven't seen the woman for three years. Haven't been near her or heard from her till last week."

"But she *was* your wife?"

"In name only – it was a marriage of convenience. I've already explained . . ."

The inspector, a tall, thin Parsee with a pale cream complexion and a big nose, sighed heavily and nodded to the ambulance men waiting to take the body away.

"We'd better get down to the Station and work on a statement. If you're telling the truth you're in a helluva mess, Max – and if you're not, you're in a worse one."

He hadn't handcuffed me. I was grateful for that, at least, as I followed him out on to the landing, crowded now with curious sightseers – two Anglo-Indian girls still in their nightdresses, with coats flung over their shoulders; servants in grubby dhoties or ill-fitting trousers and T-shirts full of holes; a fat man loitering on his way to the bathroom, with his brass lota in one hand and the tail of his dhoti caught up in the other.

Lola's apartment was in an old-fashioned, run-down block near the Taj Hotel, but at least she'd got a couple of efficient air-conditioners in the living room and bedroom – most likely bought with the money she'd lifted off me, I thought wryly. Leaving the rooms and walking out into the street was like entering a Turkish bath. The monsoon rains had done nothing to cool the ennervating heat, and you felt as though you were wrapped in steaming wet blankets. Most of the time I went around in the minimum of shorts and loose bush shirt, and thanked God I had my own business and didn't have to wear a jacket and collar and tie like the more conventional Bombay office-wallahs. And like the Inspector and his men, sweating heavily in their khaki longs.

As though he'd read my thoughts, the inspector glanced at my bare legs and said abruptly:

"What were you wearing last night?"

"Same as this – shorts and open shirt."

"In the evening?" He sounded sceptical.

"Yes. I'd been swimming out at – " I broke off. The Europeans

Only swimming club at Breach Candy was a running sore with Indians, who were still not allowed inside, according to the terms of the old founders. Not being a 'pukka sahib' myself, I always felt a sense of embarrassment when I had to mention the place. "I was swimming with a girl friend. I took her back to her place and – well, I've already told you. There was a film I particularly wanted to see, that new Italian one. She'd already seen it, so I went by myself. By the time I'd made up my mind, it was too late to go home and change. I just went as I was – seeing I was alone," I added.

*

Inspector Topiwalla grunted something as he followed me into the car. "Chalao," he ordered the driver. We made off through the crowds in the street, to the Esplanade Police Station which was only round the corner from my place.

I made out a statement and signed it. There was no point in giving him Maria's name. She couldn't give me an alibi and I'd no wish to drag her into this sordid business. But what the devil was I going to do? Lola had really fixed me all right, even in death, intentionally or not.

The blackmail note had arrived four days back, just when I'd been feeling particularly pleased with myself. I'd hooked my biggest contract yet, one that really promised to secure that golden future I needed if I was to have any chance of marrying Maria. It was just three years since I'd arrived in India from Hungary, the three toughest years of my life. Only now was I able to keep my head *and* shoulders above water.

I'd met Lola in Budapest when I was just about at the end of my tether, desperate to get away, right away, and Lola'd been stranded by her current boy-friend. She was quite attractive, older than me, an Anglo-Indian with just enough of the Indian uppermost to give her that touch of the exotic that I'd found irresistible.

"Marry me, Max," she'd begged. "Marry me, and I'll get you a visa for India."

She must have thought I'd be able to take all my assets out with me. I had a good apartment, well-furnished and I'd treated her lavishly, bought her bits of jewellery and then, over dinner one evening, I'd confided just how sick I was of the regime, told her of my aching urge to be quit of restrictions and enjoy liberty once more.

I wasn't so dumb I couldn't see her for what she was, a fairly high-class tart. Though the prospect of getting out of Hungary, of going to India, excited me, I didn't relish the idea of being tied to a prostitute, no matter how high-class. But Lola was a persistant bitch – she must have had a way with her, too; she even brought back a visa for me from the British Embassy. That, plus another unpleasant incident at my office, turned the scales.

"But the marriage will be in name only; when we reach Bombay I start proceedings for a divorce," I warned her.

She didn't seem to worry. "Sweetheart!" she'd enthused, half-suffocating me in her embrace. Two weeks later the British Consul was marrying us in Naples.

Getting out of Hungary had been expensive and complicated, and what with that and Lola's naturally extravagant tastes and the fact that we had to have the costliest suite on the Lloyd Triestino boat because no other was available, my capital had been drastically reduced. Even so, I reckoned I'd have a thousand or so to start me off in a new country.

I'd no intention of staying with Lola, of course. All apparently she wanted was the prestige of marriage, and if she was divorced later on, I guessed that wouldn't worry her much. Or maybe I really was so dim I didn't see she meant to hang on to me.

I might not have bothered too much except that I met a girl on the boat, an Italian girl, Maria, going out to join her mother and father, who was in the Diplomatic Corps. She was a dish to make your mouth water. Just twenty, a figure to make you stare, honey-gold skin, copper hair and grey eyes – the lot, as they say in those American paperbacks. And Maria liked me too, though what with me having a wife aboard and all those well-lit decks with only one, too-well patronized darkened deck for'rard, I didn't get much beyond dancing with her and a schoolboyish stolen kiss.

Then, when I landed in Bombay, I found that Lola had taken all my money, all except the equivalent of about three pounds sterling I'd got in my trouser pocket.

*

"But Max, sweetheart, you are coming to live with me, isn't it? I am only taking care of the money for you. What difference does it make?" she'd protested when I accused her, furious with my-

self for being so careless as to let her get her hands on my capital.

She had this flat near the Taj, furnished in the most appalling taste and staffed by a squint-eyed cook-bearer in dirty whites.

"This is your new master, Ram Chand. Put the Sahib's clothes in the big almirah on the veranda . . ."

I'd snatched my suitcase from Ram Chand's skinny hand, and backed to the door.

"Sorry, Lola; this is where we say good-bye. You know the arrangement. Now hand me my money like a good girl. You know that's all I've got to start me off. Once I'm established, I'll see you're looked after – you won't lose in the long run."

Lola had laughed. "In the long run," she mimicked. "Oh lover-boy, don't make me laugh! Now is when I want the money – and you don't know what is like Bombay – *you*, start off here, alone, not knowing nobody?"

Ignoring the servant, who was pottering about with her luggage, she'd pulled off her dress and walked to the window overlooking the street. She cleared her throat.

"You can start here, with me, Max, isn't it? I shall become a respectable Memsahib; we'll move out of this dump and get a flat up Gumballa Hill. *I'll* give you a start. I've plenty of contacts, important people . . ."

*

I hadn't even waited to listen to any more. I'd walked out with my suitcase and my forty rupees, and that was the last I'd seen of Lola for three years. Those three, torturing years, eased by a stroke of luck when I'd run into a Hungarian I'd known back home, and who'd helped me to get a foothold. It was slow and painful, but I was out of the mire at last. More than that to be truthful. I'd a reasonably comfortable little apartment on Cuffe Parade in one of those fantastic Victorian-Gothic, balconied old houses, shaded by palms and bougainvilla, overlooking Back Bay. I had my feet more than half-way up the ladder when Lola tried to kick it away from me.

I'd not even been able to think of getting a divorce up till now. I hadn't been in any position to afford either the time or the money. Then only three months back I'd met Maria again – at Breach Candy. Her parents had just been transferred from Delhi to Bombay. I'd told Maria my wife was dead. She'd taken me home and introduced me to her family. I found myself a solicitor and set the wheels in motion.

That evening, three or four nights ago, I'd been watching the sun go down towards Worli, sitting on my veranda with a drink in one hand and Lola's note in the other. The drink was short and strong, so was the note. Positively no divorce without making a stinking scandal about how I'd married her, then deserted her the day we landed in India, so that she'd been forced to resort to prostitution to live – unless, of course, I cared to make it worth her while – say, fifty thousand rupees?

It was so ridiculous I might have laughed if it hadn't been my money she wanted. I was doing well, but not that well, and any hint of scandal – the divorce even – coming into the open, would ruin my chances with Maria. I knew her parents wouldn't even consider a 'respectably' divorced man marrying their Roman Catholic daughter, and that was something I desired more than anything else in my life. I knew, too, that though in the end it could easily be proved that Lola had been a professional tart long before I ever met her, the publicity could do me nothing but damage in my business and my personal life.

For two days I sweated it out, racking my brains, trying to find a solution. I even thought of going to the police. I knew Inspector Topiwalla; we were both members of the Gymkhana and quite frequently played golf and squash and poker together, and stood each other drinks. But how would he react to my story? A man who'd marry a prostitute in order to get into the country might not be regarded as a very desirable citizen. I was up for membership of the Willington – that was *the* Club and if I got into that, it would not only help with my business connections but be a point in my favour as far as Maria's parents were concerned.

I decided to wait a bit longer and see if I could stall Lola until the divorce was through. I'd sent her a letter telling her that if she was in real need I'd make her an allowance of eight hundred rupees a month. It was all I could afford. But there could be no question of fifty thousand.

Then I'd gone round to Maria's to pick her up for a swim.

It was getting towards the end of the monsoon, one of those welcome days between the torrential downpours that turned Bombay's gutters into rivers and blotted out the blocks of flats and offices with as much efficiency as though some giant had drawn a grey curtain across the lot. The sun had emerged to dry up the steaming streets. Maria and I, both being sun-

worshippers, had an agreement that whenever this happened, we'd head for the Swimming Club.

So we'd spent the afternoon lazing on the grass and diving into the pool, and finally round about six o'clock I'd asked her if she'd like to come with me to see one of the rare Italian films to find their way to Bombay cinemas.

*

"Ah – it is very exciting, disturbing. Max. It is something you must certainly see. But for me, I have already been to it when I was home with my parents this year. You go to the early show and we have dinner together later, yes?"

It seemed a good arrangement, Maria was never one to hurry dressing and this way she'd have plenty of time for a leisurely bathe and change before I picked her up for drinks and dinner in Jack's 'Other Room'. The first show at the cinema began at 6.30 – no time for me to do more than see Maria to her door then dash downtown, still wearing my shorts. Not very orthodox wear for after sundown, especially in an air-conditioned cinema. But I was alone and didn't care too much what other people might think, although in the normal way being a refugee and still struggling to establish myself, I was inclined to be rather more careful than most folk in my dress and behaviour – you know, more British than the British. My English has always been one of my biggest assets. I'd only had a couple of years in a small English public school, but it had certainly stood me in good stead later.

Well, that's to digress. I'd seen the film, dashed back to my flat, had a quick shower and was just changing when Maria had rung up apologetically to postpone our date as her father had unexpected guests and wanted her to be present.

There wasn't much I could do about that but I hadn't felt like bothering to finish dressing and going out alone. My only servants were a cook-bearer and a sweeper who came in the mornings, but the bearer'd chosen that day of all days to ask for time off. He'd a child ill at home, way out in the suburbs, and I'd told him he could spend the night there so long as he was back first thing in the morning. As far as servants are concerned I'm a pretty easy-going type.

It would have done me more good if I'd put on the pukka sahib act and insisted on the fellow staying at the flat.

I told Inspector Topiwalla all this once again down at the Station, and when I'd signed the statement, rather to my surprise, he let me out on bail, after confiscating my passport.

"Didn't you meet anyone you knew on your way to the cinema or while you were in there?" he asked a little incredulously.

I shook my head. Usually in the interval, I'd follow the crowd and stretch my legs in the foyer or take a soft drink or iced coffee – all you could get in cinema cafés. And Bombay being a bit of a village in many respects, and this being a film of particular appeal to foreigners, it was almost certain that I'd see several people I know or was at least on nodding terms with. But not that one evening when it mattered.

Because I hadn't managed to bathe and change and was feeling rather scruffy, and because most other people sitting in the dress circle were more conventionally dressed, I'd just stayed where I was and read the paper while the lights were up in the interval. As a matter of fact there had been one chap I'd recognized sitting just in front of me with his wife. When he got up to go out at the interval, he'd glanced across at me as though he was about to smile, then his wife had diverted his attention and he'd walked past me without looking back. Had he actually seen me there? And even if he had – who the hell was he?

I didn't know his name or what he did for a living, only that we'd seen each other occasionally at Breach Candy and once he'd picked up Maria's sunglasses when she'd left them on a table, and chased us both to give them back to her.

But where could I find him – and if I succeeded, was there the faintest chance that he'd remember seeing me in the cinema on that particular night?

"The woman probably died some time between six and nine p.m.," Topiwalla had told me. "Fortunately the air-conditioning makes it possible to narrow down the time of death to within two or three hours. If you can find yourself a cast-iron alibi for that period it'll help quite a bit."

*

And while I was still at the Station giving him my statement, he already had a squad of men searching my apartment.

When I got back it was to find a terrified bearer who was no help at all; the fact that I'd given him the entire evening and night off only added to the suspicion against me. Not only had the clothing I'd worn yesterday been dug out of the dirty linen

box, but practically everything I even might have worn, including shoes, had been carted off to the police laboratories for analysis.

"Beer *lao*," I called to the bearer and watched his hand shaking as he poured out a tankard of lager. No servant likes to get mixed up with the police, however innocently, and from all the signs it wouldn't be long before mine disappeared.

Then I sat back and tried to look at things calmly and logically. Whichever way I looked at it, I was in a mess, as the inspector said. Everything but everything seemed to point to me. Husband in secret, anxious to get rid of wife in order to marry somebody else; blackmail victim, scared of being revealed as married to a prostitute. I'd everything to gain by Lola's death

There was no sign of the murder weapon in her flat, no evidence of theft; just my damning letter refusing to pay blackmail, and that photograph of the 'happy couple' on the floor by Lola's side.

The only thing in my favour was the fact that I knew none of my clothes could possibly bear the faintest suspicion of blood-stains which couldn't have helped but splash the murderer as he'd obviously struck again and again with crazy viciousness. But if I'd really murdered Lola, wouldn't I have had the sense to destroy every bit of clothing I'd worn, throw it into the sea in a weighted sack or something? As it was I couldn't understand why Inspector Topiwalla had let me out on bail. Friendship didn't usually stretch so far and he hadn't struck me as being the type open to bribery.

And what about Maria? The fact that we'd talked of my going to the cinema, of the later date she'd cancelled, couldn't really strengthen my own case and would only drag her into a sordid affair and certainly put paid to any hopes I might have of a future with her – if indeed I was to have any future at all.

I knew I hadn't murdered Lola – but who the hell had? I had a good motive, but if Lola'd tried to blackmail me, the chances were she'd been blackmailing other people too, respectable citizens whose wives and colleagues wouldn't appreciate the kind of publicity Lola was likely to provide for them in the scandal sheets.

*

Almost anybody *could* have murdered Lola, but with a practically foolproof case against me, why should the police bother to look for another suspect? The best I could hope for was to provide myself with the cast-iron alibi Topiwalla suggested, and then maybe the police might think again.

I telephoned Maria and put her off with a vague and probably unconvincing story of a business engagement that was to take me to Poona, then I set off on a needle-in-a-haystack search for my alibi. Despite the risk of running into Maria, I haunted Breach Candy, keeping well in the background, but searching desperately for the chap in the cinema. I tried the clubs and bookshops, even the coffee bars, and what Leon at the Ambassador and Tony at the Ritz, and the rest of the hotel proprietors, must have thought as they saw me whipping in and out of their restaurants two or three times within as many hours, I didn't bother to wonder.

The men I was looking for was completely nondescript in appearance, so ordinary that one could only describe him as being an average chap of average height and build with mousey hair – and eyes? What colour eyes? I'd never even noticed them. I thought he was British, but I'd only heard him speak two or three times. It seemed pointless even to try and leave a description like that around in the hope that the barmen could identify him.

*

A couple of troubled days went by. I was sitting in the lounge of the Nataraj, wondering if my man had gone on leave or flown to Delhi or just dropped dead overnight. Malabar Hill was silhouetted against the evening sun and the usual crowds were strolling along Marine Drive, their little transistors all on full volume.

Only that morning Topiwalla had rung me up and suggested I ought to look around for a good solicitor. Although there was only circumstantial evidence against me, it was a pretty well open and shut case.

A group of American tourists disgorged from a limousine and were immediately assailed by a skinny little fellow carrying a basket, bag, and bulbous flute.

"See snake fight, mongoose, cobra dance, Sahib, Memsahib?" he urged.

I watched the tall Sikh doorman chase him away and one grey-haired woman rush after the snake wallah with her camera at the ready. I was just turning back to my paper when I suddenly stiffened.

It was my man, crossing the road to a block of flats on the opposite corner, and I'd all but missed him, looking at the tourists!

I shot out of that hotel, pushing aside the Sikh and the grey-haired woman with not even an apology, and did what nobody ever does in India – I ran flat out along the pavement and dodged into traffic, chasing the nondescript figure as if my life depended on it, which of course, it did.

He looked at me as though I was mad when I clutched his arm, scared stiff that he'd vanish if I let go.

"D'you mind, old chap?" he pulled away from me fastidiously and brushed his Terylene jacket sleeve with a look of distaste. His eyes were nondescript brown, I noticed.

"D'you know me? D'you remember me?" I urged, ignoring his obvious desire to be rid of me.

He paused on the steps of the apartment block, considering me in faint surprise.

"Know you? Don't know you from Adam, old boy. Haven't a clue who you are!"

My heart sank and I made to catch his sleeve again. He drew back and headed for the lift.

"But you must, you must remember me – the other night at the cinema, that Italian film . . ." I was babbling almost hysterically.

He had his hand on the gate of the lift now and jerked it open impatiently.

"Oh, the cinema! Good lord, yes. Hardly expect me to forget that, old man. I mean to say, sitting in the dress circle wearing shorts! Isn't done, y'know. Just not the thing. Only a bloody foreigner'd have the nerve to wear shorts in the evening, in the dress circle . . . said as much to the wife at the time."

I couldn't get down to the police station fast enough. I had the sense to get the man's name and address and tore off, leaving him looking more bewildered than ever.

Topiwalla greeted me with a grin.

"You know, I thought it was odd, out of character. You wouldn't want to look conspicuous wearing shorts in the evening, and whatever you wore would be soaked in blood. True, you might have destroyed the lot, shoes and all, but you'd need a boat to get right out in the harbour. And burning's not good enough, certainly not in your flat where there's no fireplace and only an electric cooker."

He motioned me to a chair and I sat down, still not feeling out of the wood.

"Anyhow, just because I know you and wanted to believe your story though I might tell you nobody else here did – I went

out on a limb and got my men making further inquiries, in case you managed to come up with an alibi.

"The bearer, Ram Chand, had disappeared. I wasn't surprised at that because servants have a habit of disappearing if there's police trouble, but I did think he might have seen something, been able to give us a line on Lola's clients. I questioned the neighbours' servants, and learnt that Lola wasn't too popular an employer. She treated her servants pretty shabbily, liked to insult them in front of other people, make them lose face – nobody likes that sort of thing in the East, you know. She'd been heard swearing at Ram Chand the day she was murdered, and giving him the sack."

Topiwalla rubbed his long nose thoughtfully. "She did this pretty frequently, it seems, but it did strike me that Ram Chand might have taken her at her word this time. She'd ordered him to get her some cigarettes before he left and, apparently, he'd gone off seething. He went the rounds of the illicit bars and got himself drunk on wood alcohol, then came back three hours later with the cigarettes.

"I guess that Lola was good and angry by then. She'd been in the hot kitchen getting herself some kind of a meal and when she opened the door to him, she had a bread knife in her hand.

"Now we don't know exactly what happened, of course, but according to the boy, Lola walked back into the living room, swearing as usual. When the boy tried to give some kind of excuse for his delay and the fact that he was tight as a coot, Lola lunged out at him with the knife. Ram Chand snatched the knife from her and completely lost his head, stabbing her again and again while she staggered round the room clutching at furniture and dragging things off the tables. When he realized what he'd done, he just took to his heels and flung the knife away somewhere down the Causeway. He stayed away till he heard you'd been arrested then came back to collect his belongings, thinking he was safe. He'd got his shirt and trousers dhobied, of course but didn't think about his chaplies. There was blood in the stitches of his sandals and no doubt we'll find traces in his washed clothing too, poor devil!"

"But how come nobody heard the struggle? Lola must have screamed as she was attacked."

"My guess is that he stabbed her in the throat first go, which didn't kill her right off but stopped her making any noise. The sounds of furniture being knocked and pulled about wouldn't

rouse much attention in that particular block of flats, and since the fellow had shut the front door when he'd come in, and probably left by the back, nobody noticed anything wrong until the sweeper came early next morning." Topiwalla paused and uncrossed his long legs. "All the same, you could have been in quite a spot if Ram Chand hadn't come back." "Or if I hadn't had the cheek to wear shorts in the dress circle," I added. He grinned at me.

"Quite right – who but a bloody foreigner'd have the nerve to do that!"

'IN DURANCE VILE...'

A Prison is a grave to bury men alive, and a place wherein a man for half a year's imprisonment may learn more lawe, then he can at *Westminster* for a hundred pound.

It is a *Microcosmos*, a little world of woe, it is a mappe of misery, it is a place that will learne a young man more villany if he be apt to take it in one half yeare, then he can learne at twenty dyeing howses, Bowling allyes, Brothel howses, or Ordinaryes, and an old man more policie then if he had bin a Pupil to *Machiavill.*

It is a place that hath more diseases predominant in it, then the *pest-howse* in the plague tyme, and it stinckes more then the Lord Mayors dogge-howse or a paris-garden in August.

GEOFFREY MYNSHULL, 1618.

It is dreadful to be exposed day after day to the monotonous, constantly repeated noises of this place, where the walls are so thin that from the cells above and both sides and below the sound comes to you. Noise in the corridors, bunches of keys rattling, the doors, with their heavy bars of iron, slamming home, roll-calls of names by the warders, shutting of doors, stamping of hob-nailed boots on the stone tiles, or, more dreadful still, the shuffling of rubber soles . . .

ERNST TOLLER, *Letters from Prison*, 1922.

Doubles grilles à gros cloux,
Triples portes, forts verroux,
Aux âmes vraiment méchantes
Vous représentez l'enfer;
Mais aux âmes innocentes
Vous n'etes que du bois, des pierres, du fer.

PAUL PELEISSON-FONTANIER, *c.* 1661.

. . . on November 13th, 1895, I was brought down here from London. From two o'clock till half-past two on that day I had to

stand on the centre platform of Clapham Junction in convict dress, and handcuffed, for the world to look at. I had been taken out of the hospital ward without a moment's notice being given to me. Of all possible objects I was the most grotesque. When people saw me they laughed. Each train as it came up swelled the audience. Nothing could exceed their amusement. That was, of course, before they knew who I was. As soon as they had been informed they laughed still more . . .

OSCAR WILDE, *De Profundis*, 1902.

Some people think one must vegetate in prison – like flowers in a cellar – white and wasted. It may be so for one who makes circumstances difficult for himself, who only complains over the injustice done to him, who has to suffer for his own wrong-doing. It is quite different for me, inwardly I am happy and cheerful. I even feel myself freer than outside, for a chain, and not the lightest, has been broken. The thought never comes, that perhaps after all I am wrong, and it would have been wiser to do as others [Bösterli was a conscientious objector]. Naturally I am wrong as regards the law of man's making, but now I am free to follow an unwritten law, and this law is what every man bears in his breast.

ALFRED BÖSTERLI, *c.* 1934.

The waves are dancing on the sea
To the wind's free song.
The cell I have to dance in
Is ten feet long . . .

ERICH MUHSAM, *c.* 1910.

In prison one comes to realise more than anywhere else the basic nature of the State; it is the force, the compulsion, the violence of the governing group. 'Government', George Washington is reported to have said, 'is not reason, it is not eloquence – it is force! Like fire, it is a dangerous servant and a fearful master'. It is true that civilisation has been built up on co-operation and forbearance and mutual collaboration in a thousand ways. But when a crisis comes and the State is afraid of some danger then the superstructure goes, or at any rate is subordinated to the primary function of the State – self protection by force and violence. The army, the police, the prison come into greater prominence then, and of the three prison is perhaps the nakedest form of a State in miniature.

NEHRU, *Glimpses of World History*, 1935.

period piece

LE REVENANT

ANONYMOUS

Forgotten gems of crime fiction are often worth rescuing from oblivion. EWMM *plans to offer you a regular period piece, such as this one by an unknown writer. Melodramatic but exceedingly well observed, this is unexpectedly subtle despite an apparent artlessness. It first appeared some nine years before* Graham's Magazine *first gave Poe's trail-blazing* Murders in the Rue Morgue *to the world in 1841.*

THERE ARE few men, perhaps, who have not a hundred times in the course of life, felt a curiosity to know what their sensations would be if they were compelled to lay life down. The very impossibility, in all ordinary cases, of obtaining any approach to this knowledge, is an incessant spur pressing on the fancy in its endeavours to arrive at it. Thus poets and painters have ever made the estate of a man condemned to die, one of their favourite themes of comment or description. Footboys and 'prentices hang themselves almost every other day, conclusively – missing their arrangement for slipping the knot half way – out of a seeming instinct to try the secrets of that fate, which – less in jest than earnest – they feel an inward monition may become their own. And thousands of men, in early life, are uneasy until they have mounted a breach, or fought a duel, merely because they wish to know, experimentally, that their nerves are capable of carrying them through that peculiar ordeal. Now *I* am in a situation to speak, from experience, upon that very interesting question – the sensations attendant upon a passage from life to death. I have been *hanged*, and am *alive* – perhaps there are not three other men at this moment in Europe who can make the same declaration.

Before this statement meets the public eye, I shall have quitted England for ever; therefore I have no advantage to gain from its publication.

I have stated already that I have *been* hanged and *am* alive. I can gain nothing now by misrepresentation – I was *guilty* of the act for which I suffered. There are individuals of respectability whom my conduct already has disgraced, and I will not revive their shame and grief by publishing my name. But it stands in the list of capital convictions in the Old Bailey Calendar for the Winter Sessions, 1826; and this reference, coupled with a few of the facts which follow, will be sufficient to guide any persons who are doubtful to the proof that my statement is a true one.

*

In the year 1824 I was a clerk in a Russia broker's house, and fagged between Broad Street Buildings and Batson's Coffee-house and the London Docks, from nine in the morning to six in the evening, for a salary of fifty pounds a year. I did this – not contentedly, but I endured it; living sparingly in a little lodging at Islington for two years, till I fell in love with a poor but very beautiful girl, Elizabeth Clare, who was honest where it was very hard to be honest, and worked twelve hours a day at sewing and millinery in a mercer's shop in Cheapside for half a guinea a week.

To make short of a long tale – this girl did not know how poor I was; and in about six months I committed seven or eight forgeries to the amount of near two hundred pounds. I was seized one morning – I expected it for weeks, as regularly as I awoke, every morning – and carried, after a few questions, for examination before the Lord Mayor. At the Mansion House I had nothing to plead. Fortunately my motions had not been watched; and so no one but myself was implicated in the charge – as no one else was really guilty. A sort of instinct, to try the last hope, made me listen to the magistrate's caution, and remain silent; or else, for any chance of escape I had, I might as well have confessed the whole truth at once. The examination lasted about half an hour; when I was fully committed for trial, and sent away to Newgate.

The shock of my first arrest was very slight indeed; indeed I almost question if it was not a relief, rather than a shock to, me. For months I had known perfectly that my eventual discovery was certain. I tried to shake the thought of this off; but it was of no

use – I dreamed of it even in my sleep; and I never entered our counting-house of a morning, or saw my master take up the cash-book in the course of the day, that my heart was not up in my mouth, and my hand shook so that I could not hold the pen – for twenty minutes afterwards I was sure to do nothing but blunder. Until at last, when I saw our chief clerk walk into the room, on New Year's morning, with a police officer, I was as ready for what followed as if I had had six hours' conversation about it. I do not believe I showed – for I am sure I did not feel it – either surprise or alarm. My 'fortune', however, as the officer called it, was soon told. I was apprehended on the 1st of January; and the Sessions being then just begun, my time came rapidly round. On the 4th of the same month, the London Grand Jury found three Bills against me for forgery; and, on the evening of the 5th, the Judge exhorted me to "prepare for death"; for "there was no hope that in this world mercy could be extended to me."

The whole business of my trial and sentence passed over as coolly and formally as I would have calculated a question of interest or summed up an underwriting account. I had never, though I lived in London, witnessed the proceedings of a Criminal Court before and I could hardly believe the composure and indifference – and yet civility, for there was no show of anger or ill-temper – with which I was treated; together with the apparent perfect insensibility of all the parties round me, while I was rolling on – with a speed which nothing could check, and which increased every moment – to my ruin.

I was called suddenly up from the dock, when my turn for trial came, and placed at the bar; and the Judge asked in a tone which had neither severity about it nor compassion, nor carelessness, nor anxiety, nor any character or expression whatever that could be distinguished – "If there was any counsel appeared for the prosecution?" A barrister then, who seemed to have some consideration – a middle-aged gentlemanly-looking man – stated the case against me, as he said he would do, very "fairly and forbearingly"; but as soon as he read the facts from his brief, that only, I heard an officer of the gaol, who stood behind me, say – "Put the rope about my neck."

My master then was called to give his evidence, which he did very temperately – but it was conclusive; a young gentleman, who was my counsel, asked a few questions in cross-examination, after he had carefully looked over the indictment; but there was nothing to cross-examine upon – I knew that well enough –

though I was thankful for the interest he seemed to take in my case.

The Judge then told me, I thought more gravely than he had spoken before, "That it was time for me to speak in my defence; if I had anything to say." I had nothing to say. I thought one moment to drop down upon my knees and beg for mercy; but, again, I thought it would only make me look ridiculous; and I only answered, as well as I could, "That I would not trouble the Court with any defence." Upon this, the Judge turned round, with a more serious air, still to the Jury, who stood up all to listen to him as he spoke. And I listened too, or tried to listen attentively, as hard as I could; and yet with all I could do I could not keep my thoughts from wandering!

For the sight of the Court – all so soberly, and regular, and composed, and formal, and well satisfied, spectators and all, while I was running on with the speed of wheels upon smooth soil downhill, to destruction – seemed as if the whole trial were a dream, and not a thing in earnest! The barristers sat round the table, silent, but utterly unconcerned, and two were looking over their briefs, and another was reading a newspaper; and the spectators in the galleries looked on and listened as pleasantly as though it were a matter not of death going on but of pastime or amusement; and one very fat man, who seemed to be the clerk of the Court, stopped his writing when the Judge began, but leaned back in his chair with his hands in his breeches' pockets, except once or twice that he took snuff; and not one living soul seemed to take notice – they did not seem to know the fact that there was a poor, desperate, helpless creature, whose days were fast running out, whose hours of life were even with the last grains in the bottom of the sand-glass, among them!

I lost the whole of the Judge's charge, thinking of I know not what, in a sort of dream; unable to steady my mind to anything, and only biting the stalk of a piece of rosemary that lay by me. But I heard the low, distinct whisper of the Foreman of the Jury as he brought in the verdict – "Guilty", – and the last words of the Judge saying, "that I should be hanged by the neck until I was dead"; and bidding me "prepare myself for the next life, for that my crime was one that admitted of no mercy in this." The gaoler then, who had stood close by me all the while, put his hand quickly upon my shoulder, in an under voice telling me to "Come along!"

Going down the hall steps, two other officers met me; and,

placing me between them, without saying a word, hurried me across the yard in the direction back to the prison.

*

I had no friends, if any in such a case could have been of use to me – no relatives but two; by whom – I could not complain of them – I was at once disowned. On the day after my trial my master came to me in person and told me that he "had recommended me to mercy, and should try to obtain a mitigation of my sentence." I don't think I seemed very grateful for this assurance – I thought that if he had wished to spare my life he might have made sure by not appearing against me. I thanked him; but the colour was in my face, and the worst feelings that ever rose in my heart in all my life were at this visit. I thought he was not a wise man to come into my cell at that time – though he did not come alone. But the thing went no farther.

There was but one person then in all the world that seemed to belong to me; and that one was Elizabeth Clare. And when I thought of her, the idea of all that was to happen to myself was forgotten – I covered my face with my hands, and cast myself on the ground; and I wept, for I was in desperation. While I was being examined, and my desk searched for papers at home, before I was carried to the Mansion House, I had got an opportunity to send one word to her – "That if she wished me only to try for my life, she should not come, nor send, nor be known in any way in my misfortune." But my scheme was to no purpose. She had gone wild as soon as she had heard the news of my apprehension – never thought of herself, but confessed her acquaintance with me. The result was, she was dismissed from her employment – and it was her only means of livelihood.

She had been everywhere – to my master, to the judge that tried me, to the magistrates, to the sheriffs, to the aldermen. My heart did misgive me at the thought of death; but, in despite of myself, I forgot fear when I missed her usual time of coming, and gathered from the people about me how she was employed. I had no thought about the success or failure of her attempt. All my thoughts were, – that she was a young girl, and beautiful – hardly in her senses, and quite unprotected – without money to help or a friend to advise her – pleading to strangers – humbling herself perhaps to menials, who would think her very despair and helpless condition a challenge to infamy and insult. Well, it mattered little!

The thing was no worse because I was alive to see and suffer from it. Two days more and all would be over; the demons that fed on human wretchedness would have their prey. She would be homeless, penniless, friendless – she should have been the companion of a forger and a felon; it needed no witchcraft to guess the termination.

We hear curiously, and read every day, of the visits of friends and relatives to wretched criminals condemned to die. Those who read and hear of these things the most curiously have little impression of the sadness of the reality. It was six days after my first apprehension when Elizabeth Clare came, for the last time, to visit me in prison. Death, as plainly as ever death spoke, sat in her countenance – she was broken-hearted.

When she came, I had not seen her for two days. I could not speak, and there was an officer of the prison with us too – I was the property of the law now; and my mother, if she had lived, could not have blest, or wept for me, without a third person, and that a stranger, being present. I sat down by her on my bedstead, which was the only place to sit on in my cell, and wrapped her shawl close round her, for it was very cold weather, and I was allowed no fire; and we sat so for almost an hour without exchanging a word. She had no good news to bring me – I knew that; all I wanted to hear was about herself – I did hear! She had not a help, nor a hope, nor a prop left upon the earth. The only creature that sheltered her – the only relative she had – was a married sister, whose husband I knew to be a villain. What would she do – what could she attempt! She "did not know that"; and "it was not long that she should be a trouble to anybody". But "she should go to Lord S – again that evening about me. He had treated her kindly; and she felt certain she should still succeed. It was her fault – she had told everybody this – all that had happened; if it had not been for meeting her, I should never have gone into debt and into extravagance." I listened – and I could only listen! I would have died – coward as I was – upon the rack, or in the fire, so I could but have left her safe. I did not ask so much as to leave her happy! Oh then I did think, in bitterness of spirit, if I had but shunned temptation, and stayed poor and honest.

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How long this vain remorse might have lasted, I cannot tell. My head was light and giddy. I understood the glance of the turnkey,

who was watching me – "That Elizabeth must be got away"; but I had not strength even to attempt it. The thing had been arranged for me. The master of the gaol entered. She went – it was then the afternoon; and she was got away on the pretence that she might make one more effort to save me, with a promise that she should return again at night. The master was an elderly man who had daughters of his own; and he promised – for he saw I knew how the matter was – to see Elizabeth safe through the crowd of wretches among whom she must pass to quit the prison.

She went, and I knew that she was going for ever. As she turned back to speak as the door was closing, I knew that I had seen her for the last time. The door of my cell closed.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon when Elizabeth left me; and when she departed it seemed as if my business in this world was at an end. I could have wished, then and there, to have died upon the spot; I had done my last act and drunk my last draught in life. But as the twilight drew in, my cell was cold and damp; and the evening was dark and gloomy; and I had no fire, nor any candle, although it was in the month of January, nor much covering to warm me; and by degrees my spirits weakened, and my heart sank at the desolate wretchedness of everything about me; and gradually the thoughts of Elizabeth, and what would be her fate, began to give way before a sense of my own situation.

This was the first time – I cannot tell the reason why – that my mind had ever fixed itself fully upon the trial that I had within a few hours to go through; and, as I reflected on it, a terror spread over me as though it were that my sentence was just pronounced, and that I had not known, really and seriously, that I was to die, before. I had eaten nothing for twenty-four hours. There was food which a religious gentleman who visited me had sent from his own table, but I could not taste it; and when I looked at it, strange fancies came over me. It was dainty food – not such as was served to the prisoners in the gaol. It was sent to me because I was to die tomorrow and I thought of the beasts of the field, and the fowls of the air, that were pampered for slaughter. I felt that my own sensations were not as they ought to be at this time; and I believe that for a while I was insane. A sort of dull humming noise that I could not get rid of, like the buzzing of bees, sounded in my ears.

I tried to say my prayers, but could only remember a word here and there; and then it seemed to me as if these were blasphemies that I was uttering; – I don't know what they were – I cannot tell

what it was I said; and then, on a sudden, I felt as though all this terror was useless, and that I would not stay there to die; and I jumped up and wrenched at the bars of my cell window. And I felt all over the lock of my door; and tried the door itself with my shoulder – though I knew it was plated with iron, and heavier than that of a church. I groped about the very walls, and into the corners of my dungeon – though I knew very well, if I had had my senses, that it was all of solid stone three feet thick; and that, if I could have passed through a crevice smaller than the eye of a needle, I had no chance of escaping.

In the midst of all this exertion, a faintness came over me as though I had swallowed poison; and I had just power to reel to the bed-place, where I sank down, as I think, in a swoon: but this did not last, for my head swam, and the cell seemed to turn with me; and I dreamed – between sleeping and waking – that it was midnight, and that Elizabeth had come back as she had promised, and that they refused to admit her. I thought that it snowed heavily, and that the streets were all covered with it, as if with a white sheet, and that I saw her dead – lying in the fallen snow – and in the darkness – at the prison gate.

*

When I came to myself, I was struggling and breathless. In a minute or two I heard St. Sepulchre's clock go ten; and knew it was a dream that I had had: but I could not help fancying that Elizabeth really had come back.

I knocked loudly at the door of my cell; and when one of the turnkeys came, I begged of him, for mercy's sake, to go down to the gate and see; and moreover, to take a small bundle, containing two shirts – which I pushed to him through the grate – for I had no money; and – if he would have my blessing – to bring me but one small cup of brandy to keep my heart alive; for I felt that I had not the strength of a man, and should never be able to go through my trial like one. The turnkey shook his head at my request as he went away; and said that he had not the brandy, even if he dared run the risk to give it me. But in a few minutes he returned, bringing me a glass of wine, which he said the master of the gaol had sent me, and hoped it would do me good, – however he would take nothing for it.

And the chaplain of the prison, too, came, without my sending; and – for which I shall ever have cause to thank him – went

himself down to the outer gates of the gaol, and pledged his honour as a man and a Christian clergyman that Elizabeth was not there, nor had returned; and moreover he assured me that it was not likely she would come back, for her friends had been told privately that she could not be admitted; but nevertheless he should himself be up during the whole night. If she should come, although she could not be allowed to see me, he would take care that she should have kind treatment and protection; and I had reason afterwards to know that he kept his word. He then exhorted me solemnly "to think no more of cares or troubles in this world."

When he was gone, I did find myself for a little while more collected; and I sat down again on the bed, and tried seriously to commune with myself, and prepare myself for my fate. I recalled to my mind that I had but a few hours more at all events to live – that there was no hope on earth of escaping – and that it was at least better that I should die decently and like a man. Then I tried to recollect all the tales that I had ever heard about death by hanging – that it was said to be the sensation of a moment – to give no pain – to cause the extinction of life instantaneously – and so on, to twenty other strange ideas.

By degrees my head began to wander and grow unmanageable again. I put my hands tightly to my throat, as though to try the sensation of strangling. Then I felt my arms at the places where the cords would be tied. I went through the fastening of the rope – the tying of the hands together; the thing that I felt most averse to was the having the white cap muffled over my eyes and face. If I could avoid that, the rest was not so very horrible! In the midst of these fancies a numbness seemed to creep over my senses.

I slept until the hour of execution. It was seven o'clock on the next morning, when a knocking at the door of my cell awoke me. I heard the sound, as though in my dreams, for some moments before I was fully awake; and my first sensation was only the dislike which a weary man feels at being roused: I was tired and wished to doze on. In a minute after, the bolts on the outside my dungeon were drawn; a turnkey, carrying a small lamp, and followed by the master of the gaol and the chaplain, entered: I looked up – a shudder like the shock of electricity – like a plunge into a bath of ice – ran through me – one glance was sufficient. Sleep was gone as though I had never slept – even as I never was to sleep again – I was conscious of my situation! "R –," said the

master to me, in a subdued but steady tone, "it is time for you to rise."

The chaplain asked me how I had passed the night, and proposed that we should join in prayer. I gathered myself up, and remained seated on the side of the bed-place. My teeth chattered, and my knees knocked together in spite of myself. It was barely daylight yet; and, as the cell door stood open, I could see into the small paved court beyond: the morning was thick and gloomy: and a slow but settled rain was coming down. "It is half-past seven o'clock, R – !" said the master. I just mustered an entreaty to be left alone till the last moment. I had thirty minutes to live.

I tried to make another observation when the master was leaving the cell; but this time I could not get the words out: my tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth, and my speech seemed gone. I made two desperate efforts, but it would not do – I could not utter. When they left me I never stirred from my place on the bed. I was benumbed with the cold, probably from the sleep, and the unaccustomed exposure; and I sat crouched together, as it were, to keep myself warmer, with my arms folded across my breast and my head hanging down, shivering: and my body felt as if it were such a weight to me that I was unable to move it or stir. The day now was breaking, yellow – and heavily; and the light stole by degrees into my dungeon, showing me the damp stone walls and desolate dark paved floor; and, strange as it was, with all that I could do, I could not keep myself from noticing these trifling things – though perdition was coming upon me the very next moment. I noticed the lamp which the turnkey had left on the floor, and which was burning dimly, with a long wick, being clogged with the chill and bad air, and I thought to myself – even at that moment – that it had not been trimmed since the night before.

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In the midst of this, I heard the chimes of the chapel clock begin to strike; and I thought – Lord take pity on me – it could not be the three quarters after seven yet! The clock went over the three quarters – it chimed the fourth quarter, and struck eight. They were in my cell before I perceived them. They found me in the place and in the posture as they had left me.

What I have farther to tell will lie in a very small compass: my recollections are very minute up to this point, but not at all so close as to what occurred afterwards. I scarcely recollect very clearly how I got from my cell to the press-room. I think two little

withered men, dressed in black, supported me. I know I tried to rise when I saw the master and his people come into my dungeon, but I could not.

In the press-room were two miserable thieves who were to suffer with me; they were bound with their arms behind them, and their hands together; and were lying upon a bench hard by, until I was ready. A meagre-looking old man, with thin white hair, who was reading to one of them, came up, and said something – "That we ought to embrace," – I did not distinctly hear what it was.

The great difficulty that I had was to keep from falling. I had thought that these moments would have been all of fury and horror, but I felt nothing of this; but only a weakness, as though my heart – and the very floor on which I stood – was sinking under me. I could just make a motion, that the old white-haired man should leave me; and someone interfered and sent him away. The pinioning of my hands and arms was then finished; and I heard an officer whisper to the chaplain that "all was ready". As we passed out, one of the men in black held a glass of water to my lips; but I could not swallow: and the master of the gaol, who had bid farewell to my companions, offered me his hand. It was too much – the man who was sending me to execution, to offer to shake me by the hand!

This was the last moment – but one – of full perception that I had in life. I remember our beginning to move forward through the long arched passages which led from the press-room to the scaffold. I saw the lamps that were still burning, for the daylight never entered here: I heard the quick tolling of the bell, and the deep voice of the chaplain reading as he walked before us . . . "I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord . . ."

It was the funeral service – the order for the grave – the office for those that were senseless and dead – over us, the quick and the living.

I felt once more – and saw! – I felt the transition from these dim, close, hot, lamp-lighted subterranean passages, to the open platform and steps at the foot of the scaffold, and to day. I saw the immense crowd blackening the whole area of the street below me. The windows of the shops and houses opposite, to the fourth storey, choked with gazers. I saw St. Sepulchre's church through the yellow fog in the distance, and heard the pealing of its bell. I recollect the cloudy, misty morning; the wet that lay upon the scaffold – the huge dark mass of building, the prison itself, that rose beside, and seemed to cast a shadow over us – the cold,

fresh breeze, that, as I emerged from it, broke upon my face. I see it all now – the whole horrible landscape is before me. The scaffold – the rain – the faces of the multitude – the people clinging to the house-tops – the smoke that beat heavily downwards from the chimneys – the waggons filled with women staring in the inn yards opposite – the hoarse low roar that ran through the gathered crowd as we appeared. I never saw so many objects at once, so plainly and distinctly, in all my life, as at that once glance; but it lasted only for an instant.

From that look, and from that instant, all that followed is a blank. Of the prayers of the chaplain; of the fastening the fatal noose; of the putting on of the cap which I had so much disliked; of my actual *execution* and *death*, I have not the slightest atom of recollection. But that I know such occurrences must have taken place, I should not have the smallest consciousness that they ever did so. I read in the daily newspapers an account of my behaviour at the scaffold – that I conducted myself decently but with firmness; of my death – that I seemed to die almost without a struggle. Of any of these events I have not been able by any exertion to recall the most distant remembrance. With the first view of the scaffold all my recollection ceases. The next circumstance which – to my perception – seems to follow, is the having awoke, as if from sleep, and found myself in a bed in a handsome chamber, with a gentleman looking attentively at me. I had my senses perfectly, though I did not speak at once. I thought directly that I had been reprieved at the scaffold, and had fainted. After I knew the truth, I thought that I had an imperfect recollection of having found, or fancied myself – as in a dream – in some strange place lying naked, and with a mass of figures floating about before me: but this idea certainly never presented itself to me until I was informed of the fact that it had occurred.

The accident to which I owe my existence will have been divined. My condition is a strange one. I am a living man; and I possess certificates both of my death and burial. I know that a coffin filled with stones, and with my name upon the plate, lies buried in the churchyard of St. Andrew's, Holborn. I saw from a window the undressed hearse arrive that carried it; I was a witness to my own funeral: these are strange things to see. My dangers, however, and, I trust, my crimes, are over for ever. Thanks to the bounty of the excellent individual, whose benevolence has recognized the service which he did me for a claim upon him, I am married to the woman whose happiness and safety proved my last

thought – so long as reason remained with me – in dying. And I am about to sail upon a far voyage, which is only a sorrowful one that it parts me for ever from my benefactor.

The fancy that this poor narrative – from the singularity of the facts it relates – may be interesting to some people, has induced me to write it, perhaps at too much length; but it is not easy for those who write without skill to write briefly. Should it meet the eye of the few relatives I have, it will tell one of them that to his jealousy of being known in connection with me – even *after death* – I owe my *life*. Should my old master read it, perhaps by this time he may have thought I suffered severely for yielding to a first temptation; at least while I bear him no ill-will, I will not believe that he will learn my deliverance with regret. For the words are soon spoken, and the act is soon done which dooms a wretched creature to an untimely death; but bitter are the pangs – and the sufferings of the body are among the least of them – that he must go through before he arrives at it!

THE BUSY MAN'S WHODUNIT

Chapter 1
With tricks old-fangled
The girl was tangled.

Chapter 2
Then she was strangled,
De-ringed, de-bangled;
Her body mangled.

Chapter 3
Police cars jangled,
The clues were angled,
A confession wangled.

Chapter 4
The jurists wrangled . . .

Last Chapter
The killer dangled.

NEW BOOKS

JOHN de SOLA

EDGAR WALLACE, Margaret Lane (*Hamish Hamilton*, 30s.)

The difference between a critical biographer and an unsympathetic one is narrow but telling: the second attitude is to be regretted, and is hard to understand.

Miss Lane obviously has no sympathy for Edgar Wallace, whom she met only once. Her marriage to his eldest son (1934–9) could give her only a second-hand knowledge of the subject.

This biography has been described as 'sensitive' – 'surgical skill' would be a better tag for it. Literary surgery is the very last requirement needed to deal with so warm-hearted, so gentle a man as Edgar Wallace.

The sections often overlap with curious results. In one we are told that Edgar only attended his own first nights and those of his friends. In another, that he was at this time dramatic critic on *The Morning Post*; nor is there any recorded censure of the dramatic critic who presumably only reviewed his own plays and those of his friends.

Other inaccuracies occur where one would least expect them – on his books. *The Day of Uniting* is said to be about a supposed collision with another world, when it is about a predicted collision; the heroine of *The Northing Tramp* is down as a millionairess, which she is not. There are references to Hamilton in *Sanders of the River*, when he does not appear in this first of the Sanders' books.

This biography is referred to as a 'revised edition'. It was originally published before World War Two – the writing style and the many brackets continue to impart a curiously dated look. The revisions consist mainly of tense changes where people named have died, and minor alterations to some adjectives. Mr. Percy Hodder-Williams (Edgar's publisher) becomes Mr. Ralph Hodder-Williams.

Most baffling of all is in the appendix where the income tax owed at his death by Edgar Wallace has been altered from £21,000 to £120,000 which is then added to £116,000 owed in other directions, to produce the surprising total of £140,000.

All those who knew Edgar Wallace the man cannot but deplore this cold-hearted biography.

NORMAN BIRKETT, H. Montgomery Hyde (*Hamish Hamilton*, 42s).

As a newspaper reporter my first contact with Lord Birkett (which began a lifelong admiration) was watching him defend Dr. Buck Ruxton at Manchester Assizes in 1936. Most newspapermen present thought Ruxton guilty, but Lord Birkett's defence was adroit and brilliant. His greatness and humanity were apparent in that case, and in all those in which he appeared.

This definitive biography is finely done. Its 600-odd pages cover, and cover well, the whole of his life, presenting a view of social England as much as a legal one over many years.

Here is a warm, affectionate picture of a very great man.

THE ASSASSINATION BUREAU, LTD., Jack London (*Deutsch*, 18s.).

This is from a manuscript of Jack London's, written in 1910, and left unfinished.

The completion, after other writers have tried and failed, is by U.S. thriller novelist, Robert L. Fish, who succeeds expertly in his task.

The story is of an organization of murderers who kill for payment, but only if the killing is socially and morally desirable – a notion already given to the world five years earlier in Edgar Wallace's *The Four Just Men*, who killed for the same reason without fee.

The hero, Dragomiloff, is a sort of metaphysical George Manfred who is converted into seeing himself as deserving of death for what he is doing, and is pursued across the country by his own men. Readable, but not my book.

THE DROOD CASE, Felix Aylmer (*Hart-Davis*, 35s.).

Scarcely a crime aficionado living has not at one time or another pondered the mystery of Edwin Drood, which Dickens' death (as in the Jack London book) left unsolved and unfinished.

There have been many solutions offered, and while no one can really get into a dead author's mind to work out an uncompleted mystery he has postulated, notable actor Felix Aylmer has turned private book-eye in seeking the answer.

Using a rare detectival skill, he has based his deductions on half a century of scrutinising Charles Dickens and the Drood manuscript. It would seem he *has* found the solution.

Perhaps not everyone, for Dickens' fans can be dogmatic, will agree with the findings. Nevertheless the book is far too good to be missed, and is most admirable.

HARD TO HANDLE, John Welcome (*Faber*, 18s.)

An echo of 'Bulldog Drummond' here – hearty, extroverted, with John Buchanish- overtones.

Hero Richard Graham, one of the right sort Establishment-wise, goes racing off to France after the vanished editor of a pinkish weekly. Chases, rough-houses and a pseudo-T. E. Lawrence figure are part of a moderate tale.

Mr. Welcome's energy and enthusiasm can do better than this.

MARCH TO THE GALLOWS, Mary Kelly (*Michael Joseph*, 18s.).

There is a considerable school of icy-blooded lady whodunit writers with us today – Ursula Curtiss, Charity Blackstock, Mary Kelly, and such.

This is another of the school's typical *bombes-glacées*, the story of Hester Callard, a young librarian with a dead boy friend in the background. Very literate clues (or, rather, leads) help the sometimes confused reader along in a maze of happenings which blend and blur in – and through – Hester's character. Good, but it will trip you if read without attention.

THE CASE OF THE DEADLY TOY, Erle Stanley Gardner (*Heinemann*, 15s.).

Like a faithful hound, Perry Mason is old and familiar yet still capable of surprise. The speed, the expertise, the warmth of the courtroom battles never pall, and Hamilton Burger getting his come-uppance is always enjoyable.

It raises goose-pimples to realize it is 32 years since Perry arrived in *The Case of the Sulky Girl* (a time of miracles, for Rex Stout first appeared a few months later). He has not aged, nor changed his tactics, and Della has not acquired one single wrinkle, bless her faithful heart.

Don't miss this one. The grip is as tight as ever.

A SCATTER OF PAPERBACKS

A BULLET IN THE BALLET, Caryl Brahms & S. J. Simon.
Not exactly a typical whodunit, but fast, funny, and, to me, a bright gem of a tale. Calculated to raise the blood-pressure of dedicated balletomanes; to the layman it's pure laughter.

Four Square, 3s. 6d.

HATRED, RIDICULE OR CONTEMPT, Joseph Dean.
Not crime in a strict sense, but filled with good in-fighting over reputations besmirched or libelled. Well written, with a good index. Shows the law generally in its prissy old maid mood.

Penguin, 4s. 6d.

THE MALTESE FALCON, Dashiell Hammet.
Realism of a superb kind in this grand-daddy of the private eye-yarn. Tough, womanizing Sam Spade investigates magnificently. The villains make 007's world look like tea at the vicarage.

Penguin, 3s. 6d.

A MURDER OF QUALITY, John le Carré.
The victim seems to see this one approaching. George Smiley comes in to probe the result in a top-level private school. If you liked *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, this should suit.

Corgi, 2s. 6d.

SMART-ALEC KILL, Raymond Chandler.
This appallingly-titled collection of four stories is from *The Simple Art of Murder*. Chandler at his shining best, smooth as fine brandy. Included is that old smoothie, *Pick-Up on Noon Street*.

Penguin, 3s. 6d.

WOMAN IN THE CASE, Charles Franklin.
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EWMM TRUE CRIME CLASSIC

DID MADELEINE SMITH?

The ever-green story of Madeleine Smith, but made part of something wholly new in competitions as you will see

MADELEINE SMITH was born on March 29, 1835, at 167, West Regent Street, Glasgow, the first child of James Smith, architect.

In those days, Smith was a builder. He married, in 1834, the daughter of David Hamilton, a distinguished Scots architect, designer of many notable Glasgow buildings.

The driving force of James Smith, a crofter's son, was implemented by powerful ambition. He intended to get to the top, and did so not only by making money but through the right friends – men like William Houldsworth, one of the city's richest industrialists, and Andrew Orr, the Lord Provost, who not only liked him but stood by him valiantly when his daughter was arrested and tried for murder.

Both Smith's forthright personality and social charm helped him considerably in his successful climb to wealth and position.

Little Madeleine grew up a cosseted child, enjoying the ever expanding comfort of her home life, in a house constantly filled with the 'right' people. Their ranks were augmented when James became a director of the important North British Insurance Company, and a member of the Council of Glasgow Fine Art Association.

When time came for finishing school, the girl was sent to

Based on Nigel Morland's *That Nice Miss Smith* (Muller), and implemented with additional information from the author's private files on the case.

England, and spent a very happy time at Mrs. Alice Gorton's Academy for Young Ladies at 11, Clapton Terrace, London, then a rural place of green fields.

*

It was a progressive, well conducted school where the 17 pupils were encouraged to think for themselves. Mrs. Gorton, indeed, was both motherly and original in her outlook. It was at this school that Madeleine apparently learned of the uses of arsenic as a face wash for the complexion – the medicinal use of the poison both in moderate doses for the health, and for the complexion, was almost a commonplace on Victorian times.

She left in the 1853 summer term (her younger sister, Bessie, also attended Mrs. Gorton's for a time in 1854), and with a well developed, somewhat unusual, mind began to enjoy the pleasures of life in Smith's pseudo-baronial home on the Gareloch-Rowaleyn.

There, with her two brothers, Jack and James, and two sisters, Bessie and Janet, she enjoyed a gay social life. Dances, parties, and mild flirtations were the order of the day for the young girls, a happy waiting for marriage and womanhood.

Meanwhile, far to the south in Jersey, there lived another family with five children, the humble, decent Langeliers. (The spelling, L'Angelier, was the eldest son's later affectation, never accepted in Jersey).

Pierre Jean and Victoire Melanie Langelier were both French-born settlers, owners of a small seed shop. Their first-born, Pierre Emile, grew up as an independent-minded Jersiais, and, like his brother and three sisters, attended the National School in St. Helier.

Emile then went into the nursery business to learn the running of the seed shop when it became his, but almost at once he was seen by Sir Francis Mackenzie, Bart., of Scotland, a chance visitor to the island who was so taken with the young man's charm and potentialities that he offered Emile a post on his Conanbridge estate.

Emile was willing, and made the journey in great hopes. He was to begin with an acclimatising apprenticeship of a few months with Dicksons, nurserymen, of Edinburgh to get used to the harsh Scottish weather conditions. Within a year Sir Francis died suddenly from a stroke during a visit to London.

With this prop gone, Emile drifted from one small employment

after another, to arrive, at last, in Glasgow where, through the kindness of an elderly lady who had befriended him in Edinburgh, he was found a post with Huggins & Company, warehousemen and merchants, with a salary of £26 a year and a small living allowance. Though poor, his good looks and gaiety made him plenty of friends. But in private, he was a hypochondriac, a taker of drugs such as laudanum and (his sister has suggested) arsenic as an aphrodisiac, and other, unnamed, stimulants.

*

The social gulf between Madeleine and Emile was wide, the gulf between a well-to-do girl and a penniless clerk.

But Emile had seen her on several occasions and was determined to know her. He urged a friend, Robert Baird (also a friend of the Smith family) to effect an introduction.

One bitter morning in March, 1855, the two young men were walking in Sauchiehall Street when they saw Madeleine and her younger sister enter a drapers, and they were waiting on the steps of the shop when Madeleine and Bessie came out. Baird introduced Emile in the flowery manner of the day. It is on record that both the girls were taken with the florid good looks of the man from Jersey.

Madeleine and Emile were immediately attracted and from that moment the affair ripened. It began with furtive, stolen meetings in Mr. Ogilvie's St. Vincent Street bookshop, and continued at a musical tuition school in Hill Street, where Emile gave Madeleine a flower which she was to treasure. He gave to Bessie a letter expressing his feelings to be passed to her sister. The flower faded, but not Madeleine's infatuation. She expressed her sentiments in verse:

I never cast a flower away,
The gift of one who cared for me;
A little flower, a faded flower . . .

Then James Smith heard of the association and his foot came down formidably; Madeleine obediently told Emile "That for the present the correspondence had better *stop*" but, within weeks, she was writing from Rowaleyn:

Why should I blush to own I love;
'Tis love that rules the realm above,

MADELEINE SMITH
(Impression by unknown artist and undated)

and proceeded to prove it by stolen meetings with her beloved, by a torrent of letters which, for devotion and a most unVictorian frankness, remain unequalled.

*

It was a storm of love, marked by recklessness and indiscretion. Madeleine became Emile's mistress with a cold-blooded detachment in yielding to his persuasion at her own time and place. Through her letters she reveals a complex nature devoured by adoration and, alongside the most loving protestations, a sort of chill detachment surprising in its absorption with trivialities.

Through the long months the affair raged, cooled off, and blazed up again. Bewildered Emile did not know what was happening, nor, some of the time, did Madeleine.

It is worth noting, here, that they regarded each other as veritably husband and wife and had even 'published' the fact in telling their one mutual friend everything. This friend was Mary Arthur Perry, a spinster of independent means, who knew Emile before Madeleine first met him and for whom she had a particularly soft spot – some, indeed, have claimed it was a deep feeling which she kept to herself. In any case, the lovers often met at Miss Perry's house where she was party to all their secrets.

It is indeed a fact that the custom of the day accepted such 'marriage' by mutual declaration as marriages 'in the sight of God' and regarded them as true marriage with a precedent in law (*consensus de presenti*). The case of *Leslie* v. *Leslie* in the 1840s established the wife's right in a 'spoken' marriage, for here it was decided, on the death of her 'husband', that his goods were to be inherited by her. In court, in their letters alone, Madeleine and Emile (or at least, *he*) could have no doubt established 'marriage' which would have been near enough to the real thing.

Then there came on the scene a Houldsworth partner, William Harper Minnoch, a kindly, respectable man and a friend of James Smith, and, before long, a suitor for Madeleine's hand.

He knew nothing of Emile. While the affair between that unlucky young man and Madeleine was in the doldrums, she light-heartedly accepted a proposal of marriage from Minnoch, a match her family approved.

What Madeleine now wanted most was to recover the compromising letters she had written. She tried hard in a particularly uncouth letter to dismiss Emile, flying into a panic when he

would have none of it, and at his blunt warnings that he could not be got rid of so easily.

During this time, Madeleine had been making more than one purchase of poison for 'killing rats at Rowaleyn'.

When Emile failed to answer a demand of hers to meet her with the fatal letters, she sent a hysterical summons to his lodgings to come to her 'tomorrow night', a letter she was to claim as written on Friday, March 20, 1857, and indicating a meeting on the Saturday night, this despite the fact that the letter was not posted until that same Saturday morning.

Emile was at the Bridge of Allan on March 19. On the 22nd he hastened back to Glasgow, summoned by the urgent letter. He arrived at his lodgings in the evening and seemed in excellent health and spirits. He went out about nine, having obtained his landlady's pass-key. She saw him next at two-thirty the following morning when he rang the front door bell violently, and was in a state of pain and illness. He was in agony, and in lucid moments, asked for the presence of Mary Perry. She did not arrive until mid-day.

By that time Emile was dead of arsenical poisoning.

Nobody, it should be remembered, ever came forward to say where he was that previous night from nine until he cried out for his landlady's help five hours later. Madeleine denied having seen him at all that evening.

Circumstantial evidence was such that Madeleine was later arrested, and stood trial in Edinburgh in July for murder, a case that was brilliant with forensic argument of a high order.

*

When Madeleine Smith walked out of the High Court of Justiciary, freed by the Scottish verdict of 'Not Proven' it started a hundred years of controversy.

No evidence has since come forth that any other person could have committed the murder (nor, for that matter, had any known reason for doing it). But neither has any *concrete* evidence suggested that Madeleine did it; nevertheless Emile set off to see her *in answer to her summons*. She swore she had not seen him for days before his death.

The weight of probability, and every reasonable deduction suggests that she lied, *suggests* that hers was the hand which gave him the poisoned draught.

It is worth considering (seeing it as perhaps Madeleine saw it) that a living Emile was a deadly threat, for even if he returned the letters to her and she married Minnoch with Emile's tacit acceptance, he might still suffer a change of heart at some later date. A change through his mercurial temperament from a passive man to an angry one was not impossible, and his revelation of all that had happened, to her family and perhaps the world, would have been disastrous. And there was always that threat of their being (to each other), husband and wife, the veritable marriage by Declaration. If Emile retained the letters, the threat was doublefold.

On the other hand, she might have postulated (and this point seems never to have been raised) that were she to kill him without possession of the letters, then she would inevitably insure the whole world knowing the truth when Emile's family or friends went through his possessions.

And Madeleine Smith?

For Madeleine Smith there was legal freedom after her trial had ended. But she did nothing to implement her reputation when she wrote a letter of thanks to the matron of Edinburgh Prison, couched in casual terms, and with an equally casual, disinterested reference to poor William Minnoch, whom she never married.

About him she appeared to care nothing; Miss Tennyson Jesse has called this letter 'far more profoundly shocking' than any of those sent to L'Angelier.

The bill for the trial was £4,000, every penny of which, despite many contrary stories, was paid by James Smith. And behind it were other 'bills' – his early death at Old Polmont in 1863, and that of unhappy Melanie Langelier three years later. It is no exaggeration to claim this tragic case contributed to their untimely deaths.

Meanwhile, in a storm of controversy, attacks and defences by pamphleteers, Madeleine went to London with her eldest brother.

She duly set up an establishment in Sloane Street and there lived an apparently contented life. Her undoubtedly charming personality soon gathered round her a circle of friends. She became engrossed in the semi-artistic life spilling over from neighbouring Chelsea.

*

Before long she met a colourful, original thinker of a young man in George Wardle, a draughtsman of great ability and talent.

They got on well from the first. Wardle, with a fine contempt for the views of the world and her past history, proposed and was accepted.

On July 4, 1861, they were married in the Knightsbridge Parish Church, St. Pauls, and James Smith, perhaps with a feeling of relief, came south to give his daughter away. He even attended ('a quiet, melancholy figure' an observer wrote in a private letter) the wedding reception held that day in Regent Street at a famous Bohemian cafe.

It was a happy union. Wardle became manager of the Queen's Square establishment belonging to that notable figure, William Morris, and set up a home with Madeleine not far away in Bloomsbury Street.

There were two children born to the Wardles; Tom, in 1865, and, soon after, a girl called 'Kitten' almost from the day she was born.

They were brought up with some strictness, and both became the very archetypes of Victorian respectability, despite the somewhat iconoclastec atmosphere of their home. In fact Wardle, for all his Socialistic friends, was a conservative-minded man with no taste for extremes.

If Madeleine's immense vitality continued undiminished, her marriage failed to run smoothly. Her husband died in Plymouth in 1910, but it has never been understood why he fled to Italy long before, breaking up his married life permanently.

For a time Madeleine let herself drift.

*

As her children were grown up and Tom, indeed, living in the United States, she visited her brother-in-law, Sir Thomas Wardle, in Leek, and lived nearby for a time. As 'Mrs. Lena Wardle' (Bessie often called her Lena, though the father hated it), she stayed for an extended period with her youngest sister, Janet, now a wealthy spinster living in Falkirk.

At last Madeleine grew tired of her native soil, and decided she wanted to be near Tom.

Off she went, this indefatigable, ageing woman, to put down her roots in a new land. It suited her exactly. She married (it was not 'an alliance' as is often written) a kindly, decent Roman Catholic by the name of Sheehy; with the old tenacity of spirit she made it

clear she would never depart from the Presbyterian faith, nor did she.

It was a happy marriage. Sheehy was well circumstanced and Madeleine had an income from home, rents from a number of houses and tenements in Britain which she owned.

Impeccably groomed, her hair abundant and her sight perfect – they were to the last day of her life – she was busy, happy, even to making all her own clothes and some of her husband's.

Well read and well liked, her charm made her friends everywhere. Without a qualm this Victorian lady, known as Lena Wardle Sheehy, settled in New York City with her husband, and took to it like a born American, not that, for one moment, did she ever surrender her pride in her Scots birth.

When Sheehy died in 1926, she buried him as he had requested in the great St. Raymond's Cemetery in the Bronx, and nearby she settled down to what proved to be her last months of life. She was surrounded by friends, loved by them and so youthful in her unimpaired physical perfection that, at 90 she was fully accepted, as her small vanity liked to profess as a woman of 30 years less.

In an apartment on Park Avenue, Bronx, the end came on April 12, 1928, of kidney disease. It was a placid, and peaceful death which she had anticipated with her typical foresight, by long having purchased her last resting-place in Westchester's beautiful Mount Hope Cemetery.

And there she was laid, but not to rest. The fascination of the greatest of all murder mysteries will never die, for the enigma of Madeleine Smith's character is irresistable.

An American woman who knew her wrote in a private letter: 'I do not know if she was guilty or not, I only know she was a fine and good lady'.

The Smith Household

The Smith house was at 7, Blythswood Square, on a corner where it faced the Square and, at one side, Mains Street. At the rear was a small alley which gave access to the back door.

The premises consisted of two floors, a semi-basement with windows (and a door) looking out on an area below the Square, and side windows slightly below the level of the Mains Street pavement.

Emile L'Angelier used regularly to visit the house, crouching at one of the windows in Mains Street (where Madeleine slept with her younger sister), and there would talk to Madeleine; he had once or twice been in the house and had also talked to her at the

back door. She often gave him hot cocoa as a nightcap. All this was (ostensibly) unknown to Mr. and Mrs. Smith though Bessie certainly knew what was going on and, indeed, from her bedroom above and to the right of Madeleine's could, if she wished, see when Emile was 'visiting'. The servants were generally aware of everything but, apparently, kept their own counsel.

The upper two floors of the same house (with a front door in Mains Street, next to Madeleine's bedroom window) belonged to William Minnoch and a friend.

The people directly concerned in the case are:

Madeleine Smith.

Bessie Smith, 19, who was Madeleine's *confidente*. She had a distinct soft spot for *Emile* and, according to some writers, was secretly in love with him. She has been suspected of the crime, for she had both opportunity and, it has been said, might have done it out of jealousy or to protect Madeleine when it seemed that *Emile* was going to be the 'spoke in the wheel'.

Jack Smith, 18, always *Madeleine*'s champion, who took every care of her after the case was over. Is, generally, an unknown quantity, a shadowy figure. His bedroom was next to *Bessie's*, also overlooking *Madeleine's*, below.

Janet Smith, 13, the small sister who shared the bedroom with *Madeleine* and is only noted for her complete unconsciousness at all times when *Madeleine* was whispering at the barred bedroom window to her lover.

James Smith, 11, the smallest boy of whom nothing is known except that he slept upstairs with his mother and father until he was older when he shared *Jack's* room.

James Smith. A stern and upright Victorian paterfamilias who was largely unaware of *Emile's* existence other than, in the early days of the association, to forbid it when rumours reached his ears. He thought that the contact between *Madeleine* and *Emile* ended when he forbade it. Of *Mrs. Smith* little if anything is known except that she was a good wife and mother, timorous and retiring. Their marital bedroom was at the back, overlooking the alley.

The servants comprised *William Murray*, boy, engaged on November, 1856. He slept in a small basement room and was sent on one occasion to buy poison by *Madeleine; Christina Haggart*, (later *Mackenzie*), engaged on 1855, leaving at Whitsun, 1857, to marry. She was well aware of *Emile*, and what was going on. Carried letters between the lovers and was, in a sense, very much

in *Madeleine's* confidence; *Charlotte M'Lean*, cook, employed from September, 1857. Nothing is known of her except that she shared a basement bedroom with *Haggart*, on the other side of the passage from *Madeleine's*.

Those outside the household:

William Minnoch. A man of standing and wealth who became deeply attached to *Madeleine* and thought he was going to marry her. Is not supposed to be aware of the *affaire* but since it was going on under his nose and, as it were, almost outside his front door, he must have been reasonably knowledgeable about it. Is suspected by some writers of being a very important character in the latter part of the case, though this is not factually based assumption.

Mary Arthur Perry. A comfortably placed spinster who was fully aware of everything between *Emile* and *Madeleine*, and in many ways promoted the progress of the association. One writer at least has wondered if 'violent jealousy' made her 'do it'. Asked for by *Emile* when he lay dying, she did not (though she had plenty of time) turn up at the bedside for so long that he was dead when she arrived.

Amadee Thuau. An old and close friend of *Emile's*, who not only shared the same lodgings (and dining-room), but was well informed about the association and had many doubts – which he broached more than once – as to *Emile's* lack of wisdom in not backing out.

THE CONTEST

Nobody really knows whodunit, but there is nothing to stop 'solutions' being evolved by *EWMM* readers, and therefore a prize of Ten Guineas is offered for the best entry.

You are asked to provide, in not more than 200 words, your personal solution to the mystery, based on the facts previously set out, implemented, if you like, by any existing books on the case which may be consulted for additional data.

The prize will not necessarily be awarded for the literary merit of entries, but on sound thinking and logical deduction in providing what seems the most reasonable possible solution.

The rules are as follows:

The decision of the Editor is final on all entries.

The closing date for entries is March 30, 1965. The winning

entry, together with the winner's name and address, will be published in an early issue following this date.

All entries should be posted to:
Madeleine Smith Contest,
EDGAR WALLACE MYSTERY MAGAZINE,
4, Bradmore Road,
Oxford.

Conditions of Entry

As many solutions as desired may be sent, provided each one is on a separate sheet of paper, and written on one side of the page only. Your name and address should be on *each* entry.

All entries must be properly stamped and sealed, and clearly addressed.

All entries must be original and not taken from any published work except in the use of facts.

Entries will not be returned unless a SAE is enclosed.

Every care will be taken of entries, but *EWMM* will not be responsible for any loss or delay concerning entries. No correspondence can be entered into regarding the contest.

Crimes have to be documented fully enough to allow anyone from a sergeant to the Inspector of Constabulary to check what has been done.

– *The Police Review.*

*

A new section has been opened in the giant U.S. Department of Justice, 'the Office of Criminal Justice'. Explains its head, Harvard teacher of law Professor James Vorenberg: "We are here to help the little guy who stands in awe of the massive process of Federal criminal law . . . instead of feeling that he is being hit by a steamroller a small man in trouble with the Federal law can come to my office and be told free of charge just what his rights are."

THE TOP TWENTY CORNERSTONES

Perhaps a title that sounds like a contradiction in terms, but a cornerstone is an indispensable part or basis and the description comfortably describes those short stories which are indeed indispensable parts of the crime fiction edifice. EWMM *has (no doubt brashly!) chosen its twenty Greats up to 1939 because of a reader challenge, but ventures to add a 21st out of affection and admiration for a master of his craft.*

(Brackets contain first publisher and date)

TALES, Edgar Allen Poe (*Putnam*, New York, 1845).
The true originator of the modern crime story.

AFTER DARK, Wilkie Collins (*Smith Elder*, London, 1856).
Contains that notable story, *The Biter Bit.*

THE STOLEN WHITE ELEPHANT, Mark Twain (*Osgood*, Boston, 1882).
The light touch comes to crime stories.

THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES, Conan Doyle (*Newnes*, London, 1892).
The second most important book of crime stories.

JOHN THORNDYKE'S CASES, R. Austin Freeman (*Chatto & Windus*, London, 1909).
The first great scientific detective.

THE OLD MAN IN THE CORNER, Baroness Orczy (*Greening*, London, 1909).
First of the armchair detectives.

THE INNOCENCE OF FATHER BROWN, G. K. Chesterton (*Cassell*, London, 1911).
Contains that masterpiece, *The Queer Feet.*

THE SILENT BULLET, Arthur B. Reeve (*Dodd Mead*, New York, 1912).
Predecessor of the electronically-minded detective-in-white.

MAX CARRADOS, Ernest Bramah (*Methuen*, London, 1914).
The fine curtain to the crime story's Golden Age.

THE FOUR CORNERS OF THE WORLD, A. E. W. Mason (*Hodder & Stoughton*, London, 1917).
Contains one story about the unique Hanaud.

CALL MR. FORTUNE, H. C. Bailey (*Methuen*, London, 1920).
The début of the fascinating, remarkable investigator.

THE LAW OF THE FOUR JUST MEN, Edgar Wallace (*Hodder & Stoughton*, London, 1921).
The perfect flowering of detectives above the law.

LORD PETER VIEWS THE BODY, Dorothy Sayers (*Gollancz*, London, 1928).
Warmth, and intelligence of a very high order.

ASHENDEN, Somerset Maugham (*Heinemann*, London, 1928).
Not strictly crime fiction but still a veritable cornerstone.

THE PLEASANTRIES OF OLD QUONG, Thomas Burke (*Constable*, London, 1931).
Contains that masterpiece of crime, *The Hands of Mr. Ottermole.*

LES 13 COUPABLES, Georges Simenon (Fayard, *Paris*, 1932).
Not Maigret, but the first book of a great master.

THE LISTERDALE MYSTERY, Agatha Christie (*Collins*, London, 1934).
Includes the classic *Philomel Cottage.*

POWERS OF DARKNESS, Lord Dunsany (*Philip Allan*, London, 1934).
Has in it that detective-horror gem, *The Two Bottles of Relish.*

THE ADVENTURES OF ELLERY QUEEN, Ellery Queen (*Stokes*, New York, 1934).
Scrupulously fair deductions by another great master.

MR. CAMPION: CRIMINOLOGIST, Margery Allingham (*Doubleday*, New York, 1937).
A cornerstone with a notable detective.

The 21st title:
THE SIMPLE ART OF MURDER, Raymond Chandler (*Hamish Hamilton*, London, 1950).
Perhaps the flowering of crime-writing genius.

THE ALIBI MAN

The name was hard to recall. Once he remembered it, his future would be secure . . .

BILL KNOX

MANNY DAVIS winced and gave a groan as the white light of the torch beam lanced into his eyes. Daybreak or dusk, time was meaningless inside his prison, a half-existence measured only by the sparse meals which the torch-beam heralded.

Booted feet grated on the stone floor of the cellar and he shrank back against the damp brick of the wall, waiting. He heard a mild curse in the voice he'd come to anticipate – the only voice he'd heard since he'd first been brought to the place, the only human sound he'd heard since the last meal.

He had almost stopped caring. The cellar's perpetual chill had numbed his mind and frozen his senses. But why was it happening to him – why, in this way?

"Don't move." The gruff voice rapped its usual order and he obeyed. A rough hand clamped briefly to his forehead for a moment. "Got to make sure you stay healthy. Right – " the hand was withdrawn and he looked up, then away again as the white light seared his eyes.

"Now eat." He heard a tin mug laid down beside him, fumbled for it, felt the shock of the warm, friendly heat within, and swallowed down the thick, scalding soup. "And these – " a thick packet of sandwiches was thrust into his lap. The shape behind the light moved back.

The heavy footsteps retreated, the cellar door-hinge creaked, and there was a clatter as it was closed and locked. The last glow of the torch had gone. He was alone again. He undid the package carefully and took out the first sandwich. He tasted it delicately – food was important, food was life and interest rolled into one.

The sandwich was ham, heavily flavoured with mustard. The taste helped him forget the darkness for a moment then just as suddenly emphasised it. He began to quiver but no longer wept. That time had passed.

The two men who left the old grey-stone house closed and locked the door behind them, and strolled off together along the darkened street. A jukebox blared from a brightly lit basement coffee bar; a group of schoolgirls went chattering past them, going home to bed after a first house visit to the local cinema.

The shorter of the two men chuckled as the youngsters turned a corner and disappeared. "Like magpies, eh? Kids – their tongues are never still."

His companion, slim, serious-faced in the glow as they neared another street lamp, gave a curt nod. Children reminded him too much of the past – and the past was not pleasant.

They walked on, and a car approached, travelling slowly. It pulled into the kerb and one of its two occupants reached back and opened the nearside rear door. They climbed in, closed the door, and the car drew away again.

"How is he?" The driver glanced back for an instant.

"All right." The slim man answered for them both. "That cellar wasn't built for comfort."

"Can't have him complaining, Andrew." The driver gave a grim chuckle. "Anyway, another twenty-four hours and it'll be over. At least you don't have to go back to that flea-pit hotel tonight." He turned the car into the next street, driving aimlessly. There were few safer places to hold a meeting than in a moving car – it was strange the tricks you learned when you needed them.

The man in the front passenger seat cleared his throat and spoke for the first time. "There are some last details to be taken care of – shall we begin?"

The others nodded. Andrew Gunn took out a cigarette and lit it. Only twenty-four hours now and it would be finished. . . .

"Andrew – "

He jerked his mind to the present and made an apologetic grunt.

The man in front sighed. "Look, how much of what I've said have you been hearing?"

"Sorry." He made a grimace. "What was that last point?"

"I asked if you had everything you needed."

He nodded. "Everything. Don't worry about me."

*

In the outside world it was an hour before dawn. In the solid

darkness of the cellar, Manny Davis stirred uneasily in his shallow sleep. The door lock clicked and hinges creaked.

The torch-beam had found and pinned him before he rewoke to the usual regular sequence of nightmare reality. The vague figure approached him. By the wet feel of the sleeve which brushed against his face and the cold touch of the hand on his forehead, he guessed it must be raining outside. There was warm milk in the cup this time. He drank it greedily. As the sandwiches were dropped in his lap, he screwed his eyes in one more bid to beat the torchlight, to see even the rough outline of the face so close to his.

"Only a few more hours," said the same gruff voice.

The shape receded. He looked up at the beam, ignoring the watering pain it brought to his eyes. The vague mixture of contempt and something close to pity there had been in the words started his lips moving and he began a trembling, incoherent cursing.

The hinges creaked, the lock clicked and the darkness returned. He gave up, and felt for the sandwiches. They'd slipped from his lap, and it took a few moments of fumbling panic before he found them on the stone floor.

If he was right, he'd been in that cellar for ten days . . . though that was guesswork, backed up only by the patchy beard which had sprouted on his chin and the number of visits which his gaoler had made.

Only a few more hours. He took a deep breath of hope.

It had been a Friday when it had begun – and he could remember every detail of it. He'd had a few drinks that evening, then had started back to his bachelor flat. He'd put his key in the lock, he'd stepped inside, and then there'd been that blow on the head.

They must have drugged him after that. They – because he knew there were at least two of them. When he came round, he'd been in the dark cellar. His clothes had been changed. Instead of the neat fawn lightweight suit he'd been wearing, he was now dressed in an old wool sweather and thick, coarse trousers. No ropes, no gag restrained him. He'd explored the cellar by touch and found it was just four brick walls, a stone floor and a stone ceiling – swept absolutely bare except for two blankets as his bed.

When they came the first time, behind that torch beam, he'd tried to rush them. They'd simply knocked him down and gone away, leaving the food beside him.

He'd tried shouting, but the noise only beat back against his

ears. At last the torch beam had come, shining on his face for a moment then clicking out. He'd been left alone for a long time after that.

No violence, no threats – just the simple, unspoken lesson that to shout and rage meant no food or water. When at last the food did come, the man with the torch had seemed vaguely amused at his acceptance.

Now he felt tired again, very tired. His eyes were closing against his will, his limbs felt heavy, heavier. . . . He thought of the milk and realised he'd been drugged. By then he was halfway to oblivion and nothing more than a twinge of anger managed to register before he slumped down.

*

A lorry drove down the street with a rattle of cased milk-bottles as Andrew Gunn left the house and closed the door behind him. He walked briskly through the faint drizzle of rain. A distant church clock chimed six a.m.

The car, a sturdy but perfectly commonplace black saloon, was standing where they'd arranged. He unlocked the door, got in, and decided it was still dark enough to need sidelights. He switched them on, started the engine, then drove off, handling the car deftly and carefully.

Two and a half hours later the black saloon purred into the morning rush-hour traffic of the city. It had covered nearly eighty miles to get there.

A point-duty policeman stopped the traffic ahead; Gunn used the wait to glance up at the sky. Though the rain had stopped, the clouds were still thick – not that the weather entered into calculations. As the traffic moved again, he flicked the trafficator lever and joined the filter lane of cars drawing off to the left.

A few minutes more and he reached his goal, the dark bulk of an old office block. Across the street a sergeant and two police constables strode past, talking busily. The sight brought a quick, dry smile to his lips. He slowed the car and stopped it at the pavement's edge.

He left the vehicle and strolled into the office block, nodding casually to the liftman but using the stairs. He went up two flights, stopped outside a frosted glass office door. He tried it, found it was locked, and knocked quietly. There was no reply. Satisfied, he took a small, flat package from his pocket and

pushed it through the letter-box. It fitted easily – that detail had been carefully attended to, like all the others.

He left the building as unostentatiously as he'd entered, walked back to the car, and drove off. A little later he was having breakfast at a cafe half a mile away, eating with the leisurely enjoyment of a man with time to spare. He waited an hour then drove back, parked the car a few streets away from the office block, and walked the rest of the distance.

Outside the building a chattering, curiosity-drawn crowd was gathered round an ambulance and two police cars. He looked up, and saw the broken raw-edged glass which was all that remained of a blast-smashed window two floors above. The crowd parted as two ambulance men came out of the block, carrying a stretcher with a blanket-covered burden. They loaded it into their vehicle and a grim-faced constable climbed aboard before the doors were closed.

Andrew Gunn turned and walked away. At ten-forty he entered a call-box and dialled a local number. He let it ring for a moment then pressed the receiver rest and broke the connection. He released the rest, dialled the same number again, let it ring once more, then hung up.

Five minutes later he was driving out of the city. It had never been his home and he didn't expect to be back.

*

When Manny Davis came round he knew he was lying on the metal floor of a moving vehicle. There was a faint scent of exhaust fumes in his nostrils and the low, throbbing vibration of the engine pulsed against his body. There was something tight tied against his eyes. He groaned, pulled himself into a sitting position, and groped to remove the bandage.

"Take it off," invited a voice. "But when you do stay right where you are."

He did, his eyes gradually focussing in the dull gloom of the vehicle's interior. It seemed a medium-sized van and the partition to the driver's cab was closed. But, sitting cross-legged on the floor opposite him, were two men. Each had a nylon stocking mask over his face. One held an automatic, pointed casually in his direction.

"What's going on?" Davis licked his lips. There was no reply. Gradually, he became aware of other things. He was back in his

fawn lightweight suit. He was wearing a clean shirt – one of his own shirts. Even his shoes had been polished. He felt clean again. He put a hand up to his face and found the stubble of beard had gone.

"Just as you were seven days ago." There was grim amusement in the voice of the man with the gun.

"Seven –?"

"You thought it was longer, eh?" The man gave a grunt. "It wasn't long enough by half."

"Who are you?" demanded Davis, with a sudden spurt of courage. "Look, once I get out of this I'm going straight to the cops. You'll find out you can't kidnap someone like this – you'll find out all right."

"The police?" The second masked man shook his head. "As of now, they're your worry, not ours." A harsher note came into his voice. "Manny Davis, I've been given the task of telling you why you're here, and what faces you."

"And I've had just enough – " Davis began scrabbling to his feet in the lurching van, then subsided as the automatic swung to point steadily at him.

"Stay still and be quiet," said the man behind it.

"Just listen, Davis," advised his companion. "A little over a year ago a man named Henry Prinner was arrested by the police on a charge of murder. He set fire to a bookmaker's office. The fire spread, and five perfectly innocent people in a rented flat above died in their sleep. Five people, Davis – a man, his wife, and their three children."

Davis stared at the masked man in a sudden terror of understanding. "I wasn't involved in it – and anyway, Prinner wasn't the man. They took him in, but . . . but they let him go again."

"They let him go," growled the man with the gun. "They let him go because they had a weak case and he produced an alibi out of the blue. You were the alibi man, Davis."

"I only told the truth," protested Davis vigorously. "Prinner was with me – we played poker together that night until two o'clock."

"That's what you claimed," agreed the second man. "That was part of the bargain – that you'd give Prinner an alibi if he needed one. Because you employed him to start that fire, to get even with a bookie who wouldn't pay out on a bet." He pointed a sudden forefinger. "You supplied the alibi. And a green young lawyer who

believed you did some smart manoeuvring which made them set Prinner free."

"You're crazy." Davis beat the floor of the van with one fist. "I didn't do anything. Look, if there had been this bet, wouldn't the bookie have talked? Wouldn't the police have traced it back?"

"Men who put a heavy bet on a fixed race don't use their own name on the ledger. We know what happened, Davis – even though it took time to find out, even though we couldn't prove it the way a court would require, even though you cleared out of the city, and tried to disappear."

He stared at them, puzzling. Who were these men? Relatives? No, that was out. The family had left no kin.

He steadied his voice. "I didn't do anything."

The man opposite shrugged. "Well, hear the rest. You've been out of circulation for a week – and some strange things have happened in this city in those seven days. Each time there's been a man who looks pretty like you around, a man using your name and clothes. There's been a hotel room occupied by you. The police will find a tumbler with your fingerprints, some of your clothing, other things lying around it. They'll check – because nobody slept in that room last night and there's an unpaid bill and a false address.

"They're already looking for you, Davis. Because somebody put a parcel bomb through Prinner's letter-box this morning – somebody who knew enough about his habits to know he worked in a one-room office all alone, and never got there before ten o'clock. There's a lift-man who'll remember someone dressed like you.

"The police have already had an anonymous tip that you'd quarrelled with Prinner. If there are any paper fragments left from that bomb's wrapper, they'll find your prints on them. And the police will wonder why you wanted to kill the man you once saved. They'll wonder if the reason could be that he was blackmailing you in some way. They'll trace where you've been living, and be interested in the scraps of cut tin and electric wiring they find lying around. They'll put two and two together."

"You mean . . . you've framed me!" Davis swallowed hard, then forced a laugh. "Suppose I go straight to the cops, and tell them how you had me in that cellar?"

"Will they believe you?" he was asked. "Would you believe that kind of a story? Could you take them to the cellar? It's a very long way from here, Davis." The stranger rose and knocked

lightly on the driver's partition. The van's engine-note changed and gradually slowed.

"We're going to drop you off here," said the masked man, quietly. "Take my advice. If you see a policeman, start running. Not that you'll get far – but this time you're going to need something more than a too-clever lawyer."

The van stopped, the rear door opened, and Davis found himself pushed forward by the gun muzzle.

"Who the hell are you?" he asked bitterly.

"Just people – people who liked that family," said one of the men.

A sudden shove sent Davis toppling out. He fell on the roadway, heard the van door slam shut. Even as he dragged himself up, the vehicle was drawing away.

He cursed and stared after it through the late dusk. It was a plain dark van, like thousands of others. The registration plates were dull, muddy and unreadable.

Manny Davis looked around him. He was in a street near the docks, with tall, gaunt buildings on either side. There was no one in sight. He patted his jacket, made sure he still had his wallet, and gnawed his lip for a moment.

First of all he needed a drink. There would be somewhere near; there always was, down by the docks. Then he'd contact that young lawyer who'd swallowed the last story and got Prinner off the hook. Maybe he'd swallow this one too. That lawyer – he frowned, trying to remember his name. It had been common enough . . . it was almost on the tip of his tongue.

A drink might help him remember. He started walking, still trying to recall the lawyer's identity. Then, suddenly, he stopped. There was a car coming towards him, a car with a blue light flashing on its roof. He saw the peaked caps of the occupants and panic began to grow.

The car stopped and its police crew climbed out. Manny Davis screamed once at them – and began running.

They were overhauling him fast when he remembered. Gunn . . . that had been the lawyer's name. Andrew Gunn.

No policeman wants to be armed. They are such modest chaps they don't think they would be able to handle the darned things.

– Sir Joseph Simpson,
Commissioner of Metropolitan Police.

THE SHADOW

Herbert Harris

JANET WENT up the thickly carpeted staircase of the Park Palace Hotel and paused at the head of the stairs on the first floor

Edging her blonde head round a corner of the wall, she peered along the corridor with its white and gilt paint and rich crimson carpet. There was a slight film of perspiration forming at her hairline, and her heart beat a little faster.

There was nobody in the corridor. She moved forward carefully. The door of Suite No. Seven suddenly opened.

Janet only just had time to disappear into a recess in the corridor. With her back pressed against the wall, she waited. She held her breath until Peter Presbury had walked past and disappeared. He hadn't seen her, and luckily hadn't turned to look back. He had gone straight on and down the stairs which she had mounted only a few moments earlier.

Relaxing, she emerged from her hiding-place. After waiting for a few moments, she made her way down the staircase again, the beginning of a frown etching itself between her blue eyes.

How long, she thought, would she have to keep up this cat-and-mouse game, this furtive watching? And why should they think that Peter Presbury was anything but just another wealthy playboy with money enough to stay in Suite Seven?

One night Presbury must surely catch her out – in this act of spying on him. It might easily have been tonight. And would she have found the right amount of bravado to bluff it out?

*

Barry Gleeson, the house detective of the Park Palace Hotel, was simply testing her, of course, and deriving some kind of malicious pleasure from it.

All the same, he had warned her when he engaged her as his secretary: "I shall probably find you other jobs to do from time to time . . . right outside the realms of shorthand-typing and filing. The odd bit of spying, you know."

The first "odd bit of spying", as he had called it, came all too soon. Not that Janet hadn't relished that little surge of excitement when Barry Gleeson briefed her.

The hotel detective leaned back in his office chair, idly spinning a key-chain, studying her through eyes that had become mere slits in his wryly-smiling face.

"A little job for you, sweetheart. I want you to keep tabs on the fellow who has moved into Suite Seven. His name is Peter Presbury."

"Another of these hotel crooks?" she asked.

Gleeson shrugged. "That we don't know. But Suite Seven is the ritziest layout we've got here. Only oil-sheiks, tycoons and film-stars can afford it. Presbury doesn't fit."

"Have you checked all our reference-books?"

Gleeson grinned. "The lot! Presbury doesn't seem to belong to the mink-and-ermine brigade. And yet, even if he *is* a crook, why should this fellow – a young man on his own – install himself in the priciest suite we've got? Any ideas?"

Janet shook her head.

Gleeson massaged his chin. "Strangely enough, we had a character called Tony Manelli in that very same suite a week ago. He didn't stay long enough for me to ask questions . . . such as why he had registered with us under an assumed name.

"It wasn't until he was on his way out that I discovered who he really was – a man well-known to Interpol as a hotel-thief but extremely difficult to lay by the heels."

"Were any of the guests robbed while Manelli was here?" Janet asked.

"No. That's the queer part of it. Not so much as a cigarette-lighter was reported missing. I just can't think why he booked Suite Seven unless he felt like living it up for a bit."

Janet said thoughtfully: "And you think this Peter Presbury might be another Tony Manelli?"

Gleeson spread his hands. "He might be just a pools-winner for all *we* know. But we can never be too careful in a place like this. If Suite Seven is to become a rest-home for light-fingered chaps, or even blackmailing gigolos, it will get us a bad name."

"You intend to watch him, then?"

"Not *me*, sweetheart. He'll smell a rat. That's *your* job. And I'm hoping he's the type who talks freely to blondes."

Janet smiled. "I'm green," she said, "but I'm game."

So the witch-hunt was on. She watched and watched, and nothing happened.

Sometimes, when she lurked about the first-floor corridors, waiting for the quarry to make a false move, she wished that Presbury *would* do something – like sneaking up to the other floors, hanging about, trying doors, for example, to see if they were unlocked . . .

But Presbury very seldom moved out of his suite. Maybe, she thought, by staying in it he hoped to get his money's worth.

Tonight, when he suddenly came out of the suite, he had really startled her. And *now*, she told herself, perhaps we shall find something out . . .

When she got down to the hotel foyer, she saw that Presbury was there. He stood at the bookstall, thumbing through some magazines. He had his back to her.

Janet hesitated, considering him. He was not wearing a dinner-jacket, but a good grey lounge suit, which indicated that he was not likely to be using the dining-room but would be having his dinner served in his suite. It was also unlikely, then, that she would meet him in the ballroom, as she had hoped.

She sauntered up to the bookstall, stood within inches of him. He was browsing over a motoring magazine. She said: "That's the last copy of that paper, isn't it?"

Peter Presbury slanted his eyes at her, appearing to approve of what he saw. "Yes," he answered. "Were you wanting it, too?"

"Oh, it's all right; it doesn't matter." She treated him to one of her special smiles. "Only, I'm thinking of changing my car, and thought I'd look at the advertisements. Not that I know very much about cars really . . ."

No, she was thinking, he can't be anything but what he appears to be . . . one of the rich unknowns who likes the cream of life, and can afford to pay for it.

Not a crook surely? His face was too strong, too frank. The smile that wrinkled his eyes was too nice. A lady-killer? Well, perhaps. A gigolo on the prowl for an heiress? H'm, a probability, but difficult to believe . . .

"What sort of car are you looking for? Something pricey, or something cheap and cheerful?"

"I'm not sure," she said. "Are you in the motor trade?"

"No. Cars are just a hobby of mine, that's all. You're staying here, are you?"

"Yes. On the fifth floor. Which floor are you on?"

"The first."

"Oh!" She laughed. "Millionaires' Row!"

"I regret to say I'm not a millionaire," he told her. "I'm just on a rather good Expense Account."

"The people you work for must be very generous."

"They believe that you have to speculate to accumulate," Presbury answered with a smile.

"Accumulate what?"

"Ah well . . ."

Whatever he had been going to say died suddenly on his lips. His eyes suddenly flashed away from her face. He was no longer looking at *her*, but across her shoulder at a point somewhere on the other side of the foyer.

She turned casually, following the direction of his gaze. A man had entered by another door. A small, dapper man, dark in a swarthy way, wearing a dinner-jacket. He was strolling towards the ballroom-entrance, tapping a cigarette delicately against a case.

Janet said: "There's some sort of special event in the ballroom tonight. Will you be going to it later?"

Presbury moved his eyes back to her face. "I might. It all depends. I'd certainly like to . . . to chat with you about that car you're going to buy. Perhaps . . . later . . . we could meet in the American Bar . . .?"

"Very well," Janet nodded. "I'll look out for you."

He glanced at his wristwatch. "Right at the moment," he told her, "I . . . I've got to get back to my suite. I'm expecting a phone call, you see. You'll excuse me, won't you?"

He left her and hurried up the stairs towards the first floor, taking the steps two at a time.

*

Janet sat down on one of the long couches in the entrance lounge. She lit a cigarette thoughtfully, frowning in the direction of the staircase.

She had to come to terms with the truth, and the truth was that she *liked* Peter Presbury. Whatever he might be, she liked him a lot. And she didn't think she was being over-imaginative in thinking that Peter Presbury liked *her*. . . .

Already she could hear herself telling Barry Gleeson: "I think you're quite wrong about him – he's one of the nicest people I've ever met." And she could picture Gleeson saying, with that

crooked grin: "That's the trouble with you lady-spies, sweetheart, your hearts rule your heads."

Suddenly she stiffened alertly. The dapper swarthy man, whose entrance had caught Presbury's attention a little while before, reappeared from the ballroom.

The man moved casually towards the stairs, glanced quickly around the foyer as he paused to drop a cigarette-end into a large brass bowl, then walked in a leisurely way up the stairs.

Janet was surprised. She felt sure the man was not in residence at the hotel. She waited until he was out of sight, then followed.

Once again she paused at the head of the stairs on the first floor, inching her head round the corner of the wall to steal a furtive look down the corridor.

The man she had followed had stopped outside the door of Suite Seven. She saw him lift his hand and knock on the door. After a while, receiving no response, he knocked again.

Again the knock was not answered. Janet wondered where Peter Presbury could have gone after leaving her. He had said he was going to his suite to wait for a phone call. Why, then, was he not there?

The man outside the door felt swiftly in his pocket and took out a key. He inserted it into the lock and opened the door cautiously. Janet watched.

Then suddenly the man turned about and took a few running steps. But he didn't get very far. Presbury had shot out of the suite and gripped him.

Janet stood staring as Presbury – much bigger and heavier than his victim – wound an arm about the other man's neck. The smaller man yelled out with pain as one of his arms was twisted upwards behind his back.

She remained only long enough to see Presbury swing his victim round and fling him violently into Suite Seven. Then, flying down the staircase, Janet went to fetch Barry Gleeson.

When Gleeson and Janet finally reached the suite, Presbury – wearing a surprisingly calm look – had just replaced the telephone receiver. The swarthy man sat slumped in a chair, scowling.

The house-detective took a hard look at the man in the chair. "Well, well," he muttered, "if it isn't Tony Manelli." Then he turned to Presbury, who was nodding.

"I'm sorry if I've cut across your path in the line of duty, Mr. Gleeson," Presbury apologized. "My name isn't Presbury. It's Fenstone – Scotland Yard Special Branch. We had a nice hunch,

following a tip-off from Interpol. I tried to persuade my chief to let you in on it, but he insisted that I play this on my own."

"A hunch?" Gleeson echoed.

Presbury, otherwise Fenstone, smiled.

"Tony Manelli occupied this suite under another name."

Gleeson nodded. "I know."

"You may have wondered why nobody lost anything while he was in residence here?"

"Yes, that was curious."

"You wondered, perhaps, why Manelli chose the priciest suite in your hotel?" the Yard man went on. "I'll tell you. He did the same thing at the Paradise in Nice, the Miramar at Cannes. While staying here, he took a wax impression of the keys to Suite Seven. This enabled him to make replicas of the keys when he left here.

"You see the idea? Only the very wealthy occupy this suite – the mink-and-diamonds fry. Manelli has got the keys. He can sneak back here any time he likes to make his kill – slipping in after making sure the suite is empty, when, in fact, the occupants of the suite are out dining or dancing.

"So all I had to do was to move in here, and sit and wait for our friend to come."

"As one detective to another," Gleeson said, "I've got to hand it to you. It was very neat. And when your lads have removed the body . . ." – he jerked his head in Manelli's direction – ". . . . perhaps you'd join me for a celebration drink at the bar?"

"Yes," Fenstone smiled, "but actually I have a date to meet your secretary in the American Bar. . . ."

Janet's eyes were rounded in surprise. "You mean," she demanded, "you *know* me?"

The man in Suite Seven grinned. "Oh yes," he said, "but perhaps not well enough."

Although it has been said that the golden thread running through our law is that a person is innocent until proved guilty, one would not think so if one listens to some members of the Bench directing remarks at or to the person in the dock.

–Justice of the Peace.

Ede Was No Lady

PETER ARDOUIN

An EWMM *'first' story – slick and sly. Its moral? Old loves are best forgotten*

IT WAS Herbert who first missed Edith.

He keeps the little general just down our street; he's a widower and I think he had his eye on Ede to be his second. He used to come round to her flat – she lived just below us – every night, except Thursday, to take her out.

Well, one Friday night, it must have been about two months ago, he turns up, hammers on the door and gets no reply. Anyway he hangs around for half an hour, in case she'd just gone out for a minute. Eventually he gets bored, slips a note under her door and wanders off down to the pub, expecting her to follow him there later.

I was there drinking with some of my mates. Later on he asked me if I knew where she was, or had she told my Missus she was going away. I said my Missus hadn't said anything about it. He said he couldn't understand it because she always came into his shop of a Friday to give him her order, and he'd take it up in the evening.

On Saturday night he's round again. This time he comes upstairs and asks the Missus if Ede had said anything about going away. She says no, and goes on that perhaps she got called away because a relative got taken bad. He says he's worried because she hasn't cancelled her milk or papers, or anything, and how she'd have at least left a message for him.

That's how things stood for about a week, then Bert rings up the Police, and tells them all about how she lives there by herself

and how he's worried she might have had an accident, or something. They send a couple of young blokes round. One of them gets a ladder and puts it up against her kitchen window. When he gets up there he takes one look and comes down so fast he kicks his mate's helmet off – his mate was holding the bottom of the ladder. All he says is, "He's right; she's up there! For Gawd's sake ring the station."

We'd hardly had a chance to get upstairs when the whole block's busy with Police. They bust down her door and find her lying in the kitchen with her head stove in. She was only half dressed. Everything was turned upside down, and her bag emptied on the floor. Of course everybody thought it was one of those jobs where someone breaks in, gets disturbed and loses his head.

It doesn't take the Police doctor long to work out she must have been croaked on the Thursday night previous. Nobody had heard anything. Ede's flat was on the first floor, the one underneath was empty. My Missus always goes to her mother's Thursday, and I go to the flicks.

We all made statements, and it looked pretty cut and dried. So you can imagine how I felt when, the next day, I answered the door and two plain clothes dicks walked in and charged me with the wilful murder of one, Edith Tomkins. For the purpose of committing a felony. Of course I said I didn't know anything about it, and I still say that to them. But it won't make any difference if I tell you the story because I'm washed up for good.

*

It all came out through a half-crown, a South African half-crown.

You see, I knew Ede before. It was during the war. I was doing pretty well on the Black Market. My asthma had kept me out of the Forces – it's bad when I want it to be. Ede found she liked the good things in life, and that her face and figure would get her them without really trying, was my favourite success symbol.

This went on for about three years. By then the Big Boys had got well organised, and you either joined up with them or went under. Cash got tight, and Ede began to look round for fresh pastures. It didn't take her very long to find them. I was away from home quite often, which meant she had plenty of time to look.

I came back one week-end to find – No, not a note. That

wasn't Ede's way, but a ruddy great South African in the flat, and the way he was treating Ede told me he was no stranger. I'm not small but this Springbok looked as though he could have picked me up and used me as a billiard cue. So I didn't see much point in mixing it with him.

Well, this great ape looked me up and down, and said, "So this is him, is it?"

Ede answered: "Yes."

The South African reached into his pocket and pulled out half-a-crown, and threw it at me, saying, "Here, boy, go make us a dollar." In the old days I'd always boasted that if anyone gave me half a dollar, I could double it in ten minutes. It hit me in the chest and rolled on the floor.

I just looked at Ede and said, "Sorry, the mint's closed." I turned round and walked out. Not much of an exit line, but as I said, I wouldn't have got any joy out of mixing it with somebody that size.

Soon after that I got sent down for ten years for being mixed up in that bank job where the nightwatchman got shot. When I came out, with time off for good behaviour, I knocked around for a bit, but times had changed and nobody wanted me particularly. I wasn't a specialist. So I kept trying and got this job as a porter on the market.

That's where I met the Missus. Her husband had been killed in the war, and she was working on one of the stalls down there. Soon after that we were married. We got a little flat and for a while life was very cosy.

*

It must be nearly eighteen months ago when I was coming home from work one morning. Who should I meet on the stairs but Ede. She told me she had moved into the flat below and that I must come down one evening and talk over old times. I said that I was married and could only come on a Thursday night when the Missus was out. She told me that was okay.

One thing led to another, and pretty soon it became a regular thing for me to go in of a Thursday evening. And, you know, it was quite easy for me to carry on where I'd left off all those years ago.

It suited Ede, I suppose it gave her a taste of her old life, even though she had settled down on her savings and what she could earn as an occasional barmaid at the Swan. It suited me cause my

Missus is the homely sort, and Ede was still attractive in a hard sort of way, and good fun.

Anyway, that's how things were till suddenly, one Thursday night, she throws this half-crown on the table and asks me if I remember it. I said I did but I didn't want to talk about it. To tell the truth the memory of that Springbok still rankled; it was the first time anybody had ever got the better of me.

I think she must have been a bit drunk that night as she started to carry on about the rows we'd had and how I'd knocked her about in the old days. I lost my rag then, and slapped her round the face. That made her worse. I went mad and all I wanted to do was shut her up. I turned round and hit her again, only this time with an empty bottle. It was one of those large flagon beer bottles, and I kept on hitting her.

*

She only screamed once, then turned and ran into the kitchen. I followed still lashing out at her. She fell down with her back up against the fridge door, which was open. I could tell what I'd done, just by looking at her and that there was nothing anybody could do for her.

It's a funny thing, but when I realised she was dead and that I had killed her, I didn't panic or anything. I didn't even touch her, just stood and looked at her. Then I looked down at myself. A little blood was spattered down the front of my legs, but this didn't matter much because I'd only got my pants and socks on.

I took a towel down off the rack and wiped the neck of the bottle, then dropped it on the floor. It bounced once then rolled into the corner, I got the glass I'd been drinking from, took it into the kitchen and washed and dried it, then used the towel to stop myself leaving any prints, and put it into the cupboard. As I went out I shut the kitchen door. I thought that with the fridge door open and the window being sealed up tight – Ede didn't like fresh air – it'd be pretty cold in there. They'd have a job to figure just when she'd been killed.

I went in to the bedroom and made a bundle of all my clothes, took them out and put them on a table in the other room. Back in the bedroom I went, cleaning off all my prints. It didn't matter so much in the other rooms because we was neighbours, and Ede'd often call me in to fix a washer or put up a curtain, or something. After I thought I'd got rid of all my dabs, I turned the

mattress over onto the floor and slit it open with a pair of scissors off the dressing table.

I pulled all the drawers out and emptied them, took all her clothes out of the wardrobe and dumped them on the floor. Then I went into the other room and made that look as though it'd been done over. I emptied her bag, took out her purse and opened that and tipped out everything she had in there on the table. Then I swept all the money up and put it in my bundle of clothes. At the front door I had a quick look; it looked just as I'd meant it to.

Well, there was nothing left for me to do but to get upstairs damn quickly. I quietly opened the door, dropped the towel I was still holding on the floor behind me, and went out pulling the door to on the Yale. I ran upstairs to my own flat, where I ripped off my pants and socks, stuck them in a paper bag which I stuffed into my raincoat pocket. I knew I could get rid of them the next morning when I went to see a mate of mine who stoked a boiler in a big block of flats.

I had a quick wash and got dressed, then looked at my watch. It was only twenty to nine. I knew if I hurried I could just get to the Embassy in time for the big feature. I got there just in time. As I paid I breathed pretty hard at the girl at the cash desk, and I could tell by her face she'd back up my story that I'd been on a pub crawl for most of the night.

*

About twenty past ten I came out and ran like hell to the Swan because I'd found I hadn't got any fags, and this was going to be one night when I'd need them. I got up to the bar and put a half-a-crown and a two bob bit straight down on the bar, turned round and went out as soon as Jim, the barman, gave me the fags.

I was out the door before he'd picked up the money and when he put it down on top of the till – where he always puts cigarette money – he notices that I've given him a South African half-crown.

You see, when I swept up the money I tipped out of her purse onto the table, I must have got hold of that half-crown, because it'd still have been there on the table where Ede'd dropped it earlier that evening.

Now of all the people I could give this half-dollar to, it had to

be him. Only the day before Ede had tried to buy a drink with it and when Jim had said, "Hi, Ede, this isn't one of ours," she'd said, "Sorry, Jim, I wasn't trying it on – I wouldn't lose this for all the gin in Holland. It was given me by a friend who isn't with us any more." Jim thought that seeing that we lived in the same block, perhaps she'd given it to me to pay her milk or something. So he puts it on one side so that he can ask her if it's hers. Of course since Ede doesn't come in he forgets all about it. That is, until the Police come round asking questions and he hears Ede's been murdered.

But, you could say, surely they wouldn't get a man on that. All you've got to say is that she gave it to you for a packet of fags or something, and I say yes. That's what I said.

But, you see, I washed the wrong bloody glass.

Readers Say . . .

Extracts from current letters. Opinions expressed are those of the writers. Publication in this open forum does not necessarily mean that EWMM *agrees with any views offered.*

Collector's Pieces

As a devoted reader of detective fiction, I caught the mania when serving in World War Two, and from then on began to collect. Now I have quite a formidable number of whodunit books.

But *EWMM* has sparked off my interest in adding volumes of short stories to my collection. What would you, Mr. Editor, put down as a sort of Top Twenty list of great collections of detective stories up to 1939?

Or is the challenge too formidable, Sir?

Glasgow, W.5. P. E. MUND

● *A task after our own heart, Mr. Mund; no editor could resist such a challenge. You are urged to turn to* The Top Twenty Cornerstones *in this issue.*

The Lives Elephants Lead

The elephant craze took a long time to reach us out here. It struck me that *EWMM* probably doesn't often get a short story with an elephant for the hero. As a temporary substitute, here is a local nonsense-quiz you may like:

Why do police-elephants wear sunglasses?

Because shadowing suspects is very difficult unless you're disguised.

Kuwait. JAMES L. JUNE

Not Really Like Dave Marlowe

With all the detective stories there are, an ordinary reader like myself takes it for granted the official parts of the stories are accurate; I hope so, anyway.

But do private eyes *really* exist? I mean, to any proper extent, though I am quite aware they are unlikely to do as much as the police in investigating murders.

Lostock, Nr. Bolton. J. L. GLAZER

● *Most good modern crime writers can be read as authorities on police procedure. A private eye wouldn't be allowed within yards of a murder – in real life he is usually a hard-working man chasing debtors, obtaining divorce evidence, and making status enquiries.*

Secret Agent

I greatly enjoy the Edgar Wallace stories you publish. They are quite new to me, though I have several volumes of his short stories in my possession.

Perhaps you can name one for me? In the first world war I read, in two issues of the same magazine, stories he wrote about a German spy. I have been unable to get the name of the collected stories, if they were in a volume.

Stonor, Oxon. FREDERICK WELLS

● *You mean* The Adventures of Heine, *published by Ward Lock as a collection in 1919* (and in 'cheaps' since.) *You* may *be able to get a copy in a secondhand bookshop, or you can probably get it through your local Public Library service.*

Grumble

I have only one real complaint about *EWMM*. I do dislike very much the long "short" stories you often publish which take up most of the magazine, I remember reading, once, that the ideal short story is between six and eight thousand words, or, at the most, twelve thousand – surely you go over that in your big stories?

Ventnor, I.O.W. W. STUMP

● *You are right about length, though we favour less than 6,000. Under its new Editor,* EWMM *will stick to the 'normal' length unless something very good indeed comes up.*

You Can Count on It

We are always reading about thrillers being responsible for the rise in crime figures, and detective stories are always being blamed

for juvenile delinquency. I suppose there is the same complaint made in every generation about books, for recently I was looking through some mid-Victorian papers in volume form.

One of the letters was an angry complaint from somebody signing 'Paterfamilias' who suggested that the 'present outrageous wave of wickedness' in France could be put squarely where it belonged, on the 'disgusting, immoral' novels of M. Alexandre Dumas!

Perhaps, in a hundred years time, somebody will be laughing at our 'Paterfamilias' of 1965.

London, S.W.18. (Miss) CONYTH FIELDER

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