Edgar Wallace

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

EDGAR WALLACE
The Sirius Man
MARTEN CUMBERLAND
T. C. H. JACOBS
ED LACY
★ a new short story ★
VICTOR CANNING
The Handicap
and other outstanding stories and features plus a holiday competition

No. 13
Vol. 2

3/-

Edgar Wallace

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Mystery Magazine

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Mystery, Crime, and Detection for the Aficionado

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NIGEL MORLAND, *Editor.*

THERE is a curious belief prevailing in some quarters that 'anybody' can write a crime novel, so 'anybody' is always willing to try, from the romantic novelist to the learned historian, they sit down for a few weeks and 'bash out' a whodunit.

And how very surprised they are when it refuses to come right, or it proves bitterly hard to complete. After all, what could be more simple? A beginning; a middle: an end Whodunit, whydunit . . . almost child's play.

Briefly

No names no pack-drill but many an able writer in other fields has fallen flat on his face when his efficient talent was diverted to churn out a crime novel as a quick, money-making stop-gap. We have in our time been asked to read this or that mystery in manuscript form from the hands of experienced authors from quite different branches of fiction and non-fiction. And how difficult it has been to say nicely, 'It's awful'.

The craft is a deceptive one. Enthusiasm is fine but it isn't nearly enough, nor will a quick browse through *Police Law* and Taylor's *Medical Jurisprudence* provide the know-how.

New blood is always welcome in the field of crime fiction, but it is without doubt also the hardest field of fiction to get into and certainly the toughest in which to succeed.

The good crime novelist is a very able fellow indeed. Often he has learned the art of writing in other circles, or has served a gruelling apprenticeship, writing and writing and writing . . . and being rejected for years. While this has been going on he has read enormously; he has also been learning from practical lessons, and what learning! Medical jurisprudence; forensic chemistry; police procedure; science in many aspects; criminology . . . the list is almost endless. And on top of all this he can invariably write expertly on one or more outside professions or crafts. He knows how to create, sustain, and honestly solve a baffling problem. Above all, he is a genuine stylist. As W. Somerset Maugham once stated truly:

'I have a notion that when the historians of literature come to discourse upon the fiction produced by the English-speaking peoples during the first half of this century, they will pass somewhat lightly over the productions of the serious novelists and turn their attentions to the immense and varied achievement of the detective writers'.

The Editor

Edgar Wallace

THE SIRIUS MAN

The Orator, that taciturn detective, is at his best in the queer case of the uncle and the vanishing secretary

THE ORATOR was not in his most amiable mood when the telephone bell rang. He looked round helplessly for his clerk, for he hated telephone calls: they made greater demands on speech than he was prepared to meet.

"Is that Mr. Rater?"

Girls' voices are not easily recognizable through a telephone receiver, but Chief Inspector Oliver Rater had no difficulty in identifying the speaker.

"Yes, Miss Linstead."

It would have been unpardonable if he had forgotten her, for less than a year before she had been his secretary, a dark-haired girl, incorrigibly shy and nervous, who had given up work at the earnest request of her uncle, who for some reason had suddenly become aware of her existence. She was now, he remembered vaguely, living in a handsome flat in Mayfair.

"I wonder if it's possible to see you, Mr. Rater? It's a very important matter to me . . . nothing to do with the police, of course . . . and yet it is in a way—I mean my trouble—but you were so kind to me . . ."

She ended on a note of incoherence.

The Orator rubbed his nose thoughtfully. He was a man who had very few likes and many dislikes. He liked Betty Linstead for reasons which had no association with her pretti-

ness. She was efficient, accurate and silent. Talkative secretaries drove him mad: secretaries who demanded that he should discuss the weather he loathed. He began liking her when he found that she did not think it necessary to say 'Good morning'.

"I'm not busy; I'll come along," he said, and scribbled down her address on the blotting-pad.

He had an idea that Brook Manor was a most expensive block of flats, but he discovered it to be more exclusive than he had imagined- a place of glass and metal doors, of dignified hall porters who had the appearance of family retainers, of heavily carpeted corridors. When he was admitted to No. 9 he found himself in an apartment so luxuriously appointed and furnished that his attitude towards the girl who came to meet him was a little reserved. This was not the plainly dressed secretary he knew. About her wrist were three bracelets, the value of which probably represented Mr. Rater's salary for at least four years.

"I'm so glad you came, Mr. Rater," she said breathlessly. "I want you to meet Arthur—Mr. Arthur Menden."

She was the same fluttering, nervous creature he had known in other days. She led him into the drawing-room and introduced him to a good-looking man; and if Mr. Rater was embarrassed by the splendour of the flat, he was more embarrassed by the presence of this third party.

"It's all dreadfully complicated," said Betty, in her quick, frightened way. "It's about uncle . . . and Arthur. Uncle doesn't wish me to marry Arthur . . ."

Inwardly the Orator groaned. He had expected many problems, but that of the young lady in love with a man objectionable to her relatives was the last he anticipated. She must have guessed his growing annoyance, for she almost pushed him into an armchair.

"I must tell you everything from the beginning. Uncle Julian you know, of course—everybody knows Uncle Julian. He's a bachelor. But he's always been very kind to me, and made me a small allowance when I was working for you. Just enough to live on- I think he would have given me more, but he believes in girls working for their living. I only saw him once in six months, unless I met him by accident. I used to dine with him on Christmas Day, if he was in London. Once he asked me

down to his box at Ascot, but I made him so uncomfortable, and was so uncomfortable myself, that I rather dreaded those meetings."

"I think, in fairness to your uncle, you ought to tell Mr. Rater that there was nothing unpleasant about Julian Linstead. He simply didn't wish to be bothered with girls," interrupted Arthur Menden. And then, with a laugh: "He's a strange old devil and I've no reason to excuse him. But I haven't been exactly straightforward in the matter——"

"It was my fault entirely," interrupted Betty.

"When did you come into this property?" The Orator was heavily sarcastic as he comprehended the beauties of the room with a wave of his hand.

"That's what I'm trying to tell you," she said. "It was when I was working at Scotland Yard that I had a very urgent letter from uncle asking me to come and dine with him. I knew Arthur then, of course. We'd been—friends for a long time. I dined with Uncle Julian at the Carlton. He offered me the long lease of a big flat; he said he would furnish it regardless of cost, and that he would pay me five thousand a year so long as I didn't marry. I was bewildered at first, but eventually, after another meeting, I agreed. I don't suppose any girl would think three times about such an offer. He was my father's brother, and I was his only relative, and it was always understood that I was his heiress.

"I didn't really think very seriously about the clause prohibiting my marriage—I thought that was just a provision for my own protection, but I soon discovered that he was very much in earnest. He found out about Arthur, I really think, by employing detectives to watch us. He came round here one day in a state of terrible excitement and begged me not to think of marrying Arthur or anybody else. He made me promise that I would tell him before anybody when I had found the man I wanted to marry. I didn't really like it."

"Does he know Mr. Menden?" asked the Orator.

She shook her head.

"No. That's a queer thing: he had no objections to Mr. Menden as an individual until he learnt that I was very fond of him."

"And then?"

"Oh, then he was beastly—he did everything he possibly could to ruin Arthur."

Arthur interrupted: he was a young man with a sense of justice.

"I don't know whether you'd call it ruin to be offered a job in the Argentine, but he certainly was very anxious to get me out of the way. Naturally I wouldn't like Betty to lose her allowance, but thank the Lord I'm earning enough to keep two."

"Then you're getting married?"

She nodded slowly.

"We've been married four months," she said, and stared at him in fright.

"The devil you have!" said the Orator.

She nodded again.

"It was underhanded, but . . . I don't know. I must have been a little crazy, but I hadn't the courage to tell Uncle Julian, and I wouldn't let Arthur tell him either. What I have done is to write to him today, telling him I'm going to be married tomorrow. You see, we were married in a registrar's office and, somehow, I do want to be married in a church."

"So you're being married all over again and you're making a false declaration, and you want me to get you out of all your trouble before you get into it?" said the Orator.

"No—you're wrong," Betty Linstead said, quickly. "It is quite legal; Arthur has made enquiries. Lots of people get married in churches of different denominations, one for the husband and one for the wife; and lots of others go through two ceremonies, the one civil and the other religious. I want the religious one for . . . for a special reason."

The Orator sighed heavily.

"All this is interesting," he said, "but what exactly do you wish me to do?"

The young people looked at one another, and it was the man who spoke.

"The truth is, Mr. Rater, Betty thinks her uncle is mad. It isn't the loss of the money that worries her, it is the fear of what may happen to— well, to me, when Julian Linstead hears about the marriage. He is insane on the subject of Betty remaining a spinster. And he's one of the nicest of men on any other subject—that's the weirdness of it. There isn't anybody who could say a word against him. I doubt if he has an enemy in

the world. Honestly, I'm rather scared about what will happen —not to myself but to Betty."

A light began to dawn on Mr. Rater.

"You want police protection?"

They nodded together, so like children in their concern that the Orator almost broke a lifetime's habit and laughed.

"I think you're crazy, but I'll see what I can do about it," he said.

He was more amused than annoyed at the trivial cause of his summons. It was a simple matter to have the house watched, but he had no intention of wasting three perfectly good detectives on such a job—and here he was wrong.

★

Julian George Linstead was an antique dealer who had speculated on the Stock Exchange to such purpose that he was no longer interested in antiques, which means that he was not an antiquarian at heart but had engaged his energies and such genius as he possessed in the buying and selling of furniture, pictures and the like, having acquired in his youth the technique necessary for the successful prosecution of his business.

He was a bachelor of forty-five, good-looking in a dark and rather sinister way. He was a man of very charming manners, had a sense of humour, was a generous giver to charities, but rather shy of having his name associated with his many gifts.

He had a flat in Curzon Street which was run by a Mrs. Aldred, an elderly and unprepossessing housekeeper. There were also living in the flat a maid, Rosie Liffing, and Mr. Aldred, who acted as butler-valet. These three people were commonplace and respectable folk: the girl rather plain and stout, and a member of the congregation of Plymouth Brethren.

Mr. Linstead did not entertain at the flat; on those occasions when he gave a party it was invariably at the Carlton Hotel. Even these were of a modest kind. So far as could be ascertained, he had no entanglements of an embarrassing nature. He was a member of the Junior Carlton.

So he lived blamelessly, accepting his annual tax assessment as an act of God, and fulfilling the social obligations which convention dictated in a quiet and unostentatious fashion. He had a shoot in Norfolk, rented a fishing in Scotland, hunted twice a week in the early weeks of the season, had a box at Ascot (which more often than not he occupied alone) and a

small yacht in Southampton Water. He was at Deauville and Nice at the right moment, and spent at least three weeks at St. Moritz in the winter. People knew him as well off; he was, indeed, an exceedingly rich man. His saturnity denied him a few acquaintances who might have made life interesting, and a larger number who would certainly have made living expensive.

He had one amiable weakness, an interest in the occult, and was a friend of that remarkable man, Professor Henry Hoylash, the geometrical astrologer. Professor Hoylash was a mild little man who could and did predict world events with amazing accuracy. He was known as 'The Sirius Man' because all his prophecies were in some mysterious fashion founded on the position in the heavens of this star at the date when the Pyramids were built. It was a science that had many votaries, and Mr. Linstead, who had not even known that there was such a star, and who had the impression, gained from travel posters, that the Pyramids were erected to advertise Thomas Cook & Sons, was terribly impressed when the subject was explained to him.

Professor Hoylash came occasionally to dinner, and on one occasion did persuade Linstead to forego his winter sports holiday to make a trip to Cairo.

★

Mr. Rater made his enquiries and learned all that there was to be learnt about Mr. Linstead. Whatever change of attitude his niece may have detected, such change had been invisible to his servants. Mr. Aldred, the butler, who spoke freely to one of Mr. Rater's men—it was in the saloon bar of the Cow and Gate—said that a better employer never existed.

"He's taken up with these ghosts and spirits that the professor's so keen on and he talks about Egyptian gods and things but, bless his heart and soul, isn't a gentleman entitled to his hobbies?"

The detective pressed him on the question of Mr. Linstead's occultisms.

"There's nothing in it," protested the butler. "He amuses himself casting horoscopes, and is always asking what hour and day in the year I was born and my wife was born; otherwise you'd never know that he's gone in for this Egyptian stuff."

Apparently Mr. Linstead had taken up his studies with some seriousness. He had acquired a library of sorts on occult subjects, had a marvellous model of the Pyramids that took to pieces, would spend hours in making mysterious calculations.

The Orator's interest in Mr. Linstead's obsessions was hardly alive to start with—it waned into oblivion as soon as his enquiries were completed. After all, there was nothing remarkable in a rich uncle holding views about the destination of his money, for Betty was certainly his heiress. He returned to Scotland Yard, signed a few letters, heard the reports of his immediate subordinates and went home.

He went to bed early that evening, and he was so sound a sleeper that he did not hear the telephone ring at first, but after some time, cursing silently, he slid from his bed and picked it up.

"It's Arthur Menden, sir," said an anxious voice at the other end of the wire. "You remember you saw me at Betty's flat."

"Why, yes——"

The Orator realized from the young man's hoarse voice that somethting was wrong.

"She has been spirited away tonight—I'm speaking from her flat."

"Spirited away? What the devil do you mean? Don't talk. I'll come round."

He dressed furiously. Why should he, a responsible police official, be called out of bed in the middle of the night on such a fool's errand?

He found Mr. Menden in a state of agitation which he did not imagine could be possible in so phlegmatic a young man. Apparently he had been unaware of the disappearance until midnight.

Although he and Betty were married, they lived apart. Ordinarily he would have spent the evening with her, and it was at her request that he had gone to his own flat after dining with her at Ciro's Grill and seeing her home. At half-past ten he was called upon the telephone by a stranger, who said that he was speaking for the head of an engineering company for whom Menden worked. The caller asked him to go at once to the senior partner's house on Kingston Hill to discuss a cable that had arrived from Bermuda, where, in point of fact, Arthur Menden's firm had a big contract.

Never suspecting that there was anything wrong, he dressed, found a taxi and was driven to Kingston. Here he found a birthday party in progress. Mr. Fallaby, the engineer in question, had no knowledge whatever of the call and had no cable to discuss. Puzzled and annoyed by the hoax, Menden went back to his apartment. He arrived home at a quarter to one and heard the telephone bell ringing when he went in. It was Betty's maid. She had tried for an hour to get in touch with the husband of her mistress, but without result.

The story she told was that at eleven o'clock Betty had been called up by somebody who said he was the porter of her husband's flat. Would she go to the flat at once? He must have said something more, but this was all the maid knew. Looking out of the window, she saw a car standing by the pavement and saw Betty talking to a man for a little while before she entered the car with him and drove off.

"Did she recognize the man or the car?"

The maid shook her head. It was a very dark night, she thought the car was a Rolls-Royce—it was a very long one.

The girl dressed and waited for Betty's return. When twelve o'clock came, she became alarmed and rang up Menden's flat —to receive no answer.

That was all the information she could give and was, indeed, the only information available.

"It's Julian Linstead! It can't be anybody else," said Arthur Menden, in a state of nervous frenzy. "I waited for you to come, Mr. Rater, otherwise I'd have been at his flat by now."

The Orator could find no other explanation for the girl's flight. She had no friends in London and would not have gone off alone in a car with a stranger.

The only other clue, if it was a clue, was the fact that she had taken her sleeping things with her—her brush and comb were gone from the dressing-table and her nightdress and slippers were missing.

Ten minutes later they were knocking at the door of Mr. Linstead's flat. After a while the door was opened by the butler, who was in his dressing-gown.

He was too picturesquely dishevelled for conviction. The Orator saw that his shoes were laced and tied and this did not accord, exactly, with the disorder of his hair.

"No, sir. Mr. Linstead went out of town yesterday morning. I think he went to Paris——"

His protest was a little too loud. The Orator looked him in the eyes.

"I am a police officer," he said simply, and he saw the man look and blink.

"Will you let me write a letter to Mr. Linstead?"

The man nodded mutely, led the way into Mr. Linstead's handsome study and switched on the lights. The Orator sat down at the desk, looked left and right and, stooping, lifted the waste-paper basket and took out two crumpled envelopes. These he smoothed out on the table before him, and recognized that the first was in the handwriting of Betty Linstead. It had been posted early that morning.

He beckoned Mr. Aldred.

"Here's a letter addressed to Mr. Linstead posted this morning, delivered this afternoon. Who opened it?"

The man swallowed, but said nothing.

"Mr. Linstead opened it," the Orator went on; "therefore he couldn't have gone to Paris this morning. It arrived this evening, didn't it?"

Confronted with this evidence of the omnipotence of Scotland Yard, the butler was dumb.

"Where's Mr. Linstead gone?"

The man could only shake his head and make curious sounds. Obviously on this matter he was ignorant. He knew Mr. Linstead had one or two little places in the country. Brighton was one favourite haunt and he had an unpretentious bungalow on the Thames, but the butler was not quite sure where; and the Thames, as the Orator remarked sardonically, was a rather long river, mainly fringed with bungalows in which wealthy and semi-wealthy bachelors spend their week-ends.

He questioned the other members of the household. They were genuinely without information. If there was anybody who was privy to Mr. Linstead's movements it was the butler and no other, and he had relapsed into a dogged silence, relieved with denials. The man was dismissed, and Mr. Rater had a consultation with the bereaved husband.

"I think the matter is not as serious as you imagine," he said, "but I shall know better when I have had a talk with this bird. Walk round the houses for an hour and come back. You

understand, of course, that I am acting without any authority or warrant, and that I am on a kick in the pants to nothing."

No sooner was the young man gone than the Orator sent for the butler. For the greater part of half an hour he questioned and cross-questioned, illicitly examined the contents of such drawers as were open and at least a dozen volumes of Mr. Linstead's occult library. In that space of time he became acquainted with more devils and gods than he had dreamed existed: Hat and Seth and Osiris and bull-headed monstrosities that Tutankhamen knew; but his principal discovery was in one of the drawers of Mr. Linstead's desk.

★

By the time Arthur Menden had returned, the Orator had concluded his investigations and had formulated an exact theory.

"I don't think there's any trouble coming to your young lady. I advise you to go home and get a night's sleep. I'm going to wait here until brother Julian returns."

"Do you know where he's staying?"

The Orator shook his head.

"Haven't the slightest idea, and it doesn't matter," he said curtly.

It was with considerable reluctance that Menden at last took his departure, though not to bed: looking out of the window, the Orator saw him pacing restlessly up and down the opposite pavement.

It was half-past six o'clock when the detective heard a key in the hall lock and, anticipating the butler, whom he pushed back into his room, he opened the door.

Julian Linstead's eyes were so heavy with sleep and weariness that he did not observe that it was a stranger standing in the dark hallway and, brushing past him with no word of thanks, he walked quickly into his study. He stood for a moment just inside the room, sniffing the unexpected fragrance of the cigar which the Orator had been smoking, and then turned to face the detective.

"Why, what—what's wrong?" he stammered.

"You," said the Orator and then Linstead recognized him.

"You're Mr. Rater, from Scotland Yard?" he said, in a shrill, almost hysterical voice.

The Orator nodded. He was a little taken aback by the recognition, for he never dreamed he was amongst the famous figures of contemporary history.

"Where is Miss Linstead?" he asked.

"Miss Linstead? My niece?" Julian made a heroic attempt to appear unconcerned. "Good heavens, what has happened to her, and why on earth should I know?"

"Where is she?"

"I swear to you——"

"What's the use, Mr. Linstead?" The Orator's voice was one of infinite weariness. "I haven't been sitting up all night to have this kind of child's talk handed to me. I know pretty well that she's at your bungalow on the Thames, but I don't happen to know where your bungalow is situated, though I can find it in half an hour after I return to Scotland Yard."

The man's unshaven face was white and haggard.

"All right," he said, and suddenly seemed to grow old. "Have it your own way: she is there, and she's quite safe and well. I took her there last night and got her a woman attendant from a mental home to look after her. She won't be hurt, and I hope to be able to bring her to reason. I don't mean she's mad," he went on quickly. "God forbid that she should be! Only . . ."

"Only you take a great deal too much notice of that bogy friend of yours, Professor Hoylash," said the Orator quietly.

Julian looked up quickly.

"What do you mean?"

"That's why you're trying to prevent your niece from marrying. Well, you'll be interested to know, and apparently she hasn't told you, that she's already married.

A look of horror came to Linstead's face.

"Married?" he croaked.

"Married four months ago," said the Orator.

He saw the terror in Linstead's face vanish. It was replaced by a look of wonder and then of infinite relief.

"Four months ago?" he repeated in a hollow tone. "But that is impossible——"

"It isn't impossible," said the Orator. "Horoscopes are impossible. I have just been examining a couple, and putting two and two together. Your Professor Hoylash drew up two horoscopes, one of your life and one of your niece's, and he

discovered that you would die on the day she was married. And you're alive."

"But she never told me . . . why should she say she is going to be married . . . in a church . . . tomorrow?"

"There's a very good reason, I suspect," said the Orator drily. "A little one but a good one. I shouldn't be surprised if there are a couple of heirs to your property in a few months' time."

A HOLIDAY CRIME STORY FOR CHRISTMAS

EWMM has an idea that it might be a pleasant moment of nostalgia on December 1, 1965 (when issue No. 17 is published) to print a prize-winning short-short story written about summer, and set in holiday-time.

The contest, then, is open to all *EWMM* readers. Stories can be between 500 and 1,000 words, told with punch and with a surprise ending. They can be set anywhere in the world, about anything, but of course crime stories. Prize, ten guineas for the British First Serial and Commonwealth Rights, the winning story to appear on December 1. If the successful story is published in any foreign edition of *EWMM* the winner will be paid at prevailing rates.

Rules are simple :

Stories should be the writer's original, unpublished work, and typewritten on one side of the paper.

Manuscripts will only be returned if a stamped, addressed envelope is enclosed.

Any stories which fail to win a prize will receive editorial consideration for possible future publication, such acceptances being paid for at standard rates.

The Editor's decision in all matters is final. No correspondence can be entered into concerning this contest.

Closing date for entries is October 1, 1965. Entries must be addressed : Story Contest, *Edgar Wallace Mystery Magazine*, 4, Bradmore Road, Oxford, and correctly stamped, and sealed.

THE SECRET LEGATEE

MARTEN CUMBERLAND

Saturnin Dax is confronted with an anonymous letter-writer and a man apparently going out of his mind

FELIX NORMAN came into the office of Commissaire Saturnin Dax with a particularly virile air. He perched on a corner of his superior-officer's desk, and swung a tweed-clad leg.

"This is our lucky day," he announced. "We have a visitor. And what a visitor! Chief, I want a job that will take me to Canada."

Saturnin looked up suspiciously.

"Suppose you try to be coherent?" he suggested. "I take it there is a lady waiting to see me, that she is a Canadian, and not altogether unattractive?"

Felix produced a visiting-card and gave it to the Commissaire. It read: *Mademoiselle Suzanne Lesage : Beautician.* Below, engraved in smaller type, were the words: *320a Avenue Victor Hugo. Hours : Eleven to Four. Telephone, Triomphe 01 : 29.*

Saturnin got up, and walked over to his stove. He lifted his coat at the back, and looked at Felix.

"Is she a French-Canadian?"

Felix nodded and grinned.

"I had a talk with her in the waiting-room. I said you'd see her at once if I used my influence. Do you know what 'Beautician' means? It's an American term that—"

"Yes, yes. Slapping faces. Creaming them. Steaming them.

Packing them in ice. Taking them out; and demanding quantities of francs — and getting them." Saturnin pointed to a small desk in a corner. "Shorthand notes for you, my boy."

"Okay," said Felix. "But I'm wondering if I could get a 'facial' in my lunch-hour now and then. I wouldn't care if she iced or steamed! Wait till you see her!"

Saturnin used his telephone, and the girl who was shown a minute later into his office certainly seemed to explain Felix Norman's unusual lack of poise.

Mademoiselle Suzanne Lesage was blonde and tall. She radiated health and beauty; and she had personality. Her smile was frank and confident without being complacent; her clothes manifested chic combined with perfect taste.

Without the slightest sign of self-consciousness she glanced at the wide-eyed brigadier, and smiled at Saturnin as he placed a chair for her.

"It is kind of you to see me, Commissaire," she said. "I have often heard of you, though I have been in Paris only some six months. Madame Arvel, one of my clients, is always saying how much she owes to you."

Saturnin grunted.

"You run a beauty-parlour here, mademoiselle?"

"Yes. I'm beginning to do rather well. I've worked hard, at dermatology, and so on. And then, being French-Canadian, I speak French and English equally well — or equally badly!"

She smiled again, and Saturnin smiled in return.

"I am sure you will continue to have success, mademoiselle," he said. "If I may say so, you are obviously one of those fortunate people working in exactly the right job."

Her face became grave.

"I suppose that is why this has happened," she said. "I think some actresses and film stars sometimes have the same experience. I've been photographed in the papers, for publicity. But, all the same, there is no reason why one should be misunderstood. I call it beastly."

The commissaire's eyes had become as serious as hers.

"Have you received some anonymous letters?" he said.

She nodded, and opened her bag.

"I destroyed the first two, and did my best to forget them. But, when a third came, I felt I needed advice. All three letters were alike in language. Here is the one I had this morning."

She gave him a letter, in an envelope on which was typed her name and address. The envelope was cheap and common. The letter had been posted the previous evening in the ninth *arrondissement*.

Saturnin slipped a glove on his left hand and fingered the letter gingerly. After examining the envelope, he took out the letter, and grunted as he did so. The notepaper was grey-blue and of the very finest quality. The sheet of paper had been cut right across the top, cleanly, and as though with sharp scissors. The letter began with the words: 'Beautiful Creature.' After that there was a page and a half of filth, unsigned.

As the commissaire read, a little spot of unusual colour crept into his mahogany cheeks. But, when he looked at the girl, he saw nothing in her eyes save repugnance.

"Beastly, isn't it?" she said. "But I suppose you have seen this sort of stuff before? It is really clinical; and I suppose the writer is more or less mad. But, whether the man is irresponsible or not, I feel I would like the letter traced, if possible, and this horrible business stopped."

"Evidently," said Saturnin. "Believe me, mademoiselle, this person will be stopped. Do you leave your beauty-parlour at four in the afternoon?"

"Well, not always. Those hours look good on the business card — I mean for fashionable women. But people often descend on me at four, or later, and keep me and my two assistants busy. And then clients telephone and beg for an appointment out of hours. So, one way and another, it's difficult to close up just when I like. It's a bit of a nuisance — but there it is — it's all part of the job."

"Yes. I think you should take care of yourself, mademoiselle. Going home after dark, taking a roving taxi; keeping an appointment with some person, or at some house, unknown to you."

Her blue eyes widened a little.

"You think the writer of these letters may not get rid of his libido merely by words?" she said.

He nodded gravely.

"Dirt is dangerous — mentally as well as physically. I shall take precautions, but I'd like your collaboration. Do you live far from your place of business?"

"Only a hundred metres away, Commissaire. I have a little

suite of rooms in the Hotel Beaurivage. And then my fiancé is always around. He calls every evening to take me out, or to see me home. He is a painter. An American, Alec Thomson. I've told him nothing about these letters. He would want to murder someone — and he might do it, too! And then, I don't want him upset. He has a good commission — to paint a portrait — I would hate him to be put off his work now." She rose as she spoke. "I won't take up any more of your time. I'm very grateful, Commissaire Dax. It's a great relief just to tell somebody about this. If I get another horror, I will let you know at once. Goodbye, now."

She smiled again; included the brigadier in the smile, and walked out of the door Saturnin held open for her.

"A fiancé!" said Felix. "Isn't it always the same? I meet 'em too early or too late."

He threw down his pencil and notebook in disgust. Then he came to Saturnin's side and exclaimed at sight of the anonymous letter.

"My faith! That's queer notepaper, Chief — for a letter of that sort."

Saturnin nodded. He was holding the sheet of notepaper close under a desk-lamp, and he turned it this way and that.

"Don't say there are finger-prints!" Felix cried. "That's curious. Unless the man that wrote the stuff is completely haywire?"

"He may be," said Saturnin. "But whether he is legally insane or not, we have to stop him. The envelope is typed on a Pronto portable, and the type has certain distinctive features. But the notepaper is far more distinctive. I should say this paper is the most expensive procurable."

"A first-class hotel?" Felix suggested. "The address has been cut off."

Saturnin shook his head.

"I doubt whether even a big hotel would run to this quality of paper. I should say it is pre-war, and not obtainable since the war. An exclusive club might use this sort of stuff, supposing they had laid in a big stock before the war."

"A club? I think you're right, Chief. And I believe I know that paper! I have a friend in the Paddock Club, who writes to me occasionally, and on that paper, I think."

"Good!"

Saturnin took a cellophane envelope from a drawer and slipped the letter into the envelope.

"Take this to the technical laboratory. Try it for prints first. Then you can investigate at the Paddock Club. Avoid your haughty, aristocratic friends. They may dislike gossiping about one another. Talk to the waiters in their off-time. Remember a beautiful lady is being annoyed, and may even be in danger of violence."

"I'll remember," Felix promised. "Perhaps I ought to follow her home, too?"

"That's a job for Georges Alder — you're too impressionable. Besides, you're just the man for the Paddock Club waiters."

"Okay," said Felix. "But, if a club-member's finger-prints are on that anonymous letter it is going to be tricky work to prove anything."

"That is where the imagination, for which you are justly famed, enters into this affair, my boy. There's a *bistro* in the Rue Royale used by the Paddock Club waiters. . . . Anyhow, get at it and good luck."

★

The following afternoon Felix Norman entered the commissaire's office wearing that look of elaborate unconcern which revealed at once that he had made discoveries he felt to be important.

After a glance at his assistant's face, Saturnin rose from his desk and went towards the salamandre.

"Tell me," he said. "Or you will burst!"

"There are prints all right, and plain ones," said Felix. "And they are those of a prominent member of the Paddock Club. In fact they belong to the old Marquis de Bragelin."

"Are you *sure*?"

"Quite, Chief. I palled up with a card-room waiter. We were blood-brothers after a couple of drinks. You know, in these clubs, they throw out a pack of playing-cards every half-hour or so. My friend collects them, as one of his perquisites. I bought all he'd collected for the last week. It was just a hunch, of course. But it came off. Edmund Baschet has a lovely set of prints, any time you want to see them. They are definitely De Bragelin's. Incidentally, the club waiters say the old boy — he's

about sixty — has been gambling lately, like a maniac. Even for The Paddock he has made history. So he has probably gone crazy. It happens sometimes, at a certain age . . . "

Saturnin left the stove and got down his overcoat, hat, cane, and gloves. Felix gave him a hand with the coat.

"By the way, I still had a little time on my hands, Chief. So I looked into Mister Alec Thomson a bit."

"Aha?" Saturnin looked an inquiry.

"He seems to be all right," said Felix. "I was hoping he had written those neurotic letters, and would have to be put away. But apparently he is just a healthy type of painter, with a little bit of talent, and a hell of a lot of luck."

"Good work. I shall go and see the Marquis de Bragelin. Edmund has the letter, no? Then I'll pick it up on my way out."

"You don't want me, Chief? He might prove violent?"

Saturnin shook his head.

"I want a confidential talk. As for violence, I'll take my chance."

★

In one of the small drawing rooms, decorated with sporting prints, in a private house in the Rue Copernic, Saturnin Dax rose as the Marquis de Bragelin entered the room.

"Monsieur . . . er . . . Dax? I am sorry to have kept you waiting. Please be seated. You wish to see me?"

The marquis was a type. His picture would have served admirably for certain forms of advertisement, always supposing the quite impossible notion that he would lend himself to publicity. At sixty he was as straight as a lance. His face was pink behind a bushy, but well-kept grey moustache. His pale blue eyes inclined easily to fierceness, and his eyebrows were almost as shaggy as those of the commissaire.

Saturnin came straight to the point. Taking from a pocket the anonymous letter, enclosed in a cellophane envelope, he handed it to the marquis.

"Monsieur," he said, "I am of the Judicial Police. I shall ask you to read this letter, which was sent to a certain Mademoiselle Suzanne Lesage."

"To Mademoiselle Lesage? She . . . she has an establishment

in the Avenue Victor Hugo?" The old man looked a little surprised, and disconcerted.

"Exactly, monsieur. Will you be so good as to read it?"

The marquis read. His face changed from pink to scarlet. He swore. Finally he glared at Saturnin.

"This is infamous, monsieur! Infamous!" He had much the same look that a spinster of retired habits might wear if she overheard a smutty story. "Why do you bring this filth to me, Monsieur Dax?"

Saturnin took the letter from his hand, which was trembling with anger.

"Because," he said, softly, "your finger-prints are on that sheet of paper, monsieur."

For a moment the marquis stared and his eyes seemed to bulge with passion. Then he marched to the door and flung it open.

"Be so good as to leave my house," he said.

Saturnin leaned back comfortably in his chair.

"It is no good, sir. The implied questions have to be answered."

He strode to Saturnin's side. "Get out!" he cried. "I can't fight you — so get out!"

"Listen a little," said Saturnin. "And please close the door. I am a police-officer. Commissaire Dax — not entirely unknown. I have no wish to insult you. I repeat, your finger-prints are on that notepaper. It is my duty to discover how they got there. You have been a soldier, monsieur, and you understand the word 'duty', no?"

Slowly the marquis went back to the door and shut it. He pulled nervously at his moustache.

"You pretend my finger-prints are on that abominable letter?"

"Beyond any shadow of doubt."

"How do you know?"

"We have matched them with your prints on playing-cards used in this club."

"Ah, you are a spy!"

Saturnin shrugged his shoulders.

"If you wish, monsieur."

The marquis sat down. He was silent, staring at the carpet, and twisting his moustache. His tone changed.

"All I can say is, Commissaire — this is some kind of plot. Club servants are no longer what they were. Time was when they grew old here; one knew them for twenty or thirty years. One became friendly with them. Now, things are very different."

"You suggest a club servant is plotting against you, monsieur?"

"I suggest a club servant has been party to a plot — has been bribed to assist some scoundrel who wants to damage me. I have a habit of writing my letters in the club. It is rather convenient; and I am a bachelor who spends much of his time in clubs. So it happens that I may finger a sheet or two of notepaper, and often a piece that, finally, I never use for writing on."

"I see. You mean a waiter notes your habits. He collects a sheet of paper you have handled, but not actually written on; and then this waiter steals the paper and sells it to some person who is plotting against you?"

"That is the only explanation that offers itself to my mind. I accept your statement that my finger-prints are on that infamous sheet of paper — and certainly it looks like the club's notepaper. Very well, someone stole a sheet of paper I had touched but not written on."

Saturnin nodded slowly.

"It would be possible," he said. "Whether it is probable is a matter I must discover — and I shall. When I mentioned the name of Mademoiselle Lesage, monsieur, you knew her business address?"

He looked quickly at the marquis, who flushed.

"Yes," he said, awkwardly. "Yes, I know her address."

"Do you go there — for treatment, monsieur?"

"What . . . ? No! It's a woman's place."

"Then, how does it happen you know the young lady's address?"

The marquis shifted uneasily.

"Really, Commissaire, that is entirely my affair. It can scarcely have anything to do with that wretched letter."

"It might, monsieur. Listen a little. We of the police are discreet. I came here alone, and hoped to obtain a frank statement. Believe me, it will be better for you to tell me now, and in confidence, things I shall certainly discover very shortly.

The marquis nodded. His face became very red.

"I noticed the girl when she opened this business of hers in the Avenue Victor Hugo. That was some five or six months ago. I — er — made her a certain offer. She seemed very charming, and, in fact, quite a superior young person."

"You asked her to become your mistress?"

"Er . . . yes."

"What did she reply, monsieur?"

It seemed impossible that the old man's face could become any redder, but it did. He said: "She laughed."

"That made you angry, monsieur?"

"At first, yes. At first I was very angry — with her. Then I became angry with myself. Mortified! I saw that I had behaved absurdly. The next day I telephoned to Mademoiselle Lesage, and apologised formally."

Saturnin got to his feet.

"Thank you, Monsieur le Marquis," he said. "I am obliged to you for your frankness."

As the commissaire walked away from the house the case seemed to him a fairly simple one. He was puzzled by expressions he had detected on the face of the marquis; and these were not easy to reconcile with the idea of the old man sending filthy anonymous letters to a young girl. Saturnin was not a psychiatrist. He knew only that human nature often manifests itself in amazing contradictions, and that these contradictions are subtle, and extraordinarily difficult to analyse. Especially is this so where an elderly neurotic is concerned.

Saturnin considered it probable that the Marquis de Bragelin, confronted with the mocking laughter of a beautiful young girl, had suffered such a shock to his ego that it had — at least for a time — thrown him off his mental balance. As a result the old fellow had begun to act in a way that would previously have appeared to him unthinkable.

★

On the following day Saturnin Dax was still puzzled by the case. Investigations revealed the marquis as a simple type of aristocrat, soldier and sportsman. His reputation on the turf was excellent. He had no positive enemies; but people who disliked him — offended by the old fellow's pride or blunt manners — yet agreed that his conduct had always been

honourable. Significant, so far as the letters to Suzanne Lesage were concerned, were statements that even the normal 'dirt', common in bar and smoking-room, was something the old man condemned.

Saturnin saw Suzanne Lesage, and found she refused to believe the marquis had sent her the anonymous letters.

"He's an old dear, really," she said. "Do you know he offered me marriage. And, when I declined, he wanted to leave me money in his will. I think he wanted to adopt me."

"You refused?"

"Of course. I don't want money that I don't earn, and my fiancé would hate the idea of such a thing. Anyway, the marquis has an adopted son already, I think. But, really, Commissaire, if you had seen him as I saw him, full of contrition for what he called his 'insulting behaviour to me', and humbling himself, pathetically, in his apologies — well, you wouldn't believe he could ever write that furtive muck."

Saturnin, taking leave of the girl, was impressed by her judgment, and by the things she related. He knew that a proud man often reveals himself to a beautiful woman as he would never do to anyone else. The commissaire also felt Suzanne Lesage possessed considerable intelligence and insight.

There remained, however, the fundamental question, was the marquis suffering from some kind of mental disability; had he suddenly become a little mad?

Turning over in his mind this question the commissaire went back to his office. And that evening the case took on a violently new aspect.

Saturnin's desk telephone buzzed. He lifted the receiver and listened carefully as the voice of Brigadier Alder came over the wire.

"All right, Georges," he said. "Coming at once."

He hung up and met the inquiring eyes of Felix Norman.

"The Marquis de Bragelin has been found dead. On a park-bench in the Bois. A revolver beside him."

"Suicide, Chief?"

"I wonder," said Saturnin. "We shall go and see."

★

On a late December evening, in this part of the Bois-de-Boulogne there were few pedestrians. The local restaurant-

cafés had closed down long ago. A light drizzle was falling and dripping from the almost leafless trees. There was little to tempt the *flaneur*.

A cordon of uniformed *agents* was nevertheless posted to see that no one strayed where he was not wanted. Powerful car lamps illuminated a park-bench and threw a harsh, theatrical light upon the Marquis de Bragelin.

The body lay prone, as though it had fallen forward from the park seat. The clothes were grey; but no hat was visible. One arm was doubled up beneath the body. The other was outstretched, and the hand, in a grey glove, was turned palm upwards. Close to the hand was a Mauser self-loading pistol of military type. One shot had been fired. A single shell lay three metres to the left of the corpse.

Saturnin Dax examined the body carefully, and especially the head — with its entry and exit wounds — and powder marks which were consistent with the results of a single shot fired at close range.

He next examined the dead man's clothes, and his highly-polished hand-made shoes. He looked at the blood on the head, and on the ground, where the quantity was small. He slightly lifted the body and felt about underneath it. Finally he straightened up with a grunt.

Georges Alder, dark and lean, in his glistening black mackintosh, watched closely.

"What do you think of it, *patron*?" he asked. "To me it stinks!"

Saturnin nodded slowly.

"He didn't die here, Georges. The surgeon will tell us more, but meanwhile I'm prepared to state he was brought here. He never walked in this park — look at his shoes. And where is his hat? I very much doubt if the old fellow went about in December, formally dressed, but without a hat. Anyway, there's not enough blood here. He shot himself, or was shot elsewhere."

"No hat — but gloved hands!" said Felix. "That was convenient for a murderer. All the operator had to do was wipe the gun. He need not even press it into the dead hand."

"That's how I read it," said Alder. "There are car-tracks about twenty metres away, *patron*. Someone recently ran an automobile into the woods. It looks to me like the work of a

gang. A bit smart, but not smart enough. There's signs of another car, too. But that only stopped by the roadside. It is a Maréchal coupé, by the space-measurement between its back wheels. It's a new, expensive machine, with new tyres. The other is an Italian Fiat. The track-measurement is one point forty-two metres. Old tyres, both repaired, and both Michelin Comfort. I've got a man working with *moulage* to get the tyre patterns."

"Good work, Georges."

Saturnin was looking down abstractly at the body and thumbing his moustache to left and to right.

The sound of a car coming from the city was heard in the close, still air.

"That's the technical squad," said Felix. "And probably the surgeon."

Saturnin roused himself.

"The old fellow adopted a son," he said. "His heir, no doubt? Who is he?"

He looked at Felix, who replied.

"It is young Ernest Lauris. But I don't think it matters, Chief. From what I hear the dead man leaves nothing but mortgages and debts. He lost a fortune in the last four or five months."

Saturnin grunted.

"All right. Let's take a look at these car-tracks of yours, Georges."

The three police-officers went a little way off the path to look at the tracks of the Fiat, described by Georges Alder. The marks of the back wheels were plain enough just inside the wood, on the fringe of the trees. An *agent* was occupied making plaster casts of the back-tyre patterns. Both these tyres had been repaired a little clumsily. Felix began a sketch of the pattern left by the repairs.

After a while Saturnin went over to look at tracks of the other car. The Maréchal had remained some little time by the side of the road. The butts of two cigarettes, marked Turmac Orange, were beside the comparatively dry space the stationary car had created.

Saturnin was still going over the ground when a car came at high speed, and, ignoring the uniformed *agents*, pulled up close to where the commissaire stood in the light of a lamp.

"Hullo!" said a gruff voice. "Is that Commissaire Dax?"

Saturnin went across to look at the new arrival. He saw an elderly man, of much the same type and vintage as the Marquis de Bragelin. The newcomer had a red face, a white, clipped moustache, and the air of one accustomed to give orders.

"Yes, General," Saturnin said, quietly. "At your service."

"Thank you, Commissaire. What's all this, I've heard? Has poor René really done it?"

Since General Comte de Charence was using the kind of voice that would take an echo out of a barrack-square, Saturnin opened the door of the car and got in beside the old man.

"I don't really know what you've heard," he said, softly.

The general lowered his voice considerably.

"You're a good man — I can trust you. I heard some fellow in the club say that René had shot himself in the Bois. So I came along, of course. He was my best friend."

"From whom did you hear this, General?"

"What? I don't know. Some fellows were talking in the bar."

The general turned to look shrewdly at Saturnin.

"Do you mean it ought not to have been known?"

Saturnin shrugged. "Such news travels fast."

"Yes, it does! What did he want to do it for? Pride, I suppose. Can I see him, Commissaire?"

"Certainly, in a few minutes. The surgeon is there. And our technical people — photographers, and so forth. What makes you suggest the marquis shot himself out of pride, General?"

"Up to his eyes in debt! Look here — no point in hiding these things now, eh? René was behaving like a young rip instead of a man of sixty. He has lost a packet. On the turf; at the tables. He lost a packet to me. I told him I wouldn't touch a sou. I said to him: 'Next year, if your luck turns. Five years; ten years' time . . . ' But he was as proud as they make 'em. He couldn't pay. He wouldn't remain in debt, not even to an old friend — not where debts of honour were concerned, anyway. So he did this! It's damnable, Commissaire. My best friend — and I don't make friends very easily."

There was silence for a moment, then Saturnin spoke very quietly.

"Do you know anything about the girl?" he asked. "A

Mademoiselle Suzanne Lesage? Your friend was immensely attracted by her."

The general nodded.

"That's right. He even wanted to marry her. He talked a lot. But, I don't know that this is police business, eh?" He turned and looked at the commissaire. "May have affected him, of course. You know how it is. A man at a certain age. . . . I should say he was definitely unbalanced lately."

"For some five months, General? Since he met the girl?"

"Well, yes. Look here, there are things one can't decently discuss, eh?"

Saturnin shifted on the seat until he was closer to the other man.

"Not idle curiosity," he said. "I am going to tell you something — in confidence. Must not be repeated — not until you see it in the journals, General."

"Right! What is it?"

"Your friend did not take his own life."

"He didn't? You mean — murder?"

"There is every sign of it, General. He did not die on that park-bench. He was brought here dead, and soon after his death. In a car probably. A Fiat certainly played a part in the affair. And possibly a Maréchal coupé, new model."

The general stared.

"I don't understand," he said. "Who would want to murder poor René?"

"He has an heir, General."

"Yes, a natural son. He adopted him five years ago. Young Ernest Lauris, you know. Now I come to think of it, the lad has a Maréchal coupé. But, René could leave nothing but debts. Six months ago there could have been a murder motive. And young Lauris is a bit of a waster. But where's the gain, and where's the motive, with René penniless?"

Saturnin opened the door of the car and got out on to the road.

"I wonder . . . ?" he said, softly. "Perhaps there is something we haven't discovered or haven't thought of, General. Meanwhile, I shall tell my men that you are free to see the body of your friend."

"Thank you, Commissaire."

Saturnin went over to Norman and Alder.

"I want you," he said. "We are going to call on Monsieur Ernest Lauris."

★

Their call on Ernest Lauris took the three police-officers to an extremely comfortable-looking private house in the Avenue Niel. Outside this house all three men halted instinctively.

"My faith!" said Felix Norman. "Looks like business, eh?"

For drawn up at the kerb, close to the house, was an old, shabby Fiat. They examined the back tyres in the light of a torch.

"All right," said Saturnin. "See if you can get in it, Georges. Drive it away, then pick up three men and come back here."

Alder nodded. He had tried the door-handles of the Fiat. He now took a tool from his pocket and forced open the door beside the driving-wheel.

"The ignition key is here," he said. "The owner seems to be a Monsieur Henri Dupont. Nice old name!" He got in behind the wheel. "You're not going in until I get reinforcements, *patron*?" he said. "There might be a gang in that house. I shan't be five minutes."

Saturnin shrugged.

"I am armed," he said. "Come on, Felix, my boy." He rang the front door bell.

"There's a garage at the side of the house, Chief," said Felix.

Saturnin nodded, and rang the bell again.

Steps were heard. The door opened to reveal a slight, elderly manservant of eminently respectable appearance.

"Monsieur Lauris is engaged," he said.

Saturnin pushed past him into the hall.

"Police! You look a respectable sort of fellow, and peaceful. Remain that way. We are going to see your employer. No need to announce us. In a few minutes other police officers will come, and you will open the door to them. It is understood?"

"Yes, monsieur. But this is most unusual . . ."

"Most!" said Saturnin.

The lights in the hall were not bright. Other lights illuminated a staircase and showed on a first-floor landing. From there came a faint murmur of men's voices.

Followed by Felix, Saturnin went up the stairs and paused before a closed door. Inside the room a loud voice said: "It's

not good enough, Lauris. The job was damned risky, for all you may pretend. You're his heir, and that could get us all suspected. We've only your damned word that you're not inheriting millions, too."

"You haven't," said a cultured voice. "I've said it before, it's commonly known he ruined himself in the last six months, gambling. We agreed on a fifty-fifty split. Now you want to go back on it. Well, you can't have more because it's not there."

"That's what you say . . ."

Saturnin turned the handle of the door and walked in.

"Don't let me interrupt you," he said.

The room was a large study, two of its walls lined with books. A great pedestal-desk was placed near the curtained windows, and at it sat a dark young man with a pale face and rather long, very dark hair. Two other men were with him, seated in armchairs with glasses in their hands.

One of these men was tall and thin, with a sallow face; the third man was big and powerful-looking.

At sight of this man Felix Norman quickly produced his Mauser.

"No tricks, Ruyters!" he said sharply.

"Of course not," said Saturnin, suavely. "Ruyters has been hasty on occasions, but this is not an occasion — is it, Ruyters? Stand up, will you?"

Ruyters stood up, with a stream of blasphemy.

Saturnin frisked him, took a gun from him, and turned to the thin man, whose eyes were full of dread.

"And Coco Drouet!" said Saturnin. "Quite like old times. Rise, Coco!" He took from him a knife and a knuckleduster. This last he gave back. "I wouldn't deprive you of this, Coco," he said. "I'm all for clean, healthy fun."

Felix meanwhile watched Ernest Lauris. The young man's face was white. He was obviously turning over a number of possibilities, and making rapid mental readjustments.

"What is this?" he said, at last. "Who are you?"

"Police," said Saturnin, crossing to the big desk.

"Have you a search warrant? This is preposterous!"

"No warrant," said Saturnin. "We came rather quickly, Monsieur Lauris. I'm sure you appreciate that. May I? Do you mind?"

He opened a red and yellow box. It contained twenty-five

cigarettes and was labelled *Turmac Orange*. There was a silence as he leaned over the desk and took the cover off a typewriter. It was a Pronto portable.

Saturnin inserted a sheet of paper, tapped out a few letters, and nodded to himself. He put the sheet of paper into a pocket.

"Rather clever, Monsieur Lauris," he said. "The scheme was not bad. Unfortunately you are an amateur and so you have made serious mistakes. One was to hire Ruyters. Another was to hire Coco Drouet. Crude stuff!"

Drouet half rose in his chair.

"I am for nothing in this affair, Commissaire. Nothing! I only drove the car. I had no idea that . . ."

"Shut your trap!" shouted Ruyters.

He sprang up, but Felix pushed a gun into his back.

"Relax, Ruyters," he said.

Ernest Lauris looked from one man to another. He licked his lips and his fingers fidgeted with a shallow drawer in the pedestal desk before him.

Saturnin went to the desk, pushed Lauris aside, and opened the drawer. Within was a revolver and an automatic. Both were old and both were loaded. Examining them under a desk-lamp, Saturnin smiled.

"The serial numbers filed off!" he said. He looked from Ruyters to Drouet. "I suppose you gentlemen see the idea? Did you really think your ingenious partner would pay blackmail to you for the rest of his life? Two guns, and the serial numbers filed off. In other words, criminals' weapons, no? What would monsieur's story be? That you broke into his house, to-night and threatened him, and he got a gun away from you, and shot it out? Something like that. Something very clever, and not quite clever enough. Like the fake suicide of the Marquis de Bragelin."

"Listen, you two!" cried Lauris. "Take no notice of this. He is trying to trap the three of us. Those old guns are there quite by chance."

"A likely story, you —" said Ruyters.

"I'm for nothing in this affair!" wailed Coco Drouet, now livid with fear.

"Fools!" said Ernest Lauris. "There is no case! No case unless you talk and give him one."

"Now that's where you are wrong," said Saturnin, blandly.

"We shall show the marquis did not die on that park-bench, but was shot elsewhere. We shall show the Fiat owned by Ruyters was to-night thirty metres from the dead man, and then later outside this house. We can prove you wrote anonymous letters to Mademoiselle Lesage on this Pronto typewriter."

"Why?" cried Lauris. "Why should I do that? I never met the girl."

Saturnin nodded.

"You took care never to meet her," he said. "It was part of your scheme that you should be in no way associated with her. But you knew your father was immensely attracted by the girl, and you probably thought she would get money from him — you would naturally think that. What actually happened was that the marquis returned, more or less, to his youth. Beauty is a strange and terrible thing, and it does strange things to us. The marquis began to gamble, recklessly, as he'd done when a young man. And so you got your little plan — which was cunning enough, and dirty enough! You plotted to create the impression that the marquis had become insane. You stole from the Paddock Club notepaper he'd handled but not written on. You typed your filth on that notepaper, feeling confident Suzanne Lesage would bring the letters to us, and we should trace them — and think what you wanted us to think."

"Lies!" said Lauris. "All lies! And fantastic ones! I had no possible motive for trying to kill my father. Everyone knows he was ruined, and penniless."

Saturnin looked quizzically at the wretched Coco Drouet.

"What do you say, Monsieur Coco? As a respectable citizen and a mere innocent bystander? Perhaps you can tell us little things you overhead? Monsieur Lauris talking to Monsieur Ruyters? Just in friendly talk, you know; and without your comprehending."

"Yes!" said Drouet, eagerly. "I didn't . . ."

Ruyters jumped forward, and Felix tripped him. Coco Drouet slipped out of his chair and cowered behind it.

Saturnin gripped Ruyters and Felix handcuffed him. Ernest Lauris was staring with despairing eyes at a blotting-pad on his desk.

There were steps and voices outside the room and Georges Alder entered, followed by three plain-clothes detectives.

"Glad to see you, Georges," said Saturnin. "Take these men

away, will you? Ernest Lauris, you are under arrest and will be charged with conspiracy, and plotting the murder of the Marquis de Bragelin, your father — if he really was your father. Georges, I want that Pronto typewriter — and the cigarettes, and the guns. There may be incriminating papers in the desk. Also please look after Monsieur Coco Drouet carefully, and make him quite comfortable. I think he has things to tell us."

The commissaire took Felix by the arm.

"Come along. We shall examine that garage."

The respectable manservant, looking as though the end of the world had come, took them to the garage. Saturnin unlocked the doors, with keys taken from Ernest Lauris.

A handsome Maréchal coupé was in the garage. In the car was a grey hat with initials, R. de B., outlined in little metal nails inside.

Felix Norman flashed a torch over the floor of the car and turned up a mat.

"Blood!" he said. "And the cushions are spattered."

"Yes," said Saturnin. "He was shot in this car. The old man suspected nothing, and let us hope his end was peaceful." Saturnin added the light of his own torch to that of the brigadier's. 'Grey hairs in the blood. That will be final and conclusive. The technical squad does the rest. We have it all, now; and it will stand up in a court of law. Good!"

"Yes," said Felix. "But I still don't quite get this. As Lauris said."

"His father left nothing but debts?"

"Yes, Chief."

"That is just the point. Debts of honour. Money lost to men like General, Comte de Charance, who alone won thousands of francs."

"You mean his friends would never insist on payment?"

"Legally they couldn't, my boy. Not club gambling debts. even if one or two pressed for their money, they would never get it from Ernest Lauris. His whole, rather hasty, scheme was very largely to get his father killed before he paid out — probably by sales of such property as remained to him. In any case the gambling debts represented a fortune. Lauris thought them worth a murder."

'GOOD-BYE TO MESQUITE'

ROSE MILLION HEALEY

A tale of young love with a chilling undertone

"OH, NO, you wouldn't," Evelyn Ann chanted in a maddening, sing-song tone. "Would-unt, would-unt. You wouldn't dare. You'd be afraa-a-aid."

"I'm not afraid," Jimmy answered. He looked absurdly white and small in the huge, empty pool. The blue water distorted the lower half of his adolescent body, causing him to appear even shorter and more awkward than was actually the case. "I'm not either afraid," he repeated doggedly.

Evelyn Ann kicked one golden foot back and forth in the water. "Then why don't you go there, instead of just talking about it?" she asked.

"I would, only that place must be guarded. They wouldn't let me get near it."

"No guards," Evelyn Ann said, rising from her perch on the edge of the swimming pool. "You're just scared," she said. "Everybody's scared of everything. Nobody's got any guts."

She picked up a big, yellow towel and patted dry her long legs. The green bathing suit inched up as she bent over, revealing two strips of white skin above the smooth tan. With a swift movement, she turned and tossed the towel over Jimmy's wet head. While he struggled to free himself, she ran towards the house laughing, a laugh that was neither joyous nor pleasant.

In the kitchen they drank Cokes and ate the fresh cupcakes that Mrs. McGivern, the cook, had made for dinner.

"She'll be mad," Jimmy declared anxiously.

Shrugging, Evelyn Ann bit into the chocolate icing. "Who cares? I don't work for her. She works for me."

"My mother doesn't work for you. She works for your parents."

"Same thing."

They were silent for a moment.

"Go on. Eat." Evelyn Ann commanded. She smiled when Jimmy's tongue tentatively licked the cake's side. "Who would you rather have mad at you, your mother or me?"

Jimmy ate half the cake in one swallow.

"Now let's get back to that haunted house," the girl instructed. "Do you really believe such eyewash?"

Jimmy nodded vigorously. "About the Hillery place. I do."

"Why?"

"Gosh, don't you know about the Hillerys?"

"Why should I know anything about this pokey old town? The less I have to think about it, the better."

"But you were born here."

"That doesn't mean I have to die here, too. Thank God I only have to stand it three months a year."

"I wish your folks didn't send you up East to school."

"You like having me around, don't you?"

"I—"

"Well? Don't you?"

"Yes," Jimmy replied, so softly and breathlessly as to be almost inaudible.

Nevertheless, Evelyn Ann heard him. She leaned back, smiling. It was not a pretty smile, although she was a beautiful girl, all tanned litheness. A golden girl. Jimmy thought of her as the golden girl.

"Well, you'd better make the most of this summer," she told the boy slumped in the seat across from her. "It's going to be the last. After this year, I'm not coming back here, ever."

"You'll always have to come back here. Your father'll make you."

"No one can make me do anything. My birthday's in August. I'll be eighteen, and I get the money my grandmother left me. Then it's goodbye to Mesquite, Texas."

"You can't go for good!" Jimmy stood up, trembling. His eyes bulged behind their thick-lensed glasses.

"Who's going to stop me? You, maybe?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"I'd stop you. I wouldn't let you leave!"

Evelyn Ann threw back her head and laughed. Her brown throat moved, and the corners of her mouth turned up.

*

It was growing dark. Evelyn Ann, in a white dress, sat on the porch swing-seat. Jimmy pushed her to and fro, regularly as an automaton.

"Evie, baby," a high, tinkling voice called from within the house.

"Your mother's calling," Jimmy said, after some moments.

"I hear her."

"Evie, honey." Mrs. Reid was standing at the front door. "Oh, there you are, baby." She peered at the blurred figure of her daughter.

"What is it?" the girl demanded sharply.

"We're going now, sweetness. We won't stay late. Sure you don't want to come?"

"Heaven deliver me from your dull friends."

"Now, baby—"

Mr. Reid strode past his wife. "Give us a kiss, kiddie. Daddy's going, too."

He pushed his crimson face with its small eyes against Evelyn's smooth cheek. Almost imperceptibly she brushed her lips near him.

"Be a good girl," he admonished briskly as he hurried down the steps and became a dim outline, vanishing into the gathering night. "Come on, Birdie," he yelled over his shoulder.

"Yes, yes." Mrs. Reid fluttered. She walked daintily behind her husband. "Take care of Evelyn Ann, Jimmy," she said. "We won't be too late. Your mother said you could stay 'til we get back. Evelyn Ann, darling, if you need us—"

"I won't."

"Well, you know the Langston's telephone number . . . " her fluty tones blended with the warm breeze that stirred the cotton-woods in the yard. The grinding, then purring of a motor, the crunching of gravel in the drive, and Evelyn Ann and Jimmy were alone.

Back, forth, back, forth, the seat moved rhythmically. The moon appeared, pale in the evening sky. Shadows rushed

towards corners, filling the familiar scene with mystery.

Suddenly, Evelyn Ann planted both feet firmly on the floor. Her action jarred Jimmy. The seat banged hard against his outstretched hand. Saying nothing, Evelyn Ann sauntered slowly to the porch rail and looked out. She sighed. Receiving no response from her companion, she sighed again.

"Evelyn Ann," Jimmy said.

"What?" She didn't turn around.

"Did you mean what you said?"

"When?"

"This afternoon."

"I said lots of things this afternoon."

"You know what I mean — about going away and not coming back."

"You bet your life."

She sat on the porch steps unmindful of her white dress.

"I'll miss you," the boy said.

"I know you will."

"Will you miss me?"

He was standing over her, staring down expectantly, hopefully.

"No," Evelyn Ann answered, gazing at the night and the lacy-leafed trees.

Jimmy remained motionless, then spun about on his heels and ran into the house.

After a while, from far in the back of the building, came the sound of a drawer being slammed and then of water running. Jimmy emerged from the living-room carrying a glass. He offered it to Evelyn Ann.

"Want a drink?" he asked humbly.

"Thanks."

For a long time the two on the porch were quiet.

At last Jimmy said, "Remember the Hillery house we were talking about?"

"Uh-huh," the girl nodded.

"Want to hear about it?"

"Why not?"

Jimmy sat beside his goddess. "It's awful old, that house," he told her. "Nobody's certain when it was built. Seems like it's always been there. All ramshackle, and ruined – "

"The way a haunted house ought to be."

"Funny you've never noticed it."

"I just look at things I'm interested in."

"Well, if you're bored—" Jimmy made as if to leave.

"I'm interested; I'm interested," Evelyn Ann said. "Don't be so touchy. Go on."

"Anyhow, as I was saying—"

"Before you were so rudely interrupted."

"It's a scary-looking place, three storeys high. I used to wonder about it every Sunday, because it's not far from the church where Mom and I go — went. It's just across the road and up on a kind of hill. There's a tall fence all around it, but the ground rises so high, it's easy to see the house over the top of the fence."

"But why is it supposed to be haunted? Your imagination?"

"Oh, no. I got the whole story from Mr. Hawkins down at the railroad yard. I've told you about him before, haven't I?"

"A million times. Daddy sees him when he ships his cattle. He says Hawkins is a damned old liar."

"He isn't!"

"Don't get riled. Daddy said it; I didn't."

"Well, Mr. Hawkins knows all there is to know about Mesquite—"

"Which isn't much."

"Evelyn Ann, do you want to hear this or not?"

"I'm listening with both ears."

"Mr. Hawkins said that it was just an ordinary home until this Mr. and Mrs. Hillery went to live there. They were foreigners from Europe who'd inherited it. Didn't make any friends, stayed to themselves. They hated the town, and the town returned the feeling. About two years after they moved in, the Hillerys were both found stabbed through their hearts with a butcher's knife. Every door and window was locked from the *in*side."

"Aw."

"No, it's the truth. Mr. Hawkins swore it. He says it's all written up in the newspapers in the public library in Sourtown . . . Then some other people finally bought it. They were a couple of sisters from Chicago who had come out here for one of them's health."

"That was a mistake, I'll bet."

"You said it, because exactly twelve months later, on the

same date that the first two deaths had taken place—"

"Don't tell me. Let me guess: butcher's knives?"

"Right."

"Pooh."

"Honestly. That's what happened. Then—"

"There's more?"

"One more. Nobody else would buy the house for years after that."

"I *wonder* why."

"Then about twenty years ago, an old man and his nurse — I forget their names — took over. And it happened again, except that this time the woman escaped. Her patient had a knife in his heart, but she got away."

"Did she tell what happened?"

"She couldn't. Whatever went on in that place frightened her so much that she wasn't able to make good sense when they questioned her. Last thing Mr. Hawkins heard, she was still in the state insane asylum, as scared as she was twenty years ago."

"Whew!"

"Isn't that some story?"

"Quite a story." Evelyn Ann shivered in the hot night air. "Quite a little ghost story, Jamie boy. That's one thing you can do. You can tell a story. You're my Scheherazade."

Jimmy drew a deep breath. "Wanta go there?" he asked.

"When?"

"Now. To-night."

"You mean it? You'd have the nerve?" Evelyn Ann sounded impressed

"Sure."

★

They drove in Evelyn Ann's convertible as far as the big brick church. They parked there, because a car nearer the abandoned mansion might attract attention. It was dark now, and only one street lamp outside the church illuminated the dusty, wide road. The Hillery place was on the edge of town, past the railroad tracks and the viaduct, past Mexican town. It stood, or rather leaned, alone in a vast expanse of weedy land. In the black night that had finally settled, the house looked cardboard-like and unreal. The slowly rising moon

glowed through the partially boarded windows.

Jimmy climbed the stone wall, then forced open the huge iron gate for Evelyn Ann. Together they groped their way through the knee-high, sickly-sweet grass of the neglected old garden. A cloud, covering the moon with wispy gray fingers, threw the scene into deeper darkness. As they reached the house itself, the light returned suddenly.

"Wanta go back?" Jimmy asked in a hushed voice.

"I'm not afraid," Evelyn Ann boasted.

She hurried up the sagging porch steps which moaned eerily under her weight.

The boy and girl pushed their shoulders against the big, dark, uninviting front door. Once, twice —

"Shh," Jimmy said, and the couple stood silently, listening in the shadows. There was no sound but the rustling, busy wind and their own nervous breathing.

"What was it?"

"Nothing, I guess."

"Scared?" Evelyn Ann inquired. She laughed quietly.

At that moment the door surrendered to Jimmy's insistent pressure. It moved slowly, rustily, protestingly open, revealing a wet-smelling, almost impenetrable gloom. After a time, they could discern a large, high-ceilinged room with numerous windows, crumbling, rotted walls and a winding staircase, the top of which was lost from view in damp, wavering darkness.

They stepped inside. The boy, trembling and ungainly, his bony shoulders hunched forward, waited as the girl passed before him. She walked straight and tall with a slightly contemptuous swagger. Her shining hair was caught for a moment in a beam of milky light, then the shadows leaped forward and hid her and her new white dress.

Noisily the heavy door closed behind Jimmy and Evelyn Ann

★

Jimmy sat near the window and enjoyed feeling the sun lick his neck with a warm, dry tongue. A bird was singing in the distance. Somewhere a lorry ground to a halt, then, with a grunt, started up again. Everything seemed far away, dim and indistinct. Even the voices of his mother and the tired-looking man at the other side of the room sounded faint as though

carried by the winds from a long way off.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. McGivern, it's the only sensible thing to be done."

"I know. Still, I just can't bring myself to do it. An institution—"

"Otherwise, he'll be tried."

"Isn't there some chance? I mean, maybe it was like he said. Maybe it was spirits or something strange we don't know anything about at the old Hillery place. It could have been."

"You don't believe that, not really, Mrs. McGivern. And if the boy's own mother can't credit a story, how could a jury be expected to?"

"Well, perhaps it wasn't anything supernatural. Maybe a tramp—"

"The knife came from the Reid's kitchen."

Jimmy's mother was crying now; she sucked her breath in sharply and let it out in soft, canine yelps.

"We'll do all we can. Now, don't worry. It could be worse." The tired man glanced at Jimmy. "I'll do all I can. And Jimmy will co-operate. Won't you, Jimmy?"

Jimmy nodded and smiled pleasantly. He hoped the smile would cheer his mother and stop her tears. He didn't like to see her so miserable when he himself was happy. Turning his head towards the window and the bright summer afternoon outside, he gave himself up to the delicious contemplation that had occupied his time for hours now.

Staring out at the flat, dust-coloured town, he thought: 'She won't leave me or Mesquite. She'll stay with both of us forever.'

SOLUTION TO EWMM CROSSWORD (No. 6)

ACROSS. 1, Pocket-knife. 9, A-cre(epy). 10, Terror Keep. 11, Attache. 12, Red Aces. 14, False note. 16, Tipsy. 19, Ado-re. 20, Live wires. 22, Cyanide. 24, Arrests. 27, Trial scene (The Merchant of Venice). 28, Grey. 29, Ambassadors.

DOWN. 2, Opera (The Phantom of the Opera). 3, Kitchens. 4, Term. 5, Nooses. 6, Fake alibi. 7, Scotland. 8, Fete (fate). 13, Stain. 15, Strong-arm (man). 17, Spectres. 18, Be-friend. 21, Ode-ssa. 23, Yard. 25, Edgar. 26, Len's.

VICTOR CANNING

THE HANDICAP

Perhaps only a golfer can really understand the bitterness and revolt in Eric's heart

SO LONG as there were no eyewitnesses, you wouldn't suppose there was any difficulty about pushing your wife over the side of a cliff and getting away with it, would you? Particularly if it were known that your wife was subject to fits of giddiness, and that you appeared to be very much in love with her. But, there it is—it just happens to be one of the most difficult forms of murder.

Remember that old chestnut about the ever-loving husband who took his wife to the sea on a day trip, pushed her over the cliff without anyone seeing the act and then went happily back to his home town by train—and would have got away with it, except that the clerk at his home station remembered that on the morning of the trip the man had bought a return ticket for himself and a one-way ticket for his wife?

Well, Eric Passmore wasn't as short-sighted, or as mean with his money as that. But he made his mistake, too. As a matter of fact, let's remember this about murder—you can rehearse the thing in your mind as much as you like, but once the show goes on—then it's got to be word perfect.

Eric Passmore's wife was quite wealthy. Eric ran a small chain of shops which his wife had inherited from her father—and looked to all the world like a happy married man. In fact, for the first ten years of his marriage with Margaret he was. But then the thing happened that put murder into his mind. And once it was there, Eric Passmore found himself in an ideal situation to get rid of her.

You see, they lived in a lovely villa, with a beautiful garden of about three acres, perched on the edge of a cliff about two miles outside town. The garden ran right down to the cliff edge, and then there was a nice drop of about three hundred feet to the sea. Eric Passmore had everything right on his doorstep.

And it began like this. One Sunday morning, when they still loved one another, Margaret said to him, "Darling, why don't I learn to play golf, so that I can join you on week-ends?"

It seems a simple enough remark—unless you're a married man who has a foursome with three other men which has been going on for . . . well, longer than any of them cared to remember. If you are, it's a remark which just turns a man cold inside. To Eric's credit, it must be said he gave a soft and evasive answer, and added that if Margaret really wanted to learn he would take her round the course some time in the week.

"But you know, sweetheart," he said, "you've never been any good at games. Gardening is your *forte*. Why don't you stick to it?"

But Margaret wanted to try golf, and try she did. Now it must be made clear that Eric was no expert. He had a handicap of sixteen which he played to about once a year, a swing which was so twitch-ridden that it was painful to watch—but an enthusiasm for the game which—like his hope of improving—was unbounded.

Margaret, when he took her out during the week, showed no promise whatsoever. However, she persisted in her ambition, and Eric passed her on to the professional—which in more ways than one was the start of the trouble—and forgot all about it.

★

For three months, that is, until one day at the club the professional said to him, "You know, Mr. Passmore, your wife's game is coming on. Terrible, all nerves to begin with, but now she's relaxed and getting it. Going to be a real natural."

This last was the hardest part for Eric to take. He'd have given anything to be a natural. That his wife might be really hurt him.

Anyway, he played with his wife during the mid-week after

this and it was a humiliation to him. She was a different creature from the attractive, blonde-haired beauty at home. Her handicap was already down to twenty-four. Eric gave her six shots and she beat him five and four. She hit the ball harder than any woman he knew and, because she hadn't realized yet how difficult putting really is, she was sinking thirty- and twenty-foot putts in a way which made him want to tear his hair out.

Well, that was the beginning but it got worse. Margaret had invaded his domain and went on invading. Within a year she was giving him strokes and beating him and she had won the club's championship for women. She was modest about it, but she had been bitten by the golf bug and under the professional's tuition--she went on improving.

She became a scratch golfer, made a name for herself, and their sideboard was loaded with the cups she won. At week-ends now she went off playing in regional competitions, while Eric hacked and twitched his way around with his local week-end foursome.

Naturally, he got a lot of ribbing from his friends, who advised him to give it up or take lessons from his wife. And Eric, again to his credit, took it all in good part. Never once did he show signs of the deep, abiding jealousy which was growing in him. He was, outwardly, proud of his wife, full of love for her and, to the rest of the world, a happier couple didn't exist.

And it might have stayed like that, the smouldering fires banked down for ever, but for one thing. Eric began to suspect that his wife and the golf professional—who usually drove her to tournaments and often partnered her in the amateur-professional events—were not only interested in each other's golf. The professional was younger than Eric, good-looking, virile, and a pleasant companion, and he and Margaret often spent week-ends away playing in tournaments.

Eric hired a private detective to watch them on these trips, and suspicion became fact. Eric was far-sighted enough to realize that sooner or later she would ask him for a divorce, and that prospect was humiliating. He would lose his wife, her money, the business, and every time he played golf with his friends he would know what was in their thoughts. He decided to protect himself by getting rid of his wife.

Eric thought about it for some time, and eventually he got it all worked out. Fate helped a little in the decision. It always does. Part of their garden on the cliff edge had fallen away after heavy summer rain and the fence was gapped. Margaret's birthday was a week away—on a Sunday, when he knew that she was going off with the professional all day to play in a tournament.

He made his dispositions very carefully on that morning. Margaret had gone off early with the professional, getting a sleepy good-morning kiss from Eric, a happy birthday, and "Don't be too late, darling. We'll have our celebration this evening—in the summer house as always".

Eric got back from his own golf that day about six o'clock. The servants had the day off, so he carried a couple of bottles of champagne and two glasses to the summer house which overlooked a little terrace of roses and then a lawn that sloped to the cliff edge just where the fence had broken away. He brought out with him, too, his birthday present for her- one of those muscle-developing affairs that you grip and stretch out to build up your chest, arms and hands—Margaret wanted to build up her strength to get a few more yards on her drive.

Well, Eric waited, and Margaret was pretty late getting back. It was almost dark when he heard the professional's car stop at the road gate. The professional always dropped her at her home, and then took her gear on to the club-house. The dropping process at the gate was pretty long, but Eric bore it with equanimity. When he heard the car drive away, he went down on the grass lawn and stood at the cliff top.

Hearing his wife on the path, he called out to her and she came over to him, a summer coat draped loosely over her shoulders. She came right up to him, smiling, and Eric—who believed in getting things done quickly—put a hand in the middle of her back before she could say a word and pushed her over.

Then he went back to the summer house, opened her present, uncorked the champagne and sat quietly drinking, at peace with the world. Before he went to bed, he poured what was left of the champagne on the gravel, left the present in the summer house, and took the two glasses back to the kitchen and washed them. As he did so the telephone rang, but he ignored it. At this moment ten o'clock—his story was to be

that they were drinking in the summer house, and would not have heard the telephone.

He went to bed and slept soundly until his alarm went at three o'clock. Then he reached for the telephone and got in touch with the police.

An hour later he was sitting in the summer house with the local police superintendent, who was a golfing friend of his. A search party was already working along the base of the cliffs.

"A terrible thing . . . terrible," said Eric. "We sat out there from about nine until eleven, drinking champagne, talking, completely happy, and Margaret delighted with her present. Then, when it was time for bed, I came in bringing the glasses. Margaret said she'd like to take a little walk in the garden first.

"I washed up the glasses and came to bed. Well . . . I suppose we'd had a little too much champagne. I went off to sleep like a log—until three." He rested his head in his hands. "It's terrible. She must have gone to the cliff edge—she loved listening to the sea—and what with the champagne, and maybe, one of those giddy fits, she must have fallen. I'll never forgive myself."

"You haven't anything to blame yourself for," said the superintendent. "It was an accident." The superintendent looked down at the muscle-developer, which had velvet grips that wouldn't show prints, and went on, "She was pleased with her present, was she?"

"She loved it," Eric said. "She was so happy, delighted with it. We had a little competition to see who could stretch it farther. You know—she beat me. Can you credit that?"

The superintendent looked surprised. "She stretched it farther than you?"

"She did. She was very strong in her arms and hands. Hit the ball a mile. You know her golf."

"I do indeed," said the superintendent quietly. "But I don't think you know about her golf today."

"What do you mean?" asked Eric.

"I was playing poker at the golf club-house all evening," said the superintendent. "The pro came back and told us about your wife. After the match she had one of her giddy turns coming up the club steps. She fell and broke her right arm. A doctor there fixed it up in splints and a sling."

"What!"

"That's right. She wouldn't stop for proper treatment. Said she had to get back for her birthday treat. I phoned you about ten to ask you how she was. But I guess you were playing the muscle game in here then a game she couldn't have played. Or had you already pushed her over by then and just didn't answer the phone to keep your story the way you wanted it?"

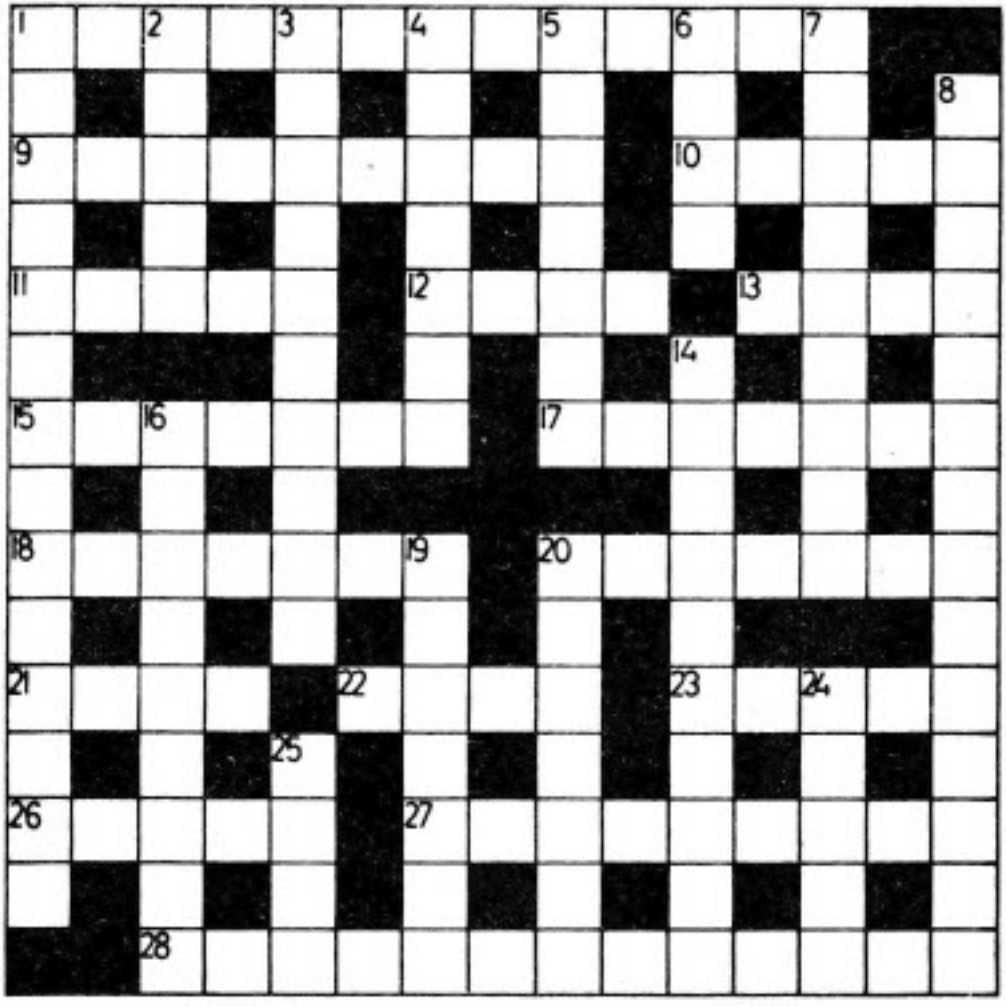
holiday quiz

Here is a not too difficult questionnaire that should test your general 'whodunit' knowledge

1. What was the title of Edgar Allen Poe's *first* detective story?
2. Who wrote *The Little Gentleman from Okehampstead*?
3. Whose are the 'little grey cells' which have worked with such impressive efficiency for 45 years?
4. Can you name a once widely popular fictional detective who was also of the 'blood royal'?
5. And can you name another fictional detective whose world-wide fame and 'snob' appeal once rivalled James Bond?
6. Name the crime writer who fathered modern monster-films with a unique (not unlovable) monster.
7. Without trying too hard, say which came first—*The Adventures* or *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes.*
8. Name an outsize, very fearful master-criminal who is now about to receive a new lease of international fame in a film just completed.
9. What are the nationalities of (a) Hercule Poirot; (b) Perry Mason; (c) Maigret; (e) Mr. Reeder; (f) Ellery Queen, and (g) Commander Gideon.
10. In describing it correctly should 'Scotland Yard' not have a prefix, and what is it?

(*Answers on page* 61)

EWMM Crossword No. 7



ACROSS

1 EW title for a very shady religious character (3, 5, 5)
9 Grow old too rapidly? (3, 2, 4)
10 May be stopped but not by the police (5)
11 Spot of refreshment (5)
12 Makes a splash at times (4)
13 Two happy people (4)
15 With which policemen can be illuminating? (7)
17 The condition of the law (7)
18 Requests, like Oliver's, for more (7)
20 Means of defence (7)
21 Robbers' opposites (4)
22 Chief character in *The Rolling Stones* (4)
23 Piece of jewellery that came to nothing (5)
26 Discharge but not a gun (5)
27 The occult cult (9)
28 Ill-mannered creditors pressing for payment? (4, 9)

DOWN

1 Warder's opportunity to read Henry James' book? (4, 2, 3, 5)
2 Irish town where Dennis was beheaded (5)
3 It seems Leo gets the most on the Stock Exchange (5, 5)
4 Doubles up at cricket! (7)
5 Not quite the same as summed up! (5, 2)
6 Where some brides were liquidated (4)
7 Boy in a girl's name (9)
8 His identity is elementary, dear solver! (8, 6)
14 Wallace assembly in London, for instance! (10)
16 Is it eaten by the Chinese after they've read it? (4-5)
19 Vessel for cooking . . . (7)
20 . . . here in bloom! (7)
24 It's corny in India (5)
25 Behaved like a fugitive (4)

(Solution will appear in our September issue.)

town cop

Some American policemen lead remarkable lives . . .

AT 11 P.M. they were drinking coffee in the rest-room of the printing plant. Herbie, the foreman, was middle-aged, all things about him weary — from the deep lines in the large-featured face to the stooped shoulders. Patrolman Jack Wagner was 34, hard-faced, lean as a working heavyweight. Herbie lived on coffee and the various beat policemen dropped in for a cup, to hang up their raincoats, use the washroom, or merely goof off over a smoke.

Now, as Jack puffed on a cigar, uniform collar open, complaining that the alimony he was paying his ex-wife kept him from even buying a second-hand car, Herbie suddenly broke in with: "Jack, are you interested in making two thousand dollars?"

"Who the hell do you want killed?"

"My brother-in-law." There wasn't any humour in Herbie's mild voice.

Jack blew out a smoke ring and said nothing. He always had a feeling Herbie was being *too* friendly. Certainly the other cops must have told him about Jack being sent to this outlying precinct as punishment, how he'd nearly been busted for holding his palm out to the wrong guy. When the smoke ring broke against the ceiling, Jack asked. "Your brother-in-law? Is he the wino I saw around here a couple of times?"

Herbie nodded, running a hand through his bushy gray hair. "That's him, Jack, he's killing us — me and the wife, a slow death. He's her kid brother, a step-brother. Thirty-five years old with the mind of a child. It's a terrible thing for me to do, pass judgement, but he'd be better off dead. You've seen him, a real dirty bum who . . . I can't even blame him,

he doesn't know which end is up. He's not nutty enough to be put away but he just can't take care of himself. Hell, he actually stinks, never takes a bath. Can't hold down any job. All he can do is drink.

"You supporting him?"

Herbie blew on his coffee. "Yes and no. His mother's folks realized he didn't have all his marbles, set up some sort of fund for him. Forty dollars a week he gets. You'd think it would be a blessing, but the second he cashes his check he gets loaded, and for the balance of the week he's on the bum, comes to us for a handout. Jack, we don't mind the few bucks, but how does it look to the neighbours, to my own kids? If Edna refuses him, he comes here and that don't look good for me, either. He stumbles around, half-dressed even in winter, and never gets a cold. He's . . . Jack, the most important thing, he's making my Edna a nervous wreck."

Jack said coldly, "You bastard! You know what they call me, a crooked cop and you've been buttering me up for this ever since I first dropped in here."

Herbie was bent over the table, an attitude of despair, but his tired eyes were steady as he said softly, "Jack, I never thought you were anything. Out of twenty thousand cops, like twenty thousand any other men, some . . . have a different sense of values than the rest. But I've only thought of you as a friend. A friend who's always crying poor-mouth. Jack, I make a fair salary, what with overtime, but I also have a big overhead with my house and kids. It will be a strain to raise two thousand but it's fair payment for a second's work. I just can't see my wife go to pieces."

Jack blew out another smoke ring and laughed, only it was more of a snarl. "Herbie, do you know what happens when a police officer kills, in line of duty? There's an investigation, he's immediately tried for second-degree murder and . . ."

"And found not guilty." Herbie finished. "A routine to protect the officer from any future law suits. Jack, I'm the cautious type; don't even start a two-bit printing job until I've checked everything. I'm not trying to make trouble for either of us. On the contrary, I'm trying to rid myself of a pest and help your money worries. It will be simple, you kill him in line of duty. Might even restore you to the good graces of the police brass. You stop him, obviously a suspicious

character, to ask a few questions. He throws a gun on you, you have to shoot him."

"Does he carry a gun? I can put him away for a year."

Herbie sighed. "And a year from now it will be the same. No, he doesn't carry a gun, but he'll have one. I'll see to that, plant one in his pockets. It will be simple; he'll be high as usual. Soon as I slip him a few bucks, he'll stop for a bottle, be feeling great when he finishes that. While he's harmless, he gets noisy when he's stoned — that gives you a reason for stopping him on an empty street . . . ending up a hero with two grand. If you want, I'll fire the gun once before putting it in his pocket. He took a shot at you."

Wagner sat there, puffing slowly on his cheap cigar. Herbie asked, "Jack, what can go wrong? He's a moron, who will miss him? Who's going to make a beef? Me? My wife? His only other relative is some cousin, lives way out in Hawaii. They've never even seen each other. Jack, what do you say?"

"That it's time I was back on my post," Wagner said, standing. "The captain usually is around making his wrap-up about now. See you tomorrow."

"Jack, think about it."

"Yeah."

★

The following morning Jack visited a private detective he often drank with, borrowed a pocket tape-recorder, the type where the microphone is pinned to the back of a coat lapel or up a sleeve. Showing him how to work the machine, the detective said, "Be careful and have this back tomorrow — this cost me two hundred and sixty-eight bucks."

"Did you buy it in town?" Jack asked.

"Yeah. Only one store here carries this make. Martin's on West Street," the private badge said, then added, "I ain't asking any questions but, Jackie boy, be careful. There's tricky laws about bugging which—"

"I told you."

"I know, you're playing this big joke on some broad who talks a lot in bed. That's not against the law. But if you have any other ideas, be careful."

That night, as Jack was having his usual coffee with Herbie in the printing plant, he said casually, "I'm not sure I dreamt

you said something last night, or we really talked. Let me hear it again, from the top, huh?"

"I told you I'm willing to pay two thousand, every cent I can afford, to have my dumb brother-in-law killed. I . . ."

As Herbie talked Jack had his arm on the table, with the mike up his sleeve, a few feet away. Jack's other hand was deep in his policeman's open coat pocket, turning the recorder off and on. He wanted certain parts of Herbie's conversation on tape, and none of his *own* questions.

When Herbie finished, Jack shut the recorder and took out his hand to light a cold stub of a cigar as he asked, "When do I get the two big bills?"

Herbie jumped. "You mean . . . you'll do it?"

"What's it sound like? I want the money in advance — cash. We'll work out the details tomorrow. And, Herbie, the price has gone up, a little. I'm thinking of doing some private snooping and I need a tape-recorder. But it might not look right for a cop to buy one. You get the recorder for me; I'll tell you the make and model. Costs a few hundred and you can buy it at Martin's. That, plus two grand, and you'll be burying your wino relative shortly."

Riding to his room that night, Jack did some figuring. If the brother-in-law had an income of $40 weekly, or roughly $2,000 a year . . . at 4% . . . there should be about $50,000 in the trust fund Herbie mentioned.

Two weeks later there was a one-paragraph story on the fifth page of one newspaper about a Patrolman Jack Wagner stopping a suspicious-looking drunk for questioning. The 'bum' had pulled a gun on the startled police-officer, who had wrestled with the drunk and finally had to yank out his own gun and kill him. The Police Commissioner had congratulated Wagner for 'quick thinking and quicker action in ridding our streets of dangerous characters.'

★

Jack and Herbie had decided it might be best if Jack didn't drop into the printing plant for a while. Jack went on a week's vacation, flying down to the Bahamas and losing the entire two grand at a gambling casino. On returning to work, he made a point of going to the surrogate's court once a week, glancing through the records. Some nine weeks after the shooting he

came across what he was looking for.

He then let another month go by, figuring it took that long to get the various legal wrinkles ironed. Then, when he was back on a night tour, he stopped at the printing plant. The tape-recorder, his own, was in his coat pocket. Herbie looked the same, tired. He asked, "Jack, do you think it's smart, our seeing each other so soon?"

"Cut the act, you double-crossed me! I ought to beat your brains out, slipping me that garbage about your wife was going nuts, your brother-in-law such a pest. Man, you hit a twenty to one shot — your wife came into forty thousand and that cousin in Hawaii got sixteen thousand. I saw it in the court news."

"Jack, believe me, I wasn't thinking of the money, I swear, until the lawyer told us. I didn't know Edna was coming into a cent."

"I believe you or I don't believe you, it doesn't matter - either way I want twenty-five grand."

The foreman gasped. "Are you nuts? I can't get that kind of money. Edna doesn't know what happened. How can I explain it to her?"

"That's your problem." Wagner said coldly. "Edna ought to listen; she must be calm and relaxed, now that her wino brother is dead. Get me the money, fast, or you can be facing a murder rap. Maybe your darling Edna will face one, too."

Herbie's tired eyes took on a new brightness. "*I can face a murder charge*? And you, where will you be, Jack, when they strap me into the electric chair — sitting on my lap?"

"Stop it, you lousy amateur. You were so damn sure you were out-smarting me, and crime is *my* business. Not a damn thing is going to happen to me. I could ask for the whole forty grand but I'm no pig. Remember this?" Jack held up the pocket tape-recorder. "Only one shop in town sells them and they don't sell six a year. The clerk will remember you, plus he has your name on the duplicate sales slip, along with the number of the machine."

"So what? I gave it to you."

"You sure did, I'll swear to that!" Jack said loudly. "Now, unless I get that twenty-five grand by this Saturday, an odd thing will happen. I'm clumsy when it comes to gadgets, so I haven't been able to work this recorder all this time. But on

Saturday, I'm fooling around with it, finally get it to play. Imagine my surprise when I hear this on the tape. You must of had it on when you were talking to me — or somebody else. *Listen*!" Jacked pressed the play-back button and Herbie heard his own voice explaining why he wanted his brother-in-law killed.

When Jack turned off the recorder, the rest-room was thick with silence. Herbie slumped in his chair, face pale, lumpy hands trembling. Jack said smoothly, "You see how it will sound when I bring this to the police — just *your* voice, no mention of me. Nor is there any proof you ever gave me a dime; I blew that money. It boils down to this: some fool cop has been had — you letting a drunk stagger around with a gun, knowing some cop will stop him. I'll look stupid but you'll be facing murder."

"You lousy rat!"

"Easy, Herbie. Giving me this shoe-polish about your wife going nuts, you and I were friends . . . and all the time you were reaching for forty grand!"

"That's not so. I never—"

" 'Friend,' there's only one thing 'so' here: I did the dirty work, and want that money. You start explaining the facts to your Edna. You know where I room?"

"Yes."

Jack got up. "Be at my place between now and Saturday. Be smart, Herbie; you'll still have fifteen grand left. Explain things very clearly to your wife; that there's only one way out — pay me!"

The next day Wagner hid the roll of tape in his sister's house and began pricing cars. Nothing new, as a cop he couldn't afford to flash money or have an expensive car. Jack had plans. He'd remain on the force for another year or two, not touch the money. But all the time he'd hunt around for a sure-fire business in which to invest.

★

That night, he stayed out of the printing plant. The following day he was off on his 52-hour swing, would report back on the morning tour. He slept late, killed a pint for breakfast. When he left his rooming-house he had no reason to notice a young fellow with crew-cut blond hair tailing him in a beat-up car.

He strolled around a used-car lot, without seeing anything worth buying, had a sandwich and two beers in a bar, then decided to take in a movie. Walking towards the theatre he passed a snappy Jaguar roadster parked at the kerb. The doors were locked, of course. He walked around it, admiring the sleek lines, peering inside at the fancy dashboard. He even tried the doors, out of force of habit.

"I'm a police-officer! You trying to steal that car?"

Jack spun around, saw this tall young fellow with a blond crew-cut, fancy sports shirt covering his belt and old slacks. Jack said gently, on seeing the badge in the blond's left hand, "Take it slow, rookie. I'm a cop myself. I'll show you my shield."

"Keep your hands in sight!" the other warned, loudly, pulling his gun as Jack's hand went towards his back pocket. The slug hit Jack in his chest, spinning him around in a drunken dance before he fell against the Jaguar.

This time Jack Wagner made all the front pages: there were pictures of both police-officers. The blond cop said he'd been off-duty, driving to the store, when he saw a man obviously trying to break into a parked Jaguar. He had stopped, identified himself as a police-officer, ordered the man to keep his hands in sight. Instead the man had gone for his back pocket.

The blond was a rookie cop and the press felt sorry for him. Also, several people passing the scene were positive he had yelled, "Keep your hands in sight!" The news-stories mentioned that Officer Jack Wagner had once been disciplined for an attempted shake-down, that the autopsy proved he was drunk and his prints were found on the door-handle of the Jaguar. The Police Commissioner said it was an unfortunate accident. That ended it.

Of course the rookie cop didn't mention he felt sure there had been a fleeting, cynical smile of admiration on Jack's face before he died. The rookie was busy buying a new car himself.

I DOUBT when dealing with some criminals whether a parental wagging of the finger and an admonition . . . have much of a deterrent effect.

— *Clement Burrows*, Chief Constable of Oxford.

country cop

. . . but others behave in a more agreeable fashion

WHEN SERGEANT Larry Abelman, of County Homicide, walked into the harbour's one-room police station, Chief McCue shouted, "Been boning up on objective, abstract, and all this art stuff, like I told you over the phone, Larry?" McCue always shouted, even when saying good-morning.

Both large men, now thick through the middle with age, Abelman was half-a-dozen years the older, as his graying hair showed. "Come on, I know crime methods, which is all I need to know about any murder," he said, taking a chair, and a cigarette from the pack on the Chief's worn desk. "How old was the deceased?"

"Louise Merriam was hitting fifty. Married to Drayton Merriam, a big-wheel in the art world and a bigger lush. He died five years ago wrapping his old car around a tree, while stoned of course. There was a wild joker. Larry, you remember Baron's Cove?"

"That would-be castle some European fellow built here long ago?"

"Before my time, which about makes it older than God. Spooky house built in the hollow of this rocky cove facing the bay. Place is always foggy. They couldn't give the house away until Drayton Merriam was crazy enough to buy it. Most of his fame comes from the sea pictures he painted there, bright sky and waves but all seen through the fog of the cove. Anyway, the house has a kind of rocky back-yard and Louise was found there last night with a thirty-thirty slug in her head. Doc Bright places time of death at about 8 p.m., and from the angle of the wound the killer was on the rocks above the cove. No prints possible, rained last night, and thirty-thirties are popular rifles

hereabouts. My guess is the killer hurled the gun into the ocean."

Abelman nodded, mostly to get McCue's shouting out of his ears, then he said, "Let's shake out possible motives. Louise Merriam was fifty and a widow — what about men?"

McCue split the office with laughter. "Larry, Louise was the kind of babe made you wonder how she *ever* got married! Homely face, big, bad temper. Kept to herself in that queer stone house, only going out to art shows in Hampton and the library — hardly went to the movies."

"Did she have any money?"

"Man, when they first came to the harbour they were starving and I mean hungry. Lou Haff, the grocer, kept them on the cuff for years. Odd thing about artists; when Drayton was alive his weird pictures sold for maybe fifty bucks, when he lucked up on a buyer. Soon as he died the price went up. Seems he started a whole school of silly jokers painting the ocean like it's a bowl of chop-suey. Now his pictures bring two grand each. Louise kept finding his paintings hidden around their nutty stone castle, maybe a dozen or so since he died, and she's been selling them, living off the money. Beats me how Drayton Merriam ever was able to hold a brush steady, way he threw his head back. Oh yeah, there's this, to make it murder for sure; three days ago Louise was badly frightened. Larry, you ever been to the Clothes-line Art Sale in Hampton?"

"Barber-shop calendars are my kind of pictures. Hold that sale once a summer, don't they?"

"Aha!" McCue boomed. "Louise brought over one of Drayton's pictures to give the show some class. Well, Mrs. Harris, one of the wealthy summer folk who've built around the harbour, she took a fancy to this painting. She says Louise got all flustered, raised the price, and finally withdrew it from the show. Mrs. Harris still wanted the painting so yesterday she drove out to Baron's Cove, offered Louise three thousand for it. Mrs. Harris claims Louise seemed very nervous, showed her where she's burned the picture. I told Mrs. Harris to be home this morning, that you'd want to talk to her."

Abelman got to his big feet. "Thanks. I'll look around."

"Be back for lunch. The wife's making chowder. If you stay the night we'll fish for strippers; low tide about seven."

"Fishing?" Abelman grunted sadly. "When I finish here I'll

have a couple hours of paper work waiting in my office. But I'll try to make the chowder. Where can I see one of Merriam's paintings?"

"Lou Haff has some above his grocery shop."

The Haff grocery was a large, old-fashioned store with well-stocked shelves and no customers.

Sergeant Abelman flashed his shield, and asked, "Can you spare some time to talk with me, Mr. Haff?"

"Time is what I have most of these days. Guess you want to ask about Louise?" the grocer told him. Haff was a wiry, little man with a bald head and a shrill whine for a voice.

Before Abelman could answer, the grocer added: "I watch these TV murder shows, know what you're going to ask: when was the last time I saw Mrs. Merriam? Well, sir, I might see her a couple times a week, passing my store. She was fickle, like the rest of the harbour folk, all running to the new supermarket. When my father started, this was the *only* grocery shop in the harbour, and during the depression we gave credit to half the town! Along comes this chain store, with its stamps, and it's slowly squeezing me out of my own town! If I had the capital I'd make this store into a real supermarket and show—"

"About Louise Merriam?" Larry cut in, gently.

"That's the point, sir. When they first came here, down and out, who carried them for months at a time? Me! Even accepted Drayton's oils in exchange for food when nobody else would give the paintings house-room."

"I'd like to see them. How many do you have, Mr. Haff?"

"About nine or ten. Follow me, Officer, up these stairs. Used to have my own house but when my dear wife passed on years ago and with my son married, working in a factory over in Riverhead — shame when a father can't even pass a business on to his son, and all because of that supermarket — I live up here, now. These are the paintings."

On the walls of the living-room hung ten small oils, all of them neatly framed and all fierce and violent colours in what at first seemed aimless designs. Abelman blinked and Haff cackled, "I felt the same way, but in time they sort of grow on you. At first they seem as nutty as he was but the more you look, more you see in 'em."

"Drayton Merriam was a nut?" Sergeant Abelman asked politely.

"A loon, sir, a drunken loon. Why, once he asked if I had dried grasshoppers for sale. Asked bold as brass, then lectured me on the fact there's more people in the world who eat 'em than there is that don't. And drink, the man was on a constant toot."

"Was Louise Merriam the same?"

"Indeed not. Just the opposite. Quiet, kept to herself all the time."

"Would you say she had any enemies?"

"Don't see how she could have had, sir. She is — was — one of these self-sufficient folk who are content to be alone. But you'd think after the way I supported them she'd at least continue to bring her trade here. No sense of gratitude."

"Mr. Haff, aren't these paintings worth a lot of money?"

"Hardly a week goes by I don't get a letter from some gallery asking me to sell. Even from places in Europe," the little grocer added, a note of pride in his high voice. "But I've held on to them this long, I'll wait. They can't help but increase in value. This here European fellow, paints as crazy as these and his stuff sells for hundreds of thousands, and he ain't even dead yet! Besides, I like the paintings."

"I see. Where does Mrs. Harris live?"

★

Mrs. Harris was a slim woman in her early thirties and everything about her, from her clothes to her house, said she was comfortably fixed. Over cold beers served on a handsome, ornate table, she told Abelman, "Officer, I don't pretend to be an art connoisseur; most of the modern stuff doesn't reach me. But when I saw this bay scene at the Hampton show, why, it seemed nothing but a mess of colours, then, it became the bay off Barcelona Point, the lighthouse in the distance, the channel red blinking-buoy, the gulls. I told Mrs. Merriam, 'Why this is our fishing-hole off Barcelona Point! Everybody said that when they put in the buoy, all that work, it would frighten the porgies away, but it still is our favourite fishing spot.' Mrs. Merriam stared at the picture as if seeing it for the first time, got rather excited, raised the price to twenty-five hundred, then stated it wasn't for sale."

"That was all you said, about fishing?"

Mrs. Harris nodded her sleek blonde head. "While I'm not

in the habit of running after artists, I wanted *that* picture. I drove out to her house, that awful castle, late yesterday afternoon and she'd burnt it, showed me the remains in the fireplace. She seemed nervous."

"At the art show, was anybody else looking at the painting?"

"Not that I noticed."

"It's kind of hard to make out Drayton Merriam's paintings, but was there any special boat, or people, say a fisherman, in the drawing?"

"No people or boats; merely the bay, the beach at Barcelona Point, blinking-buoy, water and the gulls. Just can't understand her destroying it. And now . . . her being murdered."

"Did you know Mrs. Merriam?"

"Not really; we only moved here two summers ago. I saw her around the harbour, but not often, always moody and alone."

Abelman glanced at the sunburst wall-clock; it was nearly noon and Mrs. McCue made a fine chowder. He thanked Mrs. Harris for her time and as she walked him out on to the lawn, facing the bay, she pointed a blue-silver fingernail at a sandy spit, and said, "That's Barcelona Point. Of course, the angle of view in the oil was different, but it's the same view as we get here — the old lighthouse over there, the beach. There, even in the sunlight you can just see that buoy. They put that in the first summer we were here and everybody said it would frighten the fish . . . but I told you that."

"And you've been here for two years, Mrs. Harris?" Abelman asked, in a suddenly definite voice.

"Yes. We wanted to buy in Hampton but . . . "

★

Mr. Haff looked like a starved midget between the hulks of Sergeant Abelman and Chief McCue. In his shrill voice the grocer said, "You don't have to worry about my making a confession — I want to, show up the true culprit, that lousy supermarket! Year after year I watched my business shrinking, my son having to work in a factory. I needed seventy-five thousand to remodel my store, join this independent chain. Me, a native of the harbour and our bank wouldn't give me a dime! Suddenly I saw my out, the price of Merriam's paintings was climbing. I figured in a few years they'd be worth seventy-five thousand if I could hold on to 'em. But every couple

months Louise 'found' another of his paintings and sold it, keeping the price down. But I never thought she was the real artist, although I should have suspected it. Drayton was always falling down drunk. Naturally when I heard about Louise refusing to sell to Mrs. Harris, and about the blinking-buoy in this painting, I realised the buoy hadn't even been anchored out there until a couple years *after* Drayton died . . . I had no other choice but to kill her."

"You could have exposed Louise as the real artist?"

"And have the price of the pictures drop back to fifty bucks! Seems the only artist worth his salt is a dead one. I don't have many years left to lick the supermarket, leave a going business to my son, as my father did for me. I couldn't wait! I had to stop her from painting and 'finding' more of the pictures.

"I wanted to shoot her off the terrace, thought her body would never be found, but . . . here I am. Understand, it's all the fault of that stealing supermarket! Wasn't for them, a respectable businessman like myself would never be mixed up with a lot of crazy artists in the first place."

There was a moment of strained silence in the police station as Haff's voice died, broken only when Mrs. McCue, several streets away, began bellowing about her chowder growing cold.

ANSWERS TO HOLIDAY QUIZ

1, **The Murders in the Rue Morgue** (1841). 2, E. Phillips Oppenheim (1926) not, as a second thought will show you, Valentine Williams. 3, M. Hercule Poirot. 4, **Cleek, the Man of Forty Faces,** also the true 'Prince of Mauravania' (by T. W. Hanshew, 1910). 4, Philo Vance, in the novels by S. S. Van Dine. 5, Edgar Wallace, who conceived and wrote **King Kong** in 1932. 7, **The Adventures,** 1892 — **The Memoirs** were published in 1894 then re-issued in 1896 as **The Last Adventures of Sherlock Holmes.** 8, Sax Rohmer's Dr. Fu-Manchu. 9, (a) Belgian; (b) American; (c) French; (e) British; (f) American; (g) British. 10, 'New' Scotland Yard, properly used to distinguish it from Great Scotland Yard.

and so, farewell

Farewell, my dear child, and pray for me, and I shall for you, that we may merrily meet in heaven . . .

SIR THOMAS MORE, 1535.

. . . I despise death and in good faith protest that I receive it innocent of all crime . . .

MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS, 1587.

I bless my poor child, and let him know his father was no traitor. Be bold of my innocence, for God — to whom I offer life and soul—knows it . . .

SIR WALTER RALEIGH, 1603.

Be sure to avoid as much as you can to enquire after those who have been sharp in their judgments towards me, and I charge you never to suffer the thought of revenge to enter your heart . . .

EARL OF STRAFFORD, 1641.

. . . complaint of any kind would be beneath your courage and mine; be assured I will die as I have lived, and that you will have no cause to blush for me.

WOLFE TONE, 1798.

. . . I have asked to be spared from having any weak or hypocritical prayers made over me when I am publicly murdered . . .

JOHN BROWN, 1859.

. . . but I understand them, all the same. In their place I would be unable to conceal my scorn at the sight of an officer who had been proclaimed a traitor to his country . . .

ALFRED DREYFUS, 1894.

Remember me to so many, and thank those friends who pray for me- and don't pay any attention to the lies. They are compliments, really . . .

SIR ROGER CASEMENT, 1916.

period piece

THE SQUIRE'S STORY

MRS. GASKELL

A gentle, leisurely tale of crime, by the brilliant author of Cranford, *rich in 18th century colour. First published in* Household Words, 1853

IN THE year 1769 the little town of Barford was thrown into a state of great excitement by the intelligence that a gentleman—and 'quite the gentleman,' said the landlord of the George Inn—had been looking at Mr. Clavering's old house. This house was neither in the town nor in the country. It stood on the outskirts of Barford, on the roadside leading to Derby. The last occupant had been a Mr. Clavering—a Northumberland gentleman of good family—who had come to live in Barford while he was but a younger son; but when some elder branches of the family died, he had returned to take possession of the family estate. The house of which I speak was called the White House, from its being covered with a greyish kind of stucco. It had a good garden to the back, and Mr. Clavering had built capital stables, with what were then considered the latest improvements. The point of good stabling was expected to let the house, as it was in a hunting county; otherwise it had few recommendations. There were many bedrooms; some entered through others, even to the number of five, leading one beyond the other; several sitting-rooms of the small and poky kind, wainscoted round with wood, and then painted a heavy slate

colour; one good dining-room, and a drawing-room over it, both looking into the garden, with pleasant bow-windows.

Such was the accommodation offered by the White House. It did not seem to be very tempting to strangers, though the good people of Barford rather piqued themselves on it, as the largest house in the town; and as a house in which 'townspeople' and 'county people' had often met at Mr. Clavering's friendly dinners. To appreciate this circumstance of pleasant recollection, you should have lived some years in a little country town, surrounded by gentlemen's seats. You would then understand how a bow or a courtesy from a member of a county family elevates the individuals who receive it almost as much, in their own eyes, as the pair of blue garters fringed with silver did Mr. Bickerstaff's ward. They walk lightly on air for a whole day afterwards. Now Mr. Clavering was gone, where could town and country mingle?

I mention these things that you may have an idea of the desirability of the letting of the White House in the Barfordites' imagination; and to make the mixture thick and slab, you must add for yourselves the bustle, the mystery, and the importance which every little event either causes or assumes in a small town; and then, perhaps, it will be no wonder to you that twenty ragged little urchins accompanied the 'gentleman' to the door of the White House; and that, although he was above an hour inspecting it under the auspices of Mr. Jones, the agent's clerk, thirty more had joined themselves on to the wondering crowd before his exit, and awaited such crumbs of intelligence as they could gather before they were threatened out of hearing distance.

Presently out came the 'gentleman' and the lawyer's clerk. The latter was speaking as he followed the former over the threshold. The gentleman was tall, well-dressed, handsome; but there was a sinister cold look in his quick-glancing, light blue eyes, which a keen observer might not have liked. There were no keen observers among the boys and ill-conditioned gaping girls. But they stood too near; inconveniently close; and the gentleman, lifting up his right hand, in which he carried a short riding-whip, dealt one or two sharp blows to the nearest, with a look of savage enjoyment on his face as they moved away whimpering and crying. An instant after, his expression of countenance had changed.

"Here," said he, drawing out a handful of money, partly silver, partly copper, and throwing it into the midst of them. "Scramble for it; fight it out, my lads. Come this afternoon, at three, to the George, and I'll throw you some more."

So the boys hurrahed for him as he walked off with the clerk. He chuckled to himself, as over a pleasant thought. "I'll have some fun with those lads," he said; "I'll teach 'em to prowling and prying about me. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll make the money so hot in the fire-shovel that it shall burn their fingers. You come and see the faces and the howling. I shall be very glad if you will dine with me at two; and by that time I may have made up my mind respecting the house."

Mr. Jones, the clerk, agreed to come to the George at two; but, somehow, he had a distaste for his entertainer. Mr. Jones would not like to have said, even to himself, that a man with a purse full of money, who kept many horses, and spoke familiarly of noblemen—above all, who thought of taking the White House—could be anything but a gentleman; but still the uneasy wonder as to who this Mr. Robinson Higgins could be, filled the clerk's mind long after Mr. Higgins, Mr. Higgins's servants, and Mr. Higgins's stud had taken possession of the White House.

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The White House was re-stuccoed, this time of a pale yellow colour, and put into thorough repair by the accommodating and delighted landlord; while his tenant seemed inclined to spend any amount of money on internal decorations, which were showy and effective in their character, enough to make the White House a nine days' wonder to the people of Barford. The slate-coloured paints became pink, and were picked out with gold; the old-fashioned banisters were replaced by newly gilt ones; but, above all, the stables were a sight to be seen. Since the days of the Roman Emperor never was there such provision made for the care, the comfort, and the health of horses. But everyone said it was no wonder, when they were led through Barford, covered up to their eyes, but curving their arched and delicate necks, and prancing with short high steps, in repressed eagerness.

Only one groom came with them; yet they required the care of three men. Mr. Higgins, however, preferred engaging two

lads out of Barford; and Barford highly approved of his preference. Not only was it kind and thoughtful to give employment to the lounging lads themselves, but they were receiving such a training in Mr. Higgins's stables as might fit them for Doncaster or Newmarket.

The district of Derbyshire in which Barford was situated was too close to Leicestershire not to support a hunt and a pack of hounds. The master of the hounds was a certain Sir Harry Manley, who was *aut* a huntsman *aut nullus*. He measured a man by the 'length of his fork', not by the expression of his countenance or the shape of his head. But, as Sir Harry was wont to observe, there was such a thing as too long a fork, so his approbation was withheld until he had seen a man on horseback; and if his seat there was square and easy, his hand light, and his courage good, Sir Harry hailed him as a brother.

Mr. Higgins attended the first meet of the season, not as a subscriber but as an amateur. The Barford huntsmen prided themselves on their bold riding; and their knowledge of the country came by nature; yet this new strange man, whom nobody knew, was in at the death, sitting on his horse, both well breathed and calm, without a hair turned on the sleek skin of the latter, supremely addressing the old huntsman as he hacked off the tail of the fox; and he, the old man, who was testy even under Sir Harry's slightest rebuke, and flew out on any other member of the hunt that dared to utter a word against his sixty years' experience as stable-boy, groom, poacher, and what not—he, old Isaac Wormeley, was meekly listening to the wisdom of this stranger, only now and then giving one of his quick, up-turning, cunning glances, not unlike the sharp o'er-canny looks of the poor deceased Reynard, round whom the hounds were howling, unadmonished by the short whip, now tucked into Wormeley's well-worn pocket.

When Sir Harry rode into the copse—full of dead brushwood and wet tangled grass—and was followed by the members of the hunt, as one by one they cantered past, Mr. Higgins took off his cap and bowed—half deferentially, half insolently—with a lurking smile in the corner of his eye at the discomfited looks of one or two of the laggards.

"A famous run, sir," said Sir Harry. "The first time you have hunted in our country; but I hope we shall see you often."

"I hope to become a member of the hunt, sir," said Mr. Higgins.

"Most happy—proud, I'm sure, to receive so daring a rider among us. You took the Cropper-gate, I fancy; while some of our friends here" scowling at one or two cowards by way of finishing his speech. "Allow me to introduce myself—master of the hounds." He fumbled in his waistcoat pocket for the card on which his name was formally inscribed. "Some of our friends here are kind enough to come home with me to dinner; might I ask for the honour?"

"My name is Higgins," replied the stranger, bowing low. "I am only lately come to occupy the White House at Barford, and I have not as yet presented my letters of introduction."

"Hang it!" replied Sir Harry; "a man with a seat like yours, and that good brush in your hand, might ride up to any door in the county and be a welcome guest. Mr. Higgins, I shall be proud to become better acquainted with you over my dinner-table."

Mr. Higgins knew pretty well how to improve the acquaintance thus begun. He could sing a good song, tell a good story, and was well up in practical jokes; with plenty of that keen worldly sense, which seems like an instinct in some men, and which in this case taught him on whom he might play off such jokes, with impunity from their resentment, and with a security of applause from the more boisterous, vehement, or prosperous. At the end of twelve months Mr. Robinson Higgins was, out-and-out, the most popular member of the Barford hunt; had beaten all the others by a couple of lengths, as his first patron, Sir Harry, observed one evening, when they were just leaving the dinner-table of an old hunting squire in the neighbourhood.

"Because, you know," said Squire Hearn, holding Sir Harry by the arm—"I mean, you see, this young spark is looking sweet upon Catherine; and she's a good girl, and will have ten thousand pounds down, the day she's married, by her mother's will; and—excuse me, Sir Harry—but I should not like my girl to throw herself away."

Though Sir Harry had a long ride before him, and but the early and short light of a new moon to take it in, his kind heart was so much touched by Squire Hearn's trembling anxiety, that he stopped and turned back into the dining-room to say:

"My good Squire, I may say I know that man pretty well

by this time, and a better fellow never existed. If I had twenty daughters he should have the pick of them."

Squire Hearn never thought of asking the grounds for his old friend's opinion of Mr. Higgins: it had been given with too much earnestness for any doubts to cross the old man's mind as to the possibility of its not being well founded. Mr. Hearn was not a doubter, or a thinker, or suspicious by nature: it was simply love for Catherine, his only daughter, that prompted his anxiety in this case: and, after what Sir Harry had said, the old man could totter with an easy mind, though not with very steady legs, into the drawing-room, where Catherine and Mr. Higgins stood close together on the hearth-rug—he whispering, she listening with downcast eyes.

She looked so happy, so like what her dead mother had looked when the Squire was a young man, that all his thought was how to please her most. His son and heir was about to be married, and bring his wife to live with the Squire: Barford and the White House were not distant an hour's ride; and, even as these thoughts passed through his mind, he asked Mr. Higgins if he could not stay all night—the young moon was already set—the roads would be dark—and Catherine looked up with a pretty anxiety, which, however, had not much doubt in it, for the answer.

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With every encouragement of this kind from the old Squire, it took everybody rather by surprise when one morning it was discovered that Miss Catherine Hearn was missing: and when, according to the usual fashion in such cases, a note was found, saying that she had eloped with 'the man of her heart' and gone to Gretna Green, no one could imagine why she could not quietly have stopped at home and been married in the parish church. She had always been a romantic, sentimental girl: very pretty and very affectionate, and very much spoiled, and very much wanting in common sense. Her indulgent father was deeply hurt at this lack of confidence in his never-varying affection: but when his son came, hot with indignation from the baronet's—his future father-in-law's house, where every form of law and of ceremony was to accompany his own impending marriage—Squire Hearn pleaded the cause of the young couple with imploring cogency, and protested that it was

a piece of spirit in his daughter, which he admired and was proud of.

However, it ended with Mr. Nathaniel Hearn's declaring that he and his wife would have nothing to do with his sister and her husband.

"Wait till you've seen him, Nat," said the old Squire, trembling with his distressful anticipations of family discord; "he's an excuse for any girl. Only ask Sir Harry's opinion of him."

"Confound Sir Harry! So that a man sits his horse well, Sir Harry cares nothing about anything else. Who is this man—this fellow? Where does he come from? What are his means? Who are his family?"

"He comes from the south—Surrey or Somersetshire, I forget which; and he pays his way well and liberally. There's not a tradesman in Barford but says he cares no more for money than for water; he spends like a prince, Nat. I don't know who his family are, but he seals with a coat of arms, which may tell you if you want to know—and he goes regularly to collect his rents from his estates in the south. Oh, Nat, if you would but be friendly, I should be as well pleased with Kitty's marriage as any father in the county."

Mr. Nathaniel Hearn gloomed, and muttered an oath or two to himself. The father was reaping the consequences of his weak indulgence to his two children. Mr. and Mrs. Nathaniel Hearn kept apart from Catherine and her husband; and Squire Hearn durst never ask them to Levison Hall, though it was his own house. Indeed, he stole away as if he were a culprit whenever he went to visit the White House; and if he passed a night there, he had to equivocate when he returned home the next day, and equivocation which was well interpreted by the surly, proud Nathaniel. But the younger Mr. and Mrs. Hearn were the only people who did not visit at the White House.

Mr. and Mrs. Higgins were decidedly more popular than their brother and sister-in-law. She made a very pretty, sweet-tempered hostess, and her education had not been such as to make her intolerant of any want of refinement in the associates who gathered round her husband. She had gentle smiles for townspeople as well as county people; and unconsciously played an admirable second in her husband's project of making himself universally popular.

But there is someone to make ill-natured remarks, and draw ill-natured conclusions from very simple premises, in every place; and in Barford this bird of ill-omen was a Miss Pratt. She did not hunt– so Mr. Higgins's admirable riding did not call out her admiration. She did not drink– so the well-selected wines, so lavishly dispensed among his guests, could never mollify Miss Pratt. She could not bear comic songs, or stories —so, in that way, her approbation was impregnable. And these three secrets of popularity constituted Mr. Higgins's great charm.

Miss Pratt sat and watched. Her face looked immovably grave at the end of any of Mr. Higgins's best stories; but there was a keen, needle-like glance of her unwinking little eyes, which Mr. Higgins felt rather than saw, and which made him shiver, even on a hot day, when it fell upon him. Miss Pratt was a dissenter, and, to propitiate this female Mordecai, Mr. Higgins asked the dissenting minister whose services she attended, to dinner; kept himself and his company in good order; gave a handsome donation to the poor of the chapel.

All in vain—Miss Pratt stirred not a muscle of her face towards graciousness; and Mr. Higgins was conscious that, in spite of all his open efforts to captivate Mr. Davis, there was a secret influence on the other side, throwing in doubts and suspicions, and evil interpretations of all he said or did. Miss Pratt, the little, plain old maid, was the thorn in the popular Mr. Higgins's side, although she had never spoken one uncivil word to him; indeed, on the contrary, she had treated him with a stiff and elaborate civility.

The thorn—the grief to Mrs. Higgins—was this. They had no children. She would stand and envy the careless, busy motion of children in the street; and then, when observed, move on with a sigh of yearning regret. But it was as well.

It was noticed that Mr. Higgins was remarkably careful of his health. He ate, drank, took exercise, rested, by some secret rules of his own; occasionally bursting into an excess, it is true, but only on rare occasions—such as when he returned from visiting his estates in the south, and collecting his rents. That unusual exertion and fatigue—for there were no stage-coaches within forty miles of Barford, and he, like most country gentlemen of that day, would have preferred riding if there had been —seemed to require some strange excess to compensate for it;

and rumours went through the town that he shut himself up, and drank enormously for some days after his return. But no one was admitted to these orgies.

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One day—they remembered it well afterwards—the hounds met not far from the town; and the fox was found in a part of the wild heath, which was beginning to be enclosed by a few of the more wealthy townspeople, who were desirous of building themselves houses rather more in the country than those they had hitherto lived in.

Among these the principal was a Mr. Dudgeon, the attorney of Barford, and the agent for all the county families about. The firm of Dudgeon had managed the leases, the marriage-settlements, and the wills of the neighbourhood for generations. Mr. Dudgeon's father had the responsibility of collecting the landowners' rents just as the present Mr. Dudgeon had at the time, and as his son and his son's son have done since. Their business was an hereditary estate to them; and with something of the old feudal feeling was mixed a kind of proud humility at their position towards the squires, mysteries of whose fortunes and estates were better known to the Messrs. Dudgeon than to themselves.

Mr. John Dudgeon had built himself a house on Wildbury Heath—a mere cottage, as he called it; but though only two storeys high, it spread out far and wide, and workpeople from Derby had been sent for on purpose to make the inside as complete as possible. The gardens were exquisite in arrangement, if not very extensive; and not a flower was grown in them but of the rarest species.

It must have been somewhat of a mortification to the owner of this place when, on the day of which I speak, the fox, after a long race, during which he had described a circle of many miles, took refuge in the garden; but Mr. Dudgeon put a good face on the matter when a gentleman hunter, with the careless insolence of the squires of those days and that place, rode across the velvet lawn, and tapping at the window of the dining-room with his whip-handle, informed Mr. Dudgeon of their intention to enter his garden in a body, and have the fox unearthed. Mr. Dudgeon compelled himself to smile assent, and then hastily gave orders to have all that the house afforded

of provision set out for luncheon, guessing rightly enough that a six hours' run would give even homely fare an acceptable welcome.

He bore without wincing the entrance of the dirty boots into his exquisitely clean rooms; he only felt grateful for the care with which Mr. Higgins strode about, laboriously and noiselessly moving on the tip of his toes, as he reconnoitred the rooms with a curious eye.

"I'm going to build a house myself, Dudgeon; and, upon my word, I don't think I could take a better model than yours."

"Oh, my poor cottage would be too small to afford any hints for such house as you would wish to build, Mr. Higgins," replied Mr. Dudgeon, gently rubbing his hands nevertheless at the compliment.

"Not at all! Not at all! Let me see. You have the dining-room, drawing-room"—he hesitated, and Mr. Dudgeon filled up the blank as he expected.

"Four sitting-rooms and the bedrooms. But allow me to show you over the house. I confess I took some pains in arranging it, and, though far smaller than what you would require, it may, nevertheless, afford you some hints."

So they left the gentlemen, with their mouths and their plates quite full, and the scent of the fox overpowering that of the hasty rashers of ham; and carefully inspected all the ground-floor rooms. Then Mr. Dudgeon said:

"If you are not tired, Mr. Higgins- it is rather my hobby, so you must pull me up if you are- we will go upstairs, and I will show you my sanctum."

Mr. Dudgeon's sanctum was the centre room, over the porch, which formed a balcony, and which was carefully filled with choice flowers in pots. Inside, there were all kinds of elegant contrivances for hiding the real strength of all the boxes and chests required by the particular nature of Mr. Dudgeon's business: for although his office was in Barford, he kept, as he informed Mr. Higgins, what was the most valuable here, as being safer than an office which was locked up and left every night.

But, as Mr. Higgins reminded him, when next they met, his own house was not over-secure. A fortnight after the gentlemen of the Barford hunt lunched there, Mr. Dudgeon's strong-box—in his sanctum upstairs—with the mysterious spring-bolt

to the window invented by himself, and the secret of which was only known to the inventor and a few of his most intimate friends, to whom he had proudly shown it: this strong-box, containing the collected Christmas rents of half a dozen landlords, there was then no bank nearer than Derby, was rifled; and the secretly rich Mr. Dudgeon had to stop his agent in his purchases of paintings by Flemish artists, because the money was required to make good the missing rents.

The Dogberries of those days were quite incapable of obtaining any clue to the robber or robbers; and though one or two vagrants were taken up and brought before Mr. Dunover and Mr. Higgins, the magistrates who usually attended in the court-room at Barford, there was no evidence brought against them, and after a couple of nights in the lock-ups they were set at liberty. But it became a standing joke with Mr. Higgins to ask Mr. Dudgeon, from time to time, whether he would recommend him a place of safety for his valuables; or if he had made any more inventions lately for securing houses from robbers.

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About two years after this time—about seven years after Mr. Higgins had been married—one Tuesday evening, Mr. Davis was sitting reading the news in the coffee-room of the George Inn. He belonged to a club of gentlemen who met there occasionally to play at whist, to read what few newspapers and magazines were published in those days, to chat about the market at Derby, and prices all over the country.

This Tuesday night it was a black frost; and few people were in the room. Mr. Davis was anxious to finish an article in the *Gentleman's Magazine*; indeed, he was making extracts from it, intending to answer it, and yet unable with his small income to purchase a copy. So he stayed late: it was past nine, and at ten o'clock the room was closed.

But while he wrote, Mr. Higgins came in. He was pale and haggard with cold; Mr. Davis, who had had for some time sole possession of the fire, moved politely on one side, and handed to the newcomer the sole London newspaper which the room afforded.

Mr. Higgins accepted it, and made some remark on the intense coldness of the weather; but Mr. Davis was too full of his article, and intended reply, to fall into conversation readily.

Mr. Higgins hitched his chair nearer to the fire, and put his feet on the fender, giving an audible shudder. He put the newspaper on one end of the table near him, and sat gazing into the red embers of the fire, crouching down over them as if his very marrow were chilled. At length he said:

"There is no account of the murder at Bath in that paper."

Mr. Davis, who had finished taking his notes, and was preparing to go, stopped short, and asked:

"Has there been a murder at Bath? No! I have not seen anything of it—who was murdered?"

"Oh, it was a shocking, terrible murder!" said Mr. Higgins, not raising his look from the fire, but gazing on with his eyes dilated till the whites were seen all round them. "A terrible, terrible murder! I wonder what will become of the murderer? I can fancy the red glowing centre of that fire- look and see how infinitely distant it seems, and how the distance magnifies it into something awful and unquenchable."

"My dear sir, you are feverish," said Mr. Davis, thinking privately that his companion had symptoms of fever, and that he was wandering in his mind.

"Oh, no!" said Mr. Higgins, "I am not feverish. It is the night which is so cold."

And for a time he talked with Mr. Davis about the article in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, for he was rather a reader himself, and could take more interest in Mr. Davis's pursuits than most of the people at Barford. At length it drew near to ten, and Mr. Davis rose up to go home to his lodgings.

"No, Davis, don't go. I want you here. We will have a bottle of port together, and that will put Saunders into good humour. I want to tell you about this murder," he continued, dropping his voice, and speaking hoarse and low. "She was an old woman, and he killed her, sitting reading her Bible by her own fireside!" He looked at Mr. Davis with a strange gaze, as if trying to find some sympathy in the horror which the idea presented to him.

"Who do you mean, my dear sir? What is this murder you are so full of? No one has been murdered here."

"No, you fool! I tell you it was in Bath!" said Mr. Higgins, with sudden passion; and then calming himself to most velvet-smoothness of manner, he laid his hand on Mr. Davis's knee, there, as they sat by the fire, and gently detaining him, began

the narration of the crime he was so full of; but his voice and manner were constrained to a stony quietude: he never looked in Mr. Davis's face; once or twice, as Mr. Davis remembered afterwards, his grip tightened like a compressing vice.

"She lived in a small house in a quiet old-fashioned street, she and her maid. People said she was a good old woman; but for all that she hoarded and hoarded, and never gave to the poor. Mr. Davis, it is wicked not to give to the poor—wicked—wicked, is it not? I always give to the poor, for once I read in the Bible that 'Charity covereth a multitude of sins'. The old woman never gave, but hoarded her money, and saved, and saved. Someone heard of it; I say she threw a temptation in his way, and God will punish her for it. And this man—or it might be a woman, who knows?—and this person heard also that she went to church in the mornings, and her maid in the afternoons; and so, while the maid was at church, and the street and the house quite still, and the darkness of a winter afternoon coming on—she was nodding over the Bible—and that, mark you, is a sin, and one that God will avenge sooner or later; and a step came in the dusk up the stair, and that person I told you of stood in the room. At first he—no! At first, it is supposed—for, you understand, all this is mere guesswork—it is supposed that he asked her civilly enough to give him her money, or to tell him where it was; but the old miser defied him, and would not ask for mercy and give up her keys, even when he threatened her, but looked him in the face as if he had been a baby—oh, God! Mr. Davis, I once dreamt when I was a little boy that I should commit a crime like this, and I wakened up crying; and my mother comforted me—that is the reason I tremble so now—that and the cold, for it is very, very cold!"

"But did he murder the old lady?" asked Mr. Davis. "I beg your pardon, sir, but I am interested by your story."

"Yes, he cut her throat; and there she lies yet in her little parlour, with her face upturned and white, in the middle of a pool of blood. Mr. Davis, this wine is no better than water; I must have some brandy!"

Mr. Davis was horror-struck by the story, which seemed to have fascinated him as much as it had done his companion.

"Have they got any clue to the murderer?" said he. Mr.

Higgins drank down half a tumbler of raw brandy before he answered.

"No, no clue whatever. They will never be able to discover him, and I should not wonder- Mr. Davis—I should not wonder if he repented after all, and did bitter penance for his crime; and if so—will there be mercy for him at the last day?"

"God knows!" said Mr. Davis, with solemnity. "It is an awful story," continued he, rousing himself; "I hardly like to leave this warm room and go out into the darkness after hearing it. But it must be done," buttoning on his great-coat—"I can only say I hope and trust they will find out the murderer and hang him. If you'll take my advice, Mr. Higgins, you'll have your bed warmed, and drink a treacle-posset just the last thing; and, if you'll allow me, I'll send you my answer to Philologus before it goes up to old Urban."

The next morning Mr. Davis went to call on Miss Pratt, who was not very well; and by way of being agreeable and entertaining, he related to her all he had heard the night before about the murder at Bath. And he made a very pretty connected story out of it, and interested Miss Pratt very much in the fate of the old lady—partly because of a similarity in their situations; for she also privately hoarded money, and had but one servant, and stopped at home alone on Sunday afternoons to allow her servant to go to church.

"And when did all this happen?" she asked.

"I don't know if Mr. Higgins named the day; and yet I think it must have been on this very last Sunday."

"And today is Wednesday. Ill news travels fast."

"Yes, Mr. Higgins thought it might have been in the London newspaper."

"That it could never be. Where did Mr. Higgins learn all about it?"

"I don't know. I did not ask; I think he only came home yesterday; he had been south to collect his rents, somebody said."

Miss Pratt grunted. She used to vent her dislike and suspicions of Mr. Higgins in a grunt whenever his name was mentioned.

"Well, I shan't see you for some days. Godfrey Merton has asked me to go and stay with him and his sister; and I think it will do me good. Besides," added she, "these winter evenings

—and these murderers at large in the country—I don't quite like living with only Peggy to call to in case of need."

Miss Pratt went to stay with her cousin, Mr. Merton. He was an active magistrate, and enjoyed his reputation as such. One day he came in, having just received his letters.

"Bad account of the morals of your little town here, Jessy," said he, touching one of his letters. "You've either a murderer among you, or some friend of a murderer. Here's a poor old lady at Bath had her throat cut last Sunday week; and I've a letter from the Home Office, asking to lend them 'my very efficient aid', as they are pleased to call it, towards finding out the culprit. It seems he must have been thirsty, for before going to his horrid work he tapped a barrel of ginger wine the old lady had set by to work; and he wrapped the spigot round with a piece of a letter taken out of his pocket, as may be supposed. This piece of a letter was found afterwards; there are only these letters on the outside, '*ns, Esq., -arford, -egworth*', which someone has ingeniously made out to mean Barford, near Kegworth. On the other side there is some allusion to a racehorse, I conjecture, though the name is singular enough: 'Church-and-King-and-down-with-the-Rump'."

Miss Pratt caught at this name immediately; it had hurt her feelings as a dissenter only a few months ago, and she remembered it well.

"Mr. Nat Hearn has- -or had, as I am speaking in the witness-box, as it were, I must take care of my tenses, a horse with that ridiculous name."

"Mr. Nat Hearn," repeated Mr. Merton. He referred to his letter from the Home Office again. "There is also a piece of a small key, broken in the futile attempt to open a desk—well, well. Nothing more of consequence. The letter is what we must rely upon."

"Mr. Davis said that Mr. Higgins told him——" Miss Pratt began.

"Higgins!" exclaimed Mr. Merton, "*ns*. Is it Higgins, the blustering fellow that ran away with Nat Hearn's sister?"

"Yes!" said Miss Pratt. "But though he has never been a favourite of mine——"

"*ns*," repeated Mr. Merton. "It is too horrible to think of: a member of the hunt- kind old Squire Hearn's son-in-law! Who else have you in Barford with names that end in *ns*?"

"There's Jackson, and Higginson, and Blenkinsop, and Davis, and Jones. Cousin! One thing strikes me- how did Mr. Higgins know all about it to tell Mr. Davis on Tuesday what had happened on Sunday afternoon?"

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There is no need to add much more. Those curious in lives of the highwaymen may find the name of Higgins as conspicuous among those annals as that of Claude Duval. Kate Hearn's husband collected his rents on the highway, like many another 'gentleman' of the day: but, having been unlucky in one or two of his adventures, and hearing exaggerated accounts of the hoarded wealth of the old lady at Bath, he was led on from robbery to murder, and was hanged for his crime at Derby in 1775.

He had not been an unkind husband; and his poor wife took lodgings in Derby to be near him in his last moments- his awful last moments. Her old father went with her everywhere, but into her husband's cell; and wrung her heart by constantly accusing himself of having promoted her marriage with a man of whom he knew so little. He abdicated his squireship in favour of his son Nathaniel.

Nat was prosperous, and the helpless father could be of no use to him; but to his widowed daughter the old man was all in all; her knight, her protector, her companion—her most faithful loving companion. Only he ever declined assuming the office of her counsellor—shaking his head sadly and saying:

"Ah, Kate, Kate! if I had had more wisdom to have advised thee better, thou need'st not have been an exile here in Brussels, shrinking from the sight of every English person as if they knew thy story."

I saw the White House not long ago; it was to let, perhaps for the twentieth time since Mr. Higgins occupied it; but still the tradition goes in Barford that once upon a time a highwayman lived there, and amassed untold treasures; and that the ill-gotten wealth yet remains walled up in some unknown concealed chamber; but in what part of the house no one knows.

READERS like to know what other readers think, are pleased or annoyed about . . . the Readers Say pages welcome letters.

THE RATTENBURY TRAGEDY

T. C. H. JACOBS

A fresh look at a modern murder, a veritable gem of horror

CRIMES OF passion are largely the result of excessive sexual desire which, frustrated or inflamed, provokes jealousy and hatred to the point where murder seems not only plausible, but appears as the one solution to an intolerable burden.

Such was the case in the Villa Madeira murder. Its interest lies mainly in the extraordinary character of Alma Rattenbury, a woman cursed with an abnormal sexual appetite.

At the time of the tragedy, in March 1935, she was thirty-eight years of age, a Canadian by birth, and still an attractive woman. She had been married three times and had one son by her first marriage and another by her third marriage, to Francis Rattenbury, a man nearly thirty years her senior. With such a woman the marriage was bound to fail, and she must have known it. One can only assume she married because at the time Rattenbury's financial position was agreeably comfortable, very different from her own.

The Rattenburys moved into the Villa Madeira, in Manor Road, Bournemouth, in 1933. Alma Rattenbury, a pianist and composer of considerable ability, and a woman who could be very charming when she so willed, soon established for herself a pleasant social circle. But if the ladies came to look a little sideways upon her, at least she was very popular with the men.

Her elderly husband entered hardly at all into her activities. He preferred quiet drinking with his own friends. His financial position allowed him to be generous to his wife and he did

not interfere, even when he must have been more than suspicious of some of her adventures.

Occasionally her demands for more money became too excessive and then there were quarrels. At first few of these were serious. She seems to have been able to 'manage' her elderly husband with her charms and seldom failed to get her own way in the end.

However, the strain of living with such an ardent woman, who had also developed a strong taste for alcohol, began to have its effect on Francis Mawson Rattenbury, the retired architect who had previously led such a very quiet life. He became irritable and nervous, morbidly anxious about his financial affairs, perhaps not without reason. He talked frequently of suicide. His friends became worried about him and advised him to consult a doctor. But this he refused to do, although he had a family doctor who was his friend.

Alma Rattenbury did not take his suicidal threats seriously and made no effort to amend her ways. Life at the villa went on as before, until the night of July 9th 1934, when the family doctor received a summons shortly before midnight. He found Mrs. Rattenbury with a remarkably fine black eye, which she had been easing with the comfort of the whisky decanter. She said her husband had struck her a violent blow and then gone off screaming he would commit suicide.

The doctor gave her a shot of morphia to quieten her and dressed the bruised eye. He was aware of the unhappy circumstances which had developed at the villa. As the doctor was leaving, Francis Rattenbury returned, very sorry for what he had done, and all seemed well between them again.

But Rattenbury's morbid anxiety about his financial affairs deepened until it became an obsession with him. However, by September his health had improved and he had reached a more happy frame of mind, largely due to the medical attention he had been induced to receive from the family doctor.

At his wife's suggestion, a youth named George Stoner was engaged as handyman and chauffeur. Rattenbury agreed, unaware that he was signing his own death warrant. Stoner quickly became Alma's lover, a fact which she took no pains to conceal, and which must have been known to Rattenbury, unless he was really as stupid as he sometimes appeared to be. Maybe he didn't care any more.

Stoner was eighteen years of age, an unbalanced youth, with an exaggerated urge for self-dramatization. This was shown by his declaration that he was addicted to cocaine and his habit of carrying a dagger. When the question of his addiction to cocaine came up at the trial, no medical officer who had examined Stoner could find the slightest trace that he had ever taken cocaine in any form. When asked to state the appearance of the drug, Stoner said it was brown with black spots, clearly showing that he had not even seen cocaine.

Mrs. Rattenbury, however, appears to have believed him. She was worried by his alleged drug taking and his violence toward her. This sometimes took the form of an attempt to strangle her when she was sharing her bed with him. He was violent in his love making, too. But despite this, she evidently found him very much to her taste, and their relationship continued with mounting intensity.

Stoner was an unpleasant youth with exaggerated ideas. He demanded something more for himself than the opportunities offered as a mere servant at the Villa Madeira, although he was the lover of the mistress of the house. To satisfy him, on March 19th 1935, Mrs. Rattenbry, on the plea that she needed an immediate operation, obtained £250 from her husband. With this money she took Stoner to London, where they registered as brother and sister at one of the best hotels. She spent money freely on expensive presents for him and generally they had a very hectic time.

★

When they returned to Bournemouth, Stoner appears to have been in a more amiable frame of mind. The taste of 'high life' in London had done something to satisfy his inordinate vanity and his Walter Mitty-like dreams of grandeur. If Francis Rattenbury suspected that the visit to London was for this purpose, he made no complaints and no quarrel with his wife developed from it. This complaisant attitude toward adultery in a husband was later to come in for some caustic comments from the judge, Mr. Justice Humphreys.

Stoner continued to share Mrs. Rattenbury's bed with her, even with her young son sleeping in the same room. But not for long. On March 28th happened the tragedy which ended it all so bloodily.

Francis Rattenbury was depressed again about his financial position and was seeking consolation in a bottle of whisky a day. His wife tried to cheer him up. She was not a bad or vicious woman, but one cursed with a physical appetite (to the 'verge of nymphomania' as F. Tennyson Jesse was to write) quite beyond her elderly husband's powers to satisfy. She was probably worried, too, in case they really were in financial trouble. On Sunday, the 28th, she induced him to go for a drive with her to see some puppies which had been born to her terrier bitch, an animal for which her husband had great affection. In the afternoon she had tea with him alone in his bedroom. Stoner carried in the tea-tray to them and was all too obviously in sullen mood.

The question of finance was discussed between husband and wife. Again Rattenbury's mind seemed to be full of the idea of suicide. His wife, who had heard all this so many times before, was not unduly alarmed, but rather more impressed than previously. She suggested contacting a business acquaintance who might straighten out any financial tangle and give some assurance to Rattenbury that he was not in the trouble he imagined.

His depression was lifted a little. When she suggested a trip to Bridport for a holiday together, he agreed. Later, when he was dozing in his chair, she went out to telephone and fix arrangements for the journey and hotel accommodation.

This did not suit George Stoner. He felt he was being slighted, relegated to the position of a mere servant again and not the virtual master of the house. He had overheard the telephone conversation and the arrangements being made. He pulled an air-pistol from his pocket and threatened to kill her. Mrs. Rattenbury mistook this toy for a real gun and was scared. She promised she would not sleep in the same room as her husband at Bridport and so there would be no break in her relationship with Stoner, who was coming with them as chauffeur and being lodged in the same hotel.

Later, that same evening, Irene Riggs, the maid-companion, was startled by hearing Mrs. Rattenbury screaming. When she ran to investigate, she found Rattenbury slumped unconscious in an armchair breathing very heavily, and with a bloodstained head. Mrs. Rattenbury told her to telephone for the family doctor. The maid hurried away to do so.

When the doctor did not arrive within a short time of the call, Stoner, who had been on the landing, leaning on the banister rail, smoking cigarettes nonchalantly, as if bored by the proceedings, was sent to bring the doctor with all speed.

Dr. William O'Donnell found Rattenbury unconscious, his head enveloped in a towel saturated with blood. This was obviously a much more serious matter than previous quarrels. He examined his patient and discovered three ugly wounds on the head. From their situation and appearance he judged that they had been struck with a blunt instrument, and from behind. That they might prove fatal he instantly realised and had his patient removed to a nursing home, where he could receive proper attention: Rattenbury died three days later without recovering consciousness.

Mrs. Rattenbury, when Dr. O'Donnell arrived, was drunk. But not so intoxicated that she could not point out to him certain marked passages in a book her husband had been reading. These passages all referred to suicide, suggesting that self-destruction was to be preferred to a useless life. Why she should have done this was later explained. It was all too plain that her husband could not have tried to commit suicide, but had been deliberately battered by another person, standing behind him.

The doctor informed the police. Inspector Mills took charge of the investigation. He found Mrs. Rattenbury still in a drunken condition and wondered if she was fit to answer questions. When he told her that her husband was critically ill and might die, she made a number of rambling statements confessing to attempted murder. As she was in no state to be formally charged, the doctor suggested giving her a shot of morphia to quieten her. To this the police officer agreed. She was put to bed and she fell asleep. The time was 2 a.m.

In the course of her rambling statement Mrs. Rattenbury had mentioned striking her husband with a mallet. The head wounds could have been made by such an instrument, but a search failed to reveal it. Stoner was questioned, but denied he had ever seen a mallet in the house.

Inspector Mills was very unfavourably impressed by Stoner. He knew the type. He questioned him closely. Stoner remained calm and indifferent and did not appear to have any guilty knowledge of the unhappy affair.

Mrs. Rattenbury was awake soon after 6 a.m. and, after further questioning, she was formally charged with the attempted murder of her husband, and arrested. She signed a statement admitting the crime. She said that after a game of cards he had suddenly dared her to kill him. He said that he was tired of living and wished to die. He taunted her with lack of courage to do it. Infuriated by his taunts, she had picked up the mallet and struck him. She had then hidden the mallet in the garden.

The presence of a weapon like a mallet in a drawing room suggested premeditation and her statement was viewed with considerable doubt. It was recalled that she had pointed out to Dr. O'Donnell the marked passages relating to suicide in the book which her husband was supposed to have been reading. Her explanation of the crime looked too much like an attempt to excuse herself.

When she came up for trial she told a quite different story.

From Holloway Prison she wrote to Stoner asking him to see her. Stoner was still resident at the Villa Madeira. He went to London, but returned without visiting her. He had been drinking heavily and when Riggs spoke to him, asking him about their mistress, he said that he alone was responsible for her being in prison, that he intended to give himself up and make full confession to the crime, exonerating her. If he hadn't been so drunk, maybe, he would not have tried to impress the maid with such a noble gesture. But he had committed himself, and he had to go through with it.

On his own confession he was arrested and charged jointly with Mrs. Rattenbury.

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They came up for trial before Mr. Justice Humphreys at the Central Criminal Court, Old Bailey, on March 27th 1935, charged with a crime of passion which had much in common with the case of Edith Thompson and Frederick Bywaters. Thirteen years previously Mr. Justice Humphreys had been Counsel for the Prosecution in that case. It must have been sharply in his mind when he took his place on the Bench on this occasion.

Few trials have excited great public interest and controversy than the Thompson-Bywaters trial. A large section of the pub-

lic felt very strongly that Mrs. Thompson should not have been placed in the dock with her lover, and that she was no more than the unfortunate cause of the murder. The guilt or innocence of Mrs. Thompson has been the subject of millions of words and the basis of many plays and novels.

The Court of Criminal Appeal had dismissed the appeal against the death sentence. The Home Secretary, after a long review of all the circumstances, bombarded with petitions, could find no reasons to reprieve Mrs. Thompson.

Was the Rattenbury trial going to be another such case?

Both Mrs. Rattenbury and George Stoner had made separate statements, each admitting guilt. The question arose as to whether the murder had been the result of 'one common design'. Was there a joint agreement between the accused to act together in this crime?

It was in the judge's discretion as to whether the accused should be tried separately. Mr. J. D. Casswell, for Stoner, applied for a separate trial on the grounds of a letter written by Mrs. Rattenbury to her maid, in which occurred the sentence, 'I should think his remorse at what he's brought down on my head would drive him a raving lunatic'. This letter had been admitted in evidence. The judge ruled that it was no ground for a separate trial and ordered that they be tried together.

Mr. Justice Humphreys was very careful to discover what condition Mrs. Rattenbury was in at the time she made her confession. He questioned the maid and the doctor at considerable length, because when she had first come from her bedroom she had stated that she believed that Rattenbury's grown-up son, who was not resident in the house, had struck the blows.

The doctor was a clear and reliable witness. When asked if she was under the influence of drink, he replied that she was actually intoxicated and had had one-half grain of morphia, which he had administered to make her sleep. Asked if there was any sign that she was in the habit of using a hypodermic syringe, or that she was a drug addict, he replied definitely that there was not.

The judge felt it his duty to remind the jury that they must consider whether Mrs. Rattenbury in her condition and after that terrible night knew what she was saying and signing. He

invited the jury to make a comparison of her signature to the confession with specimens of her signatures to a number of cheques.

Mrs. Rattenbury elected to go into the witness box. Although she looked drawn and haggard, a sick woman, she gave her evidence in a quiet, convincing voice and manner. She had had time to think things over while she was in prison. She had decided that either there was no hope of shielding George Stoner, or that he was not worth it. If her story surprised and shocked the people in the public gallery, it came as no revelation to the police.

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After putting her small son to bed she had returned to the drawing-room, where she had played cards with her husband. He was in better spirits than usual, quite jolly in fact. She had kissed him 'Good night' at nine-thirty and gone to her room to pack a case for the visit to Bridport the following day.

As was customary, George Stoner came to her room later and got into bed with her. He was in an excited state and declared that she would not go to Bridport, because he had hurt Rattenbury too much. She was so accustomed to Stoner's lies and stupid exaggerations that she did not take him seriously until she heard sounds of groaning coming from the drawing-room.

She got out of bed and hurried down. Rattenbury was slumped in a chair, groaning and bleeding heavily from head wounds. She tried to bring him to consciousness and failed. Frightened by the dreadful affair, she had poured herself whisky, too much whisky, and felt very ill afterwards. She could remember very little of what followed, except placing a wet towel around her husband's head and endeavouring to get his dentures back into his mouth. She had no recollection of having Dr. O'Donnell called, or of switching on the radio, or the arrival of Inspector Mills and other police officers.

That was her story, and it rang true. She had spared herself nothing, and her account of the tragedy must have impressed the jury has being the plain truth. She was a self-confessed adulteress, but that didn't make her a murderess, too.

Stoner did not go into the witness box. His defence was that he was a cocaine addict and had attacked Mr. Rattenbury in a

fit of uncontrollable jealousy while the balance of his mind was upset by the drug.

The judge made short work of this plea. Certainly Stoner looked a poor specimen, completely washed-out, due, no doubt, to the life he had been leading. But, as the judge explained to the jury, Stoner had given no sign to the experienced police officers when they had arrived at the villa that he was under the influence of drugs. He was not excited, noisy, or drowsy, but appeared to be very much in control of himself. When Mrs. Rattenbury had been arrested, he had told her brutally that she had got herself into the mess through talking too much and she could take what was coming to her.

The judge reminded the jury that if an addict is cut off from his source of supply serious illness results, together with an inability to sleep. While in prison awaiting trial Stoner had slept well, had a big appetite, and had put on weight. The jury could not have taken long to come to a decision on Stoner's plea of being a drug addict.

Mr. T. J. O'Connor, K.C., Counsel for Mrs. Rattenbury, dealt at length on Stoner's part in the crime. Addressing the jury, he said:

"Members of the jury, I suggest that the very clumsiness of the crime brands it as a crime of impulse. And if it be a crime of impulse it is not difficult to understand one impulse resulting in one act, but the theory of two synchronized impulses occurring in two different minds is, indeed, a difficult one to accept.

"Perhaps the most horrible part of my task is, in the performance of my duty to Mrs. Rattenbury, to have to call your attention to facts which clearly indicate that Stoner conceived and executed the crime. Stoner, as you know, is still a lad. His upbringing was simple. He had but few friends and no girl friends. He was flung at the age of seventeen into a vortex of vice. The evidence shows him to be an unbalanced, melodramatic boy, given to violent outbursts, an unbalanced, hysterical, melodramatic youth.

"Consider his first associations with passionate womanhood. He is taken away from his work as chauffeur, stays sumptuously at a West End hotel for a week with his mistress, wearing at night silk pyjamas from a West End store. Then he is

brought back to earth, to his drudging duties, submitting to orders from his mistress's husband.

"If you are judging moral responsibility your task might be a light one, for you cannot resist nausea and disgust at the way this middle-aged woman has ensnared and degraded this hapless youth. But that is not your task today."

Later, Mr. O'Connor said:

"Too late, like Frankenstein, she discovered that she had created the monster which she could no longer control. I beg of you to discount your horror at her moral failure and remember that the worst misery which you could inflict upon this wretched youth would be to convict her of something for which he knows she is not responsible.

"Mercifully, perhaps, you may say to yourselves, she has been punished enough. Wherever she walks she will be a figure of shame. But that is not your responsibility. It is hers."

Stoner's Counsel was eloquent in his protests that here they had a young, inexperienced youth, flattered and shamelessly seduced by a woman of the world with a quite abnormal sex appetite. It was not denied that it was this young boy's hand that had struck the fatal blows, but it was clear that at the time he did not know what he was doing. It could not possibly have been the act of a sane youth.

Unfortunately for Stoner, this did not square with the evidence as to his character.

Irene Riggs in her evidence stated that two days after the crime she had occasion to go over to Wimborne and was driven in the Rattenbury's car by Stoner. He pointed to some houses on the way and said it was where his grandfather lived and from whom he had borrowed the fatal mallet. When Miss Riggs suggested there would be fingerprints on the mallet, Stoner said he had been careful of that and had worn gloves.

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Mr. Justice Humphreys' summing-up was a masterpiece of clear statement and absolute fairness, covering every point raised during the four days of the trial. He carefully explained the law to the jury. He said:

"If two persons agree together that a felony, such as felonious wounding, should be committed on somebody, and if in the pursuance of that agreement that felonious wounding was com-

mitted by one of them and death was caused and ensued as a result of that felonious wounding, then each of those persons was equally guilty of murder.

"That is the law. It matters not by the hand of which of them that the fatal blow was delivered and it matters not whether both of them were present at the time.

"Members of the jury, it is no pleasant thing to have to say anything about that woman's character, but even her own Counsel, addressing you yesterday, said things about her which must be very painful for her to hear, if indeed she is a person who has any moral understanding at all.

"It is the case for the Crown, as I understand it, that this woman is a woman so lost to all sense of decency, so entirely without morals, that she would stop at nothing to gain her ends, particularly her sexual gratification, and if that be true, then, say the prosecution, do you think that such a woman would stop at killing her husband, particularly if she did not do it herself?

"You will remember that she gave evidence herself that she was regularly committing adultery with her husband's servant, and that in the bedroom was her child of six. It may be that you will say you cannot possibly feel any sympathy for her.

"But let me say this, that should not make you more ready to convict her of this crime. It should not, if anything make you less ready to accept her evidence."

Mr. Justice Humphreys then gave a special warning against moral prejudice. Speaking slowly and very deliberately, he said:

"Beware that you do not convict her of this crime of which she is accused because she is an adulteress, and an adulteress, you may think, of the most unpleasant type."

It took the jury under an hour to come to a decision. One can appreciate their difficulties in such a case. A woman like Alma Rattenbury was a woman beyond their experience. She was more than twice Stoner's age, and she appeared to have no moral values whatever. Yet she had impressed them by her frank confession and her honesty. Stoner, on the other hand, had not. When they returned the foreman gave the verdicts of 'Guilty, but with recommendation to mercy' against Stoner, and 'Not Guilty' in favour of Mrs. Rattenbury, who was formally discharged.

The judge then assumed the traditional black cap and sentenced Stoner to death.

Stoner appealed against the sentence of death. The appeal was heard before Lord Chief Justice Hewart, Mr. Justice Lawrence and Mr. Justice Swift.

Mr. Cresswell, for Stoner, in a spirited and forceful argument, put the case that the two prisoners should have been tried separately, since each had confessed to the crime.

Stoner, he said, had not gone into the witness box because he wished to save Mrs. Rattenbury and not incriminate her. He objected strongly to the judge's handling of the defence that Stoner was under the influence of cocaine at the time of the murder.

The Court dismissed the appeal, upholding Mr. Justice Humphreys' decision to try the two cases together. Dealing with the plea that the defence of drug addiction had been ignored, the Court of Criminal Appeal expressed the opinion that, far from the judge ignoring it, he had treated the matter with almost excessive respect.

The Lord Chief Justice added his own comments. He said:

"It is suggested that in some way or other Mr. Justice Humphreys did not quite appreciate the evidence. A man who is capable of believing that is capable of believing anything."

The usual flood of petitions poured into the Home Secretary. After a careful review of the case he found it possible to recommend a reprieve for Stoner and his sentence was commuted to penal servitude for life. He was released from Winchester Prison in 1942 and is still living in Hampshire.

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So George Stoner did not die. But Alma Rattenbury did.

Four days after her acquittal a farmhand saw a woman standing on the bank of the River Avon at a spot near Christchurch. She had a long knife in her hand. Suspecting what she was about to do, the farmhand ran toward her. Before he could reach her she had stabbed herself six times in the breast. She fell forward into the water and disappeared.

When the farmhand reached the spot he saw blood staining the water. On the bank was a handbag, a coat and a blood-stained knife. Being unable to recover the body, he hurried off for assistance. When the police examined the contents of the

handbag, they found a 'suicide' letter, making it quite clear that Mrs. Rattenbury had died by her own hand, haunted by the terrible tragedy.

A verdict of 'Suicide while of unsound mind' was returned at the inquest. Alma Rattenbury had paid a heavy price for her abnormal sexual appetite and unrestrained passions. But Miss Tennyson Jesse, later, added a personal opinion on the suicide that 'she must have known it would be worse for her children if she lived than if she died'.

CLASSIFIED

Vignette from Life (4)

'Again the Ringer'

ROGER GARNETT

A picturesque and engaging rogue whose story rivals fiction

THE LAST time I saw 'The Ringer' must have been ten years ago, when he was in No. 1 Criminal Court, Old Bailey, a wistful but highly critical member of the public. We were watching a trial concerning a horse-racing conspiracy; the Ringer thought it poor stuff.

As he was entitled to do. In his prime that delightful, quite engaging rogue, Peter Christian Barrie, cut a swath through British racing history that has never been equalled. In the golden age before World War II, Ringer Barrie and his gang — it constantly changed — ran circles round the wiliest of his enemies.

Edgar Wallace, in his day one of the kings of the Turf, did not hesitate to use the Ringer as the model and inspiration of his great character, 'The Ringer'. Barrie's talent, indeed, was ringing the changes on horses but, like Henry Arthur Milton — 'The Ringer' — you could never be sure how Barrie, himself, would turn up. Sometimes he was a burly old farmer, enjoying a day's racing, or else he might be a smart man-about-town. He had to be, with so many racecourses barred to him. He was in fact warned off in 1925, not that he worried about it, but the powers-that-be detested him, for his greatest talent was horse-doping. Once, indeed, he invented a new dope that he tried on a milkman's horse in South London early one morning.

The sober old animal took off within five minutes as if jet-propelled. It took three men to stop the ancient winner of the Milkround Cup, and cost Barrie the price of 150 bottles of

milk shaken off the cart in that wild morning gallop. The mixture of strychnine, heroin, and one other ingredient, was available to customers at £200 a shot, and it collected fortunes.

It always seemed sad to me that Edgar Wallace, who genuinely liked the engaging, unscrupulous Barrie, was not alive when the Ringer pulled off one of his most audacious coups.

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The scheme was born when the Ringer saw a horse named Rhum; it possessed all the qualities he had in mind, a horse made for a set-up. It belonged to Stanley Wootton, a man widely respected in racing, who had no suspicion at all that his horse had been 'picked'.

The first thing to find was a stooge-owner. The Ringer's unfailing luck helped him in a pub close to Charing Cross Hospital.

The quarry was a young American medical student from the hospital named Schuyler. He lived in a small flat nearby and was surprised that his new pub friend, who called himself Captain Christie, was moving into the same block.

The Ringer wasn't, but fixed it with the house agent the next morning in the fashion of those easy days.

His hospitality and charm must have worked at full speed. Schuyler quickly agreed to become a stooge-owner for a pound a week — it was less the money than the glamour of it that fascinated the American; he certainly suspected nothing wrong.

The plans of the uncrowned king of the racing underworld moved into high gear. Behind the screen of Schuyler he bought Rhum at Tattersall's auction for £300.

With the horse under his control the Ringer rapidly organised his scheme, picking on Folkestone races, 14 days away, for the first big killing.

Rhum was entered for the nine-furlong Westenhanger Selling Plate on June 24, a distance regarded by the knowing as beyond his powers. Simultaneously Schuyler was easily bamboozled into using his access as a medical student to extract certain drugs from the hospital supply.

While his arrangements went ahead, the Ringer was fixing another parallel coup. This was in sending out Rhum's name

as the winner of the year to his big clientele which patronised a tipster's business he ran under his own name of Barrie — he reckoned on a comfortable rake-off for himself.

On June 23, the day before the race, the blueprint became action; a telegram signed in Schuyler's name, as the properly registered owner, was received at Tattersall's depot at Knightsbridge, explaining that Schuyler's stableman would accompany Rhum to Folkestone the next morning, Rhum having been boarded at the depot since his sale.

In his identity of Captain Christie, but sporting a rich American accent, the Ringer got hold of an old man who hung round Tattersall's doing odd jobs, and sent him on the 24th with orders to accompany Rhum in the Southern Railway horsebox that had been hired for the road journey down.

Just as the old man and the box driver were about to start at 8 a.m., a car drove up containing a beaming 'Captain Christie'.

The little procession moved off under the hot and cloudy mid-summer sky.

The journey went well until they reached Wrotham, where they stopped for refreshments and gave Rhum a walk round. The Ringer fussed over the horse with true transatlantic sentiment and opined he just couldn't bear to have Rhum travelling without being good and close.

He garaged his car at Wrotham and continued the journey beside the driver of the horsebox, the old man being in with Rhum.

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Before long the bogus captain got really worked up about the horse, figuring the poor thing should have some Yankee high-pressure talk to put him in a winning frame of mind: 'Okay if I change places with the old guy inside, huh?'

The amiable driver, amused at all this, didn't see anything wrong in it, and the change was made. The Ringer, in with Rhum, with neat irony doped the horse just as they were passing Maidstone Prison with the famous Barrie tonic, which — on this occasion — was mainly potassium bromide, caffeine, vegetable extracts, and alcohol.

It acted as a sedative for a time until the alcohol finally triggered the mixture so that a horse would run like a suddenly

scalded cat — its chief requirement was highly expert timing.

When the horsebox was a hundred yards from Folkestone racing stables, the Ringer told the driver he was dropping off to get himself shaved.

Schuyler as the proud — and wholly innocent — owner was there when Rhum was unboxed, paraded, and duly raced. Jockey Eph Smith, who rode the animal, later said that he was staggered at his mount's speed.

The Ringer's wonderful timing judgment ensured Rhum's easy win. The gang collected a small fortune from well-placed bets, but the watchful stewards complained bitterly and suspiciously about Rhum's startling form to the Stewards of the Jockey Club.

The subsequent investigations turned up a great deal, particularly when the horsebox driver told what he had seen.

Schuyler's first win, which had excited the friendly Press, was not repeated. Rhum's future engagements at Folkestone were cancelled, and he was sold at Lewes, where the laugh was the Ringer's — the buyer was the head of a syndicate which included the Ringer and his pals.

But the last laugh was the Jockey Club's. After Rhum's transfer to his new owner, permission was refused to each unsuspecting trainer who applied for the usual licence to prepare the horse for future events.

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Rhum never raced again, but it didn't worry the Ringer, who was pulling off a trick that delighted the racing world, even if it was practically *lèse-majesté*.

He was attracted to a pretty four-year-old named Brief. It belonged to King George V, and it had cost its royal owner something like £5,000 all told. Even with Willie Jarvis training it never got into the first three, and the chopper fell: Brief was offered at the Newmarket Sales. It was bought by a smart-looking gentleman farmer for £230, the Ringer.

Promptly he found a stooge-owner (another American), and Harry Wragg accepted the mount in all innocence, prepared for a pleasant potter along the turf on the amiable Brief.

At Hamilton Park the backers ignored Brief and went on Nevitt's horse, the favourite. And Brief moving, it seemed, at the speed of light — fired by Barrie's special — was home by

an indecent 16 lengths.

His Majesty was annoyed and wanted Jarvis to explain why Brief should win in this fashion the moment it left royal ownership.

Willie Jarvis had never heard of Barrie's tonic and probably never did solve the mystery, unless racecourse scuttlebutt reached him, for the jubilant Ringer did not hesitate to tell one and all that for a mere bagatelle a milkman could enter his haybag for the Derby and, by heaven's blessing and the Ringer's, as Educated Evans would have put it, the horse could 'lie down and sleep, and *then* get up and win'.

Some EWMM Contributors . . .

John Bourne. Born in Scotland thirty years ago, lived in the Middle East for a time, and then studied medicine at Edinburgh University, the town where he now lives. A comparative newcomer to writing.

Marten Cumberland began writing 40 years ago and is popular both under his own name and under the pseudonym of Kevin O'Hara. An Englishman who lived in Paris for many years, he has now settled in Dublin.

Victor Canning. Served in the Royal Artillery during World War II, and published the brilliant *Golden Salamander* in 1948. Now one of the world's great crime writers. Lives in the heart of Kent.

Rex Dolphin. Treasurer of the Crime Writers' Association, Rex Dolphin has been a freelance since 1931. Has also written several Sexton Blake novelettes.

T. C. H. Jacobs. Plymouth-born, T. C. H. Jacobs is a prolific writer whose work has been filmed and broadcast. Past Chairman of the Crime Writers' Association, he has written over 80 books.

Ed. Lacy. A prolific writer of crime novels, he won the MWA 'Edgar' for his *Room to Swing*. Reticent about himself, but is American, and a hard-working writer.

A Question of Priority

JOHN BOURNE

The perfect murder — with a perfect ending

CHARLTON GREEN thought lovingly of Maida Walker, and viciously of her husband, William. The sweetest women always had the cruellest luck when it came to partners. The thought of that man with Maida—his Maida—caused Charlton to shake with anger.

William would be Sir William soon, Sir William of the protruding eyes and flat red nose. That's where a brass neck and the absence of commercial integrity got a man in this world—to the top, to a knighthood, and to a wife like Maida, Charlton decided.

"Leave him, and marry me," he had urged when he realised the depth of Maida's contempt for her husband. And then he had been brought face to face with the grim economic facts of life. Even a girl like Maida would find it a wrench to leave the comfort provided by William's income for the money that Charlton's pharmaceutical work brought in. If their affair had happened earlier, before Maida had grown used to affluence, things might have been different. As it was, he couldn't ask her to choose between his love and William's money. She needed both, poor girl. And the only way she could get both would be through William's death.

They'd had high hopes at one stage. Walker had been very ill. Aplastic anæmia, the doctors had said, and what Charlton had read in the medical text-books about the condition had been most encouraging. There was no real treatment; all the hospital could do for William was to transfuse him every fort-

night and hope in time that the patient's body would repair itself. Against the odds, their hopes and Charlton's fears were being fulfilled. William would apparently need two more transfusions at the most.

Charlton always wept at the tantalising ways of fate. William must not be allowed to recover.

"Mist. Pot. Cit.," said a voice.

"Pardon?" said Charlton, jerking himself out of his reverie.

"Mist. Pot. Cit.," repeated the girl, smiling. "I work behind the counter and you do the dispensing. Remember? There's a lady here with a prescription, and you've got to make it up for her."

"Sorry, Jean. I was half asleep. Four fluid ounces of Mist. Pot. Cit. coming up."

Potassium citrate mixture. Innocuous stuff, used for certain urinary infections. Hardly the perfect weapon for the perfect murder! Everything was poisonous, of course—provided the quantities taken were sufficiently excessive, but for people with normal kidneys even vast quantities of potassium citrate would be harmless. They'd excrete it as fast as they absorbed it. To kill with that stuff you'd have to give it intravenously.

Jean was talking again. "Really, Mr. Green, you must be in love or something. Time to shut up shop—five minutes over time, in fact."

"Already?" Charlton gave her his extra special smile, the one that crinkled his eyes up at the corners. "With you around time flies on winged feet."

"Oh, belt up. You don't know I exist." But she was pleased just the same. Funny how Charlton found himself flirting almost as a reflex action. Now that he had Maida to think about he didn't care if he never saw another girl in his life.

He went to the medical library, fired by the germ of an idea. After two hours the idea had blossomed into a plan—a plan he owed to the customer who had come in with that prescription.

He checked off the basic facts in his mind. The body contained a great deal of potassium. Most of it was inside cells, held there by vital processes—by mysterious things called ion exchange mechanisms, and electro-chemical gradients. A little -a very little- was outside the cells, and increasing this fraction beyond a certain level caused death. If the balance between the amount

of the stuff inside cells and that outside was upset, the electrical mechanism of the heart packed up—as simply and as surely as the extinguishing of a light bulb by pulling out a fuse. A rapid intravenous injection of any potassium salt would end William Walker's life in a few seconds.

And it would be absolutely untraceable; for the potassium inside cells comes out of them after death. The estimation of William Walker's blood potassium level after death would be a futile exercise. It would inevitably be raised, for such a biochemical finding is one of the basic facts of death.

Charlton Green felt awed and excited. He had already worked out a way of giving Walker an intravenous injection. The risk would be at that moment. If he was still free and unsuspected by the time he left the scene of the crime, he would have committed the perfect murder.

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"Don't go yet, Charlton. We've so little time." Charlton Green looked puzzled. "I mean, now the monster is getting better." Maida always described her husband as the monster. He thought it was some kind of affectionate nickname. On the principle, thought Charlton, that William's wife would never dare call her husband names to his face unless it was just in fun.

"Must go, darling. Things to do." He crinkled his eyes at her.

"Horrid busy things? Nasty chemistry shop things?"

"Y-es," said Charlton slowly. "Nasty chemistry shop things."

He wished he could tell Maida his plans—that she could know of the thing he was going to do for them both. But it wouldn't be fair. Maida was such a delicate, will-o'-the-wisp creature. This was going to be execution rather than murder, but even an execution would make Maida unhappy. And if anything went wrong, provided he told her nothing, the police wouldn't be able to crucify her as an accessory.

He dropped by the shop to pick up his potassium solution and his white coat. In the shop, the coat meant he was a dispensing chemist. But in the Burton Memorial Hospital it would proclaim him to be a doctor.

He had timed things carefully. At 11.30 p.m. the night nurse would be in the dining room, and a relief would be looking after the place in her absence. The Burton was a big hospital,

and this relief nurse would not know all the doctors on the staff. So a man in a white coat strolling in to look at William Walker would be unnoticed.

Green arrived at the ward. The nurse seemed almost relieved to see him—so far, so good.

"Evening, Doctor. Glad you've come. Mr. Henderson has the most dreadful diarrhœa. I wondered if I could give him something for it."

This was unfortunate. The girl, as expected, had assumed him to be the doctor on call. He hadn't bargained for her asking his advice about one of the patients.

"How long has it been going on for?"

"Nurse Metcalfe said since nine in the morning. I thought you knew."

"That's right, it was mentioned. Actually I'd rather wait a bit before doing anything about it. Give the thing a chance to settle on its own, if possible. We'll take action in the morning if he's no better." Charlton searched the girl's face for a sign that he had blundered. He had no idea of how a doctor spoke to a nurse, or if severe diarrhœa was a thing you could leave till morning with impunity.

The girl just nodded. Charlton held back his sigh of relief. "Just going up the ward to take a look at left six," he said. "No need for you to come with me."

William Walker was asleep. A blood drip was running slowly. Keeping his body between the nurse and the transfusion apparatus, Charlton ran his fingers along the tubing of the giving set. There it was—a length of rubber inserted in the pastic. He slipped a syringe charged with potassium citrate from his pocket, and fitted a fine bore needle. To inject twenty centimetres into the tubing took seconds. The blood from the transfusion bottle rinsed the fatal ion into a vein, and onwards to Walker's heart.

"G'night, nurse," Green murmured.

" 'Night, Doctor," replied the relief, barely glancing up from her magazine.

In less than a minute Charlton Green was in his car and out of the hospital grounds. He'd been seen by one person, and that in a dim light.

The death notice was in the evening paper, followed in the morning by a fulsome obituary in the local daily. Charlton

nodded to himself as he read. Still plain William Walker. They didn't give posthumous knighthoods, so it would stay that way —on the tombstone and for ever more. William Walker, Esquire. R.I.P.—in hospital, after a long illness. Survived by his wife, Mrs. Maida E. Walker (*née* Leslie). The reporters didn't know that Mrs. Maida E. Walker was the future Mrs. Charlton Green.

Funny how little remorse he felt. Killing people was wrong. But there were exceptions to every rule. The fact that a girl as unselfish, sweet-natured and affectionate as Maida had found her unlamented husband unbearable was proof that the fellow was better dead. It just went to show—the formal processes of justice were all very well most of the time, but there were occasions where a discerning and self-reliant individual had to take the law into his own hands as a matter of civic and humanitarian duty.

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Charlton was cautious for about a week. He did his work conscientiously, went for long walks by himself, and filled in what time remained doing chess problems of the three move and upward variety. At length, he decided to contact Maida. It would have to be a circumspect encounter—no point in starting tongues wagging, even though his plan had made detection an impossibility.

He phoned Maida and expressed his condolences.

"When can I meet you?" he asked.

"Charlton, you must be mad. I'm a new-laid widow with an image to conform to."

"Look, darling, I'll be very careful. I always have been, haven't I? The cocktail bar of that pub in Andersham. We'll arrive separately, meet casually, and leave separately. Fact is, I can't bear to go for so long without sight or sound of the future Mrs. Charlton Green."

"The future what?"

"To-day's wives are to-morrow's widows, but the converse is also true. Do I have to propose all over again? Remember, you used to long to be free simply so we could make eyes at each other over breakfast."

"Yes. I did say that, didn't I? I'd better do what you suggest. To-night at eight?"

"Wonderful, darling. See you then. 'Bye."

Maida was very quiet for a long time. Charlton chattered inconsequentially, his mood so buoyant that it was some time before he noticed her growing restiveness.

"Well, what's on your mind?" he enquired eventually.

"Death and autopsies, if you must know."

"Autopsies?"

"Those clever doctors were a bit taken aback when William passed on. After months of telling me how ill he was, they then express surprise when he dies. Insisted on a post mortem."

Charlton felt a surge of momentary panic, then steadied himself. His plan had been perfect: His poison was untraceable.

"Not to worry," he said. "Probably some young Hippocrates doing research wanted a bit of your late husband's liver to squint at under a microscope. Forget it."

He lifted his glass and twinkled at his companion.

"Here's to the future Mrs. Charlton Green."

"I'm not," snapped Maida. "I am not the future Mrs. Green."

Charlton looked puzzled. "But you've said time and time again that the one thing you longed for most was to be rid of the monster and married to me."

She inserted a cigarette into a long holder and lit it coolly. "That was a half-truth. Wanted to be rid of William—true. Wanted you instead—untrue."

"Maida, you must be joking. After all you said . . ."

"See here, Mr. Charlton-precious-Green. Circumstances alter cases. When I was tied to that oaf of a husband, I found you a welcome relaxation. You're wet, you're uninspiring, and you're as conceited as hell, but at least you're good-looking and you helped to pass the time. But that was then. Now is different. I'm a free woman and a rich woman and I intend to have a whale of a time. My future plans don't include a provincial chemist's assistant."

My God, thought Charlton, she means every word of it. He stared at her unbelievingly. Suddenly she had changed into this shrew. She stared straight back at him, unblinkingly and almost malevolently.

Two men in raincoats came into the bar. They were above medium height and had an air of authority. The elder of the two approached the table.

"You are Mrs. Maida Walker, wife of the late William Walker." It was a statement, not a question.

"What if I am?" asked Maida.

"We would like you to accompany us to the police station to assist in the enquiries we are making into the death of your husband."

"I will do no such thing. My husband died in hospital of an illness which he had had for some time. There cannot possibly be any reason for police investigation."

"Quite so, madam. Since you are unwilling to accompany us voluntarily, I will show you this. It is a warrant for your arrest on a charge of murder."

Charlton's lips were dry. His tongue felt thick and his head was swimming. He knew, whatever he felt about Maida's rejection of him, that he would have to confess.

"Er—look," he began. "You've made a mistake. I killed Walker. Went to the hospital the night he died with a syringe full of potassium and gave it intravenously. Into the tubing of his blood drop. I'm a chemist, you know."

"More like a knight in armour, if you ask me," grunted the first plain-clothes man. "We know all about your infatuation for Mrs. Walker. Well tried, sir, and if you'll excuse us we'll get on with what we came to do."

Charlton stood baffled and bewildered as the younger detective produced a pair of handcuffs and adjusted them to Maida's slender wrist.

"What about me?" he said at last. "You can't just ignore what I've just told you."

Again it was the older policeman who spoke with a suddenly friendly air, man to man: "Persistent, aren't you? If you want to confess to murder, at least get the cause of death right, my friend. Walker's body contained arsenic. The arsenic appears to have been bought by his wife—she even went to the length of signing for it at a chemist's. Not the place where you work—another chemist's. You can't even be an accessory, because if you'd been in the scheme the lady could have got the stuff under the counter without leaving evidence of purchase all over the place. Besides, with you to help her she'd have given a more realistic dose. The amount of arsenic in Walker was quite small—surprising it killed him really. But it's murder all

the same and your confession is a well-meant fairy story. Good night, Mr. Green, and forget it."

Maida leant towards Charlton as she left, her lips moving. Charlton bent forward to hear. He had done his best for her. Perhaps, now, she would realise that there was more to him than she suspected. Not only had he killed for her—he'd even confessed in an effort to save her. Surely it wasn't his fault if the words had fallen on deaf ears.

She was opposite him now and her whisper was audible.

"You sap!" she snapped at him. "You might at least have dreamed up a more convincing story than that load of drivel."

The Number

ARTHUR KENT

FALKNER WAS angry and impatient with the American seaman. The Yank was really drunk now, talking incoherently, calling everybody in the bar 'brother'. He had already bought five people a drink — next it would be everybody — and Falkner was already looking on the money in the Yank's billfold as his own.

He judged that the Yank had been sufficiently softened-up for his purpose. Now he had to get him out into the dark and rain-swept Liverpool street. Falkner wouldn't wait until they got back to the dock area. He would do it here. And that made him irritable with himself. He knew he was taking chances, because he was going to rush it, but he just couldn't help himself. As it was he was going to be late ringing Moira in Birmingham, and he knew how she worried if he was late in coming through.

Momentarily he closed his eyes and an inaudible moan escaped his lips as he visualised his wife, petite and virginal-looking in the white gown he had bought her for the honeymoon three months before.

In his mind's eye, he reached out for her, feeling her warmth, her softness, aware of animalism coming alive beneath his touch. He swore, coming back to the noisy bar, feeling the agony of their forced parting, but he just couldn't have her in Liverpool with him, not where she might discover the sordid way he made his living.

And now, since his marriage, Falkner had a new agonising problem. Say he was caught, and sent to prison? Not only would Moira learn the truth, but he would be parted from her for years. The prospect of such a thing happening gave him nightmares. He had even contemplated going straight . . . but how could he keep her in the luxury to which she was accus-

tomed on the fifteen pounds he might make in the sort of job he could get?

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The American turned, nudging him. "Hi, Bob, why so goddamn glum? Look, let me get you another drink."

"No thanks, Hank. I think we'd better go. You wanted to see the dive where the Beatles started; remember? So let's go."

"Ah, ain't no hurry. These are nice people. Let's have another one."

Falkner smiled. He lowered his voice. "If we leave it later, Hank, it will be all over. All the dancing, all the best groups would have been finished, and all those lovely kids with their skirts flying up — they'll all have gone. And what'll you tell your girl when you get back State-side? She'll be waiting to hear about it."

The American shifted. He seemed to move on leaden feet. He blinked drunkenly at Falkner, licking woodenly stiffened lips that didn't seem to be his. He had sure hung one on all right.

"Okay, Bob, you're the boss. Lead on."

Falkner turned. He moved to the door, fingering the leather of the cosh in his overcoat pocket. He reached the door, opened it, and felt the cold night air. Fog swirled around the doorway.

Hank was wishing everybody good night. He stood with his legs apart, shaking hands with his nearest neighbours, telling them if they were ever over to Houston, Texas, to drop in and see him.

Falkner stepped into the street, holding the door ajar. Hank came staggering out a moment later, crashing against the partition. Falkner caught him by the shoulder, laughing hollowly. "This way, pal."

They started along the street, Falkner guiding the American, trying to rush him, with Hank complaining bitterly about the cold, shivering suddenly, nostalgically talking about the sunshine of Texas.

Falkner knew he shouldn't do it here. Not so soon after leaving the bar. People would remember seeing him with the American and when they checked pictures down at the police station, they would be able to name him. Best to leave it, so

he could say he had left the American, and Sylvia would give him the alibi.

But his twin fears caught up with him and made him scared and hasty. He had visions of Moira, sitting on the bed in their apartment, looking anxiously at the silent telephone — and beyond that the dark agonising fear of capture and conviction. He waited only until they had gone through two narrow streets. Then he decided to do it. He would have waited a little longer, but Hank was so intoxicatingly slow, often pausing to try and tell him something . . . talking one moment about the Beatles; the next about his girl; then about Houston.

They turned a corner and entered a thicker patch of rolling fog.

"Where are you, pal?" Hank said.

"Right behind you, Hank," Falkner said. Then he struck. The leather cosh was tight in his hand, fixed now to his wrist by thonging. His arm came up high, expertly. The polished leather glistened momentarily in the yellow light of a street lamp. Then it came down on the American's uncovered head, with Falkner's weight behind it.

No sound came from Hank's lips. He jack-knifed, folded, then hit the pavement, sprawling half across it, with his head hanging over the kerb. Falkner bent down, expert fingers lifting the billfold from the long seaman's jacket.

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Then Falkner was running, racing down the street on sponge-soled shoes, his knowledge of the area guiding him through the mist-shrouded streets. Half a mile away, he came out on to the main street, and caught a bus. He alighted from it half a mile on, and turned into a narrow street. He was in the dock area now, the fog was thicker, and he heard the spaced horn of a tug, the gentle tick of her engines as she nosed squarely and slowly up the channel.

He used his key, climbed up the stairs, hoping that Sylvia had obeyed his instructions and hadn't gone looking for a client. She was all dressed up for business, handbag held loosely in her fingers, and sitting stiffly upright on the couch, watching television. Mutton-head, Falkner thought.

She looked at him nervously. She was frightened of Falkner. Friends had asked her why she didn't kick him out, now that

he had got married. But she said nothing. Falkner was Falkner, and she somehow enjoyed the fear he instilled in her; and his violence of mood and brutality.

"Any luck, Bob?"

He nodded. He dropped the billfold on the settee beside her. "He started with eighty pounds. There should still be about seventy-six. Easy. But there could be trouble. I didn't wait long enough."

"But why not?" She licked her rouged lips as he glowered irritably at her. She knew the answer to that one. His peaches-and-cream wife in Birmingham, all lovey-dovey waiting for his call. She was really under Falkner's skin, and there was no mistake about that. Bob wouldn't have taken such chances in the old days. That bitch would be the death of him.

She let her handbag drop, and stood up. "You'll need an excuse, Bob," she whispered; "for rushing back like this. What will it be?"

Falkner reflected a moment, and then smiled wolfishly. "Why you, Sylvia. I wanted you." He grasped her by each arm, his fingers biting into her flesh. He tightened his hold, and pain showed in her eyes; she winced, but she didn't try and break away.

They stood there, facing each other, with Falkner bruising her, with the television on, and finally he let her go.

He said impatiently, "We needn't go right through the act. If the cops doubt that I wanted you — should they come here — just take off your jacket and show them the marks of my sensual impatience on your arms. Tell them I always get like that when I've had a few drinks."

She nodded, watching him glumly. She felt broken not because of the bruises but the insult of his words. *We needn't go right through the act*. He had said that. Since he had been married he hadn't once touched her — a sharp contrast from his overwhelming behaviour before he met Moira. And now he was denying her again. He was anxious to be talking to Moira, putting everything before that errand — even his personal safety.

Look how jumpy he was these days! A shadow of the Falkner she had admired and who had forced her to love him — just a whisper of the man he had once been, sapped by a romantic dream. And what was Moira but just another woman;

judging from the pictures she had seen, no more attractive and certainly no more passionate and clever than she, Sylvia. But she knew that Moira possessed one quality she could never now possess. Virtue. And respectability.

Moira had been brought up in a Birmingham suburb, the daughter of a respectable family, and had led a sheltered life, something Falkner had only dreamt of. Falkner — how astonished he had been when he returned to Liverpool after his honeymoon. He had told Sylvia, in one of his rare expansive moods, 'Guess what, kid! I was the first, honest. In this day and age!'

Then he had stopped talking, abruptly changing the subject, aware of Sylvia with her peroxided blonde hair, her flashy clothes, realising what she was and had always been. It was indecent to mention somebody like Moira before a tramp like Sylvia.

Sylvia would have liked to have said some things could be faked, especially if a girl was cunning enough. But she didn't dare say that. Falkner would tear her apart for even thinking such a thing, let alone saying it.

He crossed quickly to the television set. He looked at his wrist-watch. Good. The call to Moira would be almost on time. She always expected him to call through at the time he said he would. He smiled. A terrible worrier, Moira.

He slid the contents from Hank's billfold, catching the accumulation of banknotes and personal junk in his big hands. He tossed the empty wallet across at Sylvia. It hit her lightly across the chest and dropped to the floor. He didn't want her around when he talked to Moira.

"Drop that in the Mersey, Sylvia," he said. "And do it now."

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Lifting the receiver, he got through to the exchange. He put on his smooth friendly voice and said, "Hello, can you get me Birmingham Slade nought-three-four-three. And could you please treat this as an emergency?" he added glibly. "Yes, a matter of life and death, in a sense, an illness in the family."

He thanked the operator, replaced the receiver. Sylvia tiptoed from the room, softly closing the door behind her. While he waited for Moira, Falkner began to check the stuff from

Hank's billfold. Plenty of time yet. The police, by the time they had checked everybody, would take about three hours to get here, providing the American was found tonight.

He piled banknotes in one stack and personal stuff, which would be flushed down the lavatory, in the other. Driving licence, social security card, seaman's union identity papers. All these he ripped apart. There was a brief note to Hank, signed by somebody named Dave, presumably another seaman. It was short, and sweet, and obviously Dave was no lover of letter writing, but he felt compelled, it seemed to Falkner, to write Hank about something that had happened to him.

Falkner could see it was about a woman. He began to smile. Then the smile froze into a snarl upon his lips.

The phone began to ring, but he made no move to lift the receiver. His eyes were riveted to the last paragraph of the brief note. It read:

> 'So, pal, if you can manage it in the week — but not weekends when her husband's home — you remember she's a professional who knows it *all*! The number's Birmingham Slade 0343. Ask for Moira — expensive, remember, but you should worry!'

Falkner read it again. The phone went on ringing, but he ignored it. And soon the police would be coming.

It didn't matter, it just didn't matter.

NO MARGIN FOR ERROR

Rex Dolphin

THOSE OF us who aren't geniuses must inevitably nurse a sneaking fear that our smartest and most meticulously-scheduled schemes may come unstuck. Like the foolproof betting plan, they seem too good to be true. And usually are.

Any such fear that Martin Gale may have had when he decided to murder his partner, Frank Stevens, died as his plans matured.

Nothing could go wrong.

He *had* to murder Frank Stevens. It had been different a year ago; then he had welcomed Frank into the old-established one-man antiques business as a partner. Strictly, it was Frank's money that had been welcome; it had provided new life-blood and rejuvenated the firm.

But the pleasant man of last year was now showing his true, arrogant colours. Frank, the younger man, was demanding and getting more than his share of the income, and doing less and less of the work. He had become a parasite. Worse, he was now laying siege to Martin's attractive young wife.

Martin didn't mind hard work, but he resented having the fruits of his labour filched from under his nose. He resented his own impotence at the situation. Only the removal of Frank Stevens could solve the problem. The complete removal. And as Frank wouldn't go, Martin had no choice.

The automatic removal of Frank's money would not matter; it had done its job and could be withdrawn from the business without damage.

Martin would be a prime suspect in the event of murder. Therefore, first, it wasn't going to look like murder; and second, Martin would have an impressive alibi.

Four days before Frank Stevens died, Martin Gale's light delivery van broke down near Bristol with big-end failure.

This was, as he knew, due to oil starvation, although the sump was nearly full when the van was taken to a convenient garage.

It wouldn't be repaired till Thursday. Martin returned to London by train, buying a monthly return ticket. On Thursday he had 'phoned, arranged to collect the van on Friday. On Friday he went by taxi to Paddington, where he caught the 11.45 a.m. by a hairsbreadth, assisted by a porter, whom he rewarded with five shillings. It was an express, first stop Reading, then nothing till Swindon.

About the time when Martin's train was roaring along some ten miles past Reading, a man entered Frank Stevens's place at Henley-on-Thames through a back garden. Stevens was alone, asleep in swimming trunks on a sun-lounger. The man held a cushion over Stevens's face, and when he was in the last throes, tipped him into the swimming pool. Stevens inhaled water, and died.

Martin Gale's train was due at Bristol Temple Meads at 2.09 p.m. At 2.20, after a drink in the buffet, he hired a taxi in the station approach. At the garage he collected his repaired van and drove it steadily towards London, arriving home at about 6.30.

His wife was out, but he found company waiting in the shape of Detective-Superintendent Berkeley and Detective-Sergeant Banks.

Stevens's death had already been discovered and diagnosed as possible murder. There had been saliva traces on a cushion, and a non-waterproof watch still on his wrist. Scotland Yard had been quickly called in to assist the Oxfordshire Constabulary.

Martin expressed shocked surprise, and settled down to wait for the detective's questions.

Charles Berkeley had endured the nickname of 'Chubb' for a long number of years. Guileless blue eyes in a perfectly round baby face had brought this name upon him when a schoolboy; manhood had not erased the trade-marks, only now was the blue a little smudged and the fat of the face forming into folds.

He was a quiet man with no outstanding mannerisms and no fixed working method. A muddler-through, some called him. Of himself, he said he always played a case by ear, ready to

change key or tempo by feeling the mood. Generally, he coaxed rather than bullied.

He asked Martin Gale for an account of his movements today. It was no use being subtle about this; Gale would be expecting the question, and anything devious would only put him more on his guard.

Martin was only too pleased to help. "I didn't see Frank all day. He never comes—came—in on Fridays. I was in the shop till about eleven thirty, when I closed up and got a taxi to Paddington." He explained about collecting the van. "I just managed to catch the eleven forty-five—had to run for it."

"An express," murmured Chubb Berkeley.

"That's right. Only one stop between Paddington and the West Country."

"So you would have been on the train when Stevens died?"

Martin didn't bat an eyelid at the smoothly placed question, answered it a shade too cleverly. "Yes, if he died between eleven forty-five and two fifteen."

"Which indeed he did." Chubb suddenly looked straight into his eyes. "You know this is what's called an alibi, Mr. Gale?"

Martin shrugged. "If one is needed, then I'm lucky to have one." He returned the superintendent's stare unemotionally. At this point he could have refused to talk any more. But that would have caused suspicion. He had no need to stand on his rights. He had a good story, backed with unassailable facts.

"Fair enough," soothed Chubb. "Nothing wrong with an alibi. Very useful thing to have." Perhaps he'd been too quick with the word, should have given Gale more rope. Still, it had served to plant a seed of unrest in the man. "Not everyone can remember such details."

"Well, I'm a methodical man, and I could hardly have forgotten so soon."

"You recalled them very readily. An excellent gift. Sometimes I wish I had it. Now exactly what time did your train arrive at Bristol?"

You couldn't, thought Chubb. *A pity, when everything else is so precise. You just weren't on that train* . . . "It doesn't matter. What is important is that you were on the train the whole time. Weren't you?" Gale said, yes. "And when you reached Bristol?"

"I had a cup of coffee in the buffet, got a taxi to the garage,

collected the van and drove home."

Chubb checked the items on plump fingers. "Cabby to Paddington. Just caught train, so possibly guard or porter. At Bristol, buffet girl, second cabby, garage men. Make any friends on the train, Mr. Gale?"

"Not really, I didn't stay put—too crowded and stuffy—I moved around a bit . . ."

"Of course." It had to be—especially after Reading. "Very convenient, this alibi of yours, Mr. Gale."

Martin smiled briefly. "Lucky, I'd call it."

"Lucky? H'mm. Methodical man usually has no time for luck. Or any sort of gamble." Berkeley paused. "That reminds me, I haven't heard today's winners yet. You seen a paper, Mr. Gale?"

"No, I don't bet."

"I do, the occasional long shot. Sergeant, get me an evening paper, will you." Chubb scribbled a note. "To save me reading it, check these horses for a win or place." The sergeant left. Chubb turned again to Gale. "We were saying?"

Martin smiled thinly. "You were talking about alibis."

"Were we? An unprofitable line of enquiry, I think. Let's forget it. What kind of man was Frank Stevens?"

Martin said evenly: "Speculative, grasping, lazy."

"You didn't get on?"

"We got on fine. The first two qualities he used for the firm's benefit, the third I more than made up for."

"So you had no motive, anyway?"

"I had no motive, and I *didn't* kill him."

"Of course you didn't, but a cleverer man could have. This cleverer man could have got off at Reading—eight miles from Stevens's place—done the job, then made for Bristol by road. He couldn't have beaten the train to the intermediate stations, but he could've reached Bristol not long after the train, showing himself at the station entrance."

"Using a flying saucer, no doubt," said Martin sarcastically.

"Why do you say that?"

"Well, I ask you! Reading to Henley, Henley to Bristol—ninety-five miles—plus time for the 'job.' All in one hundred and ten minutes on a busy Friday afternoon. I'd like to see you do it."

The superintendent calculated times and distances with

pencil and paper. He was deliberately slow, partly to increase Gale's tension, partly for another reason. He checked road conditions on the telephone. After a while he look up. "I don't think it could be done."

"Well?"

"Well, you didn't do it then, did you?"

"That's what I told you. Now, have we finished? I'm hungry."

Before Berkeley could answer, the sergeant came in with the evening paper. Chubb glanced at the front page, gave a start of surprise. He read on a little, then looked craftily at his suspect. "Something slightly adrift with your story, Mr. Gale. On the train all the time, you said? Train got in about two fifteen, you said?"

He suddenly displayed the headlines:

TRAIN DERAILED: MANY INJURED

He got the shock reaction he wanted—sick unbelief in Martin Gale's eyes, and the mouth moving unconsciously: *But I saw* . . . Then Gale pulled himself together and laughed, softly.

"Oh no, Superintendent! What a coincidence . . . *my* train ... derailed . . ."

"Not your train exactly, but it held up traffic on the line, delaying it nearly two hours. And you were saying you saw —saw what? A train arriving . . . departing? You were supposed to be on it, not seeing it . . ."

"I said no such thing. But let me see that paper," Martin demanded, stretching out his hand.

Chubb twisted the paper away. "If you're telling the truth you don't need it. If you're lying, it can't help you. Feeling all right, Mr. Gale? Like to change your story?"

"Keep your damned paper! What you're saying I did is a physical impossibility. You said so yourself, earlier."

"Did I, now?" Chubb's pencil slipped from his fingers, and he bent down to pick it up, his eyes close to Gale's shoes. "Mods and rockers," he said, for no apparent reason.

Martin stared at him. Surely this detective was an unbalanced character! "What the hell have mods and rockers to do with anything?"

"Nothing much. Motor-bikes and so on." He aimed his pencil at Gale. "Ever ridden one?"

"Not for many years . . ."

Chubb pointed the pencil at Martin's shoes. "Newish shoes, a bit of bruising and scoring under the right instep. Kick-start wear, I'd say. And very recent . . . the leather is still raw. To-day, perhaps?"

Martin took a deep breath. "All right, so I tried a bike out . . ."

Berkeley continued as though there had been no interruption. "Your office overlooks a free, unattended car park. You may have noticed how an habitual parker invariably chooses the same position if he can get it.

"Young chap parks his fast bike there every morning, regular as clockwork, probably leaves his skidlid and goggles on it, too. Picks it up same time every evening, lateish. Useful things, goggles and skidlids. The face inside 'em may be any age, but you assume it's young.

"A certain clever observer notices this bike, thinks what use it can be put to.

"Here's what our clever man could've done: first he fixes up a good reason for his train ride. Then on the morning of the crime, he pinches the bike early, rides it to Reading, stashes it, returns to London by train. Mid-day, he takes the Bristol train, gets out at Reading. Fast bike ride to Henley, does the job, then hell-for-leather for Bristol. A speeding car might have been noticed, or got snarled up in traffic, but a bike gets through, and nobody expects anything different of a ton-up boy.

"At Bristol he again stashes the bike and gear, and pretends to be off a train. Collects his van, loads the bike into it, stops when near home, replaces bike, drives van home. Plenty of checkable things there. Shall we start with signs of the bike being in the van?"

Martin yelled: "I didn't, I didn't, I didn't!" His shoulders slumped. "All right, I did." He hadn't noticed that the superintendent had carefully refrained from making a direct accusation. "Never thought anybody could have worked it out."

Berkeley's head oscillated slowly in sorrowful reproach. "Your first time, you see, son. But not mine, oh no. You worked it out, so what makes you think we couldn't? Especially me. They all say I think like a criminal."

Martin shrugged weary shoulders. "Spare me the characteri-

sation. Out with your little book, Sergeant, and we'll start . . ."

When the statement was recorded, beyond redemption, Martin said: "You'd never have cracked my story if it hadn't been for to-day's train derailment, would you?"

"True," Chubb Berkeley nodded. "That was the lucky coincidence that tipped you off balance and made it easy for me. It wasn't your train, but for a moment you conceded that possibility. And, earlier, you were too expert with your time-and-distance calculations. You'd obviously worked it all out before—for what? Still, I agree that luck does play a big part in our job. You can read the paper now."

Martin took the paper. The derailment hadn't even been in the South. The cunning of the man! Reading on, he frowned. *Ice* on the line—in late summer? He looked at the paper's date, and the full truth hit him.

It wasn't this evening's paper. It was all of eighteen months old.

NEW BOOKS

JOHN de SOLA

AUTUMN OF TERROR, Tom Cullen (*Bodley Head*, 30*s*.)
JACK THE RIPPER, Robin Odell (*Harrap*, 27*s*. 6*d*.).

Simultaneous publication of books on the same subject is an author's nightmare, but, in trade circles, it is said that competition sells, so you takes your choice. . . .

Both these books are very well done indeed; Mr. Cullen is the more expert writer and has the greater sense of history, but Mr. Odell writes with more feeling and warmth.

Autumn of Terror (which has some splendid, hitherto almost unknown illustrations) is written by a professional newspaperman who treats his subject as an assignment and not only (quite obviously) checks and re-checks everything he has written, but has the Fleet Street trick of delving just a little deeper into apparent facts, and coming up with overlooked or even unknown details. The style is solid and economical, and Mr. Cullen offers a well documented and quite remarkable identity for the Ripper — his choice, to date, is by far the best authenticated of all the contenders, who range from a mad Russian to a mad doctor.

On the other hand, *Jack the Ripper* deals carefully with the history (by, I venture to suggest, a new author) and is clearly a work long contemplated and probably as long in gestation as in the writing. Every related fact has been collected and worked in with almost loving care until the excellence of the resulting book compensates for the lack of professionalism which, I find, adds to the interest. Mr. Odell's contender for the Ripper stakes is again someone quite new and possibly quite unsuspected, less well based than Mr. Cullen's choice, but equally feasible.

In this second book Dr. W. L. Neustatter's preface indicates that the Ripper was a psychopath and with that I would definitely quarrel, for he was no more a psychopath than Haigh. And against both writers of these books I must offer a personal view (based on a strong clue provided to me by one of their quoted authorities) that the Ripper was none of the men so far

offered but, and my evidence seems reasonably conclusive, someone very much in the thick of social life at the time, but that, as has been said, is another story for another day.

THE WORLD'S WORST MURDERERS, Charles Franklin (*Odhams*, 21*s*.)

Mr. Franklin takes on a large selection of murderers for his book. His canvas is wide, and shows every possible aspect of murder. Beginning (also) with Jack the Ripper, he offers us sadists like Peter Kürten, bloody sexual cranks such as Christie and Heath, cold-hearted monsters like George Joseph Smith, and nauseating children like Leopold and Loeb, and Pauline Parker and Juliet Hulme.

Always, as he has done before, Mr. Franklin cannot entirely avoid revealing his compassion for even the worst of his subjects, compassion based not on mawkishness but that human material can become so warped. He writes expertly, makes sure of his facts, and draws sensible conclusions.

On only one point would I disagree with him, that being when he says 'there is no doubt in the minds of people who know all the facts that Hanratty was guilty of the A6 murder.' I am quite convinced, now, that Hanratty — like Timothy Evans — was *not* guilty of murder and that neither of them ever shed blood.

(*Nigel Morland*)

CRUSADE AGAINST CRIME, Edited by Jerry D. Lewis (*Boardman*, 21*s*.)

Nothing so clearly shows the United States as a veritable potpourri of a nation as when its law enforcement bodies are considered. It is a land bedevilled with uniforms — state police, county police, city police, FBI . . . and more, for, as the preface to this admirable book says: 'When there is a mail robbery — it would seem — all the postmen pull out guns and take to the trail; let an unexplained consignment of gold slip across the border and the next minute there is a customs man behind every tree. This makes the innocent bystander fear that any person coming along in any sort of official cap is liable to be armed to the teeth and hot on the scent'.

Crusade Against Crime is not a dryasdust study of law

enforcement; it is a vigorous compilation about crimes by different writers from Melvin Purvis, of the FBI, on the capture of John Dillinger (he crossed the state line in a stolen car which justified the FBI going after him!), to Walter Winchell explaining how Public Enemy Lepke Buchalter surrendered to him, chiefly because he was scared of being shot down without discussion if he gave in to the police. Robert Kennedy tells how he battled union leader Jimmy Hoffa, and even the Treasury men ride out against crime; a fascinating book.

UNFIT TO PLEAD? John Rowland (*John Long*, 25*s*.)

A careful study of four murderers (Ronald True; Henry Jacoby, Thomas John Ley, and John Thomas Straffen).

This is easily Mr. Rowland's best book, a sober and very fair study of that most controversial of issues, the sanity of murderers and four murderers in particular. By not only setting forth their crimes but their backgrounds the author achieves a singularly good piece of perspective. One item of particular interest to this reviewer is a quoted remark of Dr. A. Hyatt Williams, a Home Office psychiatrist, who said: '. . . a time bomb . . . inside the individual . . . any circumstance which detonates that time bomb can trigger off a murder'.

Neville Heath once admitted that a certain mixture of two alcohols (which he liked but usually tried to avoid) always 'triggers off a mania to attack some people in me' . . .

BLACK GLASS CITY, The, Judson Philips (*Gollancz*, 16*s*.)

When Pete Styles entertains a famous movie star, a long-time friend, it is the first step into a mystery which involves Monty Spain, an Orson Welles-like director, who is working on a big motion-picture set in a fabulous private estate. It is there that murder breaks violently loose in a book that streaks along with breath-taking style and effect. Does not have the glitter of the *Killer on the Catwalk*, but is equally good.

DEATH DEALS IN DIAMONDS, Bradshaw Jones (*John Long*, 15*s*.)

A new writer to this reviewer but very capable. He has also

the advantage of being in the diamond trade and thus writes with knowledge of his background. A harsh will results in a son, who runs a jewellry business, taking the first step which has a grim influence on his future life; from that point the mystery develops and proceeds at a crackling pace.

FAMILY SKELETONS, Patrick Quentin (*Gollancz*, 16*s*.)

Not the happiest of titles for this fascinating book, but the author's name guarantees entertainment. The hero, who 'almost' belongs to a very toffee-nosed family, becomes involved in a mystery which starts when he sees an inscription in a cigarette case. It leads to a jazz pianist, and murder . . . the beauty of the story is in the brilliant picture of Lieutenant Trant and the slow, frighteningly methodical step-by-step progress of his investigations. The reader will share uncomfortably in the hero's vast unease as Trant walks — as it were — beside him.

SMELL OF FEAR, The, Raymond Chandler (*Hamish Hamilton*, 30*s*.)

The greatest stylist of the modern crime writers in a book of 538 satisfying pages. The collection comprises 14 long stories, many of them familiar but every one readable again. There are *Black Mask* period stories here, vigorous, and often savage, where action is almost all, typifying Chandler's creed in such yarns which he mentions in the preface, 'when in doubt have a man come through the door with a gun in his hand.' Marlowe appears occasionally, particularly in *Finger Man* (this reviewer's introduction to Chandler when published 12 years ago in a long-defunct London mystery magazine). Perhaps it is not the Marlowe of later years, so dour and so honest, but the magic is there. Every story has that grip peculiar to its author, and, even in the very earliest that great talent is to be seen. But, so short was Chandler's successful writing life, he does not even appear in Ellery Queen's definitive *The Detective Short Story*, published in 1942.

THE LOOKING GLASS WAR, John le Carré (*Heinemann*, 18*s*.)

The penalty of writing a best-seller is the inevitable comparison when the second book comes along. *The Spy Who Came*

in From the Cold, in one sense, scored because it showed people of today in today's situations. The new book touches another, perhaps more frightening thing in human life, people stranded high and dry by events of two decades ago who — by new events — are thrust into modern espionage, fighters in Hitler's war who fight again in the 1960s.

All the le Carré magic is here in a magnificent book, as good and perhaps better than its predecessor. There is a vein of warmth and even comedy in the story, but nevertheless it chills this reviewer at least, for nothing perhaps is so pitiful as the great fighters of another war stumbling foolishly through times and events beyond their understanding.

STRANGE SMELL OF MURDER, The, Lawrence Dundas (*Hammond*, 13*s*. 6*d*.)

A very good investigator, quite properly tremendously lucky and virtually indestructable, is involved in a mystery in a South American state. The characters are well drawn and the background is obviously based on real familiarity with Latin countries. The best touch of all is in the chief villain who shows, despite what he plans to do, his friends and their feelings mean a lot to him, a lifelike touch that made this book.

STRANGE BLUE YAWL, The, Lucille Fletcher (*Eyre & Spottiswoode*, 16*s*.)

A story with a nightmare touch, where solid things — in this case a boat and a woman — in the story involving the narrator and his wife suddenly become unsubstantial. The deft transition from tangible life into something which makes the reader uneasy is very well done. The end is satisfying if harsh, but, considering the narrator's misfortunes, fair enough.

A SCATTER OF PAPERBACKS

ACE OF KNAVES, The, Leslie Charteris (*Hodder*, 3*s*. 6*d*.)

First published nearly 30 years ago this trilogy of the Saint's adventures has plenty of vigour, and is of unusually good quality. The villains, mostly foreign, deservedly bite the dust in legions.

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DIE FOR BIG BETSY, Bill Knox (*Mayflower*, 3*s*. 6*d*.)

Set in Glasgow, and told with gusto and verve, this is so good that it will spoil the point to give away 'Big Betsy's' real identity. An inside picture, too, of one of the most self-contained and efficient British police forces.

FOUR DAYS, John Buell (*Pan*, 3*s*. 6*d*.)

A story both taut and tense, told vividly and well. It is partially concerned with a Montreal bank robbery that goes wrong, but generally with a 12-year-old who is tragically involved.

GUV'NOR, The, Edgar Wallace (*Hodder*, 3*s*. 6*d*.)

Long out of print, this is a welcome paperback. It contains two stories, *The Man Who Passed*, and another involving forgery and a fairground, but both bringing in that great man, Mr. J. G. Reeder, a stream-lined, unusually intriguing Mr. Reeder.

HOURS AFTER MIDNIGHT, The, Joseph Hayes (*Mayflower*, 2*s*. 6*d*.)

A comparative newcomer to the tension stakes, Mr. Hayes writes a kidnapping thriller covering a short space of time, and, like *Four Days*, fills that period with terror mounting to a spine-tingling level.

WHERE THE SPIES ARE, James Leasor (*Pan*, 3*s*. 6*d*.)

A retitling (for some incomprehensible Hollywood reason) of *Passport to Oblivion*. Violence, drama, guns, and the inevitable initials. Exciting, but most unlike *EWMM's* own (newly discovered) Christopher Curtis and his solid reality.

NEXT MONTH . . .

MURDER ON DEADMAN'S HILL

a startling *EWMM True Crime Classic*, by Jean Justice, which also asks several disturbing questions about

HANRATTY'S GUILT

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.*

Adelaide Bartlett

The Bartlett case in *EWMM* [June] reminds me that I read a book some fifteen years ago that 'solves' the mystery from a medical man's point of view, placing the guilt squarely on the wife. I side with Roger Garnett, that she was innocent. I think the Pimlico Mystery is a crime with possibilities for a psychological-historical study in its three principals. It is a psychologist's delight and the oddness of Victorian life, vital to the whole, would round off an engrossing tale.

*Glasgow, W.*2. JOHN M. CAMPBELL

Trials

Are there any reliable studies of British trials? I have several volumes of the Notable British Trials series but find the court transcript heavy going, for a layman. Your own series of true murders is most helpful; they are very expert.

Liverpool, 3. D. E. LUCAS

● *Your question is somewhat broad, but why not the prefaces from Notable British Trials? These have been published in several small volumes by Penguin Books, and should serve you well. Glad you like our series.*

Crime Solutions

Edgar Wallace's *The Clue of Monday's Settling* [March], I remember, 'almost' solved the recent bullion robbery on a South African ship. Are there many cases where crime writers have solved wholly or in part murders or robberies before the police?

*London, S.W.*18. (Miss) CONYTH FIELDER

● *Again a somewhat broad query. Obviously the Poe classic comes to mind, but other readers may well care to send their views.*

A Matter of More English

Further to T. E. Gahagan's letter on writing good English [April] please allow me to 'blow my top' about the mis-use of a word that has gone on for years. Most crime writers, nearly all newspapers and magazines, politicians without number, and many police officers are guilty of it (but not, I notice, *EWMM*!)

The word is insoluble. It is, properly and correctly, a term used by chemists and such for something that cannot be dissolved. Why, *why* cannot people say 'unsolvable' when they are dealing with a puzzling crime or a mystery ?

I suppose it *is* possible to say the crimes of 'Jack-the-Ripper' have never been dissolved, but it looks remarkably odd to me !

Swansea, Glam. E. D. EDMUNDS

I can add no grumbles about English in the justified way of Mr. T. E. Gahagan's bold attack in your *Readers Say* section, but there is one error many who write (and many who don't) may be interested to know about.

It is the very general use of the word 'tabloid.' It might be interesting to know, in strict fact, the word should either be followed by the name of a famous proprietary chemists, who coined it, or 'trade mark' since it is their registered trade mark.

Lostock, Nr. Bolton. J. L. GLAZER

● *Coincidental, and fascinating, these letters about chemical terms. Any more ? T. E. Gahagan started a controversy that continues to enthrall all* EWMM *readers who have the cause of good English at heart.*

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EXCHANGE or SELL: *The Mouthpiece; Council of Justice; Clue of the New Pin; Lieutenant Bones; Clue of the Twisted Candle* (paperbacks, clean), and *Man Who Was Nobody* (cloth, 1929, foxed). Box A52, *EWMM.*

Scene from the new Edgar Wallace film, *Dead Man's Chest*, latest Anglo-American presentation