Edgar Wallace

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Edgar Wallace
Circumstantial Evidence

Marten Cumberland
The Madness of M. Lebourg

Charles Franklin
The Cloud of Poison

Nigel Morland
Death and the Golden West

also many other stories and features

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Mystery Magazine

Vol. II No. 9 April, 1965

Mystery, Crime, and Detection for the Aficionado

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NIGEL MORLAND, *Editor*

Briefly

IN PHILADELPHIA one hundred and twenty-four years ago the world's first mass circulation magazine was getting into its stride. Its sale in a few brief months rose from a mere five thousand copies to some forty thousand.

Under the hand of its new editor, *Graham's Magazine* was swiftly becoming the pride of a city for long a printing centre and now the founding home for the golden age of the cheap magazine. More important by far than the rise of *Graham's* was the work of its efficient and imaginative editor – Edgar Allan Poe.

In his thirty-second year, Poe was at the flood-tide – so brief and transitory – of his success. He was receiving the impressive salary of eight hundred dollars a year, which permitted him to keep his child-wife, Virginia, in comparative luxury.

In that heyday of fame Poe sat down to write a story for *Graham's*; on the original draft he called it *The Murders in the Rue Trianon Bas.* Happily, with an afterthought stemming from pure genius, he retitled it *The Murders in the Rue Morgue.* It was published in April, 1841.

Ratiocination in the form of the true detective story had been born – the eccentric Dupin, and his anonymous Boswell, have inspired unnumbered private detectives and their Watsons. The stupidity of the police, the investigatory routine, the denouement, the chronicler's mystification – they were all here in this first, perfect tale.

The mighty edifice of crime fiction since then, the millions of words, the brilliant writers, the whole immense monied structure as we know it in these times stem from that single story published on that far off April day.

It is only right to give honour where it is due, as men have done before. But in these hurried days, many of us overlook beginnings. When we read of some crime writer selling millions of copies of his works, it is easy to forget the founder of it all, the 'onlie begetter' whom every crime writer and every enthusiast should pause to remember with affection.

The ideal epitaph to Poe was written by another American, Philip Van Doren Stern: 'Like printing, the detective story has been improved upon only in a mechanical way since it was first invented; as artistic products, Gutenberg's Bible and Poe's *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* have never been surpassed.'

The Editor.

Edgar Wallace

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

The impossible sometimes
appears to be true,
and the truth
is . . .?

COLONEL CHARTRES DANE lingered irresolutely in the broad and pleasant lobby. Other patients had also lingered a while in that agreeable vestibule. In wintry days it was a cosy place; its polished panelled walls reflecting the gleam of logs that burnt in the open fireplace. There was a shining oak settle that invited gossip, and old prints and blue china bowls frothing over with the flowers of a belated autumn or advanced spring-tide, to charm the eye.

In summer it was cool and dark and restful. The mellow tick of the ancient clock, the fragrance of roses, the soft breeze that came through an open casement stirring the lilac curtains uneasily, these corollaries of peace and order has soothed many an unquiet mind.

Colonel Chartres Dane fingered a button of his coat and his thin patrician face was set in thought. He was a sparse man of fifty-five; a man of tired eyes and nervous gesture.

Dr. Merriget peered at him through his powerful glasses and wondered.

It was an awkward moment, for the doctor had murmured his sincere, if conventional, regrets and encouragements, and there was nothing left but to close the door on his patient.

"You have had a bad wound there, Mr. Jackson," he said, by way of changing a very gloomy subject and filling in the interval of silence.

Colonel Dane fingered the long scar on his cheek.

"Yes," he said absently, "a child did that – my niece. Quite my own fault."

"A child?" Dr. Merriget appeared to be shocked. He was in reality very curious.

"Yes . . . she was eleven . . . my own fault. I spoke disrespectfully of her father. It was unpardonable, for he was only recently dead. He was my brother-in-law. We were at breakfast and she threw the knife . . . yes . . ."

He ruminated on the incident and a smile quivered at the corner of his thin lips.

"She hated me. She hates me still . . . yes . . ."

He waited.

The doctor was embarrassed and came back to the object of the visit.

"I should be much more easy in my mind if you saw a specialist, Mr.–er–Jackson. You see how difficult it is for me to give an opinion? I may be wrong. I know nothing of your history, your medical history I mean. There are many men in town who could give you a better and more valuable opinion than me. A country practitioner like myself is rather in a backwater. One has the usual cases that come to one in a small country town, maternity, commonplace ailments . . . it is difficult to keep abreast of the extraordinary developments in medical science . . ."

"Do you know anything about Machonicies College?" asked the colonel unexpectedly.

"Yes, of course." The doctor was surprised. "It is one of the best of the technical schools. Many of our best doctors and chemists take a preparatory course there. Why?"

"I merely asked. As to your specialists . . . I hardly think I shall bother them."

Dr. Merriget watched the tall figure striding down the red-tiled path between the banked flowers, and was still standing on the doorstep when the whine of his visitor's car had gone beyond the limits of his hearing.

"H'm," said Dr. Merriget as he returned to his study. He sat awhile thinking.

"Mr. Jackson?" he said aloud. "I wonder why the colonel calls himself 'Mr. Jackson'?"

He had seen the colonel two years before at a garden party, and had an excellent memory for faces.

He gave the matter no further thought, having certain packing to

superintend – he was departing the following day for Istanbul, a holiday trip he had promised himself for years.

On the following afternoon at Machonicies Technical School, a lecture was in progress.

". . . by this combustion you have secured true K.c.y . . . which we will now test and compare with the laboratory quantities . . . a deliquescent and colourless crystal extremely soluble . . ."

The master, whose monotonous voice droned like the hum of a distant, big, stationary bluebottle, was a middle-aged man, to whom life was no more than a chemical reaction, and love not properly a matter for his observation or knowledge. He had an idea that it was dealt with effectively in another department of the college . . . metaphysics . . . or was it philosophy? Or maybe it came into the realms of the biology master?

Ella Grant glared resentfully at the crystals which glittered on the blue paper before her, and snapped out the bunsen burner with a vicious twist of finger and thumb. Denman always overshot the hour. It was a quarter past five! The pallid clock above the dais, where Professor Denman stood, seemed to mock her impatience.

She sighed wearily and fiddled with the apparatus on the bench at which she sat. Some twenty other white-coated girls were also toying with test-tubes and bottles and graduated measures, and twenty pairs of eyes glowered at the bald and stooping man who, unconscious of the passing of time, was turning affectionately to the properties of potassium.

"Here we have a metal whose strange affinity for oxygen . . . eh, Miss Benson? . . . five? Bless my soul, so it is! Class is dismissed. And ladies, *ladies, ladies*! Please, please let me make myself heard. The laboratory keeper will take from you all chemicals you have drawn for this experiment . . ."

They were crowding towards the door to the changing room. Smith, the laboratory man, stood in the entrance grabbing wildly at little green and blue bottles that were thrust at him, and vainly endeavouring by a private system of mnemonics to commit his receipts to memory.

"Miss Fairlie, phial fairly; Miss Jones, bottle bones; Miss Walter, bottle salter."

If at the end of his collection he failed to recall a rhyme to any names, the owner had passed without cashing in.

"Miss Grant –?"

The laboratory of the Analytical Class was empty. Nineteen bottles stood on a shelf and he reviewed them.

"Miss Grant –?"

No, he had said nothing about 'aunt' or 'can't' or 'pant'.

He went into the changing room, opened a locker and felt in the pockets of the white overall. They were empty. Returning to the laboratory, he wrote in his report book:

'Miss Grant did not return experiment bottle.'

He spelt experiment with two r's and two m's.

*

Ella found the bottle in the pocket of her overall as she was hanging it up in the long cupboard of the changing room. She hesitated a moment, frowning resentfully at the little blue phial in her hand, and rapidly calculating the time it would take to return to the laboratory to find the keeper and restore the property. In the end, she pushed it into her bag and hurried from the building. It was not an unusual occurrence that a student overlooked the return of some ingredient, and it could be restored in the morning.

Had John succeeded? That was the thought which occupied her. The miracle about which every junior dreams had happened. Engaged in the prosecution of the notorious Flackman, his leader had been taken ill, and the conduct of the case had fallen to him. He was opposed by two brilliant advocates, and the judge was a noted humanitarian.

She did not stop to buy a newspaper; she was worried by the thought that John Freeder might not have waited for her, and heaved a sigh of relief when she turned into the old-world garden of the court-house and saw him pacing up and down the flagged walk, his hands in his pockets.

"I'm so sorry . . ."

She had come up behind him, and he turned on his heel to meet her. His face spoke success. The elation in it told her everything she wanted to know, and she slipped her arm through his with a queer mingled sense of pride and uneasiness.

" . . . the judge sent for me in his room afterwards and told me that the Attorney could not have conducted the case better than me."

"He is guilty?" she asked, hesitating.

"Who, Flackman . . . I suppose so," he said carelessly. "His gun was found in Sinnit's apartment, and it was known that he quarrelled with Sinnit about money. There was a girl in it I think,

although we have never been able to get sufficient proof of that to put her into the box. You seldom have direct evidence in cases of this character, Ella, and in many ways circumstantial evidence is infinitely more damning. If a witness went into the box and said, 'I saw Flackman shoot Sinnit and saw Sinnit die,' the whole case would stand or fall by the credibility of that evidence; prove that witness an habitual liar and there is no chance of a conviction. On the other hand, when there are six or seven witnesses, all of whom subscribe to some one act or appearance or location of a prisoner, and all agreeing . . . why, you have him."

She nodded.

Her acquaintance with John Freeder had begun on her summer vacation, and had begun romantically but unconventionally, when a sailing boat overturned, with its occupant pinned beneath the bulging canvas. It was Ella, a magnificent swimmer, who had seen the accident and had dived into the sea to the assistance of the drowning man.

"This means a lot to me, Ella," he said earnestly as they turned into the busy street. "It means the foundation of a new life."

His eyes met hers, and lingered for a second.

"Did you see Stephanie last night?" he said suddenly. She felt guilty.

"No," she admitted, "but I don't think you ought to worry about that, John. Stephanie is expecting the money almost by any mail."

"She has been expecting the money almost by any mail for a month past," he said dryly, "and in the meantime this infernal note is becoming due. What I can't understand –"

She interrupted him with a laugh.

"You can't understand why they accepted my signature as a guarantee for Stephanie's," she laughed, "and you are extremely uncomplimentary!"

Stephanie Boston, her some-time room mate, and now her apartmental neighbour, was a source of considerable worry to John Freeder, although he had only met her once. A handsome, volatile girl, with a penchant for good clothes and a mode of living out of all harmony with the meagre income she drew from free-lance art work, she had found herself in difficulties. It was a condition which the wise had long predicted and Ella, not so wise, had dreaded. And then one day the young artist had come to her with an oblong slip of paper, and an incoherent story of somebody being willing to lend her money if Ella would sign her name; and

Ella Grant, to whom finance was an esoteric mystery, had cheerfully complied.

"If you were a great heiress, or you were expecting a lot of money coming to you through the death of a relative," persisted John, with a frown, "I could understand Isaacs being satisfied with your acceptance, but you aren't!"

Ella laughed softly and shook her head.

"The only relative I have in the world is poor dear Uncle Chartres, who loathes me! I used to loathe him too, but I've got over that. After Daddy died I lived with him for a few months, but we quarrelled over – over – well, I won't tell you what it was about, because I am sure he was sorry. I had a fiendish temper as a child, and I threw a knife at him."

"Good Lord!" gasped John, staring at her.

She nodded solemnly.

"I did – so you see there is very little likelihood of Uncle Chartres, who is immensely rich, leaving me anything more substantial than the horrid weapon with which I attempted to slay him!"

John was silent. Isaacs was a professional moneylender . . . he was not a philanthropist.

When Ella reached the house that night, she determined to perform an unpleasant duty. She had not forgotten John Freeder's urgent insistence upon seeing Stephanie Boston – she had simply avoided the unpalatable.

Stephanie's flat was on the first floor; her own was immediately above. She considered for a long time before she pressed the bell.

Mrs. Jones, Stephanie's daily, opened the door, and her eyes were red with recent weeping.

"What is the matter?" asked Ella in alarm.

"Come in, miss," said the woman miserably, "Miss Boston left a letter for you."

"Left?" repeated Ella wonderingly. "Has she gone away?"

"She was gone when I came this morning. The bailiffs have been here . . ."

Ella's heart sank.

The letter was short but eminently lucid:

I am going away, Ella. I do hope that you will forgive me. That wretched bill has become due and I simply cannot face you again. I will work desperately hard to repay you, Ella.

The girl stared at the letter, not realizing what it all meant. Stephanie had gone away!

"She took all her clothes, miss. She left this morning, and told

the porter she was going into the country; and she owes me three weeks' wages!"

Ella went upstairs to her own flat, dazed and shaken: as she made the last turn of the stairs she was conscious of a man waiting on the landing above, with his back to her door. Though she did not know him, he evidently recognized her, for he raised his hat. She had a dim idea that she had seen him somewhere before, but for the moment could not recollect the circumstances.

"Good evening, Miss Grant," he said amiably. "I think we have met before. Miss Boston introduced me – name of Higgins."

She shook her head.

"I am afraid I don't remember you," she said, and wondered whether his business was in connection with Stephanie's default.

"I brought up the paper that you signed about three months ago."

Then she recalled him and went cold.

"Mr. Isaacs didn't want to make any kind of trouble," he said. "The bill became due a week ago and we have been trying to get Miss Boston to pay. As it is, it looks very much as though you will have to find the money."

"When?" she asked in dismay.

"Mr. Isaacs will give you until tomorrow night," said the man. "I have been waiting here since five o'clock to see you. I suppose it is convenient, miss?"

Nobody knew better than Mr. Isaacs' clerk that it would be most inconvenient, not to say impossible, for Ella Grant to produce four hundred pounds.

"I will write to Mr. Isaacs," she said, finding her voice at last.

*

She sat down in the solitude and dusk of her flat to think things out. She was overwhelmed, numbed by the tragedy. To owe money that she could not pay was to Ella Grant an unspeakable horror.

There was a letter in the letter-box. She had taken it out mechanically when she came in, and as mechanically slipped her fingers through the flap and extracted a folded paper. But she put it down without so much as a glance at it.

What would John say? What a fool she had been, what a perfectly reckless fool! She had met difficulties before, and had overcome them. She had left her uncle's house as a child of fourteen and had subsisted on the slender income which her father had left

her, rejecting every attempt on the part of Chartres Dane to make her leave the home of an invalid maiden aunt where she had taken refuge; then she had faced what she believed was the supreme crisis of life.

But this was different.

Chartres Dane! She rejected the thought instantly, only to find it recurring. Perhaps he would help. She had long since overcome any ill-feeling she had towards him, for whatever dislike she had, had been replaced by a sense of shame and repentance. She had often been on the point of writing to him, but had thought that he might imagine she had some ulterior motive. He was her relative. He had some responsibility . . . again the thought inserted itself and suddenly she made up her mind.

Chartres Dane's house lay twelve miles out of town, a great rambling place set on the slopes of a wooded hill, a place admirably suited to his peculiar love of solitude.

She had some difficulty in finding a taxi-driver who was willing to make the journey and when she descended from the cab at the gateway of Hevel House it had grown dark, though a pale light still lingered in the western skies. There was a lodge at the entrance of the gate, but this had long since been untenanted. She found her way up the long drive to the columned portico in front of the house. The place was in darkness, and she experienced a pang of apprehension. Suppose he was not there? Even if he were, he would not help her, she told herself; and the possibility of his being absent gave her courage.

Her hand was on the bell when there came to her a flash of memory. At such an hour he would be sitting in the window-recess overlooking the lawn at the side of the house. She had often seen him there on warm summer nights, his glass of port on the broad window-ledge, a cigar clenched between his white teeth, brooding out into the darkness.

She came down the steps, and walking on the close-cropped grass bordering the flower-beds, came slowly, almost stealthily, to the library window. The big casement was wide open; a faint light showed within, and she stopped dead, her heart beating furiously at the sight of a filled glass on the window-ledge. His habits had not changed, she thought; he would be sitting just out of sight from where she stood, in that window-recess which was nearest to her. Summoning all her courage, she advanced still farther. He was not in his customary place, and she crept nearer to the window.

Colonel Chartres Dane was sitting at a large writing-table in the

centre of the room; his back was towards her, and he was writing by the light of two tall candles that stood upon the table.

At the sight of his back all her courage failed, and, as he rose from the table, she shrank back into the shadow. She saw him take up the glass of wine, and after a moment, she looked again and saw him, still with his back to her, put it on the table beside him as he sat down again.

She could not do it, she dare not do it, she told herself, and turned away sorrowfully. She would write to him.

She had stepped from the grass to the path when a man came from an opening in the bushes and gripped her arm.

"Hello!" he said, "who are you, and what are you doing here?"

"Let me go," she cried, frightened. "I – I –"

"What are you doing by the colonel's window?"

"I am his niece," she said, trying to recover some of her dignity.

"I thought you might be his aunt," said the gamekeeper ironically. "Now, my girl, I am going to take you in to the colonel –"

With a violent thrust she pushed him from her; the man stumbled and fell. She heard a thud and a groan, and stood rooted to the spot with horror.

"Have I hurt you?" she whispered. There was no reply.

She felt, rather than saw, that he had struck his head against a tree in falling and turning, she flew down the drive, terrified, nearly fainting in her fright. The cabman saw her as she flung open the gate and rushed out.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

"I – I think I have killed a man," she said incoherently, and then from the other end of the drive she heard a thick voice cry:

"Stop that girl!"

It was the voice of the gamekeeper, and for a moment the blood came back to her heart.

"Take me away, quickly, quickly," she cried.

The cabman hesitated.

"What have you been doing?" he asked.

"Take – take me away," she pleaded.

Again he hesitated.

"Jump in," he said gruffly.

*

Three weeks later Michael Penderbury, one of the greatest advocates at the Bar, walked into John Freeder's chambers.

John sat at his table, his head on his arm, and Penderbury put his

hand lightly upon the shoulders of the stricken man.

"You've got to take a hold of yourself, Freeder," he said. "You will neither help yourself nor her by going under."

John lifted a haggard face to the lawyer.

"It is horrible," he said huskily. "She's innocent. What evidence have they?"

"My dear good fellow," said Penderbury, "the only evidence worth while in a case like this is circumstantial evidence. If there were direct evidence we might test the credibility of the witness. But in circumstantial evidence every piece of testimony dovetails into the other; each witness creates one strand of the net."

"It's horrible, impossible, it's madness to think that Ella could –"

Penderbury shook his head. Pulling up a chair at the other side of the table, he sat down, his grave eyes fixed on the younger man.

"Look at it from a lawyer's point of view, Freeder," he said gently. "Ella Grant is badly in need of money. She had backed a bill for a girl-friend and the money is suddenly demanded. A few minutes after learning this from Isaacs' clerk, she finds a letter in her flat, which she has obviously read – the envelope was opened and its contents extracted – a letter from Colonel Dane's lawyers, telling her that the colonel has made her his sole heiress. She knows, therefore, that the moment the colonel dies she will be a rich woman. She has in her handbag a bottle containing cyanide of potassium, and that night, under the cover of darkness, drives to the colonel's house and is seen outside the library window by Colonel Dane's gamekeeper. She admitted, when she was questioned by the detective, that she knew the colonel was in the habit of sitting by the window and that he usually put his glass of port on the window-ledge. What was easier than to drop a fatal dose of cyanide into the wine? Remember, she admitted that she had hated him and that once she threw a knife at him, wounding him, so that the scar remained to the day of his death. She admitted herself that it was his practice to put the wine where she could have reached it."

He drew a bundle of papers from his pocket, unfolded them, and turned the leaves rapidly.

"Here it is," and he read:

> Yes, I saw a glass of wine on the window-ledge. The colonel was in the habit of sitting in the window on summer evenings. I have often seen him there, and I knew when I saw the wine that he was near at hand.

He pushed the paper aside and looked at the man before him.

"She is seen by the gamekeeper, as I say," he went on, "and when this man attempts to intercept her, she struggles from his grasp and runs down the drive to the cab. The cabman says she was agitated, and when he asked her what was the matter, she replied that she had killed a man –"

"She meant the gamekeeper," interrupted John.

"She may or may not, but she made that statement. There are the facts, John; you cannot get past them. The letter from the lawyers – which she says she never read – the envelope was found open and the letter taken out; is it likely that she had not read it? The bottle of cyanide of potassium was found in her possession, and –" he spoke deliberately – "the colonel was found dead at his desk and death was due to cyanide of potassium. A candle which stood on his desk had been overturned by him in his convulsions, and the first intimation that anything was wrong, was the sight of the blazing papers on the table. The gamekeeper saw them when he returned to report what had occurred in the grounds. There is no question what verdict the jury will return. . . ."

*

It was a great and a fashionable trial. The court-house was crowded, and the public had fought for a few places that were vacant.

Sir Johnson Grey, the Attorney-General, was to lead to the Prosecution, and Penderbury had John Freeder as his junior.

The opening of the trial was due for ten o'clock, but it was half-past ten when the Attorney-General and Penderbury came into the court, and there was a light in Penderbury's eyes and a smile on his lips which amazed his junior.

John had only glanced once at the pale, slight prisoner. He dared not look at her.

"What is the delay?" he asked irritably. "This infernal judge is always late."

At that moment the court rose as the judge came on to the Bench, and almost immediately afterwards the Attorney-General was addressing the court.

"My Lord," he said, "I do not propose offering any evidence in this case on behalf of the Crown. Last night I received from Dr. Merriget, an eminent practitioner of Townville, a sworn statement on which I propose examining him.

"Dr. Merriget," the Attorney-General went on, "has been

travelling in the Near East, and a letter which was sent to him by the late Colonel Dane only reached him a week ago, coincident with the doctor learning that these proceedings had been taken against the accused.

"Dr. Merriget immediately placed himself in communication with the Crown officers of the law, as a result of which I am in a position to tell your lordship that I do not intend offering evidence against Ella Grant.

"Apparently Colonel Dane had long suspected that he was suffering from an incurable disease, and to make sure, he went to Dr. Merriget and submitted himself to an examination. The reason for his going to a strange doctor is that he did not want to have it known that he had been consulting specialists in London. The doctor confirmed his worst fears, and Colonel Dane returned home. Whilst on the Continent, the doctor received a letter from Colonel Dane, which I propose reading."

He took a letter from the table, adjusted his spectacles and read:

Dear Dr. Merriget, – It occurred to me after I had left you the day before yesterday, that you must have identified me, for I have a dim recollection that we met at a garden party. I am not, as you suggested, taking any other advice. I know too well that this malignant growth is beyond cure, and I propose tonight taking a dose of cyanide of potassium. I feel that I must notify you in case by a mischance there is some question as to how I met my death. – Very sincerely yours,

CHARTRES DANE.

"I feel that the ends of justice will be served," continued the Attorney-General, "if I call the doctor. . . ."

*

It was not very long before another Crown case came the way of John Freeder. A week after his return from his honeymoon, he was sent for to office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, and that gentleman interviewed him.

"You did so well in the Flackman case, Freeder, that I want you to underwrite the prosecution of Wise. Undoubtedly you will gain kudos in a trial of this description, for the Wise case has attracted a great deal of attention.

"What is the evidence?" asked John bluntly.

"Circumstantial, of course," said the Public Prosecutor, "but –"

John shook his head.

"I think not, sir," he said firmly but respectfully. "I will not prosecute in another case of murder unless the murder is committed in my presence."

The Public Prosecutor stared at him.

"That means you will never take another murder prosecution – have you given up criminal work, Mr. Freeder?"

"Yes, sir," said John gravely; "my wife doesn't like it."

Today, John Freeder is referred to in legal circles as a glaring example of how a promising career can be ruined by marriage.

FRAME UP

HERBERT HARRIS

SHE DIDN'T immediately recognise him when she opened the door, because a soft hat was pulled down over his face and his coat collar was turned up.

She tried to close the door against him as he shouldered his way in, but he was too quick. And suddenly he was inside, shutting the door with a click as he leaned backwards against it, thumbing back the trilby, grinning at her lopsidedly.

"Lenny!" she murmured, her dark eyes rounded in surprise.

"Sorry to scare you, sweetie." He ran a finger across his upper-lip. "Bet you didn't recognise me without the moustache. I've got rid of it since we were – er – going steady. How've you been keeping?"

"All right," she said. "I haven't seen you around lately. Where have you been?"

He laid his forefinger against his nose. "Lying doggo, sweetie. The Invisible Man. Keeping out of trouble."

"That's something new for you," she said.

"Sure. I wanted the bogeys to get me out of their minds. And they have, I reckon. Very useful, that."

"Useful?"

"Lenny must have gone straight, they'll say. So they won't be out scouting for me."

She frowned at the leather holdall he was carrying. "You going away somewhere?"

He smiled his crooked smile. "The bag? I did think of moving on some place. But now . . . now I think I'll stay put." He waited while her eyes searched his face. "I mean, Linda my sweet, you've got yourself a new lodger."

She paused, saying nothing, letting the bald announcement sink in. Even when he smiled, there was something about Lenny that made her afraid of him. A crawling fear she couldn't explain.

"You haven't offered me a drink," he said, "so I'll help myself."

She watched in silence as he poured a liberal measure from her bottle of sherry. "Sweet sherry," he said, gulping it. "Suits my

sweet tooth down to the ground. That's what I like about you, sweetie – you're so sweet." He laughed.

"You're mad if you think you can stay here," she warned.

He studiously ignored her, walking slowly around the room, surveying it. "Quite a decent flat, this – better than your last place." He paused by the open door of the kitchen.

"Nice kitchen too," he added. "I can hardly wait to taste some of those homely dishes of yours. Real appetising. Just like dear old Mum made. . . ."

"Now, look, Lenny . . ." – a note of panic had crept into her voice.

"That lovely sweet pudding, swimming in syrup," he went on. "Just what the doc ordered for me. That's one of the first things you'll make for me, Linda poppet, a pudding soaked in syrup, like the one you made me before."

"I told you to stay away from me."

"So you did." He grinned. "But I couldn't, could I? I mean, you're not only a smasher to look at, you can cook, too. What better landlady could a boke ask for? What better place could I find to lie low for a bit?"

"You're on the run?"

"Not me. Not on the run. Just keeping out of the bluebottles' line of vision."

He sidled up to her. "Look, it'll pay you to treat me well. I'm a rather special guest. Take me under your wing for a week or two, and you won't have to worry about lolly any more."

She was silent, watching him apprehensively.

"Hell," he added, spreading his arms, "just for a smile of welcome and a plate of pudding, I'm offering you real lolly, a good time, the sweet life . . . a sweet life for my sweetie!"

Linda said nothing. He unzipped the leather holdall, groped beneath a jumble of clothing, and pulled out a handkerchief whose four corners were knotted to make an improvised bag. She watched him loosen the knots and spread the handkerchief flat.

"Just take a butcher's at that," he invited.

The heap of jewels sparkled, gleamed, gave off dazzling sparks of flame. He gathered them up lovingly, let them trickle through his fingers. "Nice load of ice, eh? Worth every bit of twenty thousand nicker, I reckon."

"Where did you get this?"

"Well, once upon a time there was a very rich Mayfair bird who

was very very careless with her rocks, the said rocks just sitting up and begging to be snitched. . . ."

Linda grew rigid. "You fool! You know they'll get you! They'll follow you *here*! They'll say I've hidden you!"

"Keep your wool on, sweetie. It's not like that at all. They won't be looking for *me* – not for *me* – because I fixed it so they won't, see?"

"How do you mean?"

"They'll be after an old playmate of mine. Johnny Deverley. That's who they'll be keeping tabs on. Know why?"

"Johnny Deverley?" she repeated, "I know him."

"Sure you know him. Everyone knows Johnny – the busys especially. They know exactly how Johnny does a job, the special trademarks he leaves around."

Linda stared at him.

"I know all the Deverley trademarks, sweetie – his timing, method of entry, m.o. – that's modus operandi, kid, to brainy geezers like me. So I think: Why not do a typical Deverley job? – make it look exactly like *him*?

"And just to make it stick, I did a little grassing by way of a well-known snout. Passed on the good word, you know? Dead clever, when you think of it. And dead funny, too. I mean, Johnny going underground on account of a job he didn't do!"

Her eyes, cold and expressionless, were tense. "What'll happen when he finds out he's been framed?"

"Dodgy, kiddo, if we were still around, but we won't be."

"We?"

"You and me. You'd like a holiday, eh? Some snazzy place. Rio maybe. Or Nassau. How does that sound?"

She walked slowly to the window, gazed down at the drab street, almost a slum, lashed by rain. He let her stand there looking out for some time, then went and stood beside her.

"What a dump!" he said. "You could get away from it all if you wanted – just by playing ball with your old chum Lenny."

She was nodding her head, the dark hair falling across her face. Lenny said: "So I stay then, don't I?"

"If you like." Her voice was flat. "If you don't go out, I don't suppose anyone will know you're here."

"I'm happy to stay indoors," he told her, sliding an arm round her waist. When she pulled herself away from him, he added, shrugging: "Oh well, you'll make a pudding for me sometime?"

"When I feel like it," she answered.

It was late afternoon on the next day, and still raining, when Linda came in. Lenny lay on a bed in the next room and called out: "That you, Linda?"

"Yes!" She took several things from a shopping bag, and prepared some cold meat.

Presently he joined her in the kitchen. "I was sound asleep when you went out," he said, looking for some warmth in the sullen face but finding none. "Must have slept for a couple of hours. Now I'm hungry."

"You always are."

He lifted the lid of a saucepan on the stove. "Cor," he said, "what's this – my pudding?"

"Yes."

"You're a gem, sweetie." He picked up a tin of syrup. "I'd like a lot of this – lashings."

"Go and lay the table."

"Hoity-toity! 'Lay the table,' she says, like we were long-marrieds!" He went out grinning. She'll come round in the end, he thought, she'll get tired of playing hard-to-get. . . .

He tried to make conversation as they ate the cold meat, but she was uncommunicative. Finally, when she brought him a steaming plate of pudding, afloat in syrup, he asked: "Was that an evening paper I saw in your shopping-bag?"

"Yes, but don't bother about it now."

"I wondered if there was anything in about. . . ."

"No!"

"Oh well, we can pick up the news on the radio."

"I told you," she said quickly. "There's nothing fresh."

But he ignored her, switching on the portable set near his elbow. "Boy, this looks a treat!" He shovelled the pudding greedily into his mouth, disposing of it like a man who hadn't eaten for days.

The radio news-reader's voice seemed to fill the room:

"John Deverley, whom the police wished to interview in connection with a Mayfair jewel robbery, was killed today when his car, ambushed by a police patrol, skidded and crashed into a shop. In the wrecked car police found a knotted handkerchief containing jewellery worth several thousands of pounds. . . ."

Lenny's spoon fell to his plate. He rose abruptly and switched off the radio. He stared unbelievingly at Linda, watching her face become paper white. Then, running into the bedroom, he flung open a cupboard and dropped on his knees.

He dragged out the holdall and tipped the contents on the floor. The knotted handkerchief was still there, but he didn't trust it. He undid the knots with shaking fingers.

Lenny glowered at the contents, a heap of worthless costume-jewellery, junk. He staggered to his feet and stood for a moment in the doorway, glaring at Linda.

"You rotten, chiselling little tramp!" He made a lunge towards her.

She leapt from her chair and put the table between them.

"You fixed things with Johnny!" he said menacingly. "You passed the stuff to him. You were going shares. You'd arranged to join him some place. That was the drill, wasn't it?"

She side-stepped, but his hand shot out, catching her wrist. "I could do you," he snarled. "Nobody would care. They'd say you were just another tramp, a call-girl. Any bloke could have killed you."

She wrenched her wrist free and stumbled to the other side of the table. A bitter smile distorted his mouth as he edged slowly towards her.

"No, Lenny . . . no!" – she backed away, helplessly.

And now his whole expression changed. The icy smile was replaced by a grimace of pain. One hand gripped the edge of the table. The other clutched his stomach as he bent over double, groaning.

She watched, motionless. He fell forward across the table and then slid slowly backwards, pulling the cloth with him. He lay writhing on the floor for a few moments, and was still.

Linda moved forward and stood over him. He seemed to have stopped breathing. She walked into the kitchen in a kind of trance, and pulled from her shopping-bag the evening paper she had bought earlier in the afternoon.

The picture of Johnny Deverley on the front page was a smiling one. He seemed to be smiling straight at *her* – his special smile. "The smile I keep for *you*," he had told her.

"We got him, Johnny – we won," she murmured softly, her eyes filling with tears. Then she walked back into the sitting-room, picked up the telephone and dialled 999.

As she spoke quietly to the man at the other end, she gazed down at the plate which Lenny had scraped clean. The sickly sweet pudding in an ocean of syrup. Apart from one ingredient, it had been just as he liked it, just what he had asked for.

THE MADNESS OF M. LEBOURG

MARTEN CUMBERLAND

The problem presented to Commissaire Saturnin Dax is deceptively simple

AS THE police-car swung into the main street of Saint Genes it was obvious that the little town was ablaze with excitement.

Citizens were clustered in the Rue de la République, talking over that morning's tragedy. This was not surprising. The affair would soon be discussed in Paris itself. It had a certain touch of the bizarre. It involved two violent deaths. And so in Saint Genes work was abandoned, whilst rumour flew from shop to shop, from *bistro* to *bistro*.

Commissaire Saturnin Dax eyed the groups a little sardonically, and spoke to Brigadier Felix Norman, who was driving the car.

"Slow down, my boy. Ask the way, and give the citizenry a treat! It is the Rue Blaise Pascal we seek."

Dutifully the younger police-officer pulled up near the sidewalk and asked for guidance. He was given it, by three gossips at once. He drove on, followed by staring eyes.

To the population of Saint Genes the affair was highly sensational. Pierre Lebourg, the barber of the Rue Blaise Pascal, had an hour ago become finally insane. In his little shop, he had cut the throat of a customer, then had leaped from a back window, to find death in the river.

Tongues wagged and heads nodded. After all, the matter was not so very surprising. Lebourg had always been a crank. There was his religion that no one seemed to comprehend. Concerning this he was vehement, but to most people irrational. The only clear statement that emerged from his flood of speech had been an assertion that the world would shortly come to an end.

The police-car stopped where a uniformed *agent* stood before

the door of a small shop, gazed at by a morbidly-curious throng. The shop was distinguished by a coloured pole.

Saturnin Dax lowered his great bulk to the sidewalk and gratefully stretched to his full height. Felix Norman shut off his engine and descended lightly.

There was the sound of a jangling bicycle bell. A little man, formally dressed and with a luxuriant beard, pedalled to the sidewalk, wobbled, and dismounted.

"Ah! Commissaire Dax! Splendid! I am delighted you could come, and so promptly, too! I am Fontan, you know. Local commissaire."

He gave his bicycle to the *agent*; he mopped his forehead with a large silk handkerchief. Politely he took off a pearl-grey glove and held out a hand. His dark, shrewd eyes surveyed Saturnin, like one trying to reconcile the physical appearance of a man with things heard about him.

"Enchanted," said Saturnin. "This is Brigadier Norman."

There followed an interchange of courtesies. The local commissaire professed knowledge of Felix, declaring he had eagerly followed his career, as middle-weight boxing champion of the Paris police force.

Saturnin brought matters back to earth, with a question that was half statement.

"You must have had a particularly busy morning, Monsieur Fontan?"

The bearded man nodded vigorously.

"A man with his throat cut; another to fish out of the river. And all at the lunch hour, messieurs! I have just come from the morgue, where our surgeon performs his autopsy. But, let us go in."

The three senior police-officers entered through a slit of a door that gave on to a tiny tobacconist's store. Fontan was talking all the time; Saturnin's eyes darted over the tobacco counter and the meagre stock on shelves. There was a curtained arch that led into the barber's saloon, and here they found tragedy.

Slumped into the one barber's chair was the draped body of a tall, fair man of about forty, his head turned grotesquely upon the left shoulder. His throat had been cut, and ample traces of the operation revealed themselves, on the white sheet draping him to the neck, and on the floor's cheap oilcloth.

"The victim," said Fontan. "Or one of the victims. We have yet to identify this man, Commissaire Dax."

Saturnin approached the chair.

"You haven't examined the body, monsieur?" he asked.

"Only very hastily," said Fontan. "I have had thirty-six things to do at once! I was here with our surgeon who established the cause of death. The throat was cut – efficiently, or with luck. The operator stood behind his victim, and slashed once only, with the right hand. For my part I looked quickly through the victim's pockets, seeking an identity card, a passport, or some letters. I found nothing to tell us who the man is. I worked hurriedly, you comprehend? There was much to do."

"Evidently," said Saturnin. "The barber, having murdered, ran to a back room and flung himself from a window into the river, no?"

He carefully drew away the sheet draping the form in the chair. A rather thin figure was revealed, clad in shirt, waistcoat and trousers. On a peg Saturnin saw the coat, collar and tie, hanging beside an overcoat and beret. The clothes were expensive and of fine quality.

"The barber," said Fontan, "poor old Pierre Lebourg, went out through his bedroom windows – that is the first floor, back – and into the river which flows immediately below. It would be the easiest of jumps."

Saturnin nodded.

He looked at the dead face, which seemed to show signs of recent exposure to sun and wind. He noted the stubble of beard on the chin. He lifted the dead hands, one after the other, and even smelled them, before scrutinizing the well-kept nails. It was some minutes before he turned to the local commissaire.

"All right. Now, Monsieur Fontan, a barber goes mad and cuts the throat of a client before jumping to a suicidal death. But you are not satisfied. You telephoned to me in Paris. So the affair is not transparently simple?"

Fontan caressed his beard and frowned.

"I don't like it, Commissaire Dax. I had the temerity to ask for your collaboration because I am apprehensive. Of a miscarriage of justice, monsieur. You see, I knew Pierre Lebourg. I have placed my throat willingly, and without qualms, under his hands. Once a week, at least, for several years."

"Aha? But it is said he was an eccentric and an unbalanced type, no?"

Fontan shrugged. "To me he always seemed a mild and gentle little man. Certainly I find it difficult to believe in this sudden

outburst of ferocity – and in the mad self-destruction afterwards. Emphatically, I shall be happier having a second opinion – and so expert an opinion."

He bowed, and Saturnin grunted.

"Then you don't think this barber was unbalanced?" he asked.

"I cannot pretend to psychological knowledge. I am scarcely a psychiatrist! But – today – we are all a little mad. They say Lebourg was crazy. Why? Because he made his own clothes? But they were serviceable enough; and, like my very intelligent wife, Lebourg was effecting economies. Was he mad then because sometimes he talked to himself? My God, is that so unusual?"

Saturnin took out a yellow packet, shook it to loosen the cigarettes, and picked one out with his lips. He made a comprehensive sign to Felix Norman, who took from a pocket pencil and stiff graph paper, and began on a projection-sketch of the room's salient features.

Fontan stepped forward and offered Saturnin a light.

"Then again, Commissaire Dax, these small-town gossips ridicule poor Lebourg's religious views. Well, he was a Swedenborgian. Does that mean all followers of Emanuel Swedenborg are insane? They say Lebourg predicted the end of the world, within a decade. He did not. He merely saw the possibility, perhaps probability of economic deterioration, of a devastating war with our nice big new bomb."

Saturnin nodded thoughtfully. He looked over Felix's shoulder, watching the clever pencil-work.

"Good! Don't crowd it, my boy. There will be plenty of photographs later. I want distances marked clearly."

He thumbed his moustache to left and to right. His eyes went to Fontan's shrewd face.

"Evidently it is easy among small-town gossips to gain a reputation for lunacy. You knew Lebourg, and knew him as mild, gentle, and not unintelligent. But I don't have to tell you that evidence more than personal opinions is needed."

Fontan nodded, threw a glance towards the shop door, and lowered his voice.

"There is the bump on Lebourg's head, Commissaire Dax."

"Aha? But he threw himself from a window. Perhaps his head struck something? A log floating on the water? Even a small boat?"

"There were no logs, Commissaire Dax. There was no boat within a hundred metres."

"Is it certain Lebourg was alive when he went into the water?"

"Perfectly. Our surgeon can vouch for that. And this bump on his head came before death, too. It could have happened, by some accident earlier this morning, of course. I am not happy about this affair. Take all this talk that poor Lebourg was mad. To me he was no paranoiac. He was never ferociously insane. He had his little peculiarities that only the stupid would regard as lunacy. I am convinced murder and suicide were things outside his character."

Saturnin nodded abstractedly. His eyes ranged round the saloon, the one barber's chair, and the furnishings. Something attracted his interest, and he asked a question.

"Was his barber's coat on Lebourg, when you got him out of the river?"

Fontan shook his head.

"No. He wore only his usual clothes. Is that an important point, Commissaire?"

"It could be . . ."

Saturnin stooped and picked from a bench a white cotton coat. The right arm was flecked with spots that were still crimson.

"My faith!" said Felix Norman. "Would a homicidal lunatic cut a fellow's throat and then, before rushing out to commit suicide, tear off his jacket?"

Fontan looked from Felix to Saturnin.

"That is a good point," he said. "A second significant point, huh? He was certainly wearing that coat, for he has only two; one in use and one in the wash."

"Wait," said Saturnin. "Perhaps he didn't actually rush to the back windows and throw himself out. He may have taken his time. Let us go gently. The man may have been more eccentric than you appreciate, Monsieur Fontan. These paranoiacs often appear normal, for some twenty hours out of twenty-four."

Fontan nodded.

"Certainly. I do not dogmatize," he said. "Yet Lebourg did rush upstairs to a back window and did fling himself out, and into the river. He was seen – and heard. By Maurice Brial, who was fishing nearby. Also we can establish, approximately, the time when this stranger came to the shop, and met his death. For, at five minutes to twelve, little Renée Tourin, with her school-friend, Marie Lampan, came in here. They had clubbed together to buy a bottle of cheap scent for Madame Tourin's fête day. They saw Lebourg. He took them into this saloon, to get the scent. Inci-

dentally, the two girls – about fourteen years of age, and by no means stupid – noticed nothing abnormal about poor Lebourg, and such children are rather quick to note the abnormal. Certainly there was no strange man here, or in fact any customers. Even more certainly there was no corpse!"

Fontan smiled and touched his beard. Saturnin dropped the barber's coat on the bench and sat down beside it.

"Good!" he said. "So, to some extent, we have witnesses, and we can fix the time of the tragedies. This Maurice Brial definitely saw the barber go out of his window and into the river?"

"He says so." Fontan lifted his shoulders. "We have nothing against Brial, but he is an idler, extremely vain, and one who dips his nose into a glass. However, one must admit his story fits in with what appears to have happened. Brial sat with his rod somewhere in view of this house. He heard, or saw the bedroom windows open. He heard Lebourg shout; in fact Brial declares he caught the actual words uttered. They were: *The judgement is upon me*! Then poor Lebourg's body came hurtling out of the window, and smack into the river. Brial ran for a boat."

"Brial ran for a boat . . ." Saturnin repeated.

"Yes. Brial cannot swim, Commissaire. He shouted for help, and he ran. He had to go some way for a boat. His shouts were not heard. He carried no watch, but it was some time after noon. There are not so many people on the banks of the river in October."

"So this Brial had not much chance of saving our barber?" said Saturnin.

"No. There were weeds. Brial found a boat. He pulled upstream. He seems to have done all he could, but he did not even discover Lebourg. We found the body, half an hour later, covered in mud and weeds. Then, we entered this house in case it contained some clue to his death. We found this stranger, dead in the chair. Apparently he was passing through the town. We don't know him. At the railway station he was not seen this morning. Someone must have seen him in the town; but, so far, no one has come forward. Perhaps his pockets will give us something. I looked only for an identity card, and very hurriedly."

Fontan glanced at the coats hanging on a peg on the wall. Saturnin rose, a little abstractedly.

"The man needed a shave badly enough," he said. "He went straight to the nearest barber's. Not necessarily a long walk.

Yet someone must have seen him. That may, or may not be important."

He began methodically to examine the clothes of the dead man and the contents of his pockets. In the coat, hanging up on the wall, was a wallet of good leather, embellished with a gold monogram: J.A. It contained only a hundred Swiss francs: no visiting cards, letters, or personal papers. Saturnin handled this wallet delicately and with a glove on one hand. Laying the wallet aside, he turned to the overcoat, the pockets of which contained a silk scarf, cigarettes, matches, leather gloves and a road map. In one of the gloves was a small key and attached to it was a plastic disc on which the words: 'Durand's Garage' were printed.

Saturnin threw the key over to Felix.

"Try this, my boy. Monsieur Fontan will tell you where Durand's Garage is."

"Yes," said Fontan. "It is at the entrance of the town, on the Rue de la République. I ought to have found that key – but it was hidden in the glove, no? And, really, I have had a time of it. And without my lunch!"

Saturnin grunted sympathetically. Felix departed, in haste. Once again Saturnin turned to the body in the chair.

"An automobile is indicated, Monsieur Fontan," he said. "Hurried as you have been, it was probably your only thought that the stranger came from Paris?"

"Yes, Commissaire Dax. Ninety per cent of our visitors pass through here from Paris. They stay an hour for lunch; maybe they look at the Norman church. Then they go south, or return to Paris."

"Evidently. But this one, I think, came a far greater distance. I'd say he drove for many hours, and in an open car. His hands show traces of motor oil and grease. He was unshaven on his arrival – probably because he rose very early, or even travelled half the night, as many do, to profit of the empty roads. The folding of that road-map rather suggests he came from the South; and he was wearing a beret Basque. So – it looks as though this visitor was no mere tourist or sightseer passing quickly through Saint Genes. It looks as though he skirted Paris, instead of sleeping, or at least resting there. If that is the case, if he pushed on here without stopping for repose or meals, then he had urgent business in Saint Genes – some definite object, which we should discover."

Whilst speaking Saturnin's hands had been busy working over

the dead man's waistcoat. His fingers touched something through the lining. He undid the waistcoat and saw a pocket in the inside lining. From this he drew out a photograph of a woman.

Fontan had crossed to Saturnin's side, watching curiously. He now uttered an exclamation.

"Madame Doullence!" he said.

"Aha?" Saturnin turned quickly. "So there we have it! Our mysterious traveller's business in Saint Genes."

"Well," said Fontan. "We don't know him. But Madame Doullence we certainly know. She is a widow, attractive and fairly well-to-do. She has been here some three years. She lives up at the Villa Les Charmettes."

"Good!" said Saturnin. "Then our unknown came to see the widow. But, before calling on a pretty woman, he requires a shave. Very natural!"

There was a stove in a corner of the saloon and Saturnin went over to it, and lifted its metal lid. The anthracite was three-quarters burnt out, but charred paper was visible on top of the glowing coal. Saturnin replaced the stove's lid. He was humming to himself.

"Madame Doullence," said Fontan, who was also busy with his thoughts. "One wonders how she comes into this picture. A delicious little woman, Commissaire Dax. It is unlikely that she is for anything in this affair. To me, her photograph in this man's pocket, is only an additional puzzle. Certainly our charming widow had no connection with Lebourg."

"He didn't attend to her coiffeur?" Saturnin asked.

"No! He was not a lady's man, in any sense. A haircut or shave for men was his limit. He was sixty; plain, and in poor health. Madame is half his age, and charmingly attractive. Chic, too. Her hair-dressing would be done in Paris."

"Is she quite content to maintain her widowed state?"

"Alas, it seems so! I have heard no scandal, nor is her name coupled with any man, so far as I am aware. But now, of course, we shall look into Madame's affairs a little. Yet, when I say I have heard no gossip about Madame, that means much in Saint Genes. It is a miracle, Commissaire Dax!"

"Let us have a look at this back window and the river," Saturnin said. "So far, whilst there are one or two little points, they are things that can be interpreted two ways."

They went out by a door at the back of the saloon. Fontan led the way up half-a-dozen shallow, ill-carpeted stairs and into a

room. It was a bedroom, scantily and austerely furnished, with a small writing-desk and a chair, and a cheap bookcase filled with paper-covered books. The windows of this room stood wide open, and gave on to a narrow balcony. Beneath, and running close to the house, was a narrow river-bank and the brown waters of the river itself.

"There!" said Fontan, dramatically. "Pierre Lebourg's road to oblivion!"

Saturnin Dax, after a glance round the bedroom, crossed it, and went out on to the balcony. Below, some boys were gathered on the river bank. One of them was fishing, but the others were staring at Lebourg's house.

"He could do it," said Saturnin. "It is almost a straight drop into the water. And he could have torn off his barber's coat, even in running to his death. There was a little blood on the coat, and it may have disgusted him. Whilst, given insanity, of course any abnormal behaviour is feasible."

"Given homicidal frenzy – yes. Lebourg could cut a throat and drown himself, Commissaire," said Fontan. "I had the temerity to ask for your collaboration because I knew poor Lebourg rather well. And I still hold to my conviction that he was a naturally gentle and kindly little man. Possibly rather eccentric, but . . ."

There was a light step on the stairs and Fontan broke off as Felix Norman came into the room.

"I thought I heard your voices," he said. "Well, Chief, the dead man's name is Jean Arvel. Soon after noon he left his car, a Swedish make, in Durand's Garage, where it is now. I've seen his driving licence. There is nothing else to interest us in the automobile. I found the mechanic who dealt with Arvel. He says Arvel told him he had come up from the Midi, and had been on the road half the night as well as this morning. Said he needed a shave, and he was directed here. Also asked the mechanic if he knew a Villa Les Charmettes."

"Ah!" Fontan exclaimed.

"Good work, my boy," said Saturnin.

He stood on the balcony, absent-mindedly humming, then he turned away with a faint sigh, and his eyes became vigilant as they swept the bedroom carpet. He stooped and picked up a greyish-white, pasty morsel. As the other men looked at him inquiringly, the Commissaire smiled.

"A piece of bread, I think," he said.

He handed it to Fontan, who looked at it curiously.

"Trodden into the carpet," he said. "And it looks as though it had been dipped in water. Of course we must go over this house minutely. So far nothing has been done – or next to nothing. Will you come and see Lebourg's body, Commissaire? That may tell you something we others have missed."

As Saturnin nodded, the local commissaire led the way downstairs. In passing the tobacco counter something caught Fontan's eye and he checked.

"Aha!" he said. "The Romeo and Juliette! So Lebourg opened the box at last, did he?"

There was in fact a box of the Havana cigars lying on the counter, and obviously its seals had been broken. Fontan lifted the lid of the box. It was a box of fifty, but some fifteen were missing. Fontan took out three and offered cigars.

"Please," he invited. "I shall pay the executors. But, not every day does one get a real Havana, eh? These are old stock. Poor Lebourg could not sell them at present prices. I used to joke with him about them."

He put a cigar in his mouth, and Felix did the same. Fontan produced a lighter; but Saturnin declared he would keep his little gift until later.

*

Commissaire Dax and Felix Norman were finishing a belated luncheon at the Café de Saint Genes. It was the one decent café-restaurant in the town, and surprisingly good. Saturnin's eyes rejoiced as he was given a *marc* with his special black coffee. He removed the band from his Romeo and Juliette, and lit the cigar with care.

"What do you think, Chief?" said Felix. "The obvious – or something subtle? Personally, the commissaire here strikes me as being no fool. If the barber wasn't mad, then some opportunist may be trying to put over a fast one. How did Lebourg get that smack on the head? And what about the charming widow?"

Saturnin sipped, first his coffee and then his *marc*.

"Madame Doullence has a complete alibi," he said. "We have ascertained that she never left her villa this morning. However, Fontan has summoned her to identify the body of this man, Arvel. It will be interesting to learn what she says about him."

"Of course," said Felix, "the woman is unlikely to have sneaked into Lebourg's saloon, knocked him out, cut Arvel's

throat, and then flung the barber out of the window. I mean it lacks plausibility. But she may have wanted Arvel killed. He could be annoying her. Blackmailing her, for example. She has money, it seems. She could pay someone to knock off Arvel, no?"

Saturnin nodded gravely.

"Something more significant," he said. "The absence of documents in Arvel's pockets. That's unnatural, especially when a man is travelling. And someone burned papers in the barber's stove."

Felix stared.

"My faith! What about recovering them, for latent writing?"

"Too far gone, my boy. Of course Lebourg could have burnt papers himself, especially if he committed suicide."

The brigadier shook his head.

"I'd say it's more likely someone bumped Arvel and went through his pockets. The murderer then destroys papers betraying Arvel's identity."

"Which we were bound to discover."

"In time. But the murderer wants to gain time. Or maybe Arvel had in his pocket some letters from our charming widow – letters she and her hired assassin didn't want us to find."

"Could be," said Saturnin. "Such a complete absence of papers on Arvel is abnormal. If we postulate a murderer then he is not so clever as he imagines himself to be. He should not . . ."

Saturnin broke off, for their waiter approached and spoke in an elaborately discreet whisper.

"The telephone, Commissaire Dax," he said. "It is the Commissaire Fontan who would speak with you."

At the instrument, Fontan's voice came to Saturnin's ears.

"I trust you have completed your lunch, Commissaire Dax? Ah, so much the better. A little news. Madame Doullence has just left us. She identified the body of Jean Arvel. And, figure to yourself, who is our strange visitor – none other than madame's husband! It seems they agreed to separate, some three years ago. She came to live here – assuming her maiden name, Doullence, but giving out that she was a widow."

"Why did he come here?" asked Saturnin.

"Monsieur wanted a reconciliation," said Fontan. "He wrote to her to that effect – from Switzerland, where he has been for some time, on business. Madame, it seems, was by no means averse to this reunion."

"Aha? She was expecting her husband in Saint Genes, today?"

"No, Commissaire Dax. Madame says not. From his letters

she expected him to come to her soon, but not necessarily today."

"Did she show you his letters?"

"Three, Commissaire Dax. They seem to bear out what she says. The last letter, among those shown to me, was posted in Geneva nearly three weeks ago. What do you think of this development?"

"I will see you a little later," he said. "If you can discover a business associate of Arvel's, or his solicitors, you might telephone them, and possibly learn something. Meanwhile, this requires thought."

He hung up, and returned to his cold coffee, his *marc* and his brigadier. To him he recounted the new developments. Felix whistled.

"I'll bet a thousand to thirty this is a murder case, or rather a double-murder case. And neat work, too! The woman wanted her husband out of the way. She knew very well he was arriving here today; he'd be bound to let her know. So she planned this affair, and paid someone to carry it out."

"It could be," Saturnin admitted. "Meanwhile, we shall separate. I shall see Fontan, and then I'll mix with the gossips in the town. You try the river. The children playing, and any elders fishing there this morning. We will meet, say about seven o'clock – at this café."

*

It was five minutes to seven and dusk was falling when Saturnin Dax approached the Café de Saint Genes. The commissaire was *frileux*, and he was about to enter the warm interior, when he saw a man seated on the almost empty terrace. Saturnin sat down at an adjoining table. He pulled a newspaper from his overcoat and glanced over it. The news interested him far less than his neighbour.

This was a man, probably forty, but with a false air of youth. He wore a bright yellow mackintosh open upon a flashy grey suit and no hat. His dark hair was long, and grew to a point, low on his forehead. He looked cunning, flashy and conceited to the point of arrogance. Saturnin knew this man to be Maurice Brial, who, on his own showing, had so gallantly endeavoured to save the unhappy barber.

Brial now rapped with a coin on the café window behind him. When a waiter came he ordered a brandy.

"The best *fine* you have, Louis," he commanded. He stared at Saturnin.

"Give me a glass of *marc*, please." The commissaire folded his journal and put it in a pocket.

Maurice Brial moved a little along the cane-covered *banquette*, an action that brought him close to Saturnin.

"Pardon, monsieur," he said. "But are you not the detective who came from Paris?"

Saturnin nodded. His face assumed a somewhat bovine air of pomposity.

"Commissaire Dax," he said. "Of the Judicial Police."

Brial's smile broadened until his white teeth showed between red, rather puffy lips.

"Yes, I thought I was not mistaken."

From a top waistcoat pocket he took a cigar and punctured its end.

"I am Maurice Brial," he said. "I think you know that I practically saw Lebourg do it. At least I heard him shout: 'God's judgement is on me!' Then he flopped into the river. Obvious case, I mean. Open and shut. You will be back in Paris, tonight, lucky man!"

He lit his cigar with an expensive lighter. The waiter came with the drinks. Brial paid, and gave a somewhat lavish tip. Then he put down some more money.

"Take for the *marc* as well," he ordered. "You must allow me, Commissaire Dax. You are a guest in our city."

"Thank you, monsieur," said Saturnin. He raised his glass.

"To the Judicial Police," returned Brial. "May they ever continue to make our criminals tremble."

Saturnin smiled, and dropped his voice, confidentially.

"You are right, monsieur," he said. "This case is transparent enough. Between ourselves one wonders why one was brought here. As you say, I shall return to Paris, tonight. But, perhaps with some small regret, and I shall tell you why. I am an ardent fisherman, monsieur. A great sport – that I seldom have the leisure to enjoy. And it seems the fishing is good here? You use the wet fly, perhaps?"

Brial shrugged.

"To tell the truth I am no great hand at the business," he said. "It is just a way to pass the time, you know. I use worms. A bit crude; but then I don't pretend to be a real angler, I could fish, with better sport, in Paris!"

He sighed voluptuously. Saturnin commented a little on current

topics of the city. He answered questions about some of the cheaper music-halls and night *boîtes*. Then he said:

"That smells like an excellent cigar, monsieur. Can one get a real Havana in this café?"

Maurice Brial shook his head.

"I doubt it. This smoke was given to me. I'm afraid it's an orphan, or I'd be delighted to give you one, Commissaire."

"Oh, my dear monsieur . . .!" Saturnin expostulated; and turned the conversation.

A minute later Felix Norman crossed the wide square in which the café was situated, spotted Saturnin and approached the table.

"Well, Brigadier?" said Saturnin. "I suppose our car is all ready, no? Let me introduce you, this is Monsieur Brial, who witnessed part of this morning's tragedy."

Felix saluted; then he shook the hand Brial offered, and finally the brigadier sat down. He looked at his superior officer.

"The car is over there in the Rue de la République," he said. "It is ready, whenever you like."

"Good!" said Saturnin. "There is no great hurry after all. Have a drink – the *marc* is excellent. We might even dine here, perhaps."

*

A woman came across the pavement, and, without glancing at the men, entered a café entrance, close to their table. She walked quickly. In the dim light one had an impression of a tall, slim figure in expensive clothes.

Maurice Brial got to his feet.

"Well, messieurs, I shall bid you good night, and adieu," he said. "I am going to the cinema. What would you? There is nothing better to do in this hole. Well – give my love to Paris."

With a laugh he swaggered off. Saturnin rose slightly in his chair. He was looking through lightly-curtained glass into the café's illuminated interior. He saw the blonde plainly now. She was exchanging a few words with the manager. She turned away and departed from the café by a door at the other side.

Saturnin grunted.

"Brial," said Felix. "A lot depends on his evidence, doesn't it? Was that the widow, who just went into the cafe? Brial looked at her, but she didn't look at him. He says he is going to the movie, but perhaps . . .?"

"Evidently," said Saturnin, rising. "Let's go, my boy."

Commissaire Dax set off at a pace that was unusual enough to cause Felix Norman surprise.

"What's on, Chief? Where are we going?"

"To the Villa Les Charmettes."

"Ah, to the widow's? Good! But why the hurry?"

"She came in a car."

"And she and Brial met?"

"Damn it, isn't Maurice Brial obvious enough for you? Typical. Doesn't work; gets plenty of money. Carries an expensive lighter – and smokes Havana cigars. The gossips know him better than our good Monsieur Fontan does."

"Havana cigars . . .?" Felix was rather excited. "Romeo and Juliette, Chief?"

"That is one of the things we shall now find out."

They had come to their car. Felix was at the wheel; Saturnin sat beside him.

The automobile had been parked near the entrance to the little town, and, in two minutes, they were on a road, quiet and rapidly becoming dark.

"First on your right, and then straight up the hill."

Felix swung the car round to the right. A steep road lay before them. It was not particularly straight, but, on the contrary, it twisted like a corkscrew.

"Hell! This goat-track needs repairing," Felix muttered. "Maurice Brial, eh? I spent over two hours on the river banks, Chief, pretending to catch tiddlers. I found a couple of kids who say they saw a man running in, through the back of Lebourg's house. That was about a quarter-past twelve this morning. One of them said he recognized Maurice Brial."

"Good work!"

"Couldn't fix the time definitely. But they were hurrying home to their lunch. Unfortunate – as otherwise they would have hung around and seen more. But their maman is strict about their coming in to meals, and she has a strong arm."

Saturnin grunted.

"All right. Take it more slowly," he said.

Ahead of them, some three hundred metres higher up the hill, the red tail-lights of a car winked in the dusk. On the crest of the hill, a single house proclaimed its presence by a lighted window.

Felix slowed down.

"I am afraid those kids won't be much good as witnesses," he remarked. "The younger is fairly bright. He said he saw Maurice

Brial put down his rod. The kids passed at the back of Lebourg's house, and the younger one claims that he recognized Brial's rod. He has often watched the man fishing, and even been allowed to play with the gear."

"Good! But, with luck, we shan't need the children's evidence. Better stop here, and shut off your lights and engine. We shall walk the rest."

The car ahead had entered the garden of a villa. Its headlights swept for a moment over the facade of a prim two-storied house, with long windows opening upon a lawn.

Saturnin was out of the police-car and once more striding along at great speed. He and Felix reached the gate and low hedge that bordered the villa's garden. Now, no lights showed, either in the villa or on the automobile. The faint sound of hushed voices came from the garden. A few seconds passed, then a light came from within a downstairs room. A woman's figure was momentarily revealed as she drew curtains across a French window.

"Come on," said Saturnin. "Softly. Avoid the gravel, and keep to the lawn."

He had, without a sound, lifted the catch of the garden gate, and closed it noiselessly, after Felix had passed through. With every precaution, the two went across the soft, moist lawn, and halted close to the lighted French windows. The windows stood ajar, upon the warmth of the night, and opaque curtains moved very slightly in the almost imperceptible breeze. For a moment nothing was heard, and then voices came with almost startling clearness.

"Listen!" said Maurice Brial, and his voice was blatantly loud, the domineering voice of a bully.

"Listen to me a moment. Surely, to God, you don't think I was serious! You know – everyone knows – what happened. That cretin went completely mad, at last! He cut your husband's throat, and then flung himself in the river."

"No!"

The woman's voice was low, musical, vibrating with suppressed feeling.

"That is not what you told me in the square. You told me the truth then. I heard it in your voice. I saw it written on your face!"

"Nonsense!" Brial laughed again. "You have no sense of humour! Don't you know when a fellow is joking. The notion came to me, afterwards – how it might be done. But, my dear Simone!"

"Joking!" The woman's voice rose. "You regard murder as matter for joking! No, no! You were boasting! Boasting of your cunning!"

"Now, listen."

The man's voice took on what he obviously intended for a wheedling note.

"We understand one another, my dear. Let us say for argument's sake that it wasn't a joke. Supposing a man who adores you arranged things for you, eh? He knows the false position you're in – bound to a husband you detest, obliged to live on his money, and. . . ."

"You must be mad! You *are* mad! Eaten up with your own conceit and rottenness. And you think you have such a hold on me!" The woman laughed, and the sound came close to hysteria. "It's really funny! Why, you were never fit to clean poor Jean's boots! Detest him . . .! You obscene beast, I'll show you what I think of your joking!"

"Simone! What . . .?"

"Stand away! Stand away from that telephone. I . . ."

There was a crash, and a muffled cry from the woman. Saturnin kicked in the window, and jerked aside the curtains. He went into the room, followed by Felix Norman.

Simone Arvel was curved back over a light table and Brial's hands were at her throat. The telephone lay on the carpet at their feet.

Saturnin jumped forward and pulled Brial away. Felix whipped out handcuffs and had them on Brial's wrists.

"Are you hurt, madame?"

Saturnin supported the woman, and half carried her to an armchair.

"Forgive me. But I had to know where you stood in this affair."

She looked up at him, trying to adjust her thoughts, trying to smile at him.

"You . . . you are of the police?" she stammered. "You came just in time."

"In time . . .? What is this idiocy? What do you think you're doing. Take off these handcuffs!"

Brial was shouting and trying to throw off Felix's grip. Saturnin crossed to the prisoner, and opened his mackintosh and jacket. From the breast pocket he took a cigar case. It held ten Romeo and Juliette cigars, and the leather bore the monogram: J.A.

At sight of the leather case Simone Arvel screamed.

"I knew it!" she cried. "He killed Jean! Oh, my God, he killed Jean!"

Saturnin nodded at her gravely.

"Yes, this animal told you the truth, madame. He knew your husband from those photographs there, on the mantel; but Monsieur Arvel knew nothing about Brial. He saw your husband in the town, heard him asking for the barber's, and Brial saw his chance. Smart opportunism. To trade on Lebourg's alleged craziness. Brial went quickly to the shop and knocked out poor little Lebourg, hiding him in the bedroom upstairs. Taking off the white coat he went, as the barber, to greet your husband. He sold him some cigars, and after – you know what Brial did. Then he went upstairs and flung Lebourg's unconscious body into the river."

Simone Arvel was weeping now. The tears ran down her cheeks, and she made no effort to stop them.

Brial jerked his head back and glared from the woman to the police officers.

"It's all lies!" he shouted. "Prove it – you bandits!"

"We shall," said Saturnin, quietly. "You made several mistakes. One was your petty pilfering. You should have left Monsieur Arvel's papers in his pocket, and his cigars."

The commissaire again dived into the prisoner's pockets. "And this roll of Swiss francs," he went on. "They will be enough by themselves to convict you. Incidentally, you don't use worms for fishing, Brial; you use a certain kind of doughy paste. You left a bit of it up in Lebourg's bedroom."

"Lies! Lies!"

Brial's voice fell now, almost to a whisper. His face had gone white.

"You made another mistake, Brial," Saturnin went on, his voice passionless. "You telephoned Madame Arvel asking her to declare to the police that she was unaware her husband was coming to Saint Genes today. No doubt you invented some cock-and-bull story to account for that request. But it set Madame wondering."

He looked at the woman; she nodded her head vehemently.

"That is so, monsieur. At the time I couldn't understand it, but later, I asked him, and then he had the mad insolence to boast – to boast to me that he had. . . ."

"Take no notice of her!" Brial shouted at the top of his voice. "How can you believe her. She lied to you. She knew her husband

was coming today, and she killed him. If not herself then by some hired crook here. She killed him because she is my mistress. She wanted Arvel out of the way. She is a murderess, a liar, and nothing more than a . . ."

Saturnin clapped a hand over Brial's mouth, and Felix jerked the man back roughly.

Simone Arvel crossed the room quietly and picked her hat up from a chair.

"I was never this man's mistress," she said. "He asked me for money, and I gave him a little. I was sorry for him, and he told me lies. There was even a time when I thought of marrying him . . . I was lonely, and miserable. Then he tried to blackmail me. Somehow he discovered I was married. I think he read a letter I left on my desk. I didn't want the town gossips to know Jean and I had separated, so I paid this brute some small sums . . ."

Brial shouted at her once more, and was again induced to remain silent.

"Enough!" said Saturnin. "We shall discuss things further down at the station. Madame Arvel, do you feel up to driving your car, or . . .?"

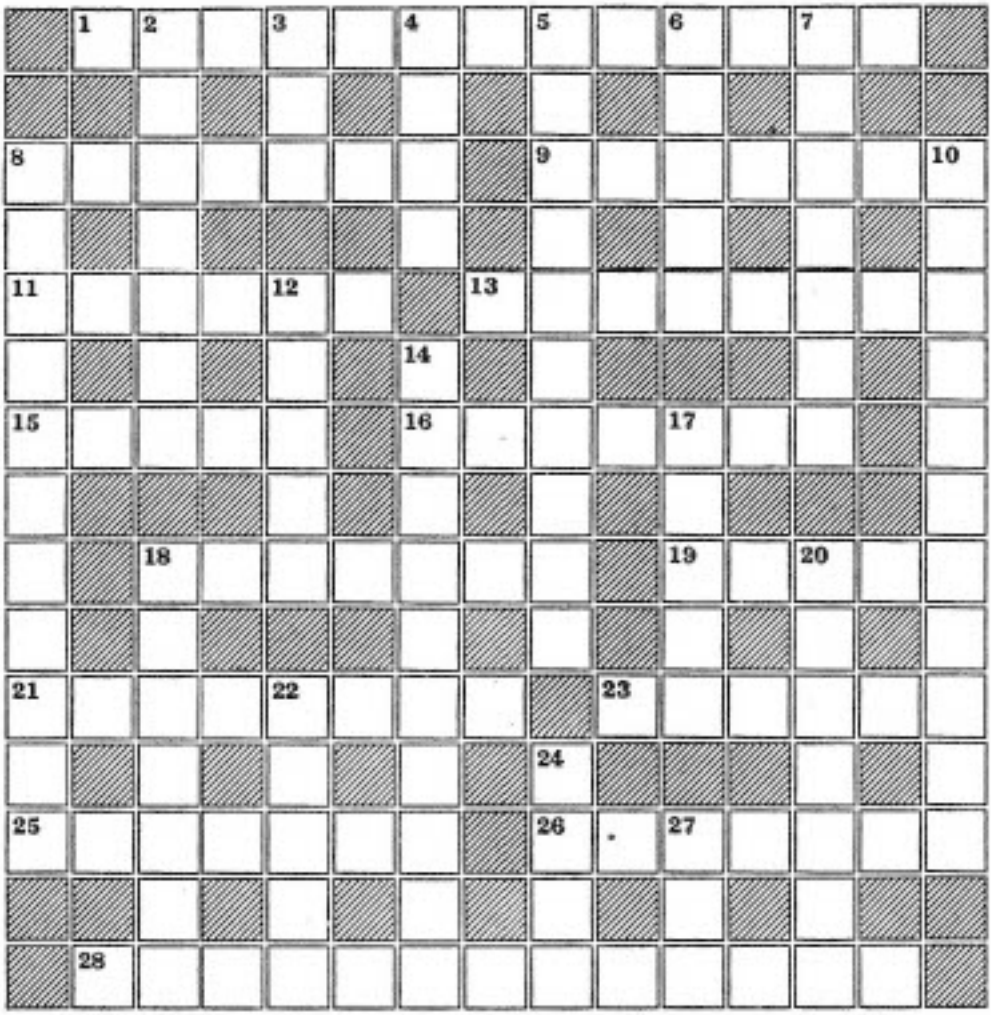
She interrupted him quickly.

"Certainly. I want to come with you, monsieur. I could not rest tonight, without telling you gentlemen all I know. I can drive easily enough, and follow you into the town."

With quick movements, denoting nervous energy and resolution, Madame Arvel adjusted a black hat and veil. Saturnin Dax grasped his prisoner's arm.

"Let us go," he said. "I think Monsieur Fontan will be pleased to see us."

EWMM CROSSWORD No. 3



ACROSS

1. To solvers, the end of an E.W. title may be lanced (7, 6)
8. Lucky accompaniment to fame (7)
9. Edgar's Rubber Men? (7)
11. Mostly before time every twelve months (6)
13. Nudity, not only a naked head (8)
15. Observed Edward was missing (5)
16. Neil has changed the way he breathes (7)
18. Partly cover on a circuit? (7)
19. Bail I arranged for a suspect (5)
21. Never coming to a conclusion (8)
23. Like a high-pitched scream (6)
25. Dr. Casti becomes violent (7)
26. Look before you leap, perhaps? (7)
28. The colourful ring of an Edgar Wallace story! (7, 6)

DOWN

2. Arresting authority (7)
3. Presumably of little value to Maigret (3)
4. Private detectives? (4)
5. Where they sell Ming pottery? (5, 5)
6. Not so gentle reminder? (5)
7. Principals in criminal circles? (7)
8. Airborne detachment Edgar booked (6, 5)
10. Fair cop who married your brother? (6-2-3)
12. Stay in a home! (5)
14. Behave like two love-birds (3, 3, 3)
17. Accessory for a dog handler (5)
18. One pair, maybe, out-of-doors (4-3)
20. Sign, briefly, that letter (7)
22. Anything known? (5)
24. Some fine picture, for instance (4)
27. Hearing aid! (3)

(Solution on page 88)

Red and White for Death

A deceptively simple tale showing that revenge can have results . . . and repercussions

Jean McDougall

FOR TWENTY years, the thought of murder had been uppermost in the mind of George Danvers.

He didn't think of it as that, of course. Revenge, maybe. Retribution, certainly. What did it matter what it was called? It still added up to the liquidation of Vincent Rogers – Captain Vincent Rogers, United States Army, payment for Lisa's death with interest that had accumulated over the long years of waiting, planning for the moment when his mission would be accomplished.

In the foyer of one of New York's luxury hotels, George sat with middle-aged placidity, bespectacled blue eyes focused on the swing doors through which any moment now a chauffeur would emerge to convey him to his destiny and Vincent Rogers to eternity.

Quite unobtrusively, with arms folded, he could feel the reassuring outline of the revolver in his pocket. Not that he intended shooting him. Twenty years had spawned a more subtle approach to evening the score for Lisa than that, but it was comforting to have the weapon at hand in case – just in case anything unforeseen should arise.

The job must be done properly. There must never be another occasion when Lisa could justifiably pour contempt on his efforts as on the last time he'd seen her.

Lisa! The past rolled back and it almost seemed she materialised

there beside him in the busy foyer. Rippling honey-coloured hair, blue eyes that could equally well flash scorn or sparkle with pulse quickening mischief, and a high-breasted figure that could drive a man mad.

They'd been engaged once but that was before the war had enmeshed them. The thought of her waiting at home had sustained him throughout his army service and made bearable the years of suspended living in the POW camp.

The day of homecoming came at last. That strange feeling of shyness when he found himself confronted by his parents. How aged they'd grown! Loving, as always, yet restrained, as though here were things he mustn't learn too bluntly. Was it only imagination that the defences were most painfully apparent when he mentioned Lisa?

"I'd been hoping she would be here with you – waiting."

"Have something to eat first, George." His mother flushed awkwardly. She never had been one to disguise her feelings successfully, and always he'd known how she disapproved of Lisa.

"At least have a smoke first, lad," suggested his father.

He had a momentary compunction about running out of them like this, but surely they understood how he felt. It had been so long.

"I won't be late – just nip round to Claver Street – say 'Hello'. How's she been anyway?"

"She's been married," his mother told him flatly, her strained face suddenly white. "Married an American captain last year."

If someone had kicked him viciously he couldn't have felt worse then. Married! And to someone who'd be taking her three thousand miles away from him.

The older edition of George Danvers in the New York hotel stiffened at the memory of that homecoming and the terse scene that had followed.

Lisa had laughed in his face.

"What did you expect? You might have been dead for all I knew."

How he longed to take the white throat in his hands. "You must have known I was a prisoner – that I'd come back some day."

"Oh, for Heaven's sake! Didn't it ever occur to you I might change my mind. I married a *man*." She was different somehow from the girl he'd left, harder, more assured. "You've always been so ineffectual, George." Her lovely eyes considered him thoughtfully for a moment with that strange, unblinking gaze. Then she

smiled, a bit penitent. "What a bitchy remark – typical, I'm afraid."

In spite of the hurt, he could still rise to her defence. "Just honest, Lisa. 'Ineffectual's' right. Maybe they'll put it on my headstone some day."

"Don't be silly! You and I will live to be a hundred. You'll see." She lit a cigarette. "The other crack I made – it wasn't true, George. I'm sorry."

The brittle sophistication melted away. She was her old self again, the girl he remembered before the nightmare of war stepped in to separate them.

He held out a hand. "Hope you'll be happy – both of you." His throat seemed tight, restricted. "Where is he anyway?"

"In the States. Demobbed last month."

"The old job waiting for him, I suppose?" His tone held double bitterness. Captain Vincent Rogers had the edge on him on two counts.

Lisa's face tightened. "Well, of course. In this father's business – antiques or something – old books, paintings – oh, I don't know, but they're filthy rich."

*

"Mr. Danvers?"

George jumped guiltily. The dream had so absorbed him that Rogers' chauffeur had caught him unawares. He looked up, flustered, into a calm, young face, surmounted by peaked cap.

At first sight the young man seemed to be deeply tanned but the magnificent white teeth and thickened lips of the negro betrayed his origin.

"Yes, that's right. Sorry! I was half asleep."

"Plenty time, sir. I'll put that in the car."

"No!" George gripped the package on the settee beside him decisively. "I mean – thanks, but I'll manage."

The chauffeur nodded, crossing in front of him to hold the swing doors politely for his stout, perspiring passenger. The mad British and their precious antiques! Did they imagine every gangster in America was waiting to pounce on their valuable first editions?

He led the way to the white Cadillac parked outside. A newsboy hawking ridiculously large papers cut across their path.

"Would you mind. . .?" George began, jerking his head in the boy's direction.

"A pleasure, sir."

The chauffeur's attention diverted, he set the large package carefully on the car floor and checked to make sure the air holes were still unblocked. Satisfied, he leaned back against the cushioned upholstery and was mopping his face when the driver returned with the paper.

He waited till the car had shot smoothly forward before he dared look for the expected headline.

DANGEROUS SNAKE LOOSE

Somewhere in the City tonight, a rattlesnake is at liberty to strike death. The Foliton Zoo reports that only five out of a fresh consignment of six snakes reached them. . . .

George tossed the paper aside contemptuously and savoured a strange sense of power. Only he knew the whereabouts of the sixth rattler and the avenging use for which it had been ordained.

*

The idea of murder had not been born out of realisation that Lisa had married someone else. He was sensible enough to admit that a girl could marry anyone she chose.

For a year after Lisa had emigrated, he'd drifted from one dead-end job to the next, but on the day he learned of her desertion and death, grief and a desire for revenge had shaped his life with the efficiency of a sculptor.

Fate it was that had provided the opening for him in the London booksellers who did so much business with Rogers Incorporated. Fate egged on by a dogged young man who had obtained and subsequently thrown up a dozen or so similar situations when he'd discovered they were minus the all-important link with the States.

The thirteenth job with Miller & Lightbody had at last rewarded him as the emissary of several first editions too valuable to be sent to Rogers Inc. except under personal escort. It had taken time, of course – a great deal of time to work himself into a position of trust with a firm like Millers which naturally did not endow every minor clerk with free trips abroad. Only the fact that he had at last been found acceptable as a husband for Miller's daughter had taken him up the ladder of ultimate success.

He thought now of his wife unemotionally, a stolid, easy-going Londoner, who neither competed with, nor in any way displaced, the memory of the incomparable Lisa.

The car left the road, swinging up a driveway, resplendent with the incredibly beautiful autumn. In these last few minutes before coming face to face with Rogers, he marshalled his energies for the task ahead.

First, he'd confront him with his real purpose in calling, demand the truth behind Lisa's death, and finally there would be the reckoning and the judgment.

A small group stood welcomingly in the autumn sunshine as the car rolled to a stop.

George noted with something of a shock that Rogers was a much bigger man than he'd visualised. And the dark haired woman by his side? Well, obviously he must have married again.

Oh, hell! he thought savagely. And kids too! I didn't count on that.

He scanned them all carefully. Would Lisa's child be amongst them. Hardly! The oldest, a girl, looked little more than fifteen.

The chauffeur nipped out smartly but Rogers was ahead of him with the door open and a hand extended warmly.

"Welcome! Come and meet the folks. Mairi, this is George Danvers, all the way from the old country."

George stammered something to the woman with those wise, dark eyes. Her little speech of welcome disconcerted him and the chauffeur's annexation of the precious box unnerved him further.

Rogers interpreted his anxious look correctly. "Hey, Stew! Where are you heading with the bullion?"

The coloured man grinned as he swung it carelessly to the other hand with a cheerfulness that made George shudder. The younger boy and girl giggled appreciatively as they offered to help.

"Where would you like it put, Major?"

"Please handle it carefully," George called out in desperation. "The bindings – very old – fragile – "

"We'll keep it beside us at dinner." Rogers decided, smiling. "O.K.?"

"O.K." agreed his guest faintly.

"I'm sure longing to see the Kilmarnock edition. How much is that old robber, Miller, asking this time?"

"Vince, honey!" put in Mrs. Rogers. "Mr. Danvers must be longing to get out of this heat."

Inside the cool living-room, he was introduced to the children. Barbara, the eldest, surveyed him with the same dark eyes as her mother. Cliff and Sue favoured their father in looks. A firmly knit

family they appeared to the stranger so plainly ill at ease, despite their warm hospitality.

George was grateful for the whisky and soda. He needed it now more than ever. What a fool he had been not to anticipate that Rogers might be surrounded.

Over dinner, Mrs. Rogers apologised for having a prior engagement later that evening. "The children and I promised to go to the party. It seems so rude, Mr. Danvers. . . ."

"But of course it isn't." He relaxed now. Maybe fate hadn't quite deserted him. "I do understand. After all, I've practically this dropped in on you without warning – only a phone call morning."

"You came by air, Danvers?" Rogers asked.

He nodded, thankful that his host did not press him for details. Actually he had spent several days in New York, preparing. . . .

"I sure would love to see your books, Mr. Danvers," the elder girl interposed as she helped clear the table.

He sweated again as the tenseness returned. What if they insisted on viewing the treasures in the box before he could be left alone with his victim?

"We just haven't time, honey," her mother protested, and Rogers laughingly explained, "Barbara has a nose for a bargain. She'll be a real asset when she comes into the business some day."

"You will forgive us all rushing off like this?" Mairi Rogers said. At the door she lingered as though some instinct bade her stay. "I've left a snack in the ice box, Vince – for later."

"Sure! Enjoy yourselves, kids." Her husband kissed her lightly, but with a tenderness that made George drop his eyes. He'd never dreamed the final act would be so darned difficult. It was one thing to plan the liquidation of a stranger, but quite something else to deprive anyone so vital and so plainly loved as Vincent Rogers of life.

*

He looked at the table arrangements Mairi Rogers had apparently taken so much trouble over. Red and white. The death symbol! He thought again of Lisa and the son that had cost her her life and his face went grim as resolution hardened against the man who had so callously thrown her aside. Vincent Rogers had a reckoning to face.

"It's hot, isn't it?" he suggested as the door closed on the family.

"You think so?" Rogers looked surprised. He prided himself on the efficient air conditioning of his luxurious home. "Maybe you'd like the french windows open a bit." He remembered the English and their love of draughty air.

"Thanks." George was congratulating himself on achieving one step further in his plans. The snake would make for the garden after its venomous sting. He was counting on that.

He took a proffered cigar and watched Rogers fill the port glasses.

"You were saying your daughter would follow you into the business," he commenced levelly. "How about your son?"

"Cliff? Oh, I guess so – if he wants to, someday. But he's only ten right now."

"I meant your other son." George said coldly. He watched the rugged features redden.

"You've got it wrong, I guess. One son, two daughters – that's my collection." The irritation at first in his voice had given place to pride, a pride that infuriated the listener.

George hoisted the package on to the cleared table. It gave him something to do as he formulated his next shaft.

"Major Rogers – perhaps I should explain – before the War, I lived in Glasgow." He came round the table, leaning heavily on one of the chairs.

"Glasgow? You're kidding! Why, I know it well – was stationed there for a bit before D-Day."

"I know that. I also knew the girl you married then."

"Lisa?" Vincent Rogers grey eyes narrowed suddenly. "You knew Lisa!"

"We were engaged once."

The heavy eyebrows lifted slightly and a look almost of compassion came into Rogers' expression. "I'm sorry. I guess I know how you feel."

"I hardly think you do." George sauntered casually away from the table to sit in an easy chair some yards off. He felt in command of the situation for the first time. Certainly it was the other's turn to look awkward and ill at ease. "Otherwise you'd know my purpose in coming here today."

Roger's glance flickered towards the package. "Well, naturally I know why you've come. Like me to look them over now?" The fellow was plainly unbalanced. The sooner he got rid of him the better.

"First – I'd like to know about you and Lisa."

"The hell you would!" Rogers' broad shoulders moved irritably. George slid a hand into his gun pocket, suddenly apprehensive. The big man looked mad enough to squeeze him to a pulp any second.

In the silent, succeeding minute, Rogers' mood changed from irascibility to tolerance. It was a fatal weakness sometimes to be able to see both sides of a problem, he could understand how the fellow felt – another of Lisa's cast-offs. Still, one would have thought after twenty years the wound would have healed.

"I don't know what's eating you," he began at last, feeling his way, "but this much I'll say – of the two of us, you were the luckier."

He stopped. He was looking into the business end of a steadily held revolver.

George stood up, keeping the gun pointed. "That's the sort of rotten thing I'd expect a cad like you to say. Now, you're going to tell me about Lisa – and her son – and just why you kicked them out when you did."

"But I didn't." He spread his hands helplessly, trying to narrow the distance between himself and the armed fanatic.

"Stay where you are!"

"What the hell do you want to know?" He was fast losing his temper even though instinct warned him it was the worst thing he could do.

"The truth."

"And be killed for it?"

"You should have thought of that before."

He sank down wearily at the table. The thought of Mairi and the children obsessed him. How to keep this from them. How to stay alive.

"If it's any comfort to you, Lisa didn't love me." He kept his eyes averted, hoping his apparent unwariness might lure the other offguard, but the weapon never faltered. "She wanted to get to the States – thousands of them did – I just happened to be the handiest sucker."

He thought it wiser not to mention that his marriage had been the standing joke of his fellow officers for months.

"So you evened the score by throwing them out – Lisa and the boy." George spat out the words.

"She left me – but of course you won't believe that."

"You're right. I don't."

"Oh, what the hell! What does it matter what you believe? Get the thing over with, and the hell with it!"

Perspiration was making his face shine. George noted it with an uneasy delight.

"First – the books I brought. You do want to see them, don't you?" He waved the revolver in the direction of the package, but levelled it instantly as his victim started towards him.

"You must be a nut case." Rogers whispered out of a dry throat. He moved slowly to fumble with the ropes round the box.

"I'd like to know what happened to your son after – after Lisa died."

"He wasn't my son. She ran off with somebody else."

"You're lying."

He had disengaged the rope from the box now and toyed with the idea of lassoing his tormentor, but it was a hopeless proposition with that ready trigger finger. He shrugged. What was the use?

"You haven't the faintest idea what Lisa was like – selfish, ruthless, and with a capacity for passion totally insatiable. No one guy could ever have held her. I didn't even try."

He saw the fury on the other's face and braced himself for the coming shot.

Suddenly he was beyond caring. He threw back the box lid contemptuously as though hurling something unclean from him.

The freed snake spiralled in anger, its head pointed right at him. Cold fear rooted him to the spot. An ominous rattle filtered through the hushed room.

George Danvers watched it all with detachment his mind busying itself elsewhere with the new conception of Lisa. Incredible – but wasn't there just a chance what the American said might be true?

True or not, it did not in any way lessen his hatred for the big man transfixed now, almost hypnotised by waiting death.

There was a swift movement by the hand that held the revolver, and the snake lay writhing amongst the red and white flowers. Then it went limp.

The two men stared at each other in dazed shock. The weapon slipped from George's hand but Rogers made no attempt to retrieve it. When at last he could move, it was towards the decanter.

George gulped his drink automatically. The enormity of the thing he'd planned for a lifetime had caught up with him. Most of all he wanted to get away, but first, he had to know.

"Who did she run off with?"

Rogers kicked the revolver out of sight beneath a chair. He bore no resentment. The guy *was* a nut – but then, only a nut could have carried a torch for Lisa all these years. That figured.

"Does it really matter now?"

"Yes, it does to me."

"We had a coloured chauffeur at the time. Seems he had a way with him."

The face that had awakened him in the hotel foyer swam mistily into George's remembrance. The boy, half negro, had struck the chord of recognition even then. He gaped at Vincent Rogers, aware that the man had a bigness that transcended the physical, a generosity that made his own years lost to vengeance and hatred the puny refuge of a stunted mind.

"You looked after the boy – I couldn't have done that."

Rogers shrugged. "It was little enough to do for the kid. Besides, I've been repaid. He's as straight as a die." He pressed a button and somewhere, far off, a bell sounded. "I'll have him drive you back to your hotel." His inherent kindness came to the fore again. "Or would you rather I did myself?"

"No." George shook his head. "I'd like to see him again."

He let Rogers guide him to the waiting car where the young driver held open the door. "Don't worry about the books," he heard his host call cheerfully. "We'll fix a price later. We'll manage to work something out."

Throughout the drive back to the hotel, George sat crumpled in the back seat, staring at the driver. It was some time later that he realised he was himself being subjected to an equally close scrutiny in the mirror. He returned the steady, unblinking gaze without flinching.

"You all right, sir?" Stew asked, worried over the paper-white look of his passenger.

"Never felt better." George got out eventually. He permitted himself a wry grimace as he wondered whether or not to tip the boy, and if so, how much?

Lisa had been right about him all along. He was quite, quite ineffectual.

Isn't Science Wonderful

MORRIS COOPER

A deft and ironic tale, again about circumstantial evidence and its dangers

IT HAD been a successful and profitable year for Tommy Birch.

There are some who may use other terms in describing blackmail, but it was strictly a paying business the way Tommy operated.

Efficient methods, no personal contact, no sentimentality, Tommy was very careful, never pressing his victims too far. On a few occasions when the expected payoff failed to materilize, he promptly forgot the entire matter. Too many others in his profession had ruined everything by incessant demands against a hard-headed individual. Cases like that could lead to publicity, and publicity was the death knell for a man who earned his livelihood through blackmail.

Incriminating documents were kept only as long as necessary, Tommy destroying the evidence when the victim began to pay. And with the blackmail evidence gone, there was no possibility of any tangible link being found by the police in the unlikely event that the victim talked and the finger of suspicion pointed at Tommy.

All contacts were made by public telephone, the payoffs delivered where he directed. On more than one occasion when his suspicions were aroused, he refused to call for the money, and either made other arrangements for delivery or wrote off the intended victim as a loss. He was reasonably certain none of his benefactors had ever managed to catch a glimpse of him; but it was a possibility he did not ignore.

To the staff of the Hotel Saugus no person such as Tommy Birch existed; but they were used to the quiet comings and goings of Charles Allen.

Charles Allen was an elderly man, a trifle overweight and stoop-shouldered, with a grey moustache that bristled under slightly flaring nostrils, and a limp that was not entirely concealed by the built-up shoe he wore on his right foot and the gnarled, lion-headed cane he carried. He never left his room without an overcoat; the low tilted brim of his hat and the muffler wound around his throat afforded an inconspicuous disguise. The grey wig on his head was a masterpiece created of human hair; a few deft strokes of a make-up pencil plus thick-lensed glasses deadened the characteristic shape of his face.

The fund of information that set Tommy up in business came into his possession accidentally . . . a briefcase forgotten on a street car. It never occurred to Tommy to turn the lost case over to the conductor.

When he returned to his cheap lodgings Tommy opened the briefcase, and it didn't take him long to realize the potential value of his find. He had no worry about the loss of the case being reported . . . the person to whom it belonged would not be eager to come forward and identify the contents.

Tommy left the rooming house. No one missed him . . . he had been there only a few days. No one would ever miss Tommy; for as long as he could remember he had drifted from town to town, never making friends, never taking root, always alert to turn what he termed a fast buck.

Tommy disappeared quietly and Charles Allen was created. He lived the simple life, doing nothing to attract undue attention. He spent no more money than was necessary, paid his hotel bills promptly, never complained about the service, tipped just enough.

Charles Allen would be remembered as a limp and a cane . . . a quiet, non-assuming skeleton clothed in an overcoat, with grey hair.

The unexpected came with startling suddenness. Mr. Allen had been, as usual, extremely cautious in his approach. Nothing spectacular . . . nothing dramatic. Merely a new victim contacted from a public phone booth, a few soft words, the automatic warning not to call the police.

A few hours later, with mingled feelings of apprehension and disgust, Mr. Allen read the story in the newspaper. The new victim had committed suicide. The fool, thought Mr. Allen. What worried him was not the death of the man . . . but the suicide note he had left.

Several things might have happened . . . the suicide could have

talked to someone before killing himself, or he might have left additional information that the police had not released to the press. From the beginning, Mr. Allen had been aware of the fact that he could have been spotted on one of the occasions when he had picked up blackmail money. Now, with the death of an intended victim, whoever possessed such information might feel it a duty to report his knowledge to the police.

Mr. Allen might have waited for developments . . . but not Tommy Birch. Tommy hadn't counted on suicide; he shuddered as he thought what a jury would do when it was pointed out that his blackmail had caused the death of a man.

In the normal course of events, Mr. Allen had intended checking out of the hotel when his pile was large enough . . . and vanishing quietly. But Tommy Birch had known that the day might come when it would be expedient for Mr. Allen to disappear quietly, with a minimum of fuss and without a trace of his destination.

The documents and pictures and scraps of paper that formed the backbone of his business were torn into a thousand pieces, dropped down a hundred sewers. Even the make-up pencil tossed through the grille of a handy drain.

*

Mr. Allen picked up the money-belt before he returned to his hotel room . . . the money-belt that had been one of the neatest dodges in his whole scheme of making blackmail a paying business. Every day without fail he left the money-belt, securely wrapped, in a public locker.

Then Tommy went to work making Mr. Allen disappear. It was imperative that there be not the slightest connection between old Charles Allen and young Tommy Birch.

Tommy shaved off Mr. Allen's moustache, used soap and water to make certain that no trace of make-up remained on his face. That wax that had given Mr. Allen's nostrils their characteristic spread was flushed down the toilet bowl.

Then he put on a pair of gloves, picked up a towel, and went to work on the room. He went over the suitcases, inside and out, polished every inch of the bathroom his hands or bare feet might have touched . . . even the spare pair of built-up shoes and his belt were not neglected.

It was possible, he reasoned, that at a future date something might occur to bring Tommy Birch into contact with the police.

In such an event, the curious fact that the prints of Tommy Birch matched those of a Mr. Charles Allen would be difficult to explain.

Tommy had prepared if it became necessary for Mr. Allen to exit quickly. Months ago he had had a drunken derelict write a short pencilled note.

> I have been called out of town unexpectedly. The clothes and the suitcase in my room are of little value, and if I do not return or write to claim them in the next two months, I would appreciate your seeing that they are donated to the Salvation Army or to some other worthy charity. I am writing, rather than making a telephone call, in the event that verbal authorization may not be sufficient for you to dispose of my effects.

The five dollar bill enclosed with the note was large enough for the hotel clerk to do as he asked, yet not so large as to excite comment. The note had been thoroughly gone over with a clean handkerchief before it was sealed in the envelope and carefully tucked away. Soon after he had written it, the incident vanished from the memory of the drunken man.

Mr. Allen left the Hotel Saugus by the back stairs. The glasses, the cane, the shoes, and the overcoat still would have identified him to any hotel employee as Mr. Allen . . . but he was pleased that he managed his getaway without being seen by anyone.

He headed for his destination by a round-about route, changing street cars and buses frequently. He had one scare when a drunk, bleeding from his nose and mouth, lurched against him; but Mr. Allen managed to push him off with his cane and walk away before a crowd was attracted.

The swamp was somewhat of a curiosity; the land was not valuable enough for anyone to go to the expense of draining it, and it had nothing to make it an attraction for the sightseer. A ten-foot barbed wire fence offered an effective barrier to any cattle that might stray off the road into the swamp.

No human was in sight as he stopped casually in front of the break in the barbed wire barrier. Quickly he worked his way through, followed the soft-earth trail that led to the swamp.

He broke off the branch of a tree, used it to dig into the ground at the edge of the swamp. He breathed a sigh of relief when he saw that the metal suitcase was still there. When Mr. Allen had checked the swamp and found it ideal, he had come back . . . and buried the metal suitcase. Inside it, wrapped in waterproof

canvas, was a complete change of clothing, a wallet with papers identifying him as Tommy Birch.

He changed clothes swiftly, cursing his haste when the money-belt and the wallet fell to the muddy ground. Tommy brushed them off as best he could, put the wallet into his pocket and the belt around his waist.

Then he began the final disposition of Mr. Charles Allen. He weighted the suitcase with rocks, pushed it deep into the swamp. In a matter of moments it would be so deep that no one could ever retrieve it. Each of Mr. Allen's shoes was weighted, carefully sunk. The overcoat, the hat and muffler – all disappeared.

Tommy looked at the neatly trimmed fingernails which belonged to Mr. Allen; he scuffed and dirtied them against a tree trunk.

He took care to see that the wig vanished; even Tommy himself could never trace the man who had got the specially built shoes and the wig of human hair for Mr. Allen.

Tommy checked over the items carefully. Wig . . . shoes . . . the four sets of thick underwear that had given the illusion of stoutness to his thin frame . . . glasses. Glasses! Tommy jerked his head in alarm. They had not been in his overcoat pocket where he had put them when he started travelling on the street cars and buses.

He ran down the trail, looking, searching. A few feet short of the road he stopped . . . walked back slowly. That was a bad break. Probably they had fallen out – he hoped whoever found them wouldn't bother turning them in. Anyway, even if they did, they would lie unclaimed, be disposed of some day at public auction.

Tommy looked about when he reached the swamp again. Everything was disposed of, excepting the cane. He picked it up, tossed it as if it were a spear, watched the arc it made through the air. The lion head struck the swamp with a soft plop, and the cane began to sink.

He covered the hole that had held the suitcase, smoothed the soft earth with a branch . . . and that was that. Charles Allen was gone . . . as though he had never existed.

Tommy Birch walked down the trail that led to the road. The voice slapped against his ears when he crawled through the break in the barbed wire fence.

"What are you doing here?"

Tommy locked into the face of the state trooper. He straight-

ened slowly, brushed some clinging dust from his trousers. "Just looking around," he finally answered.

"That ain't him." The high-pitched accusation came from a freckled-faced kid, bare toes squirming into the dusty road in an ecstacy of excitement. "Leastwise, he ain't the one I saw go in. That one was real old and bent over. That's why pa called for ma to get in touch with you fellers."

The trooper asked, "You didn't see anyone else in there?"

"That's right."

"He's a liar," the kid shouted. "I was diggin' fer worms the other side of our barn when I saw him go in. Pa was right there with me and I reckon both of us ain't blind." The boy stuck his hands in the pockets of his wash-whitened overalls. "And he ain't come out."

"The kid," Tommy said, "is nuts. Probably seen too many movies."

"Could be," the trooper agreed. "Could be. But there won't be any harm in checking."

Tommy shrugged his shoulders again. "You're the boss."

The kid made dust circles with his big toe. "I know what I seen and ain't nobody kin prove I'm blind."

*

Forty hours later the county attorney moved to have Tommy Birch indicted for first-degree murder and the court appointed a public defender.

Tommy sat in the stiff-backed chair and looked across the pencil-pitted table at Lucius Donald. "This is crazy," he said to the public defender. "Just because some wacky kid saw double is no reason to lock me up for murder."

Lucius Donald laced his hands across his bald head. "Weren't you surprised yesterday when they gave you a physical examination?"

"Why should I be? I've never been in jail before."

"It isn't a customary routine, but in your case it served to establish several important factors. For example, your blood type is O. Charles Allen's blood type was AB."

"Whose . . .?" Tommy started to rise from the chair, changed his mind. "Maybe you'd better tell me just what they think they've got on me."

"I've been trying to do that," Lucius Donald said. He began to

check the points off on his fingers. "The police found a pair of glasses caught in some undergrowth just a few feet from where the trail starts at the main road. They traced the prescription to John Hervey, an optician in Mill City. His records show they were made up for a Charles Allen, living at the Hotel Saugus.

"The police technicians found a strand of hair clinging to one of the ear bars on his glasses. They matched it up with a hair caught in the sweat band of a hat Charles Allen left in his room . . . and when the lab boys went over you yesterday, they found a bit of hair under one of your nails. It matched the other two specimens."

Tommy looked at the attorney with unbelieving eyes. "But . . . it can't be . . . it can't be."

"Let me finish, and then you can try and give me the answers. Now . . . the police have casts and photographs of two sets of footprints leading into the swamp. One of them was made by a man who wore a pair of specially constructed shoes . . . and they match with a pair found in Allen's hotel room. The other set was made by you. Allen's prints lead to the swamp . . . and end. Yours go in and out. At the spot where the glasses were found the prints are trampled over and milled. The police say you and Allen had a struggle there, and he lost his glasses."

Lucius Donald paused for a moment, looked at the white face, at the brown eyes staring at him in mounting disbelief.

"Is that all?" Tommy's question was almost inaudible.

"No. They found a cane that had not sunk in the swamp. The bottom half was snagged by some creeper vines. They traced it to the Mill City Cane and Umbrella Shop. The head is distinctive . . . a lion; and the sales record shows it was sold to Charles Allen. They found enough dried blood on the portion of the cane that hadn't sunk in the swamp to identify the blood type . . . to determine it was the murder weapon.

"You had two wallets in your possession when the police searched you. One of them was yours . . . the other carried identification that showed it belonged to Charles Allen. And you had a money belt containing twenty thousand dollars."

Tommy covered his eyes, rested his elbows on the table. That had been a bad break, forgetting to dispose of Allen's wallet. Losing the glasses hadn't helped either. If he kept quiet and let them go ahead . . . the risk was too great. Better a few years in jail for blackmail than taking a chance on walking up the scaffold stairs.

He uncovered his eyes and told Lucius Donald what had happened. "So I guess they'll have me for a blackmail rap," he finished, "but it's better than a murder charge."

"If they believe you."

"If they –!" Tommy stood up, and there was a hoarseness in his voice. "It's the truth. They've got to believe me."

"We'll try," said Lucius Donald.

*

One by one the staff of the Hotel Saugus passed by. They looked and shook their heads. No resemblance at all. Even the voice is different.

"Look," Tommy shouted, "take a good look. Imagine my hair is grey. Imagine I'm limping."

They laughed. So what . . . a man as young as Tommy Birch could never have fooled them for long.

John Hervey, the optician, was even more firm.

Doris Blake, the waitress who had served Mr. Allen when he stopped for breakfast in the Hotel Saugus breakfast nook was equally certain.

There were more witnesses . . . the bus driver who remembered the elderly man who had got off at the village. The newsboy who had sold Mr. Allen an occasional paper. They were certain they could not have been fooled for long.

The hotel room, Tommy cried. The hotel room . . . I can tell you everything that's in it.

Why not, said the police. Part of your story is true. The blackmail part. But you were blackmailing Mr. Allen. You went to his room to see if he had left anything that might incriminate you, then hurried to the swamp to keep your appointment. Before you left the hotel room you were careful to check that no fingerprints remained.

"What about the hair?" Tommy asked. "It wasn't real. It came from a wig."

Human hair, the lab boys said. Broken hairs without a root. The one from the hat was covered with dried sweat, the other two with dirt. Human hair, they repeated, and nothing to prove they hadn't come from a living head.

The letter! "That's it," Tommy's voice was triumphant. "How would I know about the letter if I wasn't Charles Allen?"

That, they told Tommy, is a damning bit of evidence which

shows the killing was premeditated. You had no intention of ever letting Charles Allen leave the swamp alive. The letter was simply insurance that the hotel would not report his disappearance to the police.

Mr. Allen was a hunk of grey hair and a moustache . . . a bit of wax and a limp . . . an extra set of underwear . . . how could you kill things like that . . . how could you kill yourself?

Tommy pleaded with his counsel. "I'm telling the truth. Honest. I'm willing to admit I was a blackmailer. I even gave you some of the names I remembered."

"We checked," Lucius Donald said. "But none of them admit to being blackmailed. I didn't expect they would."

"It's crazy," said Tommy, "It can't be true. Just because a couple of hicks say they saw . . ." He shook his head bewilderedly. "It doesn't make sense. Why should I kill myself?"

"The police believe that Mr. Allen was on the verge of exposing you – even at the risk of letting the world know why he was being blackmailed. You made the appointment knowing he always carried a large sum of money. He may have come with the idea of telling you for the last time to leave him alone. You killed him, disposed of his body in the swamp, and when the police arrested you, came up with the fantastic story of being two men."

"But they can't charge me with murder. There's no corpse. You've got to have a *corpus deliciti.*"

Lucius Donald shook his head. "That's a common bit of misinformation," he explained. "The identity of Charles Allen has been established. Hair that can be proven his was found under your fingernails. Traces of blood that do not match yours were on his cane. Two reliable, unbiased witnesses saw him enter the swamp . . . both of them later saw you. It is a physical impossibility for anyone to enter or leave save by the trail leading from the break in the barbed wire fence. The police maintain you arrived early and were already waiting in the swamp."

"Nothing but talk!" cried Tommy. "I still say I didn't kill anybody – and besides there's *no* corpse."

"There is sufficient evidence to show that Charles Allen entered the swamp, but never left. The state will prove easily that the only place Allen could have disappeared to is the bottom of the swamp . . . and there is no way for them to recover the body."

Lucius Donald sighed and looked at Tommy. "Both the act of homicide and the criminal agency may be established by purely circumstantial evidence. In a case such as this, where it is mani-

festly impossible to produce either the whole or a portion of the corpse, there is sufficient legal precedence to uphold the state's contention that murder has been committed . . . even if there is no body."

"You'll hear a lot more about this at the trial. I'll do my best for you." Lucius Donald was shaking his head sadly when he walked out of the cell.

Up the steps of the scaffold Tommy muttered. He muttered when they put the black hood over his head, the knotted noose around his neck.

"You can't do it. You can't hang me for killing myself."

But they did.

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period piece

THE WINDOWS

ANONYMOUS

Not strictly a crime or mystery story, this forgotten gem of suspense deserves a place in our period piece series. Published a decade before Poe's The Pit and Pendulum, *this anonymous author's tale has the same grim and fearsome qualities*

THE CASTLE of the Prince of Tolfi was built on the summit of the towering and precipitous rock of Scylla, and commanded a magnificent view of Sicily in all its grandeur. Here during the wars of the Middle Ages, when the fertile plains of Italy were devastated by hostile factions, those prisoners were confined for whose ransom a costly price was demanded. Here, too, in a dungeon, excavated deep in the solid rock, the miserable victim was immured, whom revenge pursued – the dark, fierce, and unpitying revenge of an Italian heart.

Vivenzio – the noble and the generous, the fearless in battle, and the pride of Naples in her sunny hours of peace – the young, the brave, the proud Vivenzio fell beneath this subtile and remorseless spirit. He was the prisoner of Tolfi, and he languished in that rock-encircled dungeon, which stood alone, and whose portals never opened twice upon a living captive.

It had the semblance of a vast cage, for the roof and floor and sides were of iron, solidly wrought and spaciously constructed. High above there ran a range of seven grated windows, guarded with bars of the same metal, which admitted light and air. Save these, and the tall folding doors beneath them, which occupied

the centre, no chink, or chasm, or projection, broke the smooth black surface of the walls. An iron bedstead, littered with straw, stood in one corner; and beside it a vessel with water and a coarse dish filled with coarser food.

Even the intrepid soul of Vivenzio shrank with dismay as he entered this abode, and heard the ponderous doors triple-locked by the silent men who conducted him to it. Their silence seemed prophetic of his fate, of the living grave that had been prepared for him. His menaces and his entreaties, his indignant appeals for justice, and his impatient questioning of their intentions, were alike vain.

Here he was to end his life – a life he had just begun to revel in. And by what means? By secret poison? or by murderous assault? No – for then it had been needless to bring him thither. Famine perhaps – a thousand deaths in one. It was terrible to think of it – but it was yet more terrible to picture long, long years of captivity in a solitude so appalling, a loneliness so dreary, that thought, for want of fellowship, would lose itself in madness or stagnate into idiocy.

He could not hope to escape, unless he had the power, with his bare hands, or rending asunder the solid iron walls of his prison. He could not hope for liberty from the relenting mercies of his enemy. His instant death, under any form of refined cruelty, was not the object of Tolfi, for he might have inflicted it, and he had not. It was too evident, therefore, he was reserved for some premeditated scheme of subtile vengeance; and what vengeance could transcend in malice either the slow death of famine or the still slower one of solitary incarceration, till the last lingering spark of life expired, or till reason fled, and nothing should remain to perish but the brute functions of the body?

*

It was evening when Vivenzio entered his dungeon, and the approaching night wrapped it in total darkness, as he paced up and down, revolving in his mind these horrible forebodings. No tolling bell from the castle or from any neighbouring church or convent struck upon his ear to tell how the hours passed. Frequently he would stop and listen for some sound that might betoken the vicinity of man; but the solitude of the desert, the silence of the tomb are not so still and deep as the oppressive desolation by which he was encompassed. His heart sank within him,

and he threw himself dejectedly upon his couch of straw. Sleep gradually obliterated the consciousness of misery, and bland dreams wafted his spirit to scenes which were once glowing realities for him, in whose ravishing illusions he soon lost the remembrance that he was Tolfi's prisoner.

When he awoke it was daylight; but how long he had slept he knew not. It might be early morning or it might be noon, for he could measure time by no other note of its progress than light and darkness. He had been so happy in his sleep, amid friends who loved him, and the endearments of those who loved him as friends could not, that in the first moments of waking his startled mind seemed to admit the knowledge of his situation, as if it had burst upon it for the first time, fresh in all its appalling horrors. He gazed round with an air of doubt and amazement, and took up a handful of the straw upon which he lay, as though he would ask himself what it meant. But memory, too faithful to her office, soon unveiled the melancholy past, while reason, shuddering at the task, flashed before his eyes the tremendous future. The contrast overpowered him.

When he grew more calm, he surveyed his gloomy dungeon. The stronger light of day only served to confirm what the gloomy indistinctness of the preceding evening had partially disclosed, the utter impossibility of escape. As, however, his eyes wandered round and round, and from place to place, he noticed two circumstances which excited his surprise and curiosity. The one, he thought, might be fancy; but the other was positive. His pitcher of water and the dish which contained his food had been removed from his side while he slept and now stood near the door.

Were he even inclined to doubt this, by supposing he had mistaken the spot where he saw them over night, he could not, for the pitcher now in his dungeon was neither of the same form nor colour as the other, while the food was changed for some other of better quality. He had been visited therefore during the night. But how had the person obtained entrance? Could he have slept so soundly that the unlocking and opening of those doors were effected without waking him? He would have said this was not possible, but that in doing so he must admit a greater difficulty, an entrance by no other means, of which he was convinced there existed none. It was not intended, then, that he should be left to perish from hunger. But the secret mode of supplying him with food seemed to indicate he was to have no opportunity of communicating with a human being.

The other circumstance which had attracted his notice was the disappearance, as he believed, of one of the seven grated windows that ran along the top of his prison. He felt confident that he had observed and counted them; for he was rather surprised at their number, and there was something peculiar in their form, as well as in the manner of their arrangement, at unequal distances. It was so much easier, however, to suppose he was mistaken, than that a portion of the solid iron which formed the walls could have escaped from its position, that he soon dismissed the thought from his mind.

Vivenzio partook of the food that was before him without apprehension. It might be poisoned; but if it were, he knew he could not escape death should such be the design of Tolfi; and the quickest death would be the speediest release.

The day passed wearily and gloomily, though not without a faint hope that by keeping watch at night he might observe when the person came again to bring him food, which he supposed he would do in the same way as before. The mere thought of being approached by a living creature, and the opportunity it might present of learning the doom prepared, or preparing, for him, imparted some comfort. Besides, if he came alone, might he not in a furious onset overpower him? Or he might be accessible to pity, or the influence of such rewards as he could bestow, if once more at liberty and master of himself. Say he were armed. The worst that could befall, if nor bribe, nor prayers, nor force prevailed, was a blow which, though dealt in a damned cause, might work a desired end. There was no chance so desperate, but it looked lovely in Vivenzio's eyes compared with the idea of being totally abandoned.

The night came, and Vivenzio watched. Morning came, and he was confounded. He must have slumbered without knowing it. Sleep must have stolen over him when exhausted by fatigue, and in that interval of feverish repose he had been baffled; for there stood his replenished pitcher of water, and there his day's meal.

Nor was this all. Looking towards the windows of his dungeon, he counted but five! Here was no deception; he was now convinced there had been none the day before. But what did all this portend? He gazed till his eyes ached; he could discover nothing to explain the mystery. That it was so, he knew. Why it was so, he racked his imagination in vain to conjecture. He examined the doors. A single circumstance convinced him they had not been opened.

Some straw which he had carelessly thrown against them the

preceding day, as he paced to and fro, remained where he had cast it, though it must have been displaced by the slightest motion of either of the doors. This was evidence that could not be disputed; and it followed there must be some secret machinery in the walls by which a person could enter. He inspected them closely. They appeared to him one solid and compact mass of iron; or joined, if joined they were, with such nice art that no mark of division was perceptible. Again and again he surveyed them – and the floor – and the roof – and that range of visionary windows, as he was now almost tempted to consider them: he could discover nothing, absolutely nothing, to relieve his doubts or satisfy his curiosity. Sometimes he fancied that altogether the dungeon had a more contracted appearance – that it looked smaller; but this he ascribed to fancy, and the impression naturally produced upon his mind by the undeniable disappearance of two of the windows.

With intense anxiety, Vivenzio looked forward to the return of night; and as it approached he resolved that no treacherous sleep should again betray him. Instead of seeking his bed of straw, he continued to walk up and down his dungeon till daylight, straining his eyes in every direction through the darkness to watch for any appearances that might explain these mysteries. While thus engaged, and as nearly as he could judge, about two o'clock, there was a slight tremulous motion of the floor.

He stooped. The motion lasted nearly a minute; but it was so extremely gentle that he almost doubted whether it was real or only imaginary.

He listened. Not a sound could be heard. Presently, however, he felt a rush of cold air blow upon him; and dashing towards the quarter whence it seemed to proceed, he stumbled over something which he judged to be the water ewer. The rush of cold air was no longer perceptible; and as Vivenzio stretched out his hands he found himself close to the walls. He remained motionless for a considerable time, but nothing occurred during the remainder of the night to excite his attention, though he continued to watch with unabated vigilance.

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The first approaches of the morning were visible through the grated windows, breaking, with faint divisions of light, the darkness that still pervaded every other part, long before Vivenzio was enabled to distinguish any object in his dungeon. Instinctively and

fearfully he turned his eyes, hot and inflamed with watching, towards them.

There were four. He could see only four; but it might be that some intervening object prevented the fifth from becoming perceptible; and he waited impatiently to ascertain if it were so. As the light strengthened, however, and penetrated every corner of the cell, other objects of amazement struck his sight. On the ground lay the broken fragments of the pitcher he had used the day before, and at a small distance from them, nearer to the wall, stood the one he had noticed the first night. It was filled with water, and beside it was his food.

He was now certain that by some means an opening was obtained through the iron wall, and that through this opening a current of air had found entrance. But how noiseless. Again he examined that part of the wall; but both to sight and touch it appeared one even and uniform surface, while to repeated and violent blows there was no reverberating sound indicative of hollowness.

This perplexing mystery had for a time withdrawn his thoughts from the windows; but now, directing his eyes again towards them, he saw that the fifth had disappeared in the same manner as the preceding two, without the least distinguishable alteration of external appearances. The remaining four looked as the seven had originally looked; that is, occupying at irregular distances the top of the wall on that side of the dungeon. The tall folding door, too, still seemed to stand beneath, in the centre of these four, as it had at first stood in the centre of the seven. But he could no longer doubt what on the preceding day he fancied might be the effect of visual deception.

The dungeon was smaller. The roof had lowered, and the opposite ends had contracted the intermediate distance by a space equal, he thought, to that over which the three windows had extended. He was bewildered in vain imaginings to account for these things. Some frightful purpose – some torture of mind or body – some unheard-of device for producing exquisite misery, lurked, he was sure, in what had taken place.

Oppressed with this belief, and distracted more by the dreadful uncertainty of whatever fate impended, than he could be dismayed, he thought, by the knowledge of the worst, he sat ruminating, hour after hour, yielding his fears in succession to every haggard fancy. At last a suspicion flashed suddenly across his mind, and he started up with a frantic air.

"Yes!" he exclaimed, looking round his dungeon, and shudder-

ing as he spoke – "Yes, it must be so! I see it! I feel the truth like scorching flames upon my brain! Yes, yes, that is to be my fate! The roof will descend, these walls will hem me round, and slowly crush me. God, look down upon me, and in mercy strike me with instant death."

He threw himself upon the ground in agony; sweat stood in large drops upon his face; he tore his hair; he rolled about like one suffering intolerable anguish of body, and would have bitten the iron floor beneath him. He breathed curses upon Tolfi, and the next moment passionate prayers to heaven for immediate death. Then the violence of his grief became exhausted, and he lay still.

The twilight of departing day shed its gloom around him before he arose from that posture of utter and hopeless sorrow. He had taken no food. Not one drop of water had cooled his parched lips. Sleep had not visited his eyes for six-and-thirty hours. He was faint with hunger, weary with watching and with the excess of his emotions. He tasted of his food; he drank with avidity of the water; and reeling to his straw, cast himself upon it to brood again over the appalling image that had fastened itself upon his thoughts

He slept. But his slumbers were not tranquil. He resisted, as long as he could, their approach; and when, at last, nature yielded to their influence, he found no oblivion from his cares. Terrible dreams haunted him – he breathed hard and thick, as though writhing between its iron walls. Then would he spring up, stretch forth his hands to be sure he yet had space enough to live – and, muttering some incoherent words, sink down again, to pass through the same fierce vicissitudes of delirious sleep.

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The morning of the fourth day dawned upon Vivenzio. But it was high noon before his mind shook off its stupor, or he awoke to a full consciousness of his situation. And what a fixed energy of despair sat upon his features, as he cast his eyes upwards, and gazed upon the three windows that now alone remained. The three – there were no more – and they seemed to number his own allotted days. Slowly and calmly he next surveyed the top and sides, and comprehended all the meaning of the diminished height of the former, as well as of the gradual approximation of the latter.

The contracted dimensions of his mysterious prison were now too gross and palpable to be the juggle of his heated imagination. Still lost in wonder at the means, Vivenzio could put no cheat upon

his reason as to the end. By what horrible ingenuity it was contrived that walls, and roof, and windows, should thus silently and imperceptibly, without noise, and without motion almost, fold as it were, within each other, he knew not. He only knew they did so; and he vainly strove to persuade himself it was the intention of the contriver to rack the miserable wretch who might be immured there with anticipation, merely, of a fate from which in the very crisis of his agony he was to be reprieved.

Gladly would he have clung even to this possibility if his heart would have let him; but he felt a dreadful assurance of its fallacy. And what matchless inhumanity it was to doom the sufferer to such lingering torments – to lead him day by day to so appalling a death, unsupported by the consolations of religion, unvisited by any human being, abandoned to himself, deserted of all, and denied even the sad privilege of knowing that his cruel destiny would awaken pity.

"It is not death I fear," he exclaimed, "but the death I must prepare for. I could meet even that – horrible and revolting as it is – if it might overtake me now. But where shall I find fortitude to tarry till it come! How can I outlive the three long days and nights I have to live? There is no power within me to bid the spectre hence – none to make it familiar to my thoughts, or myself patient to its errand. My thoughts, rather, will flee from me, and I grow mad in looking at it."

In the midst of these lamentations Vivenzio noticed that his accustomed meal, with the pitcher of water, had been conveyed, as before, into his dungeon. But this circumstance no longer excited his surprise. His mind was overwhelmed with others of a far greater magnitude. It suggested, however, a feeble hope of deliverance; and there is no hope so feeble as not to yield some support to a heart bending under despair.

He resolved to watch during the ensuing night for the signs he had before observed; and, should he again feel the gentle, tremulous motion of the floor or the current of air, to seize that moment for giving audible expression to his misery. Some person must be near him and within reach of his voice at the instant when his food was supplied; some one, perhaps, susceptible of pity. Or if not, to be told even that his apprehensions were just, and that his fate was to be what he foreboded, would be preferable to a suspense which hung upon the possibility of his worst fears being visionary.

The night came; and as the hour approached when Vivenzio imagined he might expect the signs, he stood fixed and silent as a

statue. He feared to breathe, almost, lest he might lose any sound which would warn him of their coming. While thus listening, with every faculty of mind and body strained to an agony of attention, it occurred to him he should be more sensible of the motion, probably, if he stretched himself along the iron floor.

He accordingly laid himself softly down, and had not been long in that position when, yes, he was certain of it – the floor moved under him. He sprang up, called aloud. He paused; the motion ceased; he felt no stream of air – all was hushed – no voice answered to his and as he sank to the ground, in renewed anguish, exclaimed: "Oh, my God! my God! You alone have power to save me now, or strengthen me for the trial you permit."

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Another morning dawned and the fatal index of his doom met his eyes. Two windows – and *two* days – and all would be over. Fresh food – fresh water! The mysterious visit had been paid, though he had implored it in vain. But how awfully was his prayer answered in what he now saw. The roof of the dungeon was within a foot of his head. The two ends were so near, that in six paces he trod the space between them. Vivenzio shuddered as he gazed, and as his steps traversed the narrowed area.

But his feelings no longer vented themselves in frantic cries. With eyes that were bloodshot from much watching, and fixed with a vacant glare upon the ground, with a hard quick breathing, and a hurried walk, he strode backwards and forwards in silent musing. Suddenly he stopped, and his eyes were riveted upon that part of the wall which was over his bed of straw. Words are inscribed here. A human language, traced by a human hand. He rushes towards them; but his blood freezes as he reads:

> I, Ludovico Sforza, tempted by the gold of the Prince of Tolfi, spent three years in contriving and executing this accursed triumph of my art. When it was completed, the perfidious Tolfi, more devil than man, who conducted me hither one morning, to be witness, as he said, of its perfection, doomed *me* to be the first victim of my own pernicious skill; lest, as he declared, I should divulge the secret, or repeat the effort of my ingenuity. May God pardon him as I hope he will me, that ministered to his unhallowed purpose. Miserable wretch, whoe'er thou art, that readest these lines, fall on thy knees, and invoke as I have

done. His sustaining mercy who alone can nerve thee to meet the vengeance of Tolfi, armed with his tremendous engine, which in a few hours must crush *you*, as it will the needy wretch who made it.

A groan burst from Vivenzio. He stood like one transfixed, gazing at this fatal inscription. It was as if a voice from the sepulchre had sounded in his ears, 'Prepare!'

Hope forsook him. There was his sentence, recorded in those dismal words. The future stood unveiled before him, ghastly and appalling. His brain already feels the descending horror, his bones seem to crack and crumble in the mighty grasp of the iron walls.

Unknowing what it is he does, he fumbles in his garment for some weapon of self-destruction. He clenches his throat in his convulsive gripe, as though he would strangle himself at once. He stares upon the walls, and his warring spirit demands, Will they not anticipate their office if I dash my head against them?

An hysterical laugh chokes him as he exclaims, "Why should I? He was but a man who died first in their fierce embrace; and I should be less than man not to do as much!"

The evening sun was descending, and Vivenzio beheld its beams streaming through one of the windows. It was a precious link that united him, for the moment, with the world beyond. There was ecstasy in the thought. As he gazed earnestly, it seemed as if the windows had lowered sufficiently for him to reach them.

With one wild spring he clung to the bars. Whether it was so contrived, purposely to madden with delight the wretch who looked, he knew not; but, at the extremity of a long vista, cut through the solid rocks, the ocean, the sky, the setting sun, olive groves, shady walks, and, in the farthest distance, delicious glimpses of magnificent Sicily, burst upon his sight. How exquisite was the cool breeze as it swept across his cheek, loaded with fragrance. He inhaled it as though it were the breath of continued life. And there was a freshness in the landscape, and in the rippling of the calm green sea, that fell upon his heart like dew upon the parched earth.

How he gazed and panted, sometimes hanging by one hand, sometimes by the other, and then grasping the bars with both, as loath to quit the smiling paradise outstretched before him; till exhausted, and his hands swollen and benumbed, he dropped helpless down, and lay for a considerable time.

When he recovered, the vision had vanished. He was in darkness. He doubted whether it was not a dream that had passed before his

sleeping fancy; but gradually his scattered thoughts returned, and with them came remembrance.

Once again his eyes had trembled beneath their veiled lids at the sun's radiance, and sought repose in the soft verdure of the olive tree, or the swell of undulating waves. Oh, that he were a mariner, exposed upon those waves to the worst fury of storm and tempest; or a very wretch, loathsome with disease, plague-stricken, and his body one leprous contagion from crown to sole, hunted forth to gasp out the remnant of infectious life beneath those verdant trees, so he might shun the destiny upon whose edge he tottered.

Vain thoughts like these would steal over his mind from time to time in spite of himself; but they scarcely moved it from that stupor into which it had sunk, and which kept him, during the whole night, like one who had been drugged with opium. He was equally insensible to the calls of hunger and of thirst, though the third day was now commencing since even a drop of water had passed his lips. He remained on the ground, sometimes sitting, sometimes lying; at intervals, sleeping heavily; and when not sleeping, silently brooding over what was to come, or talking aloud, in disordered speech, of his wrongs, of his friends, of his home, and of those he loved, with a confused mingling of all.

In this pitiable condition the sixth and last morning dawned upon Vivenzio, if dawn it might be called – the dim obscure light which faintly struggled through the solitary window of his dungeon. He could hardly be said to notice the melancholy token. And yet he did notice it; for as he raised his eyes and saw the portentous sign, there was a slight convulsive distortion of his countenance.

But what did attract his notice, and at the sight of which his agitation was excessive, was the change his iron bed had undergone. It was a bed no longer. It stood before him, the visible semblance of a funeral couch or bier. When he beheld this, he started from the ground, and, in raising himself suddenly struck his head against the roof, which was now so low that he could no longer stand upright.

The iron bedstead had been so contrived, by the mechanical art of Ludovico Sforza, that as the advancing walls came in contact with its head and feet, a pressure was produced upon concealed springs, which, when made to play, set in motion a very simple though ingeniously contrived machinery that effected the tranformation. The object, was, of course, to heighten, in the closing scene of this horrible drama, all the feelings of despair and anguish which the preceding ones had aroused. For the same reason the

last window was so made as to admit only a shadowy kind of gloom rather than light, that the wretched captive might be surrounded, as it were, with every seeming preparation for approaching death.

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Vivenzio seated himself on his bier. Then he knelt and prayed. The air seemed thick, and he breathed with difficulty; or it might be that he fancied it was so, from the hot and narrow limits of his dungeon, which were now so diminished that he could neither stand up nor lie down at his full length.

But his wasted spirits and oppressed mind no longer struggled within him. He was past hope, and fear shook him no more. Happy if thus revenge had struck its final blow; for he would have fallen beneath it almost unconscious of a pang. But such a lethargy of the soul, after such an excitement of its fiercest passions, had entered into the diabolical calculations of Tolfi; and the fell artificer of his designs had imagined a counteracting device.

The tolling of an enormous bell struck upon the ears of Vivenzio. He started. It beat but once. The sound was so close and stunning that it seemed to hurt his brain, while it echoed through the rocky passages like reverberating peals of thunder. This was followed by a sudden crash of the roof and walls, as if they were about to fall upon and close around him at once. Vivenzio screamed, and instinctively spread forth his arms, as though he had a giant's strength to hold them back. They had moved nearer to him, and were now motionless.

Vivenzio looked up and saw the roof almost touching his head, even as he sat cowering beneath it; and he felt that a further contraction of but a few inches only must commence the frightful operation. Roused as he had been, he now gasped for breath. His body shook violently – he was bent nearly double. His hands rested upon either wall, and his feet were drawn under him to avoid the pressure in front. Thus he remained for more than an hour, when that deafening bell beat again, and again there came the crash. But the concussion was now so great that it struck Vivenzio down.

As he lay gathered up in lessened bulk, the bell beat loud and frequent – crash succeeded crash – and on, and on, and on came the mysterious engine of death, till Vivenzio's smothered groans were heard no more.

'IN DURANCE VILE...'

ii

When the prisoners are led out into the patio and when they come back, they march four abreast along the corridor past my cell. They walk slowly, with shuffling steps; most of them wear felt slippers or bast sandals. I stand at my spy-hole and follow the procession with my eyes, as one face after another comes within my field of vision. All have a habit of reading out the name-cards on the cell doors as they pass. Often I hear my name spelled out in undertones fifteen or twenty times in succession: 'Ar-tu-ro-ko-est-ler'. Sometimes one of them will read the rest, too: '*In-co-mu-ni-ca-do. O-jo*'. '*O-jo*' means: 'keep an eye on him.' Sometimes, when I am absorbed in reading or lost in a reverie, the sudden murmuring of my name seems to come from a chorus of ghosts.

ARTHUR KOESTLER, 1937.

A Jaylor is as Cruell to his prisoners as a dogge-killer in the plague time to a diseased curre, and shewes no more pity to a young Gentleman than the unconscionable Citizen that laide him in: when they meete you in the streetes they shewe themselves more humble to you then a whore when she is brought before a Constable or a Cheater before a Justice, but when you fall into their fingers, they will be as currish as they seemed kind.

They are like Bawdes and Beadles, that live upon the sins of the people, mens follies fill their purses.

GEOFFREY MYNSHULL, 1618.

The only thing which I cannot get used to is the crowd of people and the resulting constant noise. . . . Apparently the cell is full to overflowing, but every week it seems able to stretch, as if it were blown up like a rubber ball. Russia never tires of sending us new comrades. Who is not represented here? One meets such excellent people that one is lost in brotherly love for them. Sometimes the very reverse occurs, but that is inevitable among such a lot of people.

YEGOR SAZONOV, 1910.

Another depressing feature of prison life is the 'topping', or execution, of a prisoner. Here, instead of the electric chair, is the gallows. During the week before an execution, the whole prison is filled with expectation, and while, because of the long periods of incarceration and personal troubles, you might not think it, an execution changes, and for the worse, the mood of the whole prison. For it is the end of hope for someone at least. And with the end of hope – well, what is life without it? Finis. Frustration.

And however great the precaution taken to keep this knowledge from prisoners, the news of an execution, once it has appeared in any newspaper, leaks through. This is one reason why California newspapers are forbidden here.

THOMAS J. MOONEY, 1916.

Now it is one of the peculiarities of confinement that the intense separation of the cell makes one more aware of the *community* of social life. I was not exempt from this experience. I felt the great heaving body of society stretching away from all sides of my cell, and a great love for its blind strivings was born within me. Much misery I discerned in it; much unhappiness, inevitable consequence of its ignorant groping after happiness. And I felt impelled to impart to it the secret of my own successful living. The question was, how remove those prejudices which keep society from enjoying the predatory life, which make it punish those who would attempt to enjoy it?

PADDY QUIRK, 1923.

By prison walls in vain am I oppressed;
Illusion nurtures hope within my breast,
Her wings remain to me.
Freed from the fowler's nets, the captive bird
More joyously far in the skies is heard
Singing of liberty.

ANDRÉ CHENIER, 1793.

For infinite are the nine feet of a prison cell, and endless is the march of him who walks between the yellow brick wall and the red iron gate, thinking things that cannot be chained and cannot be locked, but that wander far away in the sunlit world, each in a wild pilgrimage after a destined goal.

ARTURO GIOVANITTI, 1912.

No, a man is not foolhardy who, himself at liberty, and free

from care, praises his fate to a prisoner – so long as he desires the inner perfection of the prisoner. Because one would speak so only to a man whom one believes has spiritual strength enough to mature during his imprisonment.

ERNST TOLLER, 1919.

In durance vile here must I wake and weep,
And all my frowsy couch in sorrow steep.

ROBERT BURNS, 1794.

. . . as for my not replying to your previous letter, please do not think me discourteous if I suggest that a man who is serving a life sentence in a State Prison and has been stripped of everything he ever had, might be privileged to consider himself immune from the importunities of his creditors and their lawyers. May I wish you a Merry Christmas?

CHARLES CHAPIN, *date unknown.*

At this moment it is so quiet in the prison. A few cells off a prisoner is humming quietly to himself, and there is a faint, far-away rattle of keys. Through the window behind me I can feel the undisturbed darkness of the sky, and the stillness of it. There is a mild quality to the evening, something of the gentle temper of abstraction. Even the noises that come in through the bars are subdued and as it were meditative. The rumble of a distant train, occasionally a phrase or two of music borne in on a dying current of air, sometimes the rising hum of a car changing gears on a nearby hill, and sometimes the shouts of children at play. These sounds belong to the prison, are an integral part of its unecstatic spaciousness, of the sense of a quiet brooding which pervades it. It must have been in a prison, at just such a pensive hour, that the first god was conceived of.

MARK BENNEY, *Low Company*, 1932.

Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for a hermitage . . .

RICHARD LOVELACE, 1642.

EWMM TRUE CRIME CLASSIC

THE CLOUD of POISON

CHARLES FRANKLIN

A fresh look at the infamous Marie de Brinvilliers which reaches some new conclusions

VOLTAIRE SAID that love was the prime motive of the crimes of Marie de Brinvilliers. But on this occasion the great man was wrong. Marie was motivated almost entirely by greed. She did not understand the meaning of the word love. Apart from money, she was interested mainly in sex, and that she liked to have in as much variety as possible. As she was an exceptionally attractive woman, she had no difficulty in gratifying her urge in this respect.

It is never necessary for a woman to kill in order to enjoy sex. Her more primitive, less complicated, but in some senses more subtle sexuality does not need to be encouraged by horrific and bloody accompaniments. So we do not find female Kürtens or Christies. Elizabeth Brownrigg, who flogged a girl to death, was purely a sadist and was an exceptional female criminal who did not intend to kill.

But Marie Madeleine de Brinvilliers was a victim of her own nature in the same way as Brownrigg, Kürten and Christie were. She was also very much a creature of her age, a victim of its heartless cynicism and wild extravagances. It was to support her reckless squandering of money which made her embark upon her career of murder, the object of which was to get her hands upon the family fortune. Marie just slaughtered her way to wealth.

Tennyson Jesse, who knew all about women and crime, did not say whether women are more likely to kill for money than men are. But it is probable that they are, being more realistic than men, and not attracted to the crazy side of murder.

There were, for instance, the three Halzingler girls, of legendary

beauty who came from Little Rock, Arkansas, in the middle of the last century. Coveting the fortune of their uncle, they arranged fatal accidents for eight relatives before they finally, after much slaughter, inherited. But the Halzinglers were unlucky in all their enterprises. They were hanged publicly for one of their previous murders, and it was said that no more pretty a trio ever swung from a gibbet. Money was always the motive of these determined young killers.

It was the same with the Marquise de Brinvilliers, who was born in July, 1630, into one of the greatest families of France. Her father, the Seigneur Antoine Dreux d'Aubray, was the Civil Lieutenant of Paris, a man of immense wealth and power.

Marie, who had two brothers and a sister, was petite and very beautiful. Her upbringing could not have been of the best, even by the standards of the time, for she seems to have done what she liked as a child. From her early age she had what her countryman Balzac described as 'a fidgety fork', for in her famous confession made years later she said she committed incest with both her brothers. As her brothers turned out, in contrast to her, to be very sober and earnest young men, it is likely that any adolescent experiments of this nature were instigated by Marie.

However, such youthful wantonness and despoliation did not seem to depreciate her value on the marriage market, for at the age of 17 she made what was probably considered a good marriage.

The Marquis de Brinvilliers was a good looking, fashionably dissolute young man with a large fortune, to which the d'Aubrays added a handsome dowry. It was the usual arranged marriage. No question of love was involved. In those days love was an extra-marital affair. The husband took a mistress, and the wife a lover. This was the smart thing to do. Married people who were in love with each other were considered quite ridiculous in the French society of Louis the Fourteenth.

The first few years of their married life were uneventful. They entertained lavishly and had wild gambling parties in their splendid Paris house. They quarrelled mostly over money. It was an extravagant age and both Marie and her husband were used to living in magnificent style. The Brinvilliers fortune and Marie's dowry of two hundred thousand *pistoles* melted fast, and they were soon in debt.

They had five children who were, to all accounts, quite well brought up, though fortunately for them more under the influence

of their nurses and tutors than their parents. Brinvilliers of course had his mistresses and his wife had her lovers.

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Marie had not inherited her taste for extravagance and the wild life from her father. D'Aubray was a man of high respectability, greatly esteemed, and he expressed continual concern at his daughter's way of life. More than once he tried to make her change it. Marie, now she was married and with children of her own, not unnaturally resented the interference.

It was in fact this interference on the part of her father which precipitated Marie into her life of crime.

Brinvilliers became friendly with Gaudin de Sainte-Croix, a captain in the cavalry, a man of obscure origin, who claimed to be the bastard son of some very highly placed personage. He was a man of some charm and looks, and had all the insolent swagger of the 17th century French *galant*. Brinvilliers took him to his home, and Marie promptly took him to her bed, a fact which did nothing to impair the fast friendship between the husband and the lover. The Marquis de Brinvilliers was quite indifferent to his wife's love affairs, and had no objection to her becoming the mistress of his friend.

But the coming together of Marie and Sainte-Croix was like the coming together of two evil stars. They brought out the very worst in each other, and they fell madly in love. Their affair became the talk of Paris. They were always together. It grew into a great scandal. Marie's family remonstrated with her in vain.

Meanwhile the fortune Brinvilliers and Marie had begun their married life with was almost all spent, and no attempt was made to check the wild extravagance. Brinvilliers in particular was gambling very heavily.

Sainte-Croix, who was living off Marie, began to get worried about his own prospects, and persuaded her to embark upon a scheme to separate her property from that of her husband. This was a much more serious proposition than such a thing would be today. Her family were alarmed and horrified, and promptly appealed to the King in his tutelary capacity as the guardian of his subjects. The matter was soon stopped.

Marie's father, urged on by his two sons, took a further step, and was determined to teach his daughter and her lover a lesson, seeing that Marie would not listen to his appeal to give up

Sainte-Croix. He applied to the King for a *lettre de cachet* against Sainte-Croix. The *lettre de cachet* was granted and under it d'Aubray had Sainte-Croix thrown into the Bastille.

Marie was furious and vowed revenge. As for Sainte-Croix, he met someone in the Bastille who inspired him with the means of exacting that revenge. It was thus the righteous indignation of the father which gave to Marie and her lover both the motive and the instrument for the series of crimes which shook France in that far from lawful century.

Languishing in the Bastille was a Florentine named Exili, an expert poisoner who had apparently inherited many of the closely guarded secrets of that immemorial trade. He knew how to manufacture the most subtle and refined poisons of the day. He could administer death in any form required, sudden or lingering, painful or painless, and professed to be able to design the exact moment when the victim would die.

In consequence of his deadly expertise, Exili was in some demand in high places. He had been operating at the Papal Court in Rome under the protection of the Pope's niece, an opportunist lady named Olympia who was doing a nice trade in Papal honours, vacancies for which were made to occur at the right moment with Exili's help. There was of course a limit to what one could do in this direction even in 17th century Rome, and Exili presently had to flee. He went into the service of the eccentric Queen Christina of Sweden, who apparently received him gladly.

But there was no welcome for him when he turned up in France. The French court was becoming the most civilized in the world under Louis the Fourteenth, and had abandoned the Medici methods of political manoeuvre. The French took a poor view of Exili and threw him into the Bastille mainly in order to protect the public, much in the same way as one would keep a dangerous cobra under lock and key. The French planned to deport him.

The Brinvilliers case, after three hundred years is half buried in legend, and no one really knows exactly what secrets, if any, Exili passed to Sainte-Croix in the Bastille. No doubt Sainte-Croix was delighted to meet this much feared and notorious man. And there is no doubt also that whatever secrets Exili was prepared to part with were for sale at a high price. On the other hand, their encounter in the Bastille may have done little more than serve as an inspiration for Sainte-Croix.

The terrors of the Bastille have probably been exaggerated by

centuries of story and legend makers, as well as the propagandists of the Revolution. It was not of course a pleasant place. Neither was Newgate or the Fleet. Torture was part of the legal system as it was everywhere else. A stay in the Bastille was not necessarily unpleasant, and much freedom would be allowed a prisoner like Sainte-Croix. Anyway, he was freed after a stay of six weeks in June, 1663, d'Aubray doubtless imagining that both he and his erring daughter had learnt their lesson, and that it would be unwise in future to disobey the powerful Lieutenant of Paris.

D'Aubray was as ignorant of the man he was dealing with as he was of the daughter who had sprung from his loins, for as soon as Marie and Sainte-Croix got together they began to plan their revenge.

But more important than revenge was the over-riding need for money. This was a stronger motive than anything for the grasping Marie, but the two objectives could be usefully combined, for only by the death of her father could Marie get her hands on her share of the family fortune.

Marie, with the help of her lover, planned her father's death with great care and skill.

They set about to reverse the impression created by their wild life before Sainte-Croix's stay in the Bastille. They met only in secret. Marie sought a reconciliation with her father, and was received by that worthy man with open arms. She went in for good works, visiting hospitals and the like, and paid more attention to her children. She indeed seemed to have reformed. She had left it a little late, it was true, as she was now in her thirties, but it warmed the old man's heart to have his prodigal daughter back. He had no suspicion that it was a viper he was taking to his bosom.

*

Sainte-Croix in the meanwhile assumed an outward respectability by getting married. He installed a well-equipped laboratory in his house where he began to experiment with the lethal properties of arsenic, and enlisted the help of Christopher Glaser, a clever chemist, well known in Paris for alchemy of a more legitimate kind than that required of him by Sainte-Croix. Money talks, and it seems that Sainte-Croix was able to buy Glaser over and enlist his services in the unholy conspiracy which now began to take shape.

Glaser had a real reputation among chemists. He discovered

sulphate of potassium, was an expert botanist and was pharmacist to the royal household. He was a man of some position and wealth, and one of the mysteries of this affair is why he became associated with this mean and murderous couple. Perhaps it was purely in the spirit of scientific inquiry, a desire to rediscover those insalubrious secrets which the Medicis and the Borgias so carefully kept from the world.

Sainte-Croix and Glaser produced between them various poisonous concoctions, and Marie hit upon the bright idea of testing them upon the patients of the hospital of Hôtel Dieu. The fact that she was able to do such a thing with equaminity sheds an interesting light upon her character.

Day after day the good Marquise de Brinvilliers arrived at the great hospital with her basket of food and wine for the poor suffering inmates. The wine was skilfully blended with arsenic and the food sprayed with a very special powder created and devised by Glaser and Sainte-Croix. She chose the recipients of her bounty with care and made sure to inquire solicitously about them the following day, and even went to inspect their corpses in the damp and gloomy *Salle des Cadavres* where they awaited despatch to the dissecting tables of the anatomical schools. Always she inquired carefully of the manner in which these unfortunate victims of her charity died.

She went about this remorseless task methodically, scientifically, making careful notes, and her practical tests were a great help to her two companions working in the background. From these pitiless experiments upon the sick and the dying, Glaser eventually was able to produce his famous Glaser's Receipt, with which Marie now got to work upon her unsuspecting father. Money was getting perilously short, and it was high time for her revered parent to be called to a higher place so that she could inherit.

Three years had passed since the memorable meeting of two like minds in the Bastille, which showed how carefully the plans were laid. They had to produce the right kind of poison. It was no use just dosing the old man up with arsenic. Such crude methods would soon be detected. Every man of prominence was alive to the danger of being poisoned, such was the Medicis' legacy to France.

Glaser's Receipt was tasteless in a glass of wine. Regular small doses produced a prolonged and fatal illness and created ideal circumstances for a devoted daughter lovingly and skilfully to

nurse her beloved father to the very death. And this is what Marie did.

So great was the suspicion of poison among high places that immediately after the death of the Lieutenant of Paris, the authorities ordered an autopsy. But the doctors were unable to detect the poison in the body and announced that the Seigneur d'Aubray had died from natural causes.

Marie's success went to her head and she resumed her wild life after her father's death, spending her inheritance and quarrelling with all and sundry, including Sainte-Croix over his unfaithfulness to her.

But she was soon looking around for further sources of money. There was only one course open to her. Her father's great fortune had been divided between herself, her two brothers, and her sister Thérèse, who had become a Carmelite nun. Marie was not content with her share. She wanted the lot, and there was only one way to get it.

Her second victim was her elder brother Antoine, a serious minded young man with political ambitions, who had stepped into his father's old office of Civil Lieutenant of Paris. His wife – Marie Thérèse Villarceau d'Aubray – was a shrewd and determined woman, who became Marie de Brinvilliers' most deadly enemy.

It was no use trying to ingratiate herself with Antoine, as she had done with her father. Marie's shrewd sister-in-law would soon see through that.

Sainte-Croix had acquired a servant named La Chaussée, who took after his master in some important respects and was loyal to the cause of the conspiracy. This man was infiltrated into the household of Antoine d'Aubray, who soon began to develop a painful and mysterious malady, which baffled his blood-letter and gravely distressed his family. La Chaussée wormed his way into the affections of his victim, as Marie had done in the case of her father, and did his work well. He even deceived the astute Madame Villarceau d'Aubray.

Antoine's illness dragged on, and the conspirators had to be careful about finishing the doomed man off. But their faith in La Chaussée was well placed. The loyal servant was with Antoine day and night, devotedly and inexorably encompassing his death on September 10, 1666, by means of the poison supplied regularly by Marie and Sainte-Croix.

This operation was another brilliant success, and Antoine

d'Aubray's doctor announced that his patient had died of a 'malignant humour', a diagnosis which is itself not without a certain piquancy.

But Marie was barely half way to her goal yet. There were at least two others to be disposed of – her other brother and her sister Thérèse. It was true of course that with each death the share-out became larger for her, so her labours were not going unrewarded.

The infallible La Chaussée was chosen for the despatch of Marie's second brother, who lived under the same roof as Antoine and had come to appreciate what a faithful and devoted servant La Chaussée was. In consequence La Chaussée had an easy kill this time, in June, 1670: his victim left him a legacy in token of his appreciation.

There remained only Marie, sister Therésè and Antoine's widow, Madame Villarceau d'Aubray, who was now becoming very suspicious. But the doctors were again unable to find any trace of poison in the body.

This was due more to their ignorance than to the cleverness of Marie and Sainte-Croix. They were aware that they were under suspicion and that made them pause.

Madame Villarceau d'Aubray now found herself in possession of great wealth which she had inherited through the early deaths of her husband and brother-in-law. Right from the beginning she suspected Sainte-Croix, and now she suspected La Chaussée, and turned him out of her house after the second brother's death, thereby probably saving her own life. She was aware of what was going on, but could do nothing without proof, so she went to her legal advisers who employed agents to investigate the matter. But they moved slowly and cautiously, and it was two years before they had enough evidence to effect the arrest of La Chaussée.

Meanwhile Marie and her lover pursued their wild life. Although she and Sainte-Croix were united by a deep and powerful sexual passion, she took lover after lover. Her favourite was a young man named Briancourt, the tutor of her children. In between the love-making she tried to groom Briancourt to help her in her murder scheme. But Briancourt was both shocked and un-co-operative.

Marie now began to tire of her husband and toyed with the idea of being married to Sainte-Croix. An odd little comedy then ensued.

The marquis at first hardly noticed the strange taste in his wine. Then he fell ill. Sainte-Croix promptly gave him a powerful dose of the antidote and restored him to health. Sainte-Croix had no desire at all to be married to this highly dangerous woman, and preferred his own quiet domestic set-up with a wife who gave him no trouble. And so the queer drama progressed, with Marie dropping the odd dose of poison in her husband's wine, and Sainte-Croix promptly administering the antidote. The marquis himself finally refused to eat or drink with them, but he bore his wife not the slightest ill-will, and there was much gaiety at the château, the inhabitants of which regarded poisoning as a matter of everyday life.

Marie meanwhile was applying herself to the main task, that of eliminating her sister and sister-in-law, but her plans had not advanced very far. Sainte-Croix on the other hand had become involved with a man named Pennautier, an unscrupulous individual who had risen fast and made a great fortune by bribery and crime. Sainte-Croix had supplied the poison by which Pennautier had eliminated the contestant who stood between him and a lucrative state post, and was now blackmailing Pennautier.

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Then suddenly Sainte-Croix died and his death brought catastrophe to all his fellow conspirators.

His death was a mystery. Marie found him lying on the floor of his laboratory, the glass mask he used to protect himself from the fumes of the poisons broken beside him. Many theories have been put forward to account for his death, one of which was that he was murdered by an agent of Pennautier's. If this was so, Pennautier did not display any great cleverness.

The result was disaster for Marie de Brinvilliers. Her first concern was for a certain red casket belonging to her dead lover. She made desperate attempts to get possession of it.

Sainte-Croix's widow had been instructed by her husband that upon his death the casket was to be given to the Marquise de Brinvilliers. But Madame Sainte-Croix, docile enough during her husband's lifetime, had no intention of acceding to this request. She knew what had been going on, and she bore no love for her husband's notorious mistress. She passed the box on to the authorities, despite the frantic efforts of both Marie and Pennautier to get hold of it first.

As soon as she heard that the police had the casket, Marie fled to England. The casket contained documents which completely compromised both Marie and Pennautier, and also various packets of poisons.

Pennautier, a man of influence with many friends at Court, was questioned. Marie's arrest was ordered.

In England Marie sought the protection of Charles II, but that indulgent monarch was not in the least indulgent towards her. Louis asked for her to be sent back to France. But the easy-going Charles could not find it in himself to send a pretty woman like Marie back to the kind of punishment all knew awaited her in Paris. On the other hand he had no desire to offend the powerful King of France, so he procrastinated long enough to enable Marie to make good her escape to the Low Countries where she went into hiding in a convent.

Louis and his advisers were a little afraid of the consequences and extent of the scandal which would be revealed if Marie de Brinvilliers were brought back to Paris for trial. Pennautier was too powerful a man to touch, and the fears in Court circles were such that they were content to accept the position of Marie remaining hidden in the convent.

But one person was not prepared to accept this, and that was Antoine's widow, Madame Villarceau d'Aubray. She was the driving power behind the ruthless pursuit of Marie and her fellow conspirators. Desgrez, a determined and clever police agent, who had seen Exili out of the country following his release from the Bastille, was indefatigable in his resolve to bring the poisoners to justice.

La Chaussée, who had gone into hiding at Sainte-Croix's death, was found and arrested. Under torture he confessed that he had poisoned both the d'Aubray brothers and that he had been paid to do so by Sainte-Croix. La Chaussée was later broken on the wheel, a singularly unpleasant death which involved him being stretched along the spokes of a cartwheel and his bones broken one by one with an iron bar as the wheel was slowly turned. But it could not be said that he was unjustly treated by the standards of the time.

It was three years before Marie was eventually brought to Paris for trial. She was living in a Liège convent for much of this time, apparently supported financially by her sister Thérèse, the Carmelite nun who was next on her list, but who had obviously learned more than a little Christian charity, for there is no doubt

at all that Madame Villarceau d'Aubray kept Thérèse informed about what had been going on.

Marie in fact showed some evidence of being repentant at this time. She wrote her confession, admitting that she adminstered poison to her father, caused her two brothers to be poisoned and was planning to poison her sister Thérèse.

As for the excessively charitable Thérèse, she kept her own counsel. But there was no such milk of human kindness on the part of Marie's ever-watchful sister-in-law in Paris, the agents of whom presently traced her to Liège.

Desgrez laid a clever plan to kidnap Marie and take her across the border into France. Desgrez was a handsome man of 36 who sported all the charm and gallantry of the age. Disguised as a French abbé, he visited Marie, and paid her a great deal of romantic attention. She herself was then in her middle thirties and was flattered to discover that her charms had not faded. Desgrez persuaded her to walk with him by the river, where a coach was waiting. She was seized, driven across the border to France under an escort of cavalry. Her incriminating effects, including the confession, were in the possession of Desgrez.

She made desperate attempts to escape, and to bribe her guards, and she wrote a letter to Pennautier asking for his help. But he never received the letter which only served to further incriminate them both. He was arrested too, but was soon released and was able to save himself by his riches and his powerful friends.

Marie's trial took place in 1676. She was charged with the murder of her father and her two brothers and of attempting the life of her sister, Thérèse d'Aubray.

One of the most important witnesses against her was Jean Briancourt, who told his story of the conspiracy in the Brinvilliers' household in a convincing manner. All Marie's bold defiance and vigorous denials were of no avail against Briancourt's damning evidence.

While the trial was going on, the Marquis de Brinvilliers himself was skulking in his country château. He left his wife to her fate.

Marie was skilfully and subtly defended by *Maître* Nivelle, who cleverly pleaded on her behalf that there was no true evidence that the Marquise was a poisoner and a murderess. He placed the blame entirely upon Sainte-Croix, who had plainly been blackmailing her, and made much of the fact that La Chaussée,

confessing under torture, had said nothing against Marie. Madame la Marquise had been fascinated, bemused, by the arch-villain Sainte-Croix.

Nivelle dealt at great length with the alleged confessions, saying they were utterly unconvincing. He denounced Desgrez and his methods. He had a ready explanation for her flight, saying it was caused by her debts and the embarrassment of her being falsely accused, not to her guilt.

It was a clever piece of special pleading, but it had no influence upon the verdict which was a foregone conclusion. The authorities had already decided to make an example of Marie de Brinvilliers.

She was found guilty and ordered to perform an act of public penance. Her property was to be forfeited wherever possible to those she had wronged. She was to be put to the torture in order that the names of her accomplices should be revealed. Finally she was to be executed by beheading in the public market place and her body burnt.

During the next five days she underwent this tremendous sentence, during which a wave of fear and excitement went through Paris.

The torture was a terrible one. Her body was bent backwards over a low bench with her feet and hands chained to the floor. A funnel was placed in her mouth and jar after jar of water was poured down her throat. This, owing to the position of her body, caused the most agonizing pain it is possible to imagine.

She endured her ordeal with remarkable courage. She was dainty, feminine and petite, still immensely appealing. In that dark and terrible place of pain, she faced the brutal men whose task it was to torture her, without flinching; and here the legend of her heroism in the face of unspeakable suffering was born and was whispered all over Paris.

They got nothing out of her by the water torture, in the middle of which she is said to have remarked contemptuously to the master torturer: '*Cher maître, vous me donnez une soif insatiable.*'

*

On July 17 she was taken on a tumbril, barefoot, in a white chemise, with a rope around her neck and a lighted torch in her hand, for her act of public penance. She knelt at the steps of the porch of Nôtre Dame and said: "I admit that wickedly and for

vengeance I poisoned my father and my brothers. I attempted to poison my sister. I did this in order to possess myself of their property, and for it I ask pardon of God, the King and of Justice."

All Paris was out to see her melancholy end in the Place de Grève, and during the slow and terrible ride through the streets she maintained her courage and dignity.

"She died as she had lived," wrote Madame de Sévigné, "resolutely, merely stipulating as she walked to the scaffold that the executioners should ward off the contaminating presence of Desgrez."

She was attended by the Abbé Picot, from whom she contritely accepted the consolations of religion.

"Why is it that, when so many are guilty, I am the only one to die?" was the last thing she said.

No sooner had her pretty head been struck off, and her body consigned to the flames, than that question was being asked all over Paris. After reviling her, the fickle crowd took the opposite view and spoke of her as though she were a saint who had borne the punishment which others, worse than she, should have shared.

Glaser and Pennautier both escaped, the former to oblivion, the latter to fame and riches, though Voltaire said it cost him half his fortune to suppress the accusations against him.

Marie's execution was said to have caused a panic among the husband poisoners of the time, a practice which was then disturbingly common in France, which was probably why the authorities made such a severe example of her.

SOLUTION TO *EWMM* CROSSWORD (Page 40)

ACROSS. 1, Twisted Candle. 8, Fortune. 9, Indians. 11, Y-early. 13, Bare-ness. 15, No-Ted. 16, Inhales. 18, (c) Over-lap. 19, Alibi. 21, Unending. 23, Shrill. 25, Drastic. 26, Preview. 28, Crimson Circle.

DOWN. 2, Warrant. 3, Sou. 4, Eyes. 5, China shops. 6, Nudge. 7, (ring) Leaders. 8, Flying Squad. 10, Sister-in-law. 12, Lodge. 14, Bill and coo. 17, Leash. 18, Open-air. 20, Initial. 22, Datum. 24, Epic. 27, Ear.

(*In answer to readers' requests the crossword solution, beginning in May, will always appear in the following issue*).

A Mrs. Pym Story

DEATH AND THE GOLDEN WEST

NIGEL MORLAND

THE TELEPHONE on Mrs. Pym's desk stopped ringing when Sergeant MacPherson hooked up the receiver in one large hand. He listened, making noises of agreement.

"For you, ma'am." He handed over the receiver. "Sounds like B-Division in a sair mood."

Mrs. Pym sniffed mildly, leaning back in her chair, eyes complacently viewing the clear surface of her desk. She had caught up with the week's flood of paper work, which is the inevitable portion of Scotland Yard's assistant commissioners.

"Pym here . . . oh, it's you, Superintendent Clanmass. What's on your mind? . . . Murder? . . . What name – did you say Caravaggio Tuke? Well, well!" She lowered the lid over one blue-grey eye at the intrigued sergeant. "You tell me, then, Superintendent; I'm listening . . ."

When the conversation was finished, she cradled the receiver, studying her notes.

"That would be about art, mebbe?" MacPherson asked in a tentative voice.

" 'Mebbe' is quite right. Caravaggio Tuke was the son of an artist, which explains the christian name. Tried his hand at everything from Surrealism to Abstract Expressionism."

"*That* would be, ma'am?"

Mrs. Pym brooded over her notes.

"Action painting, son – you throw paint on a horizontal surface, and leave it to luck, so Clanmass tells me."

"Yes, ma'am?"

"Caravaggio decided that vulgar commercialism pays off. He dropped theory a year ago and makes fat money out of posters and things. Oh, yes, somebody shot him."

"An abstract expressionist, perhaps?" MacPherson's expression was bland. "Irked at a traitor to paint-throwing?"

"I heard funnier things." She stood up, jerked at the front of her neat jacket and peered in the office mirror at her latest, most remarkable hat. "Right, Mac, we're on our way. Caravaggio is a newspaper pet. The murder will raise enough trouble in Chelsea to require a trouble-shooter like me to carry the bag."

MacPherson marched into the vaulted corridor, behind the woman leading the way, down to the Back Hall recess where the open red Aston, that was the pride of her heart, was waiting where it should not be. The door constable, idling in the spring sunshine, came to attention when she appeared and stowed her carefully in the driving seat.

They called at Lucan Place to pick up Detective-Inspector Cummings from divisional headquarters, both as a matter of courtesy and for the more immediate purpose of briefing.

He was a thin, uneasy man inclined to be suspicious of Mrs. Pym with the in-built resentment of a protocol-bound old-timer for a woman with high rank from Central Headquarters.

MacPherson crushed his massive body into the rear arrangement laughingly designated by the manufacturers for the occasional passenger. Cummings sat beside Mrs. Pym, and held firmly to his neat bowler when the Aston angled deftly into Elystan Street, along Markham Street and round by the cinema into the crowded traffic of King's Road.

"He has a big studio in Shepherdess Walk," Cummings began in the patient voice of a man enduring a great deal. "Just off the lower end of Oakley Street, Assistant Commissioner. He lives alone, his body being discovered this morning at nine by Mrs. Luknol, the daily woman."

"And . . . ?"

"She found him dead in his . . . um . . ."

Mrs. Pym felt MacPherson wriggle, and stared at Cummings in surprise.

"Are you being polite on my behalf, Inspector? If so, I can assure you that I am quite grown up."

Cummings' face was pink.

"I *beg* your pardon. He paints from a sort of girder thing; he was dead on it. But I did not know how to describe it."

"Well, you've succeeded; thank you. And . . . ?"

"Shot in the face, ma'am. The doctor tentatively puts death at about four o'clock, yesterday."

Tuke's studio was in an old and graceful house quite obviously inspired by Inigo Jones, and only waiting the day when the planners proudly replaced it with a concrete match-box. There was a uniformed porter on the main door, and a tiny group of people watching from the far side of the road.

The artist's door, at the top of the building, was guarded by a uniformed constable, who admitted them. The apartment consisted of three small rooms, kitchen and bathroom, attached – as it were – to an enormous room face facing north, with a roof practically all glass.

The walls were lined with stacked canvases, interspersed with tables or benches littered with artist's impedimenta. The floor was speckled with old newspapers, empty paint tubes and rags. Before the west wall stood a model throne on which was a very good lay figure of jointed wood, standing upright by means of a flanged strut.

It was carefully dressed in the colourful clothes of an American cowboy. Behind it, covering the back wall, was a large backcloth, possibly an old theatre prop, depicting in crude colouring a wagon train crossing the prairie.

The real absurdity was the facing wall from the baseboard of which rose a film studio camera crane. At the business end, where a technician once sat with his camera, was a canvas and easel so fitted that the artist could work on it. A variety of electric switches by the seat no doubt controlled the crane's action.

Before the roughed-out sketch of the lay figure against a stylized background of the American west was Caravaggio Tuke. He wore a filthy smock, his face a hideous mask because of a homing bullet.

On a nearby table was a primus stove bearing a kettle, a cup and a teapot. In front of the model throne was a damp area and exactly beneath the artist, four feet up in the air on his death chariot, was a Derringer, the small large-bore pistol that was once the American gambler's favourite weapon.

*

Cummings decided that Mrs. Pym had taken all this in.

"That appears to be the weapon, ma'am. We left everything for you to see. But Mr. Marlborough came along from his gun shop to advise us, and says the Derringer has been fired. The face wound appears to coincide with the bore."

"Lot of guns, surely? There's what looks like a forty-five in that lay figure's holster; two Spanish saddle guns, I think they are, in that set-piece on the wall."

"Yes; he used them in his work."

"No suspects, I imagine?"

Cummings shrugged.

"The door is never locked, ma'am, the porter going off at noon for the day. Tuke has a big acquaintance, and is always being visited by people."

"H'm." Mrs. Pym turned at a knock and the door opened. "Yes?"

"The technical squad, Assistant Commissioner," the door constable said. "Prints and pictures, if that's all right?"

"Let them in. What is that damp patch, Mr. Cummings? Kettle fall over?"

"No, ma'am; boiled dry by the look of it, the primus is also dry. It's possible that glass up there leaks somewhere – we had that rainstorm yesterday. But we think the murderer came before that – the floor shows nothing like wet footprints, or marks of any kind."

"In that litter? Besides, the journey up here would just about dry wet shoes. We'll go outside and leave it to the technicians."

A stout woman was standing outside, by the constable. She wore old clothes and held a black plastic shopping bag.

"Name of Luknol. I found 'im," she jerked a thumb to the door. "Can't say I'm surprised. Mucked about with the gels, 'e did." She sucked a hollow tooth as a sort of *obbligato*. "Wives, too. Got drunk most nights, and hinsulted people – but 'e 'ad plenty of friends, mean as 'e was. Mean? I 'ad to chase the old basket to get my five bob an hour out of 'im. Yelled 'is 'eart out if you chucked away any of 'is bits of rubbish."

"You don't know who might have done it, Mrs. Luknol?" Mrs. Pym asked in an expectant voice; the daily woman probably knew most of Chelsea's cherished secrets.

"Anyone, dearie – me, the porter downstairs, most of King's Road, and 'is son, Fred. Basket 'e was and is still, wherever 'e's gorn. That all, ma'am?"

"Thank you; that will do for the moment." Mrs. Pym waited while the woman headed for the stairs, and waited again when the lift stopped and another visitor appeared.

This was a youngish woman in a sack dress, apparently hacked with a knife and fork from mauve hessian; it was girded several

times about her thick waist with a gilt curtain cord. Her hair was cut almost *en brosse*, and ancient sandals protected her large feet. Light blue eyes peering through weirdly shaped spectacles, she marched towards Mrs. Pym.

"Good morning. You are the lady catchpoll, one assumes? To find the killer?"

"You live here?"

"With the Master? Ambition destroys its possessor, as the Talmud has it." The woman peered at Mrs. Pym's surprised expression. "One is quite literate. The ambition was to live with – however, the magic hand is stilled forever."

"The Master's hand, Miss Um?" Mrs. Pym decided she had to go along with this conversational undergrowth if she was going to get anywhere.

"Sigrid Nordgren – colourful rather than accurate, but one must differ in the rat-race. One sat at his feet."

"Under the crane, of course?" Mrs. Pym's voice was very dry; MacPherson's eyes were bright with appreciation.

"His Id," Sigrid Nordgren explained. "Contact with raw earth hurt it: a bird in the air, he was free to create. One kneels to him."

"Poster artist, surely?" Mrs. Pym suddenly felt unkind at the hurt in the other's eyes.

"The Master had to live, and bastard art paid him well."

"I see. Who is Fred, Miss Nordgren?"

"Frederick Tuke, the weak branch of a noble tree, a grubby failure, a blue-jeaned yob of nineteen, with long hair and an arid mind."

"He doesn't live with Mr. Tuke?"

"He exists in some teenage pad, a gutter-scraper, a dirt-lover. He scrounged from the Master, a greedy piece of young and useless filth. One vomits at him." The woman peered as a technician opened the studio door, revealing the crane and its burden. " '. . . though you never salute me first; I shall therefore, Pontilianus, salute you with an eternal farewell'." She drifted suddenly towards the stairs. MacPherson grunted.

"Will I fetch her back, ma'am?"

"Forget it," she nodded at the bewildered Cummings. "Just a pose, Inspector, to impress our rustic wits, even to the bit of Martial. Sergeant MacPherson, I think you can check on her for me, and find out about young Tuke. I'll be here."

The technicians had finished in the studio, leaving smears of

fingerprint powder on several surfaces. The Derringer was awaiting removal, lying on a table neatly clipped to a hardboard square.

Free of interruptions, Cummings pulled out a small notebook and checked some details.

"As I haven't been able to tell you yet, Assistant Commissioner, it has been decided that the Derringer was fired from somebody standing about here, possibly talking to Tuke. The gun is fully loaded, and one of Tuke's – all his guns are loaded. He seems to be a stickler for realism, and though his guns are known as in his possession at headquarters, we did not know he had ammunition."

"What about his papers?"

"A rough check shows unpaid bills – from small to large ones. Letters from Frederick Tuke, mostly asking for money; one or two threatening letters from men concerning their . . . er . . . women. A pass-sheet from the London and Thameshire Bank, showing a balance this month of several thousand pounds."

"And he didn't pay his bills?"

"He could afford not to, I suppose; it's not uncommon, is it, ma'am."

Mrs. Pym frowned at the lay figure.

"Pity that thing can't see or talk – it's well made enough to look as if it could. However. We'll see young Tuke, Inspector. I'll look round."

When she had finished a careful scrutiny of the studio, which appeared to irritate Cummings who had no time for what he called 'story-book detectives', MacPherson had returned.

"I've made some quick inquiries, ma'am."

"Yes?"

"Miss Nordgren is well known round here. Has a studio at the back of an old music hall in the King's Road that now belongs to a television company – she does scenic work for some of their shows, I'm told. She's apparently harmless, a disciple of Mr. Tuke's."

"Mrs. Luknol?"

"A Chelsea character. Works for several artists. Very hot tempered when she's in the drink. Fred Tuke, now, he shares rooms in a down-at-heels lodging house in Walton Street; there's a club below it, the Neat-Beat."

Cummings' frown was ferocious.

"*That* place! We've visited it several times. Full of beatniks

and hoodlums, living on purple hearts. We've heard of them indulging in everything there, from marijuana to formaldehyde. For kicks, they say."

*

They brought Fred Tuke into Lucan Place an hour later. Mrs. Pym saw him in the DDI's own office.

With long, dirty, straw-coloured hair, a beard, and a sullen face, Tuke had bare feet, and wore very grimy jeans. He glared at Mrs. Pym, seated behind the desk with MacPherson looming formidably at her side.

"So the old bastard's dead, is he? Good job. I get everything, and about time. What's the idea, dragging me in to see this old bag – " he jerked as MacPherson's hand snaked out, gripped his shirt at throat and partially hauled him over the desk. "*Here!*"

"You'll speak civilly to the Assistant Commissioner," the sergeant warned in an even tone, "or you'll mebbe see some of that police brutality you're always reading about."

"Have it your way," Tuke's voice was a whine.

"We will." Mrs. Pym's face was bleak. "Now, young man, I want to know your movements for yesterday from morning on."

"Trying to pin the old swine's death on me!" Tuke's voice was angry. "I've an alibi, see?"

"Times, please."

"Morning I never went out; I can bring a dozen witnesses. "Two o'clock my solicitor collected me. Owe money; the chap threatened bad trouble. We had to wait for the bastard till after five-thirty." He wrote on a piece of paper, throwing it down with a triumphant air. "Names and addresses; you can check."

It was an hour later that MacPherson returned to Mrs. Pym's temporary office, his attitude filled with gloom.

"Checked him out, ma'am; he's alibied from nine o'clock until just on six. Nothing I can do places Miss Nordgren or Mrs. Luknol near the studio yesterday afternoon."

Mrs. Pym sighed, smoothing her whitening hair with a quick gesture.

"Then we're in trouble. The Press Bureau at Central sent out the usual bromide" – she looked at her wrist-watch – "which means the agencies and the newspapers will be on my tail by now."

MacPherson jerked an eloquent thumb.

"They picketing Lucan Place, ma'am, with Loddon at the head of the pack."

"He would be! Right." She stood up. "I'll have another go at Miss Nordgren. She's a possible."

The sergeant took her towards the back of the building, to a long passage leading to a yard and across another yard, which brought them by way of some police houses into Ixworth Place. Mrs. Pym enjoyed the unusual pleasure of walking as a way of dodging importuning reporters.

The sergeant guided her across a church-yard bordering Sydney Street to an old block behind the music hall.

They finally reached a top-floor studio whose open door revealed a room more chaotic than that belonging to Tuke.

*

The confusion was absolute, a smell of dust pervading everything. Canvases were scattered about, in one corner being an untidy day bed. In the centre of the floor stood an easel bearing a canvas with charcoal outlines. Standing before it, peering into some world of her own, was Sigrid Nordgren.

The mistress of what MacPherson later designated as 'that paint-and-refuse littered pig's wallow' breasted a wave of gloomy thought, and faced Mrs. Pym.

"Welcome, welcome. You caught the Master's killer?"

"Not yet. This where you work?"

"Where one dreams, where one metaphorically sits at the feet of the gods . . . of de Stijl . . . of Kandinsky . . . of all the noble *Maestri*, but you came to see one?"

"I want some information."

"Anything for the lady catchpoll." The woman wandered to a wall and brought across some sheets of cartridge paper. "The Master's," she explained. "Roughs. Here is his great *Hysteron Proteron*; that is the *Dream on Bone Knuckles*." She held out a bold and brilliant sea-scape, and another rough, obviously a mock-up for the Golden West cowboy who stood, crouching, a gun in one hand levelled at the beholder, the sky a gaudy and lovely picture. Tuke was a genius; of that there was no doubt at all.

Mrs. Pym's eyes narrowed in concentration. She nodded once, handed the sketches back with a word of thanks, and left the studio. She walked with a sort of absorbed tightness, as if she did not wish to be addressed and MacPherson – walking

behind her – recognized the unspoken warning with Celtic sensitivity. In that fashion they went to Caravaggio Tuke's studio.

Mrs. Pym considered the lay figure, then studied the dirty floor and picked something from it which she put into her large handbag. She suddenly appeared reasonably complacent, bidding MacPherson to fetch the Tuke sketches from Sigrid Nordgren and bring them to Lucan Place.

When he had gone, she probed round the studio for a short time, and went down to Shepherdess Walk. A cruising taxi was hailed, and bidden to take her to Walton Street and the convenient back entry to Lucan Place.

When MacPherson returned, he found his chief seated comfortably in the DDI's office with a baffled Inspector Cummings at her side. Sitting on a chair in the corner, grim-faced and faintly puzzled, was the monolithic bulk of Superintendent Clanmass, who so successfully handled the complexities of B-Division by combining toughness and diplomacy.

Mrs. Pym laid out on the desk surface the rough of the Golden West study. She tapped it gently.

"We learned that Tuke was a realist," she addressed Clanmass. "I wondered why the lay figure about which I told you had a gun in its holster. The picture, it seems, was to be of a gun fighter not touching his Colt, and therefore intending no harm, when all the time he was killing his man with a Derringer, that generally hidden secret gun of the old West."

"The lay figure had the Derringer?" Cummings asked.

"This initial sketch shows it. Tuke the realist put this loaded Derringer in the lay figure's hand, secured its jointed first finger round the trigger with a rubber band, which I found."

"Damned silly," Clanmass said, heavily.

"Realistic, Superintendent; a real gun and real bullets meant the authentic touch." Mrs. Pym's eyes brightened at Cummings' sniff of contempt. "The artistic temperament, I daresay?

"There was Tuke on his crane, working in a frenzy of inspiration or dedication, and there was the kettle boiling away *and* the rainstorm, the skylight leaks wetting the lay figure's projected hand with the gun . . . heat and wet, or one or the other, and the wood contracted just enough. The gun went off, and jerked from the figure's hand, the jointed arm fell to its side . . ." Mrs. Pym shrugged eloquently.

Clanmass looked at her and then at Cummings.

"The devil of a newspaper story, ma'am! We'll have to get the forensic laboratory on this, of course, but I'm sure you're right." He sighed. "Nothing could be worse from the point of dignity . . . death by lay figure!"

When the laboratory men had finished, it was decided that Mrs. Pym's theory was amply confirmed.

The last echo of the case was when a framed picture was sent to New Scotland Yard from Sigrid Nordgren bearing an ivorine plate that to the effect that it was a portrait of Assistant Commissioner Mrs. Pym. If the canvas looked like a sampler from a paint manufacturer's testing-room it was, as Sergeant MacPherson suggested, a useful thing for young detectives to see in an attempt to find the lady.

THE STRANGE WORLD OF LAW – AND CRIME

A psychologist attached to the Southern Michigan Prison, E. L. V. Shelley, has advanced the theory that a paint-brush can well replace a gun in the criminal's hand. He says:

'A prisoner tortured by pangs of hostility works off these feelings on the canvas before they develop into an explosive nature. Among criminals, expressing feelings is a sign of softness. But in art they can let themselves go.'

*

Paris policemen, a harassed but normally courteous body of men, are inclined to lose their tempers with argumentative citizens. One gendarme who took current traffic problems very much to heart had a batch of special notices printed for the benefit of erring motorists. They read: 'Kindly speak to me gently without raising your voice and without upsetting me in any way. It causes excess acid and is liable to make me irritable.'

– *Daily Mirror*

*

In Chile a prisoner who has committed four murders – Rene Ceron – was subjected to a brain operation for the purpose of curing him of his homicidal instincts. Three weeks after his recovery, rehabilitated murderer Ceron, freed from jail, met another ex-prisoner . . . and stabbed him to death.

*

News from the Dutch Embassy in Moscow has suddenly cast the whole sordid business of modern espionage in a far cosier light.

The Ambassador's Siamese cats discovered a hidden mike in his study. But, instead of making a direct protest, the Embassy staff decided to use the bug to transmit conversation in which they shouted to one another about the filthy state of the drains and the diabolical crimes committed by Soviet laundries. These shortcomings were immediately made good which, compared with more democratic registration of protest, proves at least that a bug in the rug is worth two fleas in the ear. – *Punch*

THE WELL

MARCUS WOOTTON

I HEARD the huge doors slam behind me and wondered why I didn't feel the elation I thought would be there. For months – no, years, I'd sat in that stinking little cell, telling myself how it would be to step outside and smell freedom. All I smelt was the gas, the diesel fumes, and the dank raincoat hanging limply over my arm next to the brown paper parcel that marked me as an ex con.

The tailor-made cigarette I'd hoarded for so long tasted sharp and salty. I threw it away and then looked at the butt drowning in the gutter, and felt the horrified apprehension that all cons feel at losing such a treasure. I pulled up short and walked away when I realized that I wasn't a con any more. I was free.

I kept saying that to myself, too – I'm free, I'm free, I'm free. I'd been rehearsing it for a very long time. When I was inside I'd built up the feeling, the feeling that I'd damn near dance down that road shouting at the top of my voice, 'I'M FREE!'

But I didn't. I didn't feel free. I just felt lonely. The road looked long, empty, and wet, and I suddenly realized that although I'd planned my dance down the road howling my joy to the world, although I'd smoked a tailored cig, although I'd planned the first deep draught of a pint in a cosy pub, I hadn't planned where the bed was going to be. Where the next meal was coming from, where I was going to get a job. Didn't I need cards, or something? I halted again, and realized how stupid Smitty really was. Smitty? That's me.

"Smitty?" I hadn't noticed the car pull alongside, and frankly, I was more curious to look at this new swinging model than at the man who had poked his head out to call me.

Then suspicion took over, like an instinct.

"I haven't done anything," I said automatically, defensively.

He looked patient, resigned almost, and said, "I know; just been sent along to give you a lift."

"Who sent you?"

"Your brother, Jake." He opened the door; I got in.

I didn't know the driver. He must have been a new one on the

mob, but he didn't chatter. That gave me chance to think of the last time I saw Jake, lying in that bank vault with half his face blown off and telling me it was my fault. But it wasn't. The jelly had been lousy, and exploded before its time. You take a chance, and, you take a chance. They caught me, and I did my time. They never caught Jake, or the others, but you don't grass on your own brother, not if you want to stay in one piece. Not in my family.

The street still looked the same as it had done five long years ago – musty, dirty, and hopeless. I almost felt like turning back to those big iron doors, and asking for the security back that I'd loathed for so long. No chance though; the driver pulled up and hustled me out and into the house that I'd called home when I was a kid. It still stank of cabbage in the hallway.

"This way, Smitty." He led on, like I didn't know my way to the basement, and then grinned for the first time when I shouldered him aside and made my own way down those well remembered steps. It was as if I'd never been away.

The light was off. I felt the first touch of fear cross my chest as I groped for it, fumbled with the catch and blinked when the single bulb illuminated the sparsely furnished room. My brother was sitting with his back to me, gazing into space.

"Jake? You quit living in the daylight or something?" I laughed nervously, and felt a tinge of tears as I heard his voice say, "Hello, boy."

He got up and turned around; he was wearing dark glasses. At first I thought maybe he had a hangover; he was a drinking man. But when I asked he said no, and took the glasses off. He was blind.

What could I say? They'd never visited me or written – you couldn't expect them to. But, blind. It hurt, not because he was that way, but because I suddenly knew that he'd been blind since that terrible blast, and I never knew.

We didn't talk for a long time. We offered each other cigarettes self-consciously, and smoked in silence, both wondering how to start. I broke the ice first.

"Where can I get a job, Jake? I need one bad now."

It was almost as if he was looking at me, the way his head swivelled around. I felt a shudder of revulsion as I looked into those scarred sightless eyes.

"Job?" His voice was quiet, but the smile that slowly spread across his lopsided face told me his peace wasn't real. "You've

got a job boy, you've got the job of the century. I've waited for a long time for you to come out. A little fellow like you; you're the only one who could do it, anyhow, and this time, it won't fail."

I caught on. I tried to tell him that I was going straight, that there would be no more basements for me, no more cells for me, no more fright for me. Just a room and a job, and no trouble.

I tried, but his eyes told me I owed it to him and Ma, and this job would set us all up for life. With that scarred face, I had no chance. I went to the cot in the corner, and slept, and waited for Jake to tell me when, and how, but not why.

*

Ma woke me in the morning with a cup of tea that tasted like nectar. I didn't recognize her at first, sleepy eyed and all that, but the inevitable cigarette was still hanging from the side of her mouth and my first words were to ask her if it was the same one that was there when she saw me go down for five. She gave one of her rare smiles and told me indignantly that she'd changed it twice since then.

Jake was already up and dressed by the time I'd surfaced, and the map in front of him said that he was ready for work, too. He heard me come in, put the glasses on, and asked me what I thought of the map.

I felt curious, and asked him what he thought of it. He said "ha-ha-bloody-ha," and, again, what did I think of it. Feeling a little bit ashamed, I looked down at the contoured job. It was just a thing in heavy relief of some forest with a couple of roads. I said it meant nothing at all, but as I was in a good mood what exactly was I expected to think.

He took time and trouble to explain to me in detail what was going on, and what I was supposed to do. After the end of his spiel I had to let out a whistle of admiration. The plan was superb and almost foolproof.

When I mentioned the 'almost' to him, he snarled and asked what I meant by 'almost'. I tried so hard to explain that no plan was foolproof when the human element was involved, human element this time being me. He shrugged off my protest and told me it would be the week-end.

I started sweating then. I sweated until the Saturday, and after.

The plan was dirt simple really – all we had to do was to hijack the money from a gang that'd robbed a bank. Simple! Jake already had the information about when the job was going to be done, where and how, where they were going to ditch the money, hence the map; in fact he knew every angle going. Where he wanted me was the easy bit. I'm a very little chap, just over five feet and thin, but fast on my feet. They were going to hide the money in an old well shaft in the New Forest, if they made the grab okay that is. All I had to do was to wriggle down the shaft and get it. That's all.

So, no risks for us, and reap all the profits at God knows whose expense.

The passing days were very uneasy ones for me. I woke up now and then in the night panicking, thinking I was trapped down that well shaft. It should have been an omen.

Jake woke me up on the last morning with a cup of tea. He must have felt my grimace for he said, "Don't worry, old son, you won't have to look at it much longer." Then he sat on the edge of the bed and once more completely outlined the plan.

The other mob was due to get away with a quarter of a million. That made me whistle. All Jake could, or would, tell me about their plan was that it was foolproof. I had to snort at it. You don't find them that easy. Foolproof plans, that is. But my brother gave an ominous grin that worried me sick and said it was okay. How did he have the information, I wanted to know. He said a man was going to help them do the job and told him – my brother – and mysteriously disappeared.

My neck itched. My neck always itches when there is trouble in the air. This time, like a fool, I ignored it.

All we had to do was to go to this spot in the New Forest and wait for them to turn up. They would be six strong, and jumping them would be a messy business. This way, it would be quiet and easy and nobody would get hurt.

They, the original gang, intended to lower the loot in waterproof bags to the bottom of this old well. A deep job, but with only a couple of feet of water at the bottom. That way, they could collect any time they felt like it. All we had to do was to let them dump the money, let them clear off, and then the hired yobs would lower me into the well to pick the money up. Easy.

Easy.

We said good-bye to Ma, and I damn near burnt my chin on the inevitable ciggy that drooped from her mouth. She was

almost disdainful as she turned away and asked me if I hadn't had enough yet. Jake came as far as the gate and said he'd see me soon. I still wasn't so sure.

There was just the driver, the big fellow who'd picked me up, and an equally silent type who I'd seen around. There was no conversation at all until we'd reached the outskirts of London and were wending a fast way towards the country. Then the driver told me the rope was in the back. It wouldn't take long for them to lower me, for me to tie the sacks on, and then they'd lower the rope again for me to get hauled up.

My neck itched again.

We slid in, engine off, into a sheltered little glade that must look beautiful in the summer. The driver shrugged us both out, and we followed him to squat behind an enormous oak that towered so high into the dark it gave me an inferiority complex. My hand automatically went for a fag and the driver automatically knocked it wordlessly out of my hand, picked it up, put it in his pocket and whispered for me to put my gloves on.

I began to feel cowed and annoyed at the same time. After half an hour of cramped silence, I began to get fidgety, and asked quietly how long it would be and were they sure they had the right place. For an answer the big man shrugged and beckoned me to follow him. It was a relief to straighten up. It was amazing such a big man as him could just unwind upwards and walk away without any sign of stiffness.

I could just follow his back in the dark, and nearly ran up it as he came to an abrupt halt. He motioned me alongside, and suddenly shone a torch down to the ground. At first I couldn't see a thing, then, as my eyes grew gradually accustomed to the beam, I made out a small hole in the ground, no more than a foot and a half across each way.

"That's the well?" I whispered. The big man nodded. I shuddered and told him in the same urgent whisper that I wasn't going down there. Not for the money or Ma or Jake or him.

The gun he levelled at my head said I was. He motioned me back to the tree where we sweated it out for another half hour. I was almost on the point of making a run for it, gun or no gun, when they both shushed at the same time and hugged the shadows even closer. A car slid into the glade the same way as we made it, and shadowy figures got out and walked towards the hole. I heard a hurried whispered conversation, saw a sudden movement, and then a quiet splash. I turned urgently to the driver to ask

him how deep the water really was down there but, as if he anticipated my mouth opening, he clapped his hand over it.

The others got back into their car and left almost as silently as they arrived. We gave them five minutes, and then crept forward to the well. The silent one knotted the rope expertly around my waist as I stood helplessly wondering if I should pray or not. The big man gave me the urgent whispered instructions that all I had to do was to tie the sacks on to the rope after I'd hit the bottom, let them draw them up, then they'd send the rope down for me and haul me back up again. Simple, they said.

They gave me a torch and stuffed me into the hole like I was a rabbit. It was a tight squeeze even for me, I suddenly realized why Jake had chosen me for the job; it needed a boy with the strength of a man. Me. Idiot. They lowered me gently, and the darkness clamped around me. The sides, all the sides of the well slid past. I smelt the dankness of water that hadn't been drawn for a long time. Somewhere in the back of my mind I remembered that the body swells with fear. I tried not to be afraid of the grip of those slimy walls.

There wasn't room for me to lift the torch at all; I just had to stay rigid and trust the men at the top. My nostrils dilated as the stench of the water came nearer. It seemed an eternity before I felt the wetness enveloping my knees in that clammy darkness. Suddenly, my panic spread when I wondered how deep the water was. I struggled to climb back up the rope but it was wet with the green muck from the walls. The water came higher and higher until it was up to my chest. Just before the scream came out of my throat my feet touched bottom.

I was too scared to switch on the torch, not because I was scared at what I might see, but because for one terrible moment I was afraid it wouldn't work. Understand?

Then the big man's voice came down the shaft, asking if I was okay and was the stuff there. I pulled myself together and remembered what I was supposed to be doing in that damned tomb. The torch lit up okay. I slowly moved around, and my stomach turned over. I was chest deep in dark green stinking water. The shaft widened to a bowl-like compartment where I was standing. It measured no more than five feet by four, but at least it was better than that tiny tunnel I'd slid down.

I located the sacks. They were in polythene bags, floating in the muck by the wall. I undid the rope round my waist. My cold hands fumbled in tying the bags. I gave a couple of tugs on

the rope and my torch beam followed the jerky progress as they were hauled up.

It was cold down there. The seconds ticked by like hours. My torch began to flicker. Then it died, and I was in the total blackness.

There was no sound from above. At first I whispered, for God's sake send that bloody rope back down. When they didn't hear me I called, and then I shouted. And then I heard the car being driven off.

*

I started to weep, and then I tried to climb. I turned around and around blindly in the darkness, whimpering, falling, clawing at dank walls. Then I started screaming.

It wasn't relief that made me almost faint into the enveloping slop; it was fear. When that police beam came down the shaft, and I heard that voice say, "Get down there and get him out, fast, if he's still alive," I felt the panic that said there wasn't room for the two of us down there and we'd both be trapped.

I can't tell you how they got me up. But that poor cop must have reeked for days the same way that I did.

They'd caught not only my double-crossing chums, but the original gang too. The big driver at least had the decency to tell them where my living grave was.

Yes, I'm back inside now, and glad of it. It's safer.

WAITING FOR GOODY

ROSE MILLION HEALEY

A tale of childhood with a very wry undertone

THE APARTMENT looks lovely. Mother bought masses of yellow and red flowers this morning, and arranged them in vases all over the living-room and dining-room, and Goody's new room. Goody and I won't share a room any more. I'm to stay in the old nursery, only with the pink baby furniture removed, and a walnut bed put in. The wallpaper is still bordered with Mother Goose pictures. I hate Mother Goose, but I don't suppose it would do any good to mention that. And Goody will stay in the little room between the kitchen and Daddy's study. It used to be Mother's dressing-room. I went in yesterday to look at it; the smell of Mother's perfume is still strong, especially in the corner where the dressing-table once stood.

I have to stand very carefully at the window and not lean against anything that might soil or crush my dress. It's a new one, plaid with a white collar. I mustn't suck the collar, because only little children and nervous girls do that. I'm neither, any more. I wish my dress were pale, pale pink with a white sash. Goody had a dress like that. It suited her personality, Mother says. I tried it on, and tore it under the arms. I'm too big for Goody's clothes. And we're not the same type. Mother prefers the simple line for me. Goody is the cuddly, frilly kind. She has curls you can put your middle finger into without touching the hair at all. Goody's eyes are blue. I love my little sister very much.

There's a lot of traffic on the streets today. Rain always makes the cars go more slowly. I wonder why that is? They crawl past our building on their way across town, and the big, glittering drops of rain on their tops look like jewels or tears.

I cried a lot when Goody and Daddy left on their trip. At first it didn't seem fair that she should go, while I stayed behind in the hot city. But, as Mother pointed out, Goody had been sick and needed the rest, and there were my piano lessons and Mrs.

Henderson. Mrs. Henderson doesn't like it, if I miss visiting her. I visit her three times a week, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. We talk or play games. Mostly, though, we just talk. I honestly think that woman would rather listen to conversation than do anything else in the world.

She says I'm extremely intelligent. That's what several people have remarked about me: that I'm the intelligent one. Goody's pretty. But I'm intelligent, and I play the piano better than she does.

"What's the use in playing the old piano-wanno?" Goody asks.

"The better to accompany you, when you sing, my dear."

She's always singing. Or she was, up until the time she had her accident. She sang *I Dreamt I Dwelt in Marble Halls* and *The Last Rose of Summer* twenty-three times one week. I kept count. She stood on the scales in the bathroom to make herself tall enough to look into the medicine-chest mirror, and she sang to her own face, smiling and making the corners of her mouth dimple the way she can. Daddy said it sounded beautific. Resonance is something terrific in a bathroom, but I don't believe he took it into consideration. Also, he was out quite a bit and didn't have to listen so much, or he might have gotten as tired of Marble Halls and Roses as I did. I love Goody, but I do hope she's enlarged her repertoire by now.

The fat man who lives on the first floor just waddled across the street, being led by his two poodles. Of all the foolish-looking animals in this world, poodles are the prize-winners in my estimation. All those crinkly curls. I prefer dachshunds. They're sleek and shiny. In a way, Goody and I are like a poodle and a dachshund. I'd really rather be a dachshund, but I've got to admit, poodles are awfully popular.

"What are you doing, Elizabeth?" Mother asks.

She can see what I'm doing – or not doing.

"Watching for Daddy and Goody."

"That's a nice girl. Any sign of them yet?"

Certainly, and I shouted to them to go away; the house is on fire, and I have the measles.

"No, Mother. Not yet."

"Well, keep your eyes open."

Mother finishes putting on an earring. She looks at me closely, then disappears from the doorway. I wish she'd stop popping out at me all the time. Lately she's begun to remind me of a jack-in-

a-box, springing unexpectedly from behind doors or round corners. She has a kind of suspicious, accusing air about her, too, and she looks so disappointed, when she sees that I'm not misbehaving, I'm almost tempted to get into trouble for her sake.

*

Why don't they come? I'm getting tired of this waiting business. Oh, well, I've waited this long, I can wait a little longer. It'll be wonderful to see Daddy again, and Goody, too, of course. Daddy's about the tallest man I know. I'm tall for my age, and I've grown some since he's been away, but he'll still be 'way up above me, when he talks to me. Generally he seems to be standing up, when I'm around. Goody catches him, when he's sitting, and she gets on to his lap somehow. He says I'm too heavy. Goody's small, and after all, she's the baby. Perhaps she's bigger now, but I doubt it. She may be a midget, for all I know. Maybe she isn't my sister at all, but a grown-up woman, just pretending to be a little girl, so she can live here and eat free food and go for long vacations at the seashore with my father. That's silly, though. Mother would know if Goody weren't her child.

Or would she? There's a lot Mother doesn't know about me – unless Mrs. Henderson has told her. I don't think she'd do that, when she promised. But you never can tell. You can't trust anybody. Not completely. At least, I haven't completely trusted Mrs. Henderson, so it's all right, even if she does blab.

I think I'll play something. Chopin. Mother likes Chopin. I'm bored with looking out the window and waiting. They'll drive up in a taxi and tumble out, laughing and red in the face. I'll get that funny feeling in the pit of my stomach. I love riding in taxis. They're more fun than buses or our own cars. Every block you go, you know it's costing money, and so, to get where you're going must be worthwhile. You can see how much it's worth on the little box in the front seat. I'll tell Mrs. Henderson about that when I see her tomorrow. She'll tap her pencil and stare at me with her bulging, muddy-water eyes and say: "That's extremely interesting. What else?"

She invariably wants to find out 'what else'. It's hard for her to comprehend that sometimes there isn't any 'else'; that there's just a single fact with no 'else' to it.

Like about Goody. When she asks me about Goody, I answer: "I love my sister very much."

Then Mrs. Henderson says: "Yes, yes, you've told me that before. But what else?"

"That's all."

And that really *is* all. As Mother says, who could help loving Goody? She's so sweet and pretty. Everybody loves her. I certainly do.

"Where are you?"

"Here," I say.

Mother jumps nervously and turns towards the alcove where I'm now sitting.

"I thought you were going to watch for Daddy and Goody."

"I got tired."

"They'll be here any minute now."

"I know."

"Don't you want to be the first to see them?"

"John will be the first. He'll open the taxi door for them. Taxis are – "

Mother interrupts. She often interrupts. It's a bad habit of hers.

"I mean the first in the family to see them," she says.

"There's only you and me," I point out.

"Elizabeth – "

"Yes?" I'm not looking at her. I can tell by the tone of her voice she's going to have a 'little talk' with me, though.

"Elizabeth, come here a minute."

I sigh and put one finger on middle c. Middle c is dead centre of the eighty-eight keys. It's not my favourite note, A-natural is, but middle c doesn't annoy me.

"Did you hear me – *dear*?" my mother asks.

Hauling myself from the piano seat, I shuffle over to where Mother stands by the fireplace. She's tall and slender, my mother, and she has beautiful hands. Her face is pretty, too. I don't know why Goody inherited her dimples and blue eyes both, and I didn't. I don't take after my father either. Sometimes I think I'm adopted. In fact, I'd be sure I'm adopted, except that would mean they *chose* me.

"Elizabeth," Mother begins, looking down. Why doesn't anybody ever stare me straight in the eye – or take me on his or her lap? I'm not all that heavy . . . Which reminds me: I'm hungry. I'd like a banana split.

" – listening to me?"

"Yes, Mother," I nod.

"Well, then, answer me."

"What was the question again, please?"

Mother takes a deep breath. She's controlling her temper. It's a pretty bad temper, when it's let loose – boy!

In a super, calm, smooth voice, like the ones women on the television use, she says: "You're glad your sister is coming home, aren't you, Elizabeth?"

"Oh, yes, Mother."

"And you're going to be very sweet to her in the future?"

"Yes, Mother."

"Now, don't forget about the school, will you? Remember Daddy still thinks you should go, but I'm sure what happened was an accident – "

As if I could forget about the school. That school they keep talking about sending me to, if I don't do exactly as I'm told. My goodness, I almost always do as I'm told.

"Won't it be lovely for us to be all together again?"

"Yes, Mother."

"You've missed Goody, haven't you?"

"Oh, yes."

"Just think: now, when you play the piano, Goody will sing. Daddy and I can be the audience. We're going to spend many more evenings together after this."

"I know. You've told me."

"Mother has given up her bridge club and the Music Society, and Daddy has promised not to work in the evenings unless it's absolutely necessary."

"Uh-huh," I say. She's been over this before. I don't see why it's necessary to go through it again . . . I'd like chocolate ice cream in the split. Pecans, chopped fine and sprinkled over the whipped cream.

" – don't you, dear?"

"Don't I, what?"

Tapping her long fingers on the mantelpiece and catching a glimpse of herself in the mirror, Mother exclaims: "Elizabeth, you aren't paying attention to me!"

"Yes, I am. I just like to be sure I understand." That's always an acceptable explanation. It can't be used too often, though, or you're considered not very bright.

Mother smoothes her hair and steps back to observe the effect. She really is pretty.

"I said," she says, without glancing at me, "that you realize how wrong you were, don't you?"

Oh, dear, we're back to that again.

"Yes, Mother."

"And you'll never, never do anything like it again?"

"No."

"Where are you going?"

"To the piano. Would you like to hear me play?"

Mother doesn't talk when I play. She thinks it interferes with my concentration. She's right, but why can't she understand that I occasionally concentrate when I'm not at the piano?

"Certainly, dear," she says in an oozy, encouraging manner.

Goody isn't exactly encouraging; she says what she thinks. Like the time last March when we were taken to the Museum of Modern Art, and she pointed to that huge picture on the second floor by Mr. Picasso.

"Liz'beth! Liz'beth!"

Those ugly females with their crooked, sharp noses and eyes out of place. Personally, I saw no resemblance at all. Besides, I'll grow out of it. I'm probably a butterfly in the cocoon-stage, as Mrs. Henderson has explained. However, it was Goody's opinion at the time, and she did voice it as she had every right to. She's no milk-and-water baby like most little blondie girls.

*

Hmmm, here's the hard part. I always mess it up. Let's see: b-flat. It's coming. One, two. Got it. Got it, by golly. I'd like to see Goody do that. Of course, she can hit d above high c when she sings, but it sounds pretty popcorn-whistle thin to me, and her voice will change in a few years. Mine is completely different from when I was her age.

When I was her age. Doesn't seem as if I ever was. That's because, no matter how young or little I might be, Goody was always younger and littler. No, there's no such word. Littler. Littler. Wonder how you'd spell it? Goody can't spell, and I can. Mother and Daddy laugh when she mispronounces words. They correct me. I'm older and can grasp their meaning. I'm intelligent.

But I'll always be older than Goody. Always. All my life. Unless she dies.

I love my little sister. She's so cute, and she has a tinkle-bell laugh. It's nice to hear her laugh, except when she's laughing *at* you. She points her finger at you, when you get out of the bathtub and haven't anything on. And she says things you don't want to

hear. Even if they're true, you shouldn't have to hear them said. Or you go to parties. She hands her present to the girl or boy's mother and sort of curtsys and smiles. I usually drop the box or stumble or can't think of what to say. Once I handed the gift to the butler and said: "I hope your little girl has a happy birthday."

Goody practically burst from laughing. I thought they were going to have to throw iced water on her or slap her face to stop her, but nobody did. They just let her giggle and giggle in her tootling soprano. When she was calm enough, she told everybody there, and they laughed, too. She couldn't wait to get home and tell Mother and Daddy. They thought it was all very humorous. It occurs to me that parents can take after their children the same as the other way around. I don't remember too well, but I could swear that before Goody was born, and I was tiny, neither Mother nor Daddy laughed in quite the same tone they use now.

I hate parties. I hope I never have to go to another one as long as I live. Come to think of it, I haven't been invited to one lately, not since Goody left. Probably people don't want me without her. Well, that doesn't matter. I hate parties anyhow. You play silly games and grin and say things you don't mean . . . Or, if you manage to get away from the shouting, stamping kids, you wander into an empty room which doesn't remain empty long. Adults come in. They don't see you where you sit in a dark corner in your simple-line dress with you black patent pumps and white socks. One of them sinks into a comfortable chair, and the other pours drinks. Whisky, I guess.

"God! The little monsters. Haven't they got homes?"

"Two apiece, most of them."

"Who's the little doll in pink? The have-you-a-little-fairy-in-your-home type?"

"Isn't she adorable? Linda and Stuart Hammond's youngest. Everybody calls her 'Goody'. My Phyllis worships her."

"Oh, yes, I've heard Linda mention her daughter."

"Daughters."

"Oh?"

"The one who knocked over her chair during the ice cream."

"Not that – "

My hostess swallows and sits down. She places a hand on her friend's knee. "Isn't it too incredible: that angelic child and a veritable gargoyle?"

The guest chuckles. Wagging her head from side to side, she gazes into her ice-filled glass. "If I were Big Sister, I'd choke

Goldylocks with her own hair-ribbon, or push her out the nursery window."

"Or scatter ground glass over her cereal!" the other adult agreed.

Then they spoke of other things. Of Sartre, and Bergdorf-Goodman's, and a cunning little bistro just off Washington Square. I pretended to be asleep in the big chair, so they wouldn't think I'd heard if they saw me. But in a few minutes, they rose, looked at each other, twisted their faces and said: "Courage."

They trailed back into the party rooms, where the kids were playing spin-the-bottle.

Goody's called the most in spin-the-bottle. She laughs and twirls so that the ruffles on her pants that match her dress show. She looks darling, when she's excited. She claps her little hands together and screams: "Goody, goody, goody!"

I'm the one who first named her "Goody". I did it, because she says the word so often. A person would think she was part parrot.

It was just after that party that the accident happened.

*

"Splendid, Elizabeth, dear. You've never played so well."

"Thank you."

Mother is at the window now, her straight back towards me. The afternoon light strikes her hair. How it shines!

"Mother?"

"Yes?"

"Shall I play another?"

"Hmmm?"

"Would you care to hear the *Minute Waltz*? Professor MacQuerdy says I've improved on it."

"What? Oh, not now, dear. I think – yes, yes, they're here! There's Daddy. How tanned he is. And Goody. My baby!"

Mother turns and hurries towards the hall. Passing me, she says more to herself than anyone else: "I'm going down. I can't wait. My pretty baby's home at last."

At the door she halts briefly. "Want to come?"

Mrs. Henderson has told her I mustn't feel left out.

I shake my head.

Impatient to be off, Mother instructs: "Tell Agnes to set out the tea things. Help her, dear. We'll have a party!"

She's gone.

I wander over and glance down. Sure enough, there's Daddy, surrounded by baggage and tennis racquets and toys and boxes. John, the doorman, and the elevator boy, Tommy, are hovering around. Goody sits on top of a suitcase. She holds a doll in her arms. Her brown legs swing back and forth. She is prettier than before.

My sister. My little sister. It's marvellous to have her home at last. I've waited all summer. I've waited and waited. In fact, I guess I've been waiting most of my life for this day, when Goody would return.

"Agnes! Mother says to serve the tea now. She told me to help you. I'll get the silverware. Oh – the candy I made for Goody. You didn't tell Mother, did you? I want it to be a surprise, remember. I'm going to give it to Goody when we're alone, and she can eat it all by herself. There's not much of it, so it can't make her sick. I wouldn't ever want to make her sick. Bugs upset Goody, you know. I saw one in the kitchen the other day, so I bought DDT powder with my own money. I love my little sister very much."

EW BOOK MART

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OFFERED: *The Thief in the Night*, Readers Library (damaged spine), and *The Man Who Was Nobody*, Ward Lock 1929 ed., foxed. Exchange, what have you? Box A50, *EWMM*.

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NEW BOOKS

JOHN de SOLA

MANUEL, Christopher Jackson (*Cape*, 21s.)

This non-fiction book deals with a Chilean murderer confined to a Valparaiso jail, a documentary by a prison visitor. The story of the convict, serving a long sentence for killing a lawyer, strives hard to get inside the murderer. There are plenty of background details of Chilean prison life which has the same beastliness common to most prisons run by Spanish-speaking peoples.

The author digs into his subject's psychopathic mind with the zest of a child digging sand, and reveals that each turned spadeful presents the same old sand. Our own Peter Manuel would have made a far, *far* better subject.

THE BLESSINGTON METHOD, Stanley Ellin (*Macdonald*, 16s.)

Ten short stories by one of the great modern masters of the crime-writing craft, stories written in the last eight years.

It would be pointless to pick one story as better than the others, since every taste differs, but *Robert* is probably the most shattering while those who debate capital punishment will find material for discussion in *The Question*.

If it is possible for Mr. Ellin to excel himself, then he has done it. One correction, which has nothing to do with him: in the preface Julian Symons says, '*The Strand* and its fellows have gone long since, and there is now no magazine at all' in England 'which specializes in the short crime story of classical length'. No sir? Why not take out a subscription to *EWMM*?

THE CASE OF THE JUMBO SANDWICH, Christopher Bush (*Macdonald*, 15s.)

Since he wrote the brilliant *Perfect Murder Case* in 1929, Christopher Bush has been turning out mystery stories as British and as satisfying as roast beef.

In this Ludovic Travers, of the Broad Street Detective Agency, is called in to recover some money for a swindled woman. He is gradually bogged down in a matter of personality and crime

which, as each layer is lifted, reveals something more. To pun execrably, 'Good wine has its Bush'.

CORNERED, James McKimmey (Boardman, 12s. 6d.)

Criminal Tony Quirter is prepared to pay fifty thousand dollars to his brother to 'get' the girl who sent him to the death house.

With mounting speed, gunman Billy Quirter pursues the girl across the States with Javert-like remorselessness, to a not unexpected but cleverly handled conclusion. This is a tension thriller, pure and simple. It grips like gummed tape.

DEAD MAN'S CROSS, Howard Charles Davis (*John Long*, 15s.)

Another solid, almost stolid British whydunit, well told and imperturbably written.

The mystery begins when a Victoria Cross is willed to the holder's old regiment and disappears, moving forward gradually and reasonably towards the threatened murder of a Chinese VIP visiting London with a trade mission.

The secret is held until the last page but one; the story will particularly please those who also like Christopher Bush.

DOUBLE TROUBLE, Ed Lacy (*Boardman*, 12s. 6d.)

Told with great zest, this appears to be a simple enough story of a child's kidnapping without motive – the parents are newcomers to New York City and most unlikely targets for such a crime.

In the unfolding of the story – which occurs in a day – the picture widens to take in the wholly unexpected; the police background is good.

THE LONELY MAN, John T. Phillifent (*Boardman*, 12s. 6d.)

A first novel so competently written that I am prepared to bet its author is an established writer under another name.

The plotting is sound, the hero being Chief Inspector Powell; he is involved in a chase after a murderer whose killing lust gives the story some subtle overtones. The police background is very accurate, but the criminal is given away almost at the beginning, the only weak part of the book.

The atmosphere is not unlike those early, non-Maigret Simenons, and comes over well.

PETROVKA 38, Julian Semyonov (*MacGibbon & Kee*, 21s.)

This is all about juvenile delinquents, dope, drink, and all the rest of the sorry picture, given momentum by the murders of a police officer and a bank clerk. There is a curious atmosphere weirdly reminiscent of Sherlock Holmes, were Baker Street lifted into the more violent days of Chandler and Chase.

The story is strong and well told, the intriguing difference being that Petrovka 38 is the telephone number of Moscow's CID, the city where the story is set.

THE TASTE OF PROOF, Bill Knox (*John Long*, 15s.)

The eleventh book by *EWMM*'s contributor, Bill Knox, a writer who seems incapable of turning out a bad story.

This begins with a raid on the safe of a whisky warehouse, and brings in that Glasgow police team of Detective Chief Inspector Thane and Detective Inspector Moss. The official background is expert, the tale competent and forceful, and only a Scotsman could make whisky a sort of secondary hero. Even in the abstract, a Sassenach found the whisky excellent.

WHO STEALS MY NAME, Clay Richards (*Boardman*, 12s. 6d.)

A weak, not over-appropriate title for a good chase crime novel with a wholly new type of hero.

In this Postal Inspector Blake Morgan crosses the United States, with certain detours, after a criminal who has used the mails to defraud, and has killed a postal clerk.

The U.S. Post Office gets its man as surely as the Mounties, and in doing so the author shows us a fresh aspect of crime fighting.

A SCATTER OF PAPERBACKS

LET MY PEOPLE BE, Desmond Reid and MURDERER AT LARGE, W. A. Ballinger (*Mayflower*, 2s. 6d. each)

As one of those writers who turned an honest guinea in his early days contriving Sexton Blake stories, I welcome these revivals of an old favourite. The over-sexed adventures and bogus Mayfair background that marred later Sexton Blakes have now gone. These fresh paperbacks return to the old tradition with typical adventures, adroitly turned and well told. Carry on, please.

THE DEMONIACS, John Dickson Carr (*Penguin*, 3s. 6d.)

Historically well researched, this story of the Bow Street Runners and an old woman murdered on London Bridge has an eerie atmosphere. Cloaks and daggers and excitement.

GIDEON'S STAFF, J. J. Marric (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 3s. 6d.)

A big crime wave is expertly tackled by Commander George Gideon, with realism and solidity in a very competent narrative. Warmly recommended.

GREEN ARCHER, The, Edgar Wallace (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 2s. 6d.)

One of the author's longest novels, this new edition has been excellently revised. The story has somehow doubled its speed into becoming a jet-paced thriller.

KING'S RANSOM, Ed McBain (*Penguin*, 3s. 6d.)

A tough tycoon – King – is asked for ransom when his supposed son is kidnapped. Good and vigorous, yet I feel the author is writing too much, and gripping less.

SCARLET LETTERS, The, Ellery Queen (*Penguin*, 3s. 6d.)

The greatest crime-writing duo tell the story of a jealous and irrational husband, and a seemingly unfaithful wife. A return to the remarkable vigour of *The Roman Hat Mystery*.

THANKS TO THE SAINT, Leslie Charteris (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 3s. 6d.)

Born over thirty years ago, but still going as strong and as light-footed as ever, Simon Templar appears again in six typical adventures, readable and immensely enjoyable.

ALL CHANGE

Pete Hammerton

Willie made his own opportunities
. . . but he was not
the only one

WILLIE CUMMINGS was smiling as he boarded the train at Folkestone, smiling over the brand new razor that nestled in his jacket pocket, and the wonderful thing he intended to do with it.

He had to walk the length of the first-class coach before finding a compartment with just one occupant; a quick glance satisfied him that she would do. Elegant and sophisticated; certainly not the hysterical type.

Willie settled his angular body on the seat opposite and stared at her slender throat. Her eyes flicked disdainfully over him then returned to the window; but a moment later they were back, this time a little disturbed. And when they left his face it was to dart to the newspaper in her lap.

Inwardly he smiled with satisfaction, for all the papers carried the story of the previous evening's murder on the cross-Channel steamer. Soon, he thought, she would begin to fidget.

Sunlight poured into the carriage as the train slid out of the station. Then the corridor door opened and a little girl rushed in with a cry of, "Mummy, we're moving!"

Willie's mouth twitched in irritation. This didn't help matters at all. Still, he could handle it. He tried grinning at the girl, and when she smiled shyly back he leaned across to ruffle her hair. "What's your name?"

"Susan, and my dolly's called Nelly."

"Nelly, is it?" He reflected a moment, but before he could add anything the door was sliding open again.

A portly man with a shining red face and a brief-case shoved past him to take the corner seat, panting, "Whew, that was close!"

Willie raised his eyes in despair, and considered going in search of a more promising carriage; but, he reflected sadly, they must all be filling up now. No, he would have to isolate somebody here. . . .

"What do you think about this maniac killer at large?" he asked with gregarious affability.

"Who says he's a maniac?" snorted the newcomer, mopping his face with a handkerchief. "A man was found murdered on the boat, that's all."

Willie's eyebrows were raised. "But haven't you read the details? Any ordinary murderer would have been content with slitting the throat. This fellow evidently carved his initials all over the poor chap's – "

"Stop it!" The young woman glared at him. "Try to remember there's a child here."

Willie beamed at the girl. "How could I forget the little darling?" he asked. "But they revel in a bit of gore, you know." He winked at her, and she tried hard not to grin. "I'll bet your mummy tells you not to talk to strange men."

"Yes!" snapped the mother. "And you would oblige me by not encouraging her to disobey."

Willie pulled a face at the girl, then closed his eyes as if in meditation. Presently he said dolefully, "The killer's probably on this train, you know." The woman scowled at him. "Could be one of us, in fact; any of us. No need to be a man." He looked round. "Dare say we all got on at Dover or Folkestone?"

The mother's lower lip trembled, but she didn't speak.

The big man laughed. "You can't really be suggesting that he'd hang around in Dover till the hue and cry had been raised? Surely he'd have gone straight on to London last night?"

"Would he, though? They're subtle, these chaps. I'll bet the police were waiting at Victoria when the Golden Arrow rolled in; but they're not going to worry about the ordinary passenger train next morning, are they?"

"Hm."

*

Willie closed his eyes again. It would have to be the man, he decided. It was always easier to deal with one than two. Besides, he could probably get rid of the others.

Snapping his eyes open, he pointed dramatically at the young woman. "You. You're not English, are you?"

For a moment all she could muster was an indignant squeak. "Of course I am!" she protested at last.

Willie narrowed his eyes. "I thought I could detect an accent. Just came over today, did you?"

"Hey, you leave her alone, now." The big man looked hurt. "No need to go picking on her just because of your daft theories."

Willie nodded slowly. "I apologise, madam." He looked

thoughtfully at the man. "You know, you're right about the murderer. He's not really mad."

He saw the interest quicken in their faces, but neither wanted to do the prompting. Eventually the man asked, grudgingly, "Well, what do you know about it?"

Willie smiled mysteriously, one finger on his chin. "It isn't his first killing. I've been following his career for some time, and I know; I understand him." He let one hand drop to fondle the long slim shape in his pocket.

"He fancies himself as a modern Robin Hood. Goes about asking people to contribute to his favourite charity. If they're generous they never learn how close they were to death. But if they're mean. . . ." He made a quick gesture across his throat. "Most people are pretty mean," he finished.

Good, that had stunned them! The girl was leaning forward, wide-eyed, her mother shook her head, evidently amazed at his views.

Again it was the man who asked the obvious, "Where did you get all this information?"

Ignoring him, Willie leaned forward. "Susan, can I talk to Nelly?"

The girl nodded. Giggling, she held out the doll. He took it and caressed the hair. "Pretty curls, just like yours," he said.

"She goes to bye-byes."

He cradled the doll, smiling as its eyes closed. "So she does," he said; then: "Say, 'Mama'."

The girl explained, "She doesn't talk."

"Say, 'Mama,' I said!" He shook the doll viciously.

The girl stared in dismay.

"That'll do!" said her mother, holding out her hand. "Give it back to me."

Willie scowled at her. Ignoring her outstretched arm, he offered the doll to the girl. Just as her hands closed on it he forced his thumb up under the neck. There was a brittle sound; the head broke off and fell.

"Bye-byes," he said, clasping his hands across his chest and leaning back.

The girl wailed.

"Come on," said her mother. "We're going to find another carriage."

"Damned if I'm going," said the man; "but I'll help you with your cases."

Willie sat quite motionless, his face a doleful mask, until they had gone and the man was closing the door behind them. Only then did he let the laugh trickle out.

"That got rid of them," he chuckled. "Now we can talk."

"I *thought* that's what it was. All that crazy talk! Well, let me tell you I disapprove heartily of your methods, and I. . . ." His indignation faded before Willie's steady gaze. He turned to his paper.

Willie studied him for a few minutes in silence, then he said quietly, "I didn't make it all up." He leaned across. "I bet you'd like to hear the rest of the story."

*

The big man put down his paper, obviously uneasy, yet evidently unwilling to antagonise his strange carriage mate. "All right, talk if you must. But couldn't we have some other topic?"

"Very well. What are you – a businessman?"

The question seemed to startle him. Which was strange, Willie thought; most people liked to talk about themselves.

"Er, no. I'm a scientist. A meteorologist."

"Really? That's interesting. I suppose the first thing people say is, 'What's it going to do tomorrow?' "

He nodded uneasily. "Something like that."

Willie pointed out the window. "I know what you could tell me. See those clouds over the Downs – the big thunderheads? What is it you call them? Something majestic and Latin, isn't it?"

His tongue touched his lips. "Yes . . . er, cumulus."

"Oh no, they're the little ones. I mean those big hefty things; surely you know the word I mean."

"No. . . . As a matter of fact I – I don't actually do any forecasting. I'm in the statistics department."

"Strange," Willie mused. "A Met. man who doesn't even know a cumulo-nimbus when he sees one. . . ."

The big man slapped his paper against his knee. "Now listen here. I'm not a meteorologist – you caught me there – but I don't make a habit of discussing my business with total strangers. All right?"

Willie laughed softly. "It's funny, really. I don't care who knows my job." His hand eased out of his pocket with the razor and flicked it open. "Cut-throats, they call them. Remember?"

"Of course." He sat back, tense.

"Well, I travel in these. You'd be surprised how they're catching on. It's a reaction against these electric things, I suppose."

He ran the blade expertly down his cheek. "Wonderfully smooth, once you get the hang of them. Like to try?"

"No." The big man touched his throat. "Very kind of you, all the same."

"Be no trouble." Willie laid the open blade on the seat beside him. "Would you believe it? Ten thousand people in Dover alone have placed orders for these. Ten thousand!"

"But – "

Willie held up his hand. "I know just what you're going to say. The entire population can't be forty thousand, and half of those are women." He nodded wisely. "Doesn't that just prove my point? This is going to be the biggest thing since television!"

"That's not what I was going to say." The big man spoke slowly, as if afraid of giving offence. "I was going to remark that you got on at Folkestone, not Dover."

Willie let the silence grow taut.

"Ah yes, perceptive of you," he said at last. "I came on by bus, you see." He paused. "But then, how did *you* know that? I was already here when you arrived."

The big man abruptly stood up, tucking his brief-case under his arm.

Willie stood too, barring his way. "Please don't leave yet."

"But I get off at Ashford. I want to be first at the door; I have a bus to catch."

Willie kept his voice low, soothing. "Oh, sit down now. There's plenty of time." Absent-mindedly he picked up the razor. "I wanted to discuss a pet charity of mine."

"Y-you're carrying this joke too far." The big man backed to his corner. Willie touched his shoulder, and he sat.

And then the door opened and a sombre voice droned, "Tickets, please."

The big man struggled to stand. "Let me up!"

He mustn't escape now. Willie narrowed his eyes in menace, but spoke gently. "It's no use, sir; if you leave me now I'll only follow. I'm going to keep . . . pestering you till you do contribute to this chairty I was talking about."

"Tickets, please."

Willie felt in his pocket and passed back the ticket without turning. From this angle the ticket inspector couldn't possibly see the razor. He jerked it slightly in silent threat.

The big man's hands trembled as he took out his wallet and

extracted the ticket. Willie carefully removed the wallet from his fingers.

"Thank you, sir." A uniformed arm returned the tickets. Then came the sound of the door sliding shut.

"Wait!"

Willie looked up sharply at the change in the big man's voice. He was actually grinning! In desperation Willie thrust the blade towards his throat. Incredibly, his victim laughed aloud. Then he pushed, and Willie was forced to sit, dismayed, deflated.

The ticket inspector had reopened the door, and now stood staring.

The fat man's whole personality had changed. "Witness this," he said brisky. "You saw the razor at my throat? Good. And see that wallet he's got? It's mine."

Dazed, Willie handed it back.

"Look here." Jovially the big man unfolded a tattered form. "That's me: Detective-sergeant Morrow. And this – " He thrust a photograph at Willie " – is you. Willie Cummings, one of the best Con-men in the business. And what an opportunist!"

Willie suddenly felt old. He let the razor fall. "You followed me on the train," he said numbly.

Morrow laughed. "All that play, and harmless as a baby really." He turned to the waiting ticket inspector. "Now I want you to remember everything you saw and heard here."

"All right," Willie interrupted. "I won't try and wriggle out."

"Well!" Morrow beamed. "That's – "

Suddenly the three men were in a heap as the train screeched and jerked to a halt.

Disentangling himself, the detective moved to the door. In the corridor he stopped a fleeing man. "What's happened?"

"Let me past! Let me go! Murder! In the guard's van. Man with 'is throat slit open!"

Morrow charged back the way the man had come.

"Well I'll be damned!" Willie grinned up at the ticket inspector. "Don't worry. I won't try to escape."

"You won't escape."

Willie saw then how cold the man's eyes were; and he saw that the uniform didn't quite fit.

The official nodded. "As you seem to have noticed, he was a smaller man than me." Then he picked up the razor and tested its edge on his thumb before advancing.

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.*

Just like Philip Marlowe

You headed my letter in February (and thank you for answering my questions): Not Really Like Dave Marlowe.

Did you mean *Philip*? It puzzled me as something more than meets the (private) eye, or was it a gap in the editorial omniscience?

Lostock, Nr. Bolton. J. L. GLAZER

● *Sheer editorial cunning, Mr. Glazer. Originally a proof error, we left it as a 'deliberate mistake' to see what happened. You and four others pointed it out.*

Suggestions

I have just bought my first *EWMM* and find it very good indeed; I wish I had seen it before.

I would like to suggest (if I may) things I hope to see published: (a) possibly a long Wallace story in serial form and (b) a page of 'wants' for Wallace books.

Diss, Norfolk. HERBERT A. SMITH

● *The first suggestion is already scheduled for a later issue. The second we liked so much it starts right away!*

Bouquets, and Some Bricks

Read with interest the first issue [February] under the new editor. Tremendous fun, and a fine variety of reading matter. Peter Ardouin is a poppet of a writer. More, please.

Portsmouth. (Miss) ELLIE PETERS

You have produced a well-balanced content with verve and competence. I liked in particular *The Good Old Days* and *In*

Durance Vile. After all these years Edgar Wallace reads as well as ever. Sincere congratulations.
Dartford, Kent. IAN RICHMOND

● *Others, too, liked* In Durance Vile. *We offer the second and final part in this issue.*

I liked the new style of contents very much, but I thought the cover picture [February] awful. I'm sure readers would like something less suited to a penny dreadful and more up to the good material inside.
Henley-on-Thames. E. F. RODGERS

Good, good, good! I'm all for John de Sola and the period piece. Don't agree about the *Top 20 Cornerstones*, but maybe you're right. That cover! Cheap and nasty!
London, N.8. E. D. L. LUCAS

● *The cover was a matter of production take-over, and 'inherited', as it were. Our new dress came with March. Like it, Mr. Rodgers and Mr. Lucas?*

The new-type *EWMM* certainly pleased this reader. I liked (very much) Edgar Wallace, Peter Ardouin, Nigel Morland, and the crossword. Welcome to our own Bill Knox. Thank you for taking up my notion for the *Top 20*; I was most flattered.
Glasgow, W.5. P. E. MUND

A Matter of English

I suppose that crime writers consider that they have a certain amount of licence to adopt a "slick" and slangy style. I find, however, that they are apt to put Americanisms into the mouths of English characters, e.g. "O.K., so I'm scared," or "it looks like we're too late". Authors as a whole, however, are far less guilty of mutilated English and Americanisms than journalists and reporters, especially those writing in the newspapers. In the Press crude Americanisms appear regularly, such as "make a getaway" for "escape", "make a come-back" for "return" or "re-appear", "step-up" for any increase, however gradual; not to mention vague and meaningless expressions like "split-second", "within minutes" or "within hours". (How many hours?)

Not only popular writers but large numbers of people in this

country are copying the Americans more and more, particularly in the matter of adding "out", "up", etc. to nearly every verb, e.g. "check up on", "meet up with", "test out", "start in", "sound out" and – a particularly foolish one – "drown out" (the Americans even speak of "closing out" a file!) Such American expressions as "shut-down", "the run-down", "the Cut-back", "the set-up", "an all-time high", and "a new low" are as unnecessary as they are crude; they may be suitable for "first year" Americans from Europe, but unworthy of educated Britons.

The reporters' fondness for using ready-made phrases often leads to ludicrous results. I read in a newspaper: "The lorry burned furiously and in a few minutes was *reduced to matchwood*"; and I frequently see "the building collapsed like a pack of cards". (How does a pack of cards collapse?) Another bit of nonsense that appears regularly in newspapers is "went through it with a fine tooth-comb", or sometimes "with a tooth-comb"! Is there a comb for cleaning teeth, or do the writers mean a "a fine-toothed comb"?

May I mention some common examples of (*a*) wrong grammar and (*b*) misuse of words:

(*a*) 1. "A man whom the police think may be able to help" is wrong; it should be "a man who, the police think, may be able . . ."

2. "After he went" is wrong; it should be "after he had gone".

3. "He said he is" should be "he said he was".

(*b*) 1. "Alibi" does not mean "excuse" but "elsewhere".

2. "Crescendo" does not mean a "a loud noise", but "growing" or "increasing".

3. "Brittle" does not mean hard, nor "bright", but "fragile", "easily broken".

4. "Connive" does not mean "conspire" or "plot", but "wink (at)".

London, S.W.20. T. J. GAHAGAN

● *In awarding Mr. Gahagan a guinea for this month's best letter, we concur but hesitate to throw any stones at our fellows since we probably share a common glass-house.*

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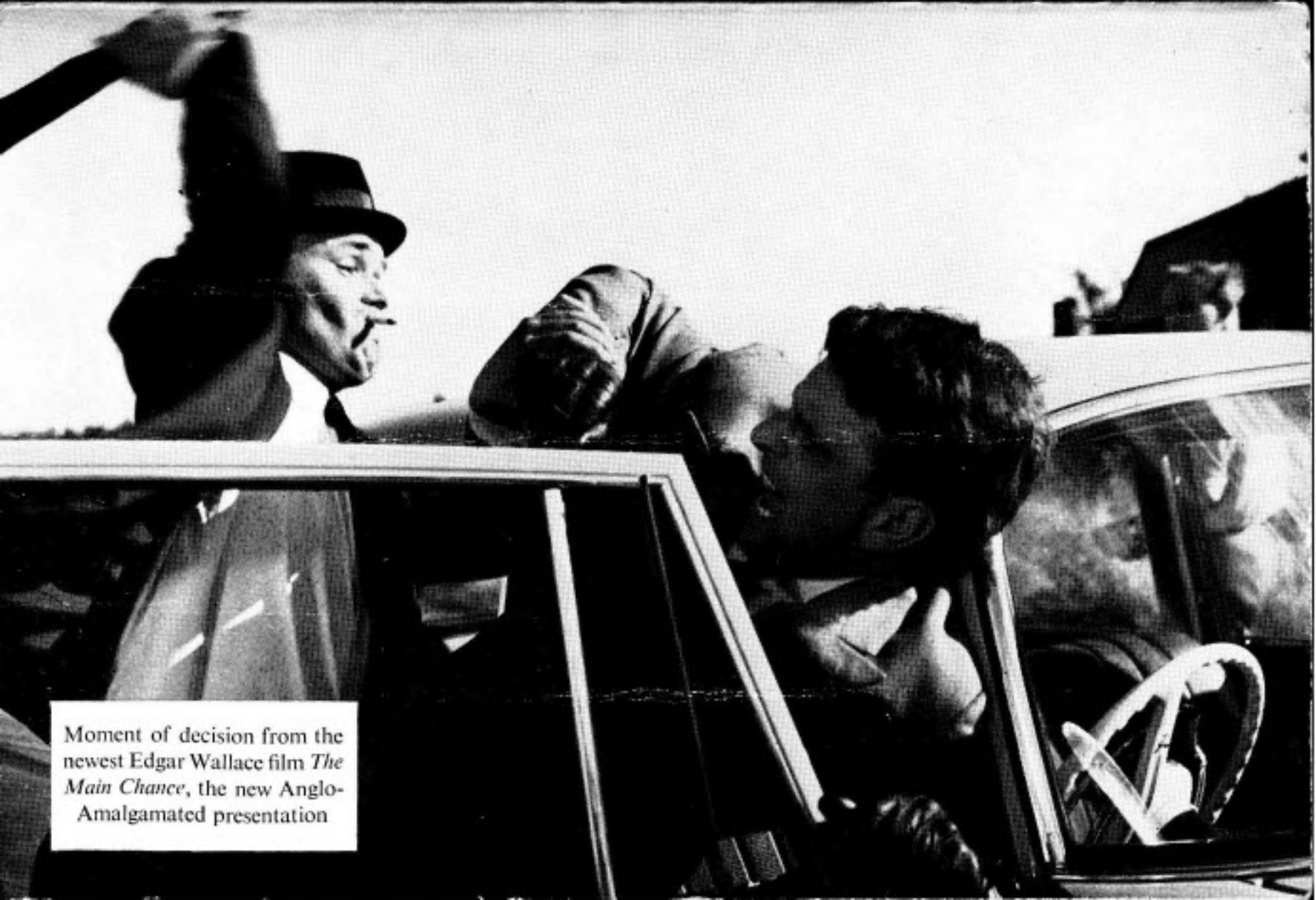

Moment of decision from the newest Edgar Wallace film *The Main Chance*, the new Anglo-Amalgamated presentation