THE TOP SELLING BRITISH CRIME MAGAZINE

Edgar Wallace

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

EDGAR WALLACE
The Remarkable Mr. Reeder

BILL KNOX
MAX MUNDY
PAUL TABORI

SAX ROHMER
The Malmsey Jewel

and other outstanding stories and features

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Edgar Wallace

EDGAR WALLACE

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Mystery, Crime, and Detection for the Aficionado

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NIGEL MORLAND, *Editor*

Briefly

RATHER IN THE MANNER of a modern Quixote, tilting at windmills from the back of a spavined nag, a writer in the press tittuped forth recently to lay about him. In that solemn, pontifical manner that can make airy nothings sound like something handed down from Sinai he said: 'Thriller novels are at the bottom of the crime wave, which would collapse but for this form of literature.'

It must be comforting to have such a simple solution for an immense problem! It seems that things like a lowered regard for the Ten Commandments, amenable consciences, an under-manned, over-worked police force, or just plain wickedness have nothing to do with the crime wave. The guilty party is the crime novelist's imagination, his writings being the cause of everything from the Great Train Robbery down.

We are to believe, apparently, in fantasies like a master-mind wallowing in his luxurious hideaway, surrounded by fawning henchmen, waiting for the new Margery Allingham in order to get to work again, or are we to consider Mr. Sykes, armed to th teeth, quite at a loss until he pops into the booksellers and buys *The Traitor's Gate*. Whereupon he is instantly inspired to steal the Crown Jewels . . .

How very convenient, how beautifully pigeon-holed! But, alas, people do *not* get notions from crime novels for their illegalities, for, after all, nine crime novels out of ten are utterly inapplicable to the requirements of real life. And the tenth might provide a few tips *if* villains were literate, subtle, or if all things were precisely equal.

Television or the cinema are far better Aunt Sallies, since we are frequently told, one picture tells a better story than a thousand words. And, incidentally, pictures and their stories set forth an insistently lifelike guide to successful misdeeds.

Crime novels are moral. In most the lawman is the hero. They are the modern miracle dramas, where good is triumphant and evil bites the dust; the crimes presented are too complicated, or too dependent on unlikely factors, to work in everyday existence.

Crime novels do *not* encourage crime, but they certainly show the would-be criminal he hasn't got a chance.

The Editor

Edgar Wallace

A little matter of a very smooth operator who is unimpressed by

The Remarkable Mr. Reeder

THERE was a quietude and sedateness about the Public Prosecutor's office which completely harmonised with the tastes and inclinations of Mr. J. G. Reeder. For he was a gentleman who liked to work in an office where the ticking of a clock was audible and the turning of a paper produced a gentle disturbance.

He had before him one morning the typewritten catalogue of Messrs. Willoby, the eminent estate agents, and he was turning the leaves with a thoughtful expression. The catalogue was newly arrived, a messenger having only a few minutes before placed the portfolio on his desk.

Presently he smoothed down a leaf and read again the flattering description of a fairly unimportant property. His scrutiny was patently a waste of time, for, scrawled on the margin of the sheet in red ink was the word *Let*, which meant that 'Riverside Bower' was not available for hire. The ink was smudged, and *Let* had obviously been written that morning.

"Humph!" said Mr. Reeder.

He was interested for many reasons. In the heat of July riverside houses are at a premium: at the beginning of November they are somewhat of a drug on the market. And trans-Atlantic visitors do not as a rule hire riverside cottages in a month which is chiefly characterised by mists, rain and general discomfort.

Two reception: two bedrooms: bath, large dry cellars, lawn to river, small skiff and punt. Gas and electric light. Ten guineas weekly or could be let for six months at eight guineas.

He pulled the telephone towards him and gave the agent's number.

"Let, is it — dear me! To an American gentleman? When will it be available?"

The new tenant had taken the house for a month. Mr. Reeder was even more intrigued, though his interest in the 'American gentleman' was not quite as intensive as the American gentleman's interest in Mr. Reeder.

When the great Art Lomer came on a business trip from Canada to London, a friend and admirer carried him off one day to see the principal sight of London.

"He generally comes out at lunch time," said the friend, who was called 'Cheep' because his name was Sparrow.

Mr. Lomer looked up and down Whitehall disparagingly, for he had seen so many cities of the world that none seemed as good as the others.

"There he is!" whispered Creep, though there was no need for mystery or confidence.

A middle-aged man had come out of one of the narrow doorways of a large grey building. On his head was a black hat, his body was tightly encased in an ill-fitting black coat and striped trousers. A weakish man with yellowy-white side-whiskers.

"Him?" demanded the amazed Art.

"Him," said the other, incorrectly but with emphasis.

"Is that the kind of guy you're scared about? You're crazy. Why, that man couldn't catch a cold! Now, back home in T'ronto —"

★

Art was proud of his home town, and in that spirit of expansiveness which paints even the unpleasant features of One's Own with the most attractive hues, he had even a good word to say about the Canadian Police — a force which normally, and in a local atmosphere, he held in the greatest detestation.

Art operated — he never employed a baser word — from Toronto, which, by its proximity to Buffalo and the United States border, gave him certain advantages. He had once operated in Canada itself, but his line at that period being robbery of a kind which is necessarily accompanied by assault, he had found himself facing a Canadian magistrate, and a Canadian magistrate wields extraordinary powers. Art had been sent down for five years. Thereafter he cut out violence and confined himself to the formation of his troupe — and Art Lomer's troupe was famous from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

He had been plain Arthur Lomer when he was rescued from a London gutter and a career of crime and sent to Canada, the charitable authorities being under the impression that Canada was rather short on juvenile criminals.

"I'll tell the world you fellows want waking up! So that's your Reeder? Well, if Canada and the United States was full of goats like him, I'd pack more dollars in one month than Hollywood pays in ten years. Yes, sir. Listen, does that guy park a clock?"

His guide was a little dazed.

"Does he wear a watch? Sure, a pocket one."

Mr. Art Lomer nodded.

"Wait — I'll bring it back to you in five minutes. I'm goin' to show you sump'n."

It was the maddest thing he had ever done in his life; he was in London on business, and was jeopardising a million dollars for the sake of the cheap applause of a man for whose opinion he did not care a cent.

Mr. Reeder was standing nervously on the pavement, waiting for what he described as 'the vehicular traffic' to pass, when a strange man bumped against him.

"Excuse me, sir," said the stranger.

"Not at all," murmured Mr. Reeder. "My watch is five minutes fast — you can see the correct time by Big Ben."

Mr. Lomer felt a hand dip into his coat pocket, saw, like one hypnotised, the watch go back to J. G. Reeder's pocket.

"Over here for long?" asked Mr. Reeder pleasantly.

"Why — yes".

"It's a nice time of the year," said Mr. Reeder. "But the country is not quite so beautiful as Canada in the fall. How is Leoni?"

Art Lomer did not faint; he swayed slightly and blinked hard, as if he were trying to wake up. Leoni was the proprietor of that little restaurant in Buffalo which was the advanced base of those operations so profitable to Art and his friends.

"Leoni?" Say, mister —"

"And the troupe — are they performing in England or — er — resting? I think that is the word."

Art gaped at the other. On Mr. Reeder's face was an expression of solicitude and inquiry. It was as though the well-being of the troupe was an absorbing preoccupation.

"Say — listen —" began Art huskily.

Before he could collect his thoughts, Reeder was crossing the road with nervous glances left and right, his umbrella gripped tightly in his hand.

"I guess I'm crazy," said Mr. Lomer, and walked back very slowly to where he had left his anxious cicerone.

"No — he got away before I could touch him," he said briefly, for he had his pride. "Come along, we'll get some eats, it's nearly twel—"

He looked at his wrist, but his watch was gone. Mr. Reeder could be heavily jocular on occasions.

★

"Art Lomer — is there anything against him?" asked the Director of Public Prosecutions, whose servant Mr. J. G. Reeder was.

"No, there is no complaint here. I have come into — er — possession of a watch of his, which I find, by reference to my private file, was stolen in Cleveland five years ago — it's in the police file of that date. Only — um — it seems remarkable that this gentleman should be in London at the end of the tourist season."

The Director pursed his lips thoughtfully.

"M-m. Tell the people at the Yard. He doesn't belong to us. What's his speciality?"

"He's a troupe leader — I think that is the term. Mr. Lomer was once associated with a theatrical company in — er — a humble capacity."

"You mean he's an actor?" asked the puzzled Director.

"Ye-es, sir; a producer rather than an actor. I have heard about his troupe, though I've never had the pleasure of seeing them perform. A talented company."

He sighed heavily and shook his head.

"I don't quite follow you about the troupe. How did this watch come into your possession, Reeder?"

Mr. Reeder nodded.

"That was a little jest on my part," he said, lowering his voice. "A little jest."

The Director knew Mr. Reeder too well to pursue the subject.

★

Lomer was living at the Hotel Calfont, in Bloomsbury. He occupied an important suite, for, being in the position of a man who was after big fish, he could not cavil at the cost of the ground bait. The big fish had bitten much sooner than Art Lomer had dared to hope. Its name was Bertie Claude Staffen, and the illustration was apt, for there was something very fish-like about this young man with his dull eyes and his permanently opened mouth.

Bertie's father was rich beyond the dreams of actresses. He was a pottery manufacturer, who bought cotton mills as a side-line, and he had made so much money that he never hired a taxi if he could take a bus, and never took a bus if he could walk. In this way he kept his liver, to which he frequently referred, in good order and hastened the degeneration of his heart.

Bertie Claude had inherited all his father's meanness and such of his money as was not left to faithful servants, orphan homes and societies for promoting the humanities, which meant that Bertie inherited almost every penny. He had the weak chin and sloping forehead of an undeveloped intellect, but he knew there were twelve pennies to a shilling and that one hundred cents equalled one dollar, and that is more knowledge than the only sons of millionaires usually acquire.

He had one quality which few would suspect in him: the gift of romantic dreaming. When Mr. Staffen was not occupied in cutting down overhead charges or speeding up production, he loved to sit at his ease, a cigarette between his lips, his eyes half closed, and picture himself in heroic situations. Thus, he would imagine dark caves stumbled upon by accident, filled with dusty boxes bulging with treasure; or he saw himself at Monte Carlo Casino, with immense piles of *mille* notes before him, won from fabulously rich Greeks. Armenians — in fact, anybody who is fabulously rich. Most of his dreams were about

money in sufficient quantities to repay him for the death duties on his father's estate which had been iniquitously wrung from him by thieving tax officers. He was a very rich man, but ought to be richer — this was his considered view.

★

When Bertie Claude arrived at the Calfort Hotel and was shown into Art's private sitting-room, he stepped into a world of heady romance. For the big table in the centre of the room was covered with specimens of quartz of every grade, and they had been recovered from a brand new mine located by Art's mythical brother and sited at a spot which was known only to two men, one of whom was Art Lomer and the other Bertie Claude Staffen.

Mr. Staffen took off his light overcoat and, walking to the table, inspected the ore with sober interest.

"I've had the assay," he said. The Johnny who did it is a friend of mine and didn't charge a penny; his report is promising — very promising."

"The company —" began Art, but Mr. Staffen raised a warning finger.

"I think you know, and it is unnecessary for me to remind you, that I do not intend speculating a dollar in this mine. I'm putting up no money. What I'm prepared to do is to use my influence in the promotion for a *quid pro quo*. You know what that means?"

"Something for nothing!" said Art, and in this instance was not entirely wide of the mark.

"Well, no — stock in the company. Maybe I'll take a directorship later, when the money is up and everything is plain sailing. I can't lend my name to a — well, unknown quantity."

Art agreed.

"My friend had put up the money," he said easily. "If that guy had another hundred dollars he'd have all the money in the world — he's that rich. Stands to reason, Mr. Staffen, that I wouldn't come over here tryin' to get money from a gentleman who is practically a stranger. We met in Canada — sure we did! But what do you know about me? I might be one large crook — I might be a con man or anything."

Some such idea had occurred to Bertie Claude, but the very frankness of his friend dispelled something of his suspicions.

"I've often wondered since what you must have thought of me, sittin' in a game with that bunch of thugs," Art went on, puffing a reflective cigar. "But I guess you said to yourself 'This guy is a man of the world — he's *gotta* mix.' An' that's true. In these Canadian mining camps you horn in with some real tough boys — yes, sir. They're sump'n' fierce."

"I quite understand the position," said Bertie Claude, who hadn't. "I flatter myself I know men. If I haven't shown that in *Homo Sum* then I've failed in expression."

"Sure," said Mr. Lomer lazily, and added another "Sure!" to ram home the first. "That's a pretty good book. When you give it to me at the King Edward Hotel I thought it was sump'n' about arithmetic. But it's mighty good poetry, every line startin' with big letters an' the end of every line sounding like the end word in the line before. I said to my secretary, 'That Mr. Staffen mst have a brain'. How you get the ideas beats me. That one about the princess who comes out of a clam —"

"An oyster — she was the embodiment of the pearl," Bertie hastened to explain. "You mean The White Maiden?"

Lomer nodded.

"That was great. I never read poetry till I read that; it just made me want to cry like a great big fool. If I had your gifts I wouudn't be loafin' round Ontario, prospecting. No, sir."

"It is a gift," said Mr. Staffen after thought. "You say you have the money for the company?"

"Every cent. I'm not in a position to offer a single share — that's true. Not that you need worry about that. I've reserved a few from promotion. No, sir, I never had any intention of allowing you to pay a cent."

He knocked off the ash of his cigar and frowned.

"You've been mighty nice to me, Mr. Staffen," he said slowly, "and though I don't feel called upon to tell every man my business, you're such an honest fellow that I feel sort of confident about you. This mine means nothing."

Bertie Claude's eyebrows rose.

"I don't quite get you," he said.

Art's smile was slow and a little sad.

"Doesn't it occur to you that if I've got the capital for that property, it was foolish of me to take a trip to Europe?"

Bertie had certainly wondered why.

"Selling that mine was like selling bars of gold. It didn't want any doing; I could have sold it if I'd been living in the

Amaganni Forest. No, sir, I'm here on business that would make your hair stand up if you knew."

He rose abruptly and paced the room with quick, nervous strides, his brow furrowed in thought.

"You're a whale of a poet," he said suddenly. "Maybe you've got more imagination than most people. What does the mine mean for me? A few hundred thousand dollars' profit." He shrugged his shoulders. "What are you doing on Wednesday?"

The brusqueness of the question took Bertie Claude aback.

"On Wednesday? Well, I don't know that I'm doing anything."

Mr. Lomer bit his lips thoughtfully.

"I've got a little house on the river. Come down and spend a night with me, and I'll let you into a secret that these newspapers would give a million dollars to know. If you read it in a book you wouldn't believe it. Maybe one day you can write it. It would take a man with your imagination to put it over. Say, I'll tell you now."

And then, with some hesitation, Mr. Lomer told his story.

"Politics, and all that, I know nothing about. But I do know that some of the royalty that've been kicked out have been feeling the pinch and there's some from one country — no names. My interest in the place was about the same as yours in Piketown, Saskatchewan, but about six months ago I met up with a couple of these people. They came out of the United States in a hurry, with a sheriff's posse behind them, and I happened to be staying on a farm near the border when they turned up. And what do you think they'd been doing?"

Mr. Staffen shook his head.

"Peddling emeralds," said the other soberly.

"Emeralds? Peddling? What do you mean — trying to sell emeralds?"

Art nodded.

"Yes, sir. One had a paper bag full of 'em, all sizes. I bought the lot for twelve thousand dollars, took 'em down to T'ronto and got them valued at something under a million dollars."

Bertie Claude was listening open-mouthed.

"These fellows had been peddlin' jewellery for four years. Some broken-down Prince was acting as agent for the others — I didn't ask questions too closely, because naturally I'm not inquisitive."

He leant forward and tapped the other's knee to emphasise his words.

"The stuff I bought wasn't a twentieth of their stock. I sent them back for the rest of the loot, and they're due here next week."

"Twenty million dollars!" gasped Bertie Claude. "What will it cost you?"

"A million dollars — two hundred thousand pounds. Come down to my place at Marlow, and I'll show you the best emeralds you ever saw — all that I've got left, as a matter of fact. I sold the biggest part to a Pittsburg millionaire for — well, I won't give you the price, because you'll think I robbed him ! If you like any stone you see — why, I'll let you buy it, though I don't want to sell. Naturally, I couldn't make profit out of a friend."

Bertie Claude listened, dazed, while his host catalogued his treasures with an ease and a shrewd sense of appraisement. When Mr. Staffen left his friend's room, his head was in a whirl, though he experienced a bewildered sense of familiarity with a situation which had often figured in his dreams.

As he strode through the hall, he saw a middle-aged man with a high bowler hat, but beyond noticing that he looked rather like a bailiff's officer, Bertie Claude would have passed him, had not the old-fashioned gentleman stood in his way.

"Excuse me, sir. You're Mr. Staffen, are you not?"

"Yes," said Bertie shortly.

"I wonder if I could have a few moments' conversation with you on — er — a matter of some moment."

Bertie waved an impatient hand.

"I've no time to see anybody," he said brusquely. "If you want an appointment you'd better write for it."

And he walked out, leaving the sad-looking man to gaze pensively after him.

Mr. Lomer's little house was an isolated stone bungalow between Marlow and the Quarry Wood, and if he had sought diligently, Mr. Lomer could not have found a property more suitable for his purpose. Bertie Claude, who associated the river with sunshine and flannelled ease, shivered as he came out of the railway station and looked anxiously up at the grey sky. It was raining steadily, and the taxi which was waiting for him at the station dripped from every surface.

"Pretty beastly month to take a bungalow on the river," he grumbled.

Mr. Lomer, who was not quite certain in his mind what was the ideal month for riverside bungalows, agreed.

"It suits me," he said. "This house of mine has got the right kind of lonesomeness. I just hate having people looking over me."

★

The road from the station to the house followed parallel with the line of the river. Staring out of the streaming windows, Mr. Staffen saw only the steel-grey of water and the damp grasses of the meadows through which the road ran. A quarter of an hour's drive, however, brought them to a pretty little cottage which stood in a generous garden. A bright fire burned in the hall fireplace, and there was a general air of comfort about the place that revived Bertie's flagging spirits. A few seconds later they were sitting in a half-timbered dining-room, where tea had been laid.

Atmosphere has an insensible appeal to most people, and Bertie found himself impressed alike by the comfort of the place and the unexpected service, for there was a pretty maid, a sedate, middle-aged butler, and a sober-faced young man, who had helped him off with his wet raincoat.

"No, the house isn't mine: it is one I always hire when I'm in England," said Mr. Lomer, who never told a small and unnecessary lie; because small and unnecessary lies are so easily detected. "Jenkins, the butler, is my man, so is the valet; the maid comes from London."

After tea he showed Bertie up to his bedroom and, opening a drawer of his bureau, took out a small steel box, fastened with two locks. These he unfastened and lifted out a shallow metal tray covered with a layer of cotton-wool.

"You can have any of these that take your eye," he said. "Make me an offer and I'll tell you what they're worth."

He rolled back the cotton wool and revealed six magnificent stones.

"That one?" said Mr. Lomer, taking the largest between his finger and thumb. "Why, that's worth six thousand dollars — about twelve hundred pounds. And if you offered me that sum for it, I'd think you were a fool, because the only safe way of getting emeralds is to buy 'em fifty per cent under value. I

reckon that cost me about" — he made a mental calculation — "ninety pounds."

Bertie's eyes shone. On emeralds he was something of an expert, and that these stones were genuine, he knew.

"You wouldn't like to sell it for ninety pounds?" he asked carelessly.

Art Lomer shook his head.

"No, sir. I've gotta make some profit, even from my friends! I'll let you have it for a hundred."

Bertie's hand sought his inside pocket.

"No, I don't want paying now. What do you know about emeralds, anyway? They might be a clever fake. Take it up to town, show it to an expert —"

"I'll give you the cheque now."

"Any time will do."

Art wrapped up the stone carefully, put it in a small box and handed it to his companion.

"That's the only one I'm going to sell," he explained as he led the way back to the dining room.

Bertie went immediately to the small secretaire, wrote the cheque, tore it out and handed it to Mr. Lomer. Art looked at the paper and frowned.

"Why, what do I do with this?" he asked. "I've got no bank account here. All my money's in the Associated Express Company."

"I'll make it 'pay bearer'," said Bertie obligingly.

Still Mr. Lomer was dubious.

"Just write a note telling the President, or whoever he is, to cash that little bit of paper. I hate banks anyway."

The obliging Bertie Claude scribbed the necessary note. When this was done, he came to business, for he was a business man.

"Can I come in on this pewel deal?"

Art Lomer shook his head reluctantly.

"Sorry, Mr. Staffen, but that's almost impossible. I'll be quite frank with you, because I believe in straightforward dealing. When you ask to come in on that transaction, you're just asking me for money!"

Bertie made a faint noise of protest.

"Well, that's a mean way of putting it, but it comes to the same thing. I've taken all the risk, I've organised the operation

— and it's cost money. I just hate to refuse you, because I like you, Mr. Staffen. Maybe if there's any little piece to which you might take a fancy, I'll let you have it at a reasonable price."

Bertie thought for a moment, his busy mind at work.

"What has the deal cost you up to now?" he asked.

Again Mr. Lomer shook his head.

"It doesn't matter what it's cost me — if you offered me four times the amount of money I've spent — and that would be a considerable sum — I couldn't let you in on the deal. I might go so far as giving you a small interest, but I wouldn't take money for that."

"We'll talk about it later," said Bertie, who never lost hope.

★

The rain had ceased, and the setting sun flooded the river with pale gold, and Bertie was walking in the garden with his host, when from somewhere above them came the faint hum of a small plane. Presently he saw the machine circling and disappearing behind the black crown of Quarry Wood. He heard an exclamation from the man at his side and, turning, saw Art's face puckered in a grimace of annoyance and doubt.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"I'm wondering," said Art slowly. "They told me next week . . . why, no, I'm foolish."

It was dark. The butler had turned on the lights and drawn the blinds when they went indoors again, and it was not difficult for Bertie to realise that something had happened which was very disturbing to his host. He was taciturn, and for the next half hour scarcely spoke, sitting in front of the fire gazing into the leaping flames and starting at every sound.

Dinner, a simple meal, was served early; and whilst the servants were clearing away, the two men strolled into the tiny drawing room.

"What's the trouble, Lomer?"

"Nothing," said the other with a start, "only —"

At that moment they heard the tinkle of a bell, and Art listened tensely. He heard the sound of voices in the hall, and then the butler came in.

"There's two men and a lady to see you, sir," he said.

Bertie saw the other bite his lip.

"Show them in," said Art curtly, and a second later a tall man walked into the room swinging in his hand a pilot's headset.

"Marsham! What in hel —!"

The girl who followed claimed Bertie Claude's instant attention. She was slim and dark, and her face was beautiful, despite the pallor of her cheeks and the tired look in her eyes. The second of the men visitors was hardly as prepossessing: a squat, foreign-looking individual with a short-clipped beard, he was wrapped to his neck in an old overcoat, and his wild-looking heard was bare.

Art closed the door.

"What's the great idea?" he asked.

"There's been trouble," said the tall man sulkily. "The Prince has had another offer. He has sent some of the stuff, but he won't part with the pearls or the diamonds until you pay him half of the money you promised. This is Princess Pauline, the Prince's daughter," he explained.

Art shot an angry look at the girl.

"See here, young lady," he said, "I suppose you speak English?"

She nodded.

"This isn't the way we do business in our country. Your father promised —"

"My father has been very precipitate," she said, with the slightest of foreign accent, which was delightful to Bertie's ear. "He has taken much risk. Indeed, I am not sure that he has been very honest in the matter. It is very simple for you to pay. If he has your money tonight —"

"Tonight?" boomed Art. "How can I get the money for him tonight?"

"He is in Holland," said the girl. "We have the aeroplane waiting."

"But how can I get the money tonight?" repeated the Canadian angrily. "Do you think I carry a hundred thousand pounds in my pocket?"

Again she shrugged and, turning to the unkempt little man, said something to him in a language which was unintelligible to Mr. Staffen. He replied in his hoarse voice, and she nodded.

"Pieter says my father will take your cheque. He only wishes to be sure that there is no —" She paused, at a loss for an English word.

"Did I ever double-cross your father?" asked Art savagely. "I can't give you either the money or the cheque. You can call off the deal — I'm through!"

By this time the pilot had unrolled the package he carried under his other arm, placed it on the table, and Bertie Claude grew breathless at the sight of the glittering display that met his eyes. There were diamonds, set and unset; quaint and ancient pieces of jewellery that must have formed the heir-looms of old families; but their historical value did not for the moment occur to him. He beckoned Art aside.

"If you can keep these people here tonight," he said in a low voice, "I'll undertake to raise the money you want on that collection alone."

Art shook his head.

"It's no use, Mr. Staffen. I know this guy. Unless I can send him the money tonight, we'll not smell the rest of the stuff."

Suddenly he clapped his hands.

"Gee!" he breathed. "That's an idea! You've got your cheque book."

Cold suspicion showed in the eyes of Bertie Claude.

"I've got my cheque book, certainly," he said, "but —"

"Come into the dining room." Art almost ran ahead of him, and when they reached the room he closed the door. "A cheque can't be presented for two or three days. It certainly couldn't be presented tomorrow," he said, speaking rapidly. "By that time we could get this stuff up to town to your bankers, and you could keep it until I redeem it. What's more, you can stop payment of the cheque tomorrow morning if the stones aren't worth the money."

Bertie looked at the matter from ten different angles in as many seconds.

"Suppose I gave them a post-dated cheque to make sure?" he said.

"Post-dated?" Mr. Lomer was puzzled. "What does that mean?" And when Bertie explained, his face brightened. "Why, sure!" he said. "That's a double protection. Make it payable the day after tomorrow."

Bertie hesitated no more. Sitting down at the table he took out his cheque book and a fountain pen, and verified the date.

"Make it 'bearer'," suggested Art, when the writer paused, "same as you did the other cheque."

Bertie nodded and added his signature, with its characteristic underlining.

"Wait a second."

Art went out of the room and came back within a minute.

"They've taken it!" he said exultantly. "Boy," he said, as he slapped the gratified young man on the shoulder, "you've gotta come in on this now and I didn't want you to. It's fifty-fifty — I'm no hog. Come along, and I'll show you something else that I never intended showing a soul."

He went out into the passage, opened a little door that led down a flight of stone steps to the cellar, switching on the light as he went down the stairs. Unlocking a heavy door, he threw it open.

"See here," he said, "did you ever see anything like this?"

Bertie Claude peered into the dark interior.

"I don't see —" he began, when he was so violently pushed into the darkness that he stumbled.

In another second the door closed on him; he heard the snap of a lock and shrieked:

"I say, what's this?"

"I say, you'll find out in a day or two," came the mocking voice of Mr. Lomer.

★

Art closed the second door, ran lightly up the stairs and joined the butler, the valet, the maid and the three visitors in the drawing room.

"He's well inside. And he stays there till the cheque matures — there's enough food and water in the cellar to last him a week."

"Did you get him?" asked the bearded man.

"Get him! He was easy," said the other scornfully. "Now, you boys and girls, skip, and skip quick! I've got a letter from this guy to his bank manager, telling him to —" he consulted the letter and quoted —" 'to cash the attached cheque for my friend Mr. Arthur Lomer'."

There was a murmur of approval from the troupe.

"The plane's gone back, I suppose?"

The tall man nodded."

"Yes," he said. "I only hired it for the afternoon."

"Well, you can get back too. Ray and Al, you go to Paris and take the CP boat from Havre. Slicky, you get those whiskers off and leave honest from Liverpool. Pauline and Aggie will make Genoa, and we'll meet at Leoni's on the fourteenth of next month and cut the stuff all ways."

Two days later Mr. Art Lomer walked into the noble offices of the Northern Commercial Bank and sought an interview with the manager. That gentleman read the letter, examined the cheque and touched a bell.

"It's a mighty big sum," said Mr. Lomer, in an almost awe-stricken voice.

The manager smiled.

"We cash fairly large cheques here," he said, and, to the clerk who came at the summons: "Mr. Lomer would like as much of this as possible in American currency. How did you leave Mr. Staffen?"

"Why, Bertie and I have been in Paris over that new company of mine," said Lomer. "My! It's difficult to finance Canadian industries in this country, Mr. Soames, but we've made a mighty fine deal in Paris."

He chatted on purely commercial topics until the clerk returned and laid a heap of bills and banknotes on the table. Mr. Lomer produced a wallet, enclosed the money securely, shook hands with the manager and walked out into the general office. And then he stopped, for Mr. J. G. Reeder stood squarely in his path.

"Pay-day for the troupe, Mr. Lomer — or do you call it 'treasury'? My theatrical glossary is rather rusty."

"Why, Mr. Reeder," stammered Art, "glad to see you, but I'm rather busy just now —"

"What do you think happened to our dear friend, Mr. Bertie Claude Staffen?" asked Reeder anxiously.

"Why, he's in Paris."

"So soon!" murmured Reeder. "And the police only took him out of your suburban cellar an hour ago. How wonderful are our modern systems of transportation! Marlow one minute, Paris the next."

Art hesitated no longer. He dashed past, thrusting the

detective aside, and flew for the door. He was so annoyed that the two men who were waiting for him had the greatest difficulty in putting the handcuffs on his wrists.

★

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Reeder to his chief. "Art always travels with his troupe. The invisibility of the troupe was to me a matter for grave suspicion, and of course I've had the house under observation ever since Mr. Staffen disappeared. It is not my business, of course," he said apologetically, "and really I should not have interfered. Only, as I have often explained to you, the curious workings of my mind —"

(From *The Mind of Mr. J. G. Reeder,* shortly being published by Pan Books, Ltd.)

Some EWMM Contributors . . .

Morris Hershman. Lives in Bronx, New York. Author of eleven paperbacks, dozens of short stories. Ex-committee member of Mystery Writers of America.

Bill Knox. Professional newspaperman and journalist. Constant traveller, works a lot for television. Born in Glasgow, 1928. Lives in Ayr. His new thriller, *Devilweed,* is just out.

Max Mundy. Has just bought a house in Spain. Worked ten years with the Foreign Office in Algiers. Travels a lot. Has written a delightful Christmas tale for *EWMM's* December issue.

Colin Robertson. Senior press censor for Scotland in the last war. Leading light of the Crime Writers' Association. Latest book is *Clash of Steel.*
in U.S.A.

John Salt. 43, married, with two children. Five years in Royal Navy in World War Two. Began as a dairy-farmer, now a journalist and magazine editor. Lives in Hertfordshire.

Paul Tabori. Long-time professional journalist, born Hungary. Busy traveller (just back from behind the Iron Curtain). Television and motion picture writer.

CRIME FICTION

This fascinating inside report (specially commissioned by EWMM) *shows that the crime novel has vast numbers of faithful devotees*

Behind the Iron Curtain

PAUL TABORI

WHEN I WAS in Budapest recently, I walked into a bookshop that used to belong to an uncle of mine. The last time I had seen it the sign above the entrance read: ELEK TABORI — BOOKS OLD AND NEW; and the thoroughfare was called the JOSEPH BOULEVARD. Now the sign proclaimed: STATE ANTIQUARIUM NO. 7 and the street had also changed its name to LENIN BOULEVARD.

An old gentleman received me with a marked lack of interest. I asked him whether he had a copy of Edgar Wallace's *The Ringer* — or rather, its Hungarian translation — in stock. He gave me a look of amazement not unmixed with contempt. I produced a dollar bill. His expression changed.

"If you could wait a minute, sir," and he pointed to a rickety chair. "I'll do my best, I really shall."

He disappeared and I looked around in the dusty, forlorn place with its stacks of collected works of Marx and encyclopaedias published forty years ago leavened with some Hungarian classics and an obviously cherished illustrated edition of Boccaccio. I didn't have to wait long. Back my old man came, bearing triumphantly a book wrapped in a plain brown cover. He blew the non-existent dust off it and while he took the dollar bill he said:

"It's the very last we have. And I shouldn't really sell it to you . . . Mr. M.'s been asking for one ever so long. . . ."

Mr. M. was a well-known name in the country, a high government official who had risen from rather humble beginnings and was famous for two things: his addiction to hard liquor and to crime fiction. Both of them were private passions. Crime fiction, mystery stories, detective tales are largely taboo in the People's Republics and 'Socialist' countries of Eastern Europe.

There are three reasons for this. First, the existing books are without exception by Western writers — therefore they represent the 'decadent and capitalistic' society in which gain and jealousy are ripe, providing motives for murder and other crimes. Secondly, crime as such is supposed to be non-existent in a Communist state. Looking at a Polish or Rumanian newspaper, you will never find huge headlines or front page reports about a murder case. Details of all criminal prosecutions, except political trials, are kept to an absolute minimum. To be a crime reporter must be one of the most frustrating, futile assignments in Czechoslovakia or Bulgaria, because you never achieve a byline. When the head of all Hungarian state catering organisations was arrested and convicted for embezzlement and abuse of his powers, it was only by accident that a few details leaked out.

Finally, as the native product does not exist, detective stories have to be imported and copyright fees cost foreign currency that could be used for more vital purposes.

Still, there is such a craving for this type of literature which cannot be entirely denied. In Hungary some mysteries are being published — especially if, like Chandler's or Hammett's, they present a repulsive society, a selfish, unattractive group of people. But even so, a detective story is priced three times higher than an original novel by some Hungarian writer and costs ten times more than a classic — with the brutally frank explanation that an addict should pay through the nose for his particular kind of 'drug'.

★

In Poland, native authors of thrillers and Westerns were put in their proper places by a new system of payment which was introduced on January 1, 1960. This regulated *all* forms of writing. Authors of detective stories and Westerns, for example, received 500 zlotys (about £7) less per sixteen printed pages than writers of other works who were paid 2,000 zlotys (about

£25) per sixteen printed pages. Yet I found that there was still a lively interest in detective and spy stories, and that translations of Fleming's James Bond books were circulating in duplicated private editions.

East German fans are both more frustrated and more highly stimulated than the others behind the Iron Curtain. In Western Germany there is a tremendous renaissance of the *Krimis*, as crime stories are called. The top-ranking authors are Edgar Wallace, Ellery Queen, E. C. Bentley and John Dickson Carr, Ngaio Marsh and Dorothy Sayers — not to mention Nicholas Blake, Arthur W. Upfield, Anthony Berkeley, Rex Stout, Raymond Chandler, Georges Simenon, Agatha Christie, Frances Crane, Edmund Crispin, Stuart Palmer, and many others.

The principal publishers are Ullstein, Goldmann, Scherz, Rowohlt and Desch. Their books, of course, circulate freely in the Federal Republic, and in spite of the Wall and the ever-watchful East German police, find their way into Eastern Germany in considerable quantities. Equally, the many television programmes based on some of the famous fictional detectives, the Perry Masons, Philip Marlowes and Hercule Poirots, are seen regularly by those East Germans whose sets have been secretly adjusted to receive the West.

★

In the colourful market-place of Zagreb, stretching on the slopes of the Cathedral Hill, I bought some fruit. This was wrapped in the pages of a week-old newspaper. It was something of a shock to discover that it was running not one but two serials. One was a novel by a lady called Agatha Kriszti — which was the Croatian way of spelling the name of the creator of the great M. Poirot — and the other was a non-fiction book by myself. I very much hope that Miss Christie has collected her royalties without difficulty: it took me six months before I gathered in my modest harvest of dinars. The business manager of the newspaper wasn't particularly embarrassed when I taxed him with publishing the book without my permission. "We are very busy people," he said, "and you should be honoured that our readers get acquainted with your work. . . ."

I was too much in a hurry to argue: but certainly, in Eastern Europe Yugoslavia is the one country in which an astonishingly

wide variety of Western literature is published. And while it is somewhat bewildering to see the name of William Faulkner spelled in at least four different ways (Fokner, Falkner, Faulkner and Fukner) according to what phonetic translation the publishing house uses, you discover that not only are Edgar Wallace, Sax Rohmer, Erle Stanley Gardner and many others regularly translated, but British authors figure regularly on the programmes of Zagreb, Ljubljana and Belgrade television, and the adventures of Paul Temple delight the radio audiences.

In some countries there are attempts to create native schools of detective stories and television series. In Poland *Barbara and Jan*, the adventures of a young journalist couple who are modelled somewhat on the Norths, have been hailed by the critics and the audiences as "As last something of our own!" In Hungary the *Szabo Family* combines the features of a soap-opera — perhaps a working class *Mrs. Dale's Diary* — with elements of a Magyar *Dixon of Dock Green*, and has acquired a huge following.

★

As for the Soviet Union, almost the only two crime writers of the West that have been fully translated are Conan Doyle (his Sherlock Golmes is fantastically popular) and Dashiel Gammet. (There is no initial *H* in Russian.)

As in the other Communist countries, crime novels — banned since 1917 — seem to be making a comeback. Thanks to Leo Heiman, a journalist who lies in Israel, I have been able to study three such novels published in Moscow in 1963. Since then only half-a-dozen others have appeared.

The representatives of the law in these books have little in common with Lord Peter Wimsey or Mrs. Pym. They are not only supermen but loyal patriots — and their quarries are not the usual Western-type criminals but 'economic offenders' and therefore 'enemies of the people'. In other respects, the books follow the classic whodunit formulae, full of violence, mystery and dramatic climax. Reading them, one enters a world of crooked cops, dishonest officials, corrupt customs inspectors, dope fiends, sex maniacs, drunkards — and a vast gallery of comrades who are as eager to make a dishonest rouble.

In Anatoli Gladilin's *Eternal Mission* (published by Sovietski Pisatel), for example, the crooks are active in the frozen wastes

of Siberia and their loot is gold — gold from the fabulous Lenskiye Priiski mine on the River Lena, to be sold on the Black Market. It takes all the skill, daring and persistence of Major Kraminov, of the KGB State Security Committee, a 'veteran intelligence operative', to bring the large and desperate gang to justice — after which he returns to his wife, a happy ending.

The second thriller is by Arkadi Adamov, called *Personal Search*. The villains are professional smugglers and crooked customs inspectors — the heroes, police investigators and devoted excise men. It is a colourful story with wayward husbands, unfaithful wives, corrupt officials and plenty of sex.

It is the honest customs officials (apparently a minority) who help the investigators to crack down on the crooks, track them from Moscow to the frontier station of Brest-Litovsk and back again, and wipe out the 'nest of vipers'.

The chief villain of the third thriller, *In the Name of the Law*, by Nikolai Toman (published by Molodaya Gvardiya) is a crooked policeman — probably the first in Soviet fiction. He works hand in glove with the criminals and when one of them is arrested, he himself kills him in his cell and claims the man had a fatal heart attack. Yet in the end Colonel Volkov, Major Mironov and Lieutenant Alekhin of the Department for Combating Theft of Socialist Property, expose the crooked Lieutenant Antipov and justice triumphs.

These three books are no great shakes as literature or even good, average workmanship — but they mark a trend. Perhaps before long crime fiction will be accepted in Eastern Europe as a legitimate and exciting branch of writing, and worth both reading and writing.

SOLUTION TO EWMM OCTOBER CROSSWORD (No. 9)

ACROSS. 1, The Man Who Knew. 8, Hot-spur. 9, Off-hand. 11, Unhurt. 13, Hara-kiri. 15, Totem (pole). 16, Endorse. 18, Reality. 19, (il)Ve-no-m(ore). 21, O.B.-solet-E. 23, P-lag-ue. 25, Milksop. 26, Archers. 28, Melody of Death.

DOWN. 2, Hatchet(man). 3, Map. 4, Nark. 5, Hook and eye. 6, (Dr.) Kafka (The Trial). 7, Evasive. 8, Haunted Room. 10, Dying embers. 12, Rum-B.A. 14, Devil to pay. 17, (The) Rival(s). 18, Resolve. 20, Neglect. 22, Lass-O. 24, Gaff. 27, Cue.

EYES DOWN MURDER

BILL KNOX

It had to happen, the first Bingo murder plus a very clever swindle indeed

ADVANCE PUBLICITY had described it as the Bingo game of the century, and for once advance publicity was right.

There would be one game, one prize — and a full card could mean £10,000 to the winner.

Eagle Bingo Enterprises had been building up to it for weeks and now, at last, the night had come. Two hundred finalists, drawn in groups of five from each of Eagle's chain of forty halls throughout the country, were poised on the brink of possible fortune.

An audience of four hundred filled the rest of the space in the converted Picador Cinema in High Street; and a network of microphones, landlines and loudspeakers would relay the proceedings to another 12,000 Bingo fans who were crammed in Eagle halls up and down the country.

Detective-Superintendent Ferras wasn't impressed. He was looking for a woman, a woman who'd called Headquarters fifteen minutes before.

She had claimed she was going to be murdered . . . and then the line had gone silent.

"It's an obvious hoax," protested the dinner-jacketed man by his side. George Eldon, the manager of the Picador and also a director of the Eagle company, had said the same thing at thirty second intervals ever since the police had arrived.

A small, slim man with heavy rimless glasses, he bit his lip and tried again. "You don't really think . . ."

"Maybe, maybe not." Detective-Superintendent Ferras shrugged. He was about the same height as the manager, but bulky with a chubby, half-asleep face.

His suit was unpressed and an old-fashioned watch-chain was slung across his ample stomach. "We should find out, soon."

They were standing in the main foyer of the Picador, and it was almost 9 p.m. The doors had opened at 7.30, and the first hour had been taken up by three single-line bingo games, designed to warm things up for the big occasion.

Then had come a half-hour interval, to give the microphone network time to be tested and allow the cash customers time to queue for tea and biscuits at the refreshment counters.

But now the foyer and refreshment counters were emptying as everyone got back to their seats. It was time for the real game of the evening.

"If anything should . . ." Eldon swallowed, and left the thought unfinished. "What will we do? What about the game?"

"Let's wait and see," said Ferras, allowing himself to be mildly sympathetic. "We know who we're looking for."

Her name — at least the name she'd given on the telephone — was May Timmins. Her seat number in the hall was H.24, and that was when the line had become silent.

But it helped. The 200 finalists for the £10,000 game were in a bank of reserved seats. The booking chart showed she was one of five finalists who'd travelled to the city from the Eagle hall at Southshaw.

★

"We could try broadcasting for her on the Tannoy again," the manager suggested.

"If she'd heard, she'd have come forward by now," Ferras shook his head. "Let's go and have a look from the back."

They went to what, in the old days, had been the entrance to the back stalls. The last few seats were filling amid a buzz of conversation.

On stage, the blower machine stood under a blaze of light against a back-cloth of black velvet. The new set of numbered balls to be used for the Big Game lay on display in their special box to one side of the caller's desk.

A burst of applause sounded as two figures strode on-stage. The first was about thirty, with an expansive smile and curly black hair.

The other was a much younger man with a sweater and jeans tailored on expensively casual lines. It was hard to say which of the two was getting the main ovation.

"Recognise the boy in jeans?" asked Eldon happily. "That's Manny Garland, the pop singer. He's guest caller. Special fee, of course. I'd another star lined up, but she cancelled this morning. Getting Garland was quite a rush, but it's worth the money."

"Of course," Superintendent Feras gave a grunt. "Who's the other fellow?"

"Our regular caller, Bob Hayes," explained Eldon, growing more nervous as the last of the late-comers settled down. "He's my assistant-manager."

On stage, Hayes was getting to work. He introduced the singer to another round of shared applause, told a joke which was obviously expected ritual, then got down to welcoming the audiences outside the Picador.

His enthusiasm boomed from the hall amplifiers and over the microphones to the rest of the network. "Remember, all you people, whatever Eagle hall you're in, this is your contest too, with your finalists here tonight . . ."

Ferras stopped listening as a tall, thin figure came quietly round the back of the hall towards him. Detective-Sergeant Hardy stopped beside him and shook his head.

"No sign of her in row H, sir. I've talked to the other four in her party. They haven't seen her since the interval began."

On stage, introductions and greetings over, Manny Garland had produced his guitar and was about to launch into song. Superintendent Ferras winced as the first notes twanged out and beckoned Eldon closer.

"I'm going to have a word with the other four from Southshaw," said the detective quietly. "Do what you like about your programme, but I've already got men at the

exits and nobody leaves until Mrs. Timmins is located."

Eldon surrendered with a sigh. "You can use my office. Manny can sing another song, and then I'll keep them happy with a free bonus game — tell them it's a surprise item."

"Sounds a good arrangement."

"Good ?" The manager was bitter. "I hope the customers think so — but I haven't much choice. I can't start the ten thousand final with one hall unrepresented." He shook his head. "This is the first real trouble we've ever had here, apart from that break-in a couple of weeks back."

"Break-in ?" Ferras was immediately interested.

"Kids, according to the police who came round," explained Eldon. "They got in through a window and took the petty cash from my desk. What mattered more was they knocked over a bottle of ink — made a pretty mess, I can tell you." He broke off as the wall-phone behind them buzzed.

Sergeant Hardy answered it, then passed the receiver to his chief.

When Superintendent Ferras hung up a moment later, his face had lost much of its sleepy calm.

"Well, we've found May Timmins," he said softly. "One of my men looked inside your balcony store-room. She was lying behind some boxes."

"Dead ?" George Eldon's voice trembled on the word.

"Murdered," corrected the policeman. "Stabbed in the back. Mr. Eldon, this looks like being a night for you to remember — in more ways than one."

★

The body lay on the floor of the upstairs store-room. May Timmins had been a stoutly-built, middle-aged woman with red hair and a hard angular face.

Her oatmeal coloured suit had a small round stain of blood — a stain little more than the size of a penny — low down between the shoulder blades. There was no other mark of violence.

Ferras knelt beside the dead woman for a moment. Her handbag lay to one side, her finalist's card for the £10,000 bingo close beside it.

He glanced up. "Eldon, where's the nearest telephone she could have used ?"

The hall manager swallowed. It was a long time since he'd seen death and then, at any rate, he'd been in khaki. "There's a public call-box just along the corridor a few yards."

Ferras got to his feet with a grunt and saw for himself. The call-box was at the end of the blue-walled, emulsion-painted corridor — the Picador's balcony area was all that colour, in contrast to the more expensive decorations below. The corridor was really just a small passage-way leading off a larger one which ran between front and back balcony exits. It was a quiet backwater — and if May Timmins had been stabbed as she telephoned it would have been the work of seconds to drag her unobserved into the store-room.

"Any other public phones?"

"Just one downstairs, in the main foyer." Eldon started to open the call-box door, the hinges squeaking.

"Leave it," snapped the policeman. "The scientific squad get annoyed when people do things like that."

Eldon gave a quick, apologetic nod. "What will I do?" he asked almost pathetically. He thought of the publicity build-up to the Big Game, of the finalists who'd travelled from all over the country, expenses paid. Then there were the microphone hook-ups to the other Eagle halls, every last one of them filled at that moment with fans. He chewed unhappily on his lower lip. "Will — will I close the hall?"

"No, nobody leaves," said Ferras after a moment. "Keep things going and say nothing about this. I'll let you know what to do later — once I've seen the rest of the Southshaw party."

Sergeant Hardy shoe-horned the four remaining Southshaw contestants out of their seats and shepherded them back to the manager's office, where Superintendent Ferras was waiting.

"What's it all about?" demanded the first to enter, a broad bald man in his late fifties. "Just because May Timmins has taken herself off in a huff there's no need for all this. We've a lot o' money at stake, and the Big Game's coming up."

Ferras soothed him down and introduced himself as he got them seated. They were a strange foursome, two men and two women. Sergeant Hardy had their names.

The indignant one was Daniel Newton, a butcher by trade. Peter Francis, a thin, dark-haired young man, was a commercial traveller.

The two women provided a considerable contrast.

Anna Corrigan, the one seated nearest the door, was married and a plump, cheerful brunette, probably aged about forty, decided Ferras. The last of the quartet, Miss Letham, first name almost unbelievably Rosebud, was thin of face, grey-haired and with small bird-like eyes. Her Big Game card was in the open mouth of her bucket-bag, and the knitting needles between her fingers were already quietly clicking on what looked like a half-completed sock.

"What's it all about?" demanded Newton again.

"I'll ask you something first," said Ferras mildly, settling behind the manager's desk. "Why would Mrs. Timmins go off in a huff?"

"Well . . ." Newton flushed and glanced at the others. "There was a — a disagreement on the train coming here," said Anna Corrigan awkwardly.

"About what?" Ferras leaned forward, interested. "This game?"

"No."

"I'll tell you," said Miss Letham with a sniff, the knitting needles hardly slowing. "May Timmins is a small town gossip, one of the nasty kind. She started hinting things about Peter's wife — and whether they were true or not she'd no right to say them."

"Mr. Francis?"

Peter Francis nodded. "It's my wife who should be here to-night," he said in a low voice. "She won the game that qualified her for he final. But she's been ill — the bingo people said I could take her place."

"And the story about her?" probed Ferras.

"The kind May Timmins suggest about any woman she doesn't like," snapped Miss Letham. "That she wouldn't be lonely while Peter was away. Somebody should murder that woman for the common good."

"Somebody has," he told her.

★

There was a sudden, absolute silence in the room. Even

the knitting needles stopped clicking. From outside, they could hear the amplified voice of the bingo caller as the Picardor's hurriedly arranged a bonus game got under way.

"She's dead?" Newton broke the silence, then a wary note entered his voice. "So that's why we're here . . ."

"She was with you," said Ferras. "That means maybe you can help. What happened at the interval?"

"Well, the rest of us stuck more or less together," said Anna Corrigan awkwardly. "But she was in a pretty foul mood. She went off on her own."

They'd all been separated from time to time during the half-hour tea interval. None of them could supply a complete alibi.

"There's a doctor examining the body now," Ferras told them, his face expressionless. "I'll need his report. But I'd say she was stabbed with something long and thin. Something like a knitting needle, Miss Letham."

Her lips tightened. "These are plastic, Superintendent."

"Any others in your bag?"

She reached for the bucket-bag, rammaged inside it, then seemed to freeze.

"Miss Letham?"

Slowly, the grey-haired woman drew out a pair of steel No. 8 knitting needles.

One long needle was bright along its length. But the other — she stared at the smear of blood which ran from its sharp tip to halfway up towards the head.

"I'll take them." He crossed over and deftly collected the needles in a handkerchief.

"Well, Miss Letham?" Wordlessly, she shook her head. "You had that bag with you all through the interval?"

"She had," said Anna Corrigan resolutely. "But couldn't anyone, even one of us, have taken that knitting needle and killed May Timmins, then slipped it back in the bag again?"

Superintendent Ferras nodded. "They could. Did Mrs. Timmins ever spread a story about you, Mrs. Corrigan?"

"Once, yes — but a long time ago."

"How about you, Newton?"

The big, bald man growled and started to rise to his feet. "Are you suggestin' —"

"Sit down, I'm suggesting nothing yet." Ferras stopped as the door opened and Sergeant Hardy looked in.

"Manager would like to see you, sir."

"Wheel him in," agreed Ferras.

George Eldon entered looking more worried than ever. "They're getting restless in the hall," he declared. "The bonus game's over, and I've got to tell them something."

"Then tell them the Big Game's about to start," said the policeman briskly. "Sergeant — "

"Sir ? "

"Ever played bingo ? "

Sergeant Hardy blinked. "No, sir."

"Here's your chance to watch how it's done," said his chief cheerfully. "Go with these four. Let them play their game, then bring 'em back."

There was no harm in checking on another possibility — and £10,000 could be a motive in any language.

★

Tension was growing in the Picador hall. On stage, George Eldon had announced that it was Big Game time — and the audience were hushed and expectant.

No one spared a second glance as the four Southshaw finalists sqeezed back into their places among the rest of the competitors, Sergeant Hardy taking the middle seat which had been May Timmin's position.

Pencils poised ready over their special souvenir bingo cards, the Southshaw quartet showed more serious faces than the rest of the players. But Eldon had kept his word — apart from a handful of hall attendants, no one else knew of the gathering number of police moving behind the scenes.

From the back of the hall, Superintendent Ferras watched while Bob Hayes solemnly emptied the air-blower machine of its regular supply of numbered balls. Then Hayes lifted the displayed package of new balls, ripped off their seal of transparent plastic, fed the balls into the blowers, closed the machine, and stood back.

"Eyes down for the Big Game. Full house — ten thousand pounds. Your guest caller, Manny Garland."

The singer pressed a switch, the blower whined to life, and the light plastic balls began their frantic progress,

thrown up by the fan jet from beneath. The first ball entered the trap and came out.

Many Garland picked it up. His voice boomed over the amplifiers.

"Legs eleven."

A mixture of sighs and groans came from the contestants, a few pencils scored — and the next ball was waiting. Ferras turned away. Acording to Eldon, the game should last a minimum of 20 minutes, with luck half-an-hour. The process was always stretched to the limit on a big occasion. And Ferras had several things to do in that time.

The slow-paced call of numbers and the soft whirr of the blower still reached his ears when he got to the balcony corridor.

Doc Williams, the police surgeon, was packing his medical bag outside the storeroom. He nodded a greeting to Ferras, offered a cigarette, took one for himself, and accepted a light.

"Not much I can tell you," he shrugged. "She was stabbed in the back. It was a neat puncture-style wound, upward-angled, and it's pretty certain it penetrated the heart. The rest will have to wait until I've done the autopsy."

Silently, Ferras showed him the knitting needles. The police surgeon whistled. "One of these would do it all right."

"A powerful blow?"

"Powerful enough."

"Man or woman?"

Doc Williams shook his head. "I'm a police surgeon, not a magician. Sorry."

The scientific squad were working around the call-box, but their contribution was still minimal.

"There's half a hundred prints around this 'phone," complained the sergeant in charge. "And I can't see us having much luck with those knitting needles, sir — they're too slim to take a print. We've still to check her handbag, and Miss Letham's bucket-bag."

"Got yourself a place to work from?"

The sergeant nodded. "We're using the assistant-manager's office — it's a glorified cupboard, but it's just around the corner from the store-room."

Ferras handed over the needles, then frowned. "You've got that special bingo card she was carrying ? "

"Yes, sir."

"I'll take charge of it for now," he said: "Let me know if you've any more luck." He collected the card then went back downstairs to the empty silence of the manager's office. There were a couple of telephone calls he wanted to make, and not much time remaining.

In Row H of the Picador stalls, Detective-Sergeant Hardy found, much against his will, that he was being caught up in the excitement around him. More than half the numbers on the big electronic check-board beside the blower machine were now glowing, and each call from the stage brought the Big Game nearer to conclusion.

So far, the Southshaw contingent were having mixed fortune.

On his immediate left, Anna Corrigan now needed only two numbers, 86 and 4. Miss Letham also needed an 86 and had another three squares trailing.

He turned and glanced at the two men on his right. Peter Francis needed a 27 and an 8. Daniel Newton was scowling down at his card and hiding it completely with one cupped hand.

"Two-seven, twenty-seven." Francis's pencil jerked, with one square to go.

The next call was in the mid-thirties and drew a groan from most of the players.

Another ball popped out. Manny Garland lifted it, kept everyone waiting for a moment, then announced: "Eight-six; eighty-six. Anyone lucky ? "

Peter Francis was breathing heavily. But Anna Corrigan, her pencil trembling as she scored the last but one number from her card, didn't look up. Sergeant Hardy could hear her muttering quietly to herself.

Manny Garland had another ball in his hand.

"This time, number four — "

Sergeant Hardy stared at Anna Corrigan's card, nudged her, pointed, then, as she still sat paralysed, her mouth open, eyes dazed, he stood up and took things into his own hands.

" House ! "

His bellow rang out just as the guest caller's hand reached

out for the next ball. There was a moment's silence, then a storm of applause from their audience. A checker came hurrying across.

Daniel Newton, rose to his feet, disgust written on his face. Sergeant Hardy reached over and gripped him by the arm. "Sorry, Mr. Newton. Nobody leaves — win or lose."

There were formalities, there were consultations, but a couple of minutes later Anna Corrigan was brought on stage. She stood bewildered in the glare of lights while Hayes, the assistant manager, read her name and address into the microphones. She blinked as Manny Garland smacked a congratulatory kiss on her cheek, but there was no indecision about the way she gripped the cheque he offered.

At the back of the hall, George Eldon gnawed on a finger for a moment. Then he ran towards his office.

"The Corrigan woman, Superintendent — " he gasped the words as he burst in and saw Ferras. "She's won ! "

"That makes things awkward." He replaced the telephone on its receiver and gave a frown. "Still . . . tell me, who holds the keys to the hall ? "

"As manager, I do."

"Any other sets ? "

Eldon nodded. "One spare set, locked in my desk. Why?"

Ferras shrugged. "Just curiosity. That store-room where we found Mrs. Timmins wasn't locked."

"It — well it should have been ! " Eldon looked startled. He checked his desk, unlocking the bottom drawer. The spare keys were still there. "I don't understand — "

"Well, it's too early to let anyone leave," decided Ferras. "Better give the house another bonus game. You could call it a losers' consolation."

"And who pays ? " demanded the bingo hall manager indignantly.

"For the game ? " Ferras shook his head. "That's your problem. Mine is to decide who pays for murder, Mr. Eldon. I'm nearly ready to present the bill. I want to see your assistant-manager — and that singer Manny whatever his name is."

Anna Corrigan came off-stage in a partial daze, the cheque clutched in her hands, and almost collided with

Superintendent Ferras as she reached the centre aisle.

"I've won — " she gave an almost hysterical laugh.

"It's a lot of money," he agreed gravely. "Come out to the foyer with me, Mrs. Corrigan. I want to talk to you."

She followed him out through the doors, shaking her head. "Wait till I get home — I've a husband and two children who'll have some ideas on how to spend this. You know when I saw that card completed I just couldn't believe it."

"So Sergeant Hardy told me," agreed Ferras. He looked at her for a moment then asked. "What about the rest of your group? How did they react?"

"I didn't notice. Why?"

Ferras's face was grim. "Mrs. Corrigan, I wouldn't make too many plans for that money — not yet."

A burst of applause came from the hall. George Eldon had just announced the special consolation game, and the audience were definitely in favour.

Anna Corrigan ignored the noise. "But I won the game — "

"You won," nodded Ferras. "But somebody else lost, somebody who didn't expect that to happen. No — " he saw the question framing on her lips and shook his head. "I can't say more right now. But I want to know when it was you fell foul of May Timmins."

"Three years ago." Anna Corrigan shrugged. "We'd just moved into Southshaw and she was my first experience of a small-town gossip." She looked down at the cheque. "What about this?"

"Hold on to it. It could still be yours. Tell me about the others in your party, Miss Letham, for instance."

Anna found a brief smile. "She's a pleasant old dear, but I don't know her very well. She only moved into Southshaw about a year after we did."

"And the men? Newton and Francis?"

"I don't get on particularly well with Mr. Newton," she admitted. "I had a row with him once in his shop, when he over-charged me. Peter Francis is the quiet type, but I've heard he's very much the boss as far as his wife is concerned."

"The quiet ones often are." Superintendent Ferras broke

off with a frown as Sergeant Hardy came towards him. "What is it?"

"Hayes and Manny Garland, sir," said his assistant laconically. "Ive got them waiting."

Ferras rubbed his chin. "All right. Who's calling the numbers in the hall?"

"Eldon, sir."

"Fine. Look after Mrs. Gorrigan, Sergeant; with that cheque you'd better have a man stay near her. I'll see the other two in Eldon's office."

He was settled in a chair behind the manager's desk when the two men came in and he came straight to the point.

"What time did you arrive here tonight, Garland?"

The singer blinked. "At seven. Half an hour before the show."

"Can you confirm that, Mr. Hayes?"

The assistant-manager nodded. "We asked his agent to have him here for the start in case he was needed. He waited up in my office until the interval was over."

"Near the store-room." Ferras stared at the singer. "Did you leave the office, Garland? Or did you hear anything?"

Garland shook his head. "There's a television set up there. I watched it right through until Bob Hayes came to get me." He was obviously worried. "Look, I didn't know I'd be coming here until this morning — "

"I've no reason to even suggest you were involved," soothed Ferras. "But tell me — did either of you know any of the contestants before tonight?"

"Not me," declared Garland emphatically.

"You gave out the special bingo cards, didn't you, Mr. Hayes?"

"Yes." The assistant manager seemed to hesitate. "But— no, I don't know any of these people."

"How long have you worked here?" asked Ferras.

"Since this place was a cinema. I was an operator then."

"Mind turning out your pockets?" Ferras asked.

The assistant-manager shrugged and obeyed. There were no keys among the collection of items he produced.

"Fine. Now, where were you at the interval?"

Hayes put the stuff back in his pockets as he answered.

"Talking on the microphone hook-up, testing the connections to the other halls."

"That's positive enough," agreed Ferras. He saw them out and found Daniel Newton and Peter Francis standing with a constable at the opposite side of the foyer.

"Well, Mr. Newton?"

The burly Southshaw butcher greeted him with a scowl. "The last train home goes in twenty minutes. We want to be on it."

Ferras shrugged. "Sorry, but you won't make it."

"Why not?" demanded Peter Francis. "The game's over."

"But not my investigation."

"I'd no part in any of that," said Francis sullenly.

Suddenly, Superintendent Ferras changed his approach. "You didn't have much luck in there, did you?"

Newton grunted. "Hardly got my card half-filled."

"Mind if I see it?"

The man fished the bingo card from his pocket and handed it over.

"And yours, Mr. Francis?"

"I tore it up," said the younger man gloomily.

Superintendent Ferras glanced at Newton's card for a moment. "Well, we'll arrange transport for Southshaw, later."

★

As the two players headed back towards the hall, Ferras jerked his head significantly towards the constable, who slowly followed. Then he returned to the manager's office. He telephoned Headquarters — and the C.I.D. man at the other end of the line had already been busy. Ferras listened, grunted, and half-way through took a moment to check the bingo card he'd taken from Newton.

"That's what I wanted," he agreed. He hung up, then frowned as the door burst open.

"Sir —" Sergeant Hardy had been hurrying.

"I was going to send for you," said Ferras. "Find Hayes, the assistant-manager, for me. Then gather up the Southshaw people. Tell Eldon he can let everyone else home — but every competitor must surrender their Big Game card before they leave. Right?"

Hardy swallowed and shook his head. "You can't have Hayes, sir. He's dead. One of the lads on outside patrol just found him in the car park at the back of the hall. Looks like he was trying to climb down a drain-pipe from an upstairs window, trying to get away from here. There's a fifty-foot drop."

Out in the darkened car park, Ferras inspected the dead man by the light of a hand-torch. Hayes had a broken neck—and up above, one of the Picador's top-floor windows was wide open. There was a drain-pipe just beside it.

"Seen this, Sergeant?" Ferras pointed to the light blue staining on the dead man's jacket. He took time to go through the pockets, found a set of keys, then gave a sigh. "I wish he'd told me."

"Sir?"

"Hayes had something on his mind. My guess is he wasn't sure if he was right, and tried to find out. Another thing, Sergeant. I had Headquarters check with Southshaw police; Francis said his wife was ill. She isn't. According to her, he insisted on taking her place."

"Why, sir?" asked Hardy.

"Because he felt lucky, she says. There's something else, something I wish I'd known half an hour earlier—". Ferras shook his head, led the way back into the Picador, and headed upstairs. The open window was at the opposite end of the balcony from the store-room. He leaned out, peering into the darkness. He drew back in and grunted as he saw the light blue smears on his jacket—smears from the emulsion painted walls. "Torch, Sergeant."

Hardy obliged, then watched while his chief once again leaned far out of the window and gripped the pipe. When Ferras drew back, his hands were thick with grime.

"Notice Bob Hayes' hands? They were clean. Two murders now, Sergeant, and that set of keys planted in his pocket holds the answer to both."

"Planted?" Hardy struggled to follow.

"I'm pretty certain of it. Well, let's get on with the rest. I want the Southshaw people and Eldon, the manager, on stage once the hall's cleared. And get those bingo cards."

Hardy began to understand. "Somebody's been working a fiddle, is that it, sir?"

"I've had Headquarters working on it. These cards are fakes."

Superintendent Ferras walked down between the empty seats of the Picador hall and climbed the few steps into the hot glare of the stage-lights. George Eldon stood by the blower machine in frowning isolation. The four remaining Southshaw finalists were nearby. Anna Corrigan was in anxious, low-voiced conversation with Peter Francis, Daniel Newton standing with a cigarette and a scowl, only Miss Letham was apparently composed as she sat in the caller's chair, her plastic knitting needles clicking as busily as ever.

"I've kept you waiting. I'm sorry," said Ferras, no real apology in his manner. "You know Bob Hayes is dead?"

They nodded. Anna Corrigan moistened her lips. "Sergeant Hardy told us."

"What was Hayes doing?" grunted Newton. "Trying to make a bolt for it?"

"Now look here—" began Eldon, springing to his dead assistant's defence.

"Easy, Mr. Eldon," said Superintendent Ferras. "Making a bolt for it, Newton?" There was an icy edge to his voice. "That's how somebody hoped it would look. Somebody here."

He let the hubbub die down. "We're going to start from the beginning. Eldon, how were the finalists chosen for the Big Game?"

The manager cleared his throat. "Each hall in our chain held five special games, one a week. The winners were to come here."

"And the order of the winners from Southshaw?"

"I was first, then Peter Francis, May Timmins, Mrs. Corrigan, and last week Mr. Newton." Miss Letham answered for her quartet without looking up from her knitting.

"Right." Superintendent Ferras perched himself on the edge of the caller's table. "To-night's game was meant to be rigged, a fraud."

"Eh?" Newton gave a rumble of anger. "How?"

Miss Letham had stopped knitting. Anna Corrigan and Francis simply stared. But the Picador manager was indignant.

"It couldn't be done," declared Eldon hoarsely. "It's impossible. You can't fiddle our bingo sessions — we've spent time and money making sure."

"Anyone can fiddle anything anytime, as long as they put enough work into it," Ferras corrected him. "These were the first stage — " He dragged a wad of bingo cards from his pocket and slapped them on the table. "They're phoney."

"The firm that prints them . . ." began Eldon weakly.

"The firm that prints them takes a very private precaution," staid Ferras. "Their managing director told us about it half-an-hour ago. There's a small, deliberate flaw in the shading of the top right blank square on each card they produce. They printed two hundred special souvenir cards for this game. Somebody substituted these instead. They look the same, but the flaw is absent.

"When were the special cards delivered here?"

"About a week ago." Eldon was uneasy. "I locked them in the store-room upstairs."

"And the printers sent a sample first?"

"Yes, about ten days before that." The manager still wouldn't give in. "But a printed card can't fake a game's result, Superintendent. It would have to be too blatant a fiddle to work."

"Not this way." The policeman's smile was a mere twist of the lips. "I'll tell you about these cards. Every one has either the number eighty-two or eighty-six. Not one of them has number eight." He let his words sink in. "But, according to my sergeant, your card was different, Mr. Francis. It had number eight — but neither eighty-two nor eighty-six."

"What's that supposed to mean?" asked Francis, watching him carefully.

"Superintendent," Miss Letham blinked her bird-like eyes. "Do you mean the odds were altered in Mr. Francis's favour?"

"With stage two in operation, yes." "I've had Sergeant Hardy look at the numbered balls — eighty-two and eighty-six in particular." He picked a ball at random from the rack. It was light-weight, plastic, hollow, almost transparent.

"These are brand new," reminded Eldon hastily. "I sealed them in their display pack myself — and I'll swear it wasn't opened until Bob Hayes used them for the Big Game."

"No?" Ferras swung from the hall manager towards Francis. "You know better don't you, Mr. Francis?"

"Now look—" Francis took a step back, then stopped. Sergeant Hardy was standing inconspicuously on stage left. Two uniformed men were on the other wing.

"Surgical spirit and a hypodermic syringe—right, Francis?" queried Ferras relentlessly. "The needle down through the plastic wrapping into balls eighty-two and eighty-six. Inject spirit into each to give them extra weight, to hold them lower than the main stream when the blower was working. Two holes in each ball—because you wanted the spirit to evaporate quickly afterwards."

"Then what went wrong?" demanded Daniel Newton with a grudging admiration. "Both eighty-two and eighty-six were called—"

"The murder. the bonus game, the delays—they added up to half an hour extra." Ferras shook his head. "That was longer than calculated. My guess is that when the Big Game began the heat from those stage lights for that extra time had evaporated most of the spirit."

"Well, at least the rest of us are in the clear," growled Newton. "But—say, all this would need inside help!"

"Help?" Ferras gave a sleepy smile. "Yes, but not the way you're thinking. Like to talk about it, Francis? About making your wife stay home and all the rest?"

"You've proved nothing," spat the man.

"I will," said Ferras. "What puzzled me about May Timmins' murder was how she could be stabbed in the back in that call-box. The door squeaks loudly—she had to hear it.

"But if she had someone in the box with her when she began phoning, one she trusted, things are different. And that someone stabbed her at an upward angle because she was crammed in behind May Timmins."

★

"'She?'" Anna Corrigan goggled.

"Miss Letham," said Ferras steadily. "Then she was smart enough to leave the bloodstained needle in her own bag, hoping it would help point suspicion away from her." He shook his head. "You must be stronger than you look,

Miss Letham to drag May Timmins into that store-room, especially to push Hayes over that window. You knocked him out first, I suppose?"

"I think I'd better have a lawyer present if there's any more of this nonsense," snapped the grey-haired spinister.

Ferras slipped down from the table. "You mean you've never been on the top floor, up near the window Hayes was thrown from?"

"Never."

"Then you won't mind if our scientific squad check your suit for traces of blue emulsion paint? The top floor's the only part of the Picador where you'll find that paint."

She gave him a sudden glare and sat silent.

"You talked about small-town gossip when this began, Miss Letham," said Ferras wearily. "Well, most of that gossip percolates to the local cop — or his wife. About Francis, for instance. That he travels for a stationery and printing firm. About you — that you were the head cleaner in a place in the city before you retired and went to Southshaw." He rubbed his chin and glanced at the man. "What about it, Francis?"

Francis swallowed.

"Suppose I show that the old cinema records show Miss Letham was once head cleaner here," encouraged Ferras. "And that the keys planted on Hayes' body fit all the locks except two new ones fitted since then?"

"All right." Francis shrugged as Miss Letham gave a groan. "I'm not the heroic type — not when there's murder involved." He pointed at the woman. "It was her idea — she knew I was tight for cash and would help. She told me she still had a set of keys for the Picador, an extra set she'd had made when she worked here. Miss Letham had the keys, and I could get the fake bingo cards printed."

"The first break-in?" queried Ferras. "When the ink was spilled?"

Francis nodded. "That was when I saw the sample for the Big Game cards. But when that ink spilled I had to cover up, make it look like a simple burglary. The other visits were easy; we had the keys."

"And May Timmins found out?"

He nodded. "I brought the 'winning' card with me and

worked a switch once we'd been issued with the others. But she'd seen my first card, remembered the numbers, and she spotted the switch. She tackled me at the interval." His face twitched nervously. "I told her to keep her trap shut or I'd fix her."

"But she told me she was going to call the police," said Miss Letham quietly. "I had to kill her. She was going to spoil our Big Game — our ten thousand pounds."

"And Hayes?" asked Ferras softly. "He remembered you from the cinema days."

"Not at first — but later, yes." She shrugged. "I said if we went up to his office I'd tell him what happened. Then afterwards — well, it seemed a good way to get rid of the keys. I thought that silencing him — well, that it would be the end."

Hardy took her away and the two uniformed men collected Francis. Ferras watched them go. It had had to be Miss Letham — from the moment he'd found Hayes dead he'd known. Eldon had been on stage, Manny Garland was an outsider, Francis, Newton and Anna Corrigan had been under watch in the hall.

"Anna," — he turned to the brunette.

"The cheque is yours," he told her.

"Now wait," protested Eldon.

"Why?" asked Ferras. "The way things happened, the Big Game did run straight. Everybody had the same chance." He yawned. "You wouldn't want to go through it all again, would you, Mr. Eldon?"

The manager of the Picador winced.

"Cash the cheque, Mrs. Corrigan," he said hastily. "The Big Game's over."

WRONGFUL RHYMES

I once had a craze for roulette,
But now it's a legal old bore——
Say! d'you know where to get
A game, and *still* break the law?

——*Lufo.*

THE
Trembling Palace

COLIN ROBERTSON

A Venetian fairy-tale
with a touch of
opera buffa

AS THE young couple approached, waving to him, Carlo Principe overcame his temporary dejection. He returned their gay salute from his gondola moored near the Accademia Bridge, his heart going out to them. They were a well-matched pair, he thought, the girl slim and graceful, the young man half a head taller with dark hair topping a good forehead and a sensitive mouth.

All his life Carlo had been honest, unlike some gondoliers who overcharged when they got the chance. He had never stooped to such tricks. And in return . . . Breathing heavily, he passed brown fingers through his bushy grey hair. Half an hour ago, he had changed a five-thousand lire note for a customer and then had discovered it was a forgery. He had been pondering this injustice, gazing moodily into the sun-drenched water.

Maybe he could pass the note to some unsuspecting tourist. Maybe one of the Americans. They had all the money in the world. Most of them could afford to lose five-thousand lire — but it would be unwise to try it on an American woman. *Mamma mia,* they were always so shrewd! The hearty American with a bulging waistline and expensive cigar would be more suitable. Carlo found it a great temptation.

But suppose he were caught? A thread will bind an honest man tighter than a rope will bind a rogue. And this thread, this banknote, was such an obvious forgery. He could have made a better one himself, hand-drawn, for he was clever with a pen. If only he had looked at it before thrusting it away in his wallet: none of his sharp-eyed colleagues would

waved to him he had been wondering if it was an honest man have been caught so easily. When the young couple had who had said that exchange was no robbery.

Another gondolier, touting for custom, called out to them, but they ignored him. Carlo forgot his financial problem greeting them with a flashing smile.

"*Buona sera, signorina . . . Buona sera, signore.*"

He steadied the gondola against the water slapping the prow and helped the girl in, admiring the freshness of her skin. Her pretty eyes sparkled even more than usual, he thought.

"To-day we are very happy," she said, pressing the young man's hand. "At last my father has agreed to meet Enrico."

"I am to call at the Palazzo Venora tomorrow afternoon," Enrico added, confidently. "Now he must consent to our marriage. You must be the one to take me there, Carlo."

"*Certamente, signore*!" His smile widened, the news bringing a ready response from him. As they settled themselves on the cushions he continued to study them approvingly. Then he stepped on to the *poppa*, working away steadily, moving in the direction of the lagoon.

Usually, on these occasions, he sang native songs. He did so now as Enrico pressed his lips to Telesa's. There wasn't a cloud in the sky. The obstacles Carlo had thought insuperable to their romance were clearing away. Nevertheless, he felt curiously uneasy.

★

Telesa Biagini belonged to an old Venetian family with traditions. Together with her father and brother, she lived at the Palazzo Venora, one of the smaller palaces which, like many others, was fighting a losing battle with erosion, the water rotting the piles that supported it.

Umberto Biagini was a man ridden with pride, cold and aloof. Why then had he changed his mind and agreed to meet his daughter's suitor? For Enrico Cosi was a social nobody. He worked in one of the fancy leather shops in the Piazza San Marco, a fine boy, but certainly not Biagini's idea of a husband for Telesa. She had met Enrico secretly for months before she had dared to mention him to her father. There had been a violent scene. She had been forbidden to see him again.

But they had continued to meet, and now, it appeared, Biagini had swallowed his pride and was prepared to give them his blessing.

Carlo found that hard to believe. Men like Biagini didn't change. Had he agreed to this meeting, determined to speak very bluntly to the boy, even to buy him off? Such tactics would get him nowhere with Enrico — so perhaps the old fox had some other plan. It bothered Carlo as they glided past the Salute Church and out into the blue vista of the lagoon. There were no shadows there, but he sensed trouble.

Later, when he brought them back to the quay, Enrico reminded him. "At three o'clock to-morrow then, Carlo. I mustn't be late for my appointment." He squeezed Telesa's hand. "That would never do, eh, *caro*?"

"While Enrico speaks to father I shall be waiting in my room," she said. "Wish us luck."

"All the luck I can command, *signorina*!" Carlo held up a calloused palm, his fingers crossed, his teeth showing whitely against his tanned skin.

Then they were gone, taking romance with them, and he was just another gondolier touting for trade.

Not long afterwards he way lying alongside the quay at San Marco, his thoughts having reverted to his financial loss. He was gazing thoughtfully at the pigeons in the *piazzetta* close to the marble fretwork of the Ducal palace when a man hailed him.

"The Palazzo Venora," said Umberto Biagini curtly, stepping into the gondola. He settled down where his daughter had sat, his long tight-lipped face and hooded eyes so different from Telesa's.

On this trip Carlo did not sing. He knew he would have been silenced peremptorily if he had done so. With practised dexterity he turned off the twisting sweep of the *Canalazzo*, continuing along the quiet backwaters to the grey frontage of the Palazzo Venora. There, Biagini alighted without a word, offering a ten-thousand lire note.

Carlo knew better than to pass the forged note in change to Biagini. He would never have dreamt of doing it. But as he opened his wallet the forgery was visible among other notes. He was fumbling with smaller ones when Biagini reached out impatiently and took it.

"I am in a hurry. Give me this one."

"*Signore*, please . . . He tried to take it back.

Biagini frowned, puzzled, before eyeing the note more closely. Then his expression changed. He looked very hard at Carlo.

"A forgery! You have others no doubt."

"No, no, *signore*!"

Obviously Biagini did not believe him. "I shall take the number of your gondola and report this to the police. I am too busy to deal with you now."

In vain Carlo explained how it had come into his possession.

"You, a gondolier, accepted a forged note!" The answer was scathingly sardonic. "You had better think of a better excuse than that. Give me my change."

Biagini pocketed it, keeping the forgery, and moved quickly away.

After the man had gone, Carlo sat down helplessly in his boat, his shoulders hunched, making no attempt to return to the *Canalazzo*. He saw himself being arrested and marched along to the *Questera*. Would they believe him there? Biagini's word carried weight. Fate was against him. He felt very depressed.

★

It was the sound of a motor-boat that roused him from his unhappy reverie. Not a gentle purr but a noisy roar. The boat was approaching at speed, the angry wash from the wake lashing the time-weary dwellings on either side. Fast driving along the narrower canals was forbidden by law since many of the old buildings shook as if with ague under such treatment.

Carlo was both furious and amazed. For, as the boat swept past, he saw that it was being driven by Luciano Biagini, Telesa's brother, who should have known better. The gondola began to pitch and toss and all Carlo's efforts were needed to prevent it from being smashed against the wall of the Palazzo Venora.

He clutched at a window-shutter, cursing, gradually steadying his craft. By then the motor-boat had vanished. But through the partly open window Carlo saw Umberto Biagini. Oddly enough he had ignored the disturbance, though the old palace must have trembled to its foundations.

In other tways, too, he was behaving strangely, Carlo decided. He had come into the room, glancing at his wrist-

watch before stepping forward as if to greet someone, someone who wasn't there. Yet he nodded and smiled affably. Then his hand went to his sagging pocket. He produced a heavy metal paper-weight, raised his arm swiftly, and brought it down as though delivering a blow.

Carlo blinked, edged more to the side of the window to avoid being seen, and peered in watchfully.

Biagini was moving across the room. From a cabinet he took a large, obviously heavy, Indian idol, ornately decorated, carrying it back to the spot where he had been before. This was immediately beneath an empty shelf set high up near the frescoed ceiling. A display-shelf where the idol might have stood in the past.

He bent down, placed the idol on the floor lying on its side, and after a few moments glanced at his watch again, his lips tightly pursed. Then he picked the ornament up, returned with it to the cabinet, locked it away, and left the room.

It was beyond Carlo. He could make nothing of what he had seen. Removing his ribboned straw hat he scratched his head, feeling presently for a cigarette tucked behind his ear. He lit it, but it provided no ideas. So with a shrug he dismissed this riddle and began to paddle away.

He had not gone far when he saw Luciano Biagini return in the motor-boat, driving slowly now. He moored it outside the Palazzo Venora and went inside.

Carlo frowned. Luciano was very much under his father's thumb, he had heard, and after the disgraceful exhibition of boating was simply asking for trouble. The incident must be fresh in the older man's mind, and if he realized his son was responsible . . .

With sudden resolve but for no reason he could have defined Carlo brought his gondola round, gliding back again.

Outside the partly open window he saw Luciano talking to his father in the room. "We must put the idol back in its place before Telesa sees it has been moved," he was saying nervously.

Biagini nodded. "There is ample time. She has not returned yet — still with that upstart Cosi." He patted his son's shoulder. "You did very well, Luciano. The vibration might

easily have dislodged the idol if it had been standing too near the edge of the shelf."

There was harshness in his voice as he went on, "I shall make sure that Cosi is standing directly beneath it when you drive past tomorrow. Then I shall strike him down. One blow should be enough — before I take the idol from the cabinet crushing it against his skull and leaving it by his side."

His son made a grimace but he ignored it.

"Telesa mustn't see me, of course, but I find I shall have plenty of time to reach my room before she runs downstairs, disturbed by the vibration. It will seem that Cosi was waiting for me here, alone, when the idol fell and killed him. A fool-proof plan, Luciano!

"I know Captain Tranetti of the *Questera* well. When he learns that I was about to give my consent to Telesa's marriage he will share our deep regret. There will be no suggestion of foul play, since he will not know, of course, that it was you who drove past so recklessly in the motor-boat."

"Poor Telesa!" Luciano's shoulders drooped. "I wish there were some other way."

"There is none," his father snapped. "As you know, she is bedazzled by the attentions of this shop-assistant. She is a Biagini and must be protected." His face was stiff as he paused. "The way I have planned it nothing can go wrong."

Carlo didn't wait any longer. He pushed the gondola away from the window, his homely face alarmed. The police must be told of this at once, he thought. But then he realised he couldn't prove that Biagini was planning to murder Enrico. All he had seen and heard could be denied. It would only be his word against that of an important and respected citizen.

Besides, Biagini would bring up the matter of the forged note, implying that his accuser had a grudge against him and was taking a cheap revenge. Carlo now saw himself branded as a malicious liar as well as a crook. What could he do? If only he could think of some way to prevent this crime without going to the police. And without implicating himself.

★

On the following afternoon he was waiting for Enrico

Cosi at the Accademia quay. After careful thought Carlo had decided not to warn him. In spite of the risk, all might go well, for he had a counter-plan. It called for no action from the *Questera* and if it worked would hurt nobody.

Enrico was cheerful when he arrived, confident that all would go well at the meeting, scenting no danger as Carlo took him to the Palazzo Venora.

"Wait for me," he said when they got there. "I want you to be the first to know that Telesa and I are engaged. I've always said you brought us luck, Carlo."

He went with a wave of his hand; Carlo's smile vanished. He became tense with anxiety. The window-shutters were closed. Uneasily he listened for the sound of the motor-boat. If it came it would mean that his plan had failed. In that event, he was ready to sound his fists against the closed shutters. That would attract Enrico's attention, and he could warn him.

★

But the motor-boat didn't appear. The canal remained undisturbed, and his fears subsided. He knew it was going to be all right. At last Enrico and Telesa came out and joined him, as happy as a newly-engaged couple should be.

"You must take us on the lagoon and sing to us, Carlo," Telesa said, brushing his cheek with her lips. "Sing as you have never sung before."

They settled on the cushions, and he watched them, thinking of the letter he had written and delivered secretly the night before. It had been addressed to Umberto Biagini and had taken a long time to compose. Being clever with a pen he had not found it difficult to forge Captain Tranetti's signature, which he had managed to procure from his brother-in-law, a clerk at the *Questera*.

The letter itself had been typed on plain notepaper, and ran:

I am writing to you unofficially, signore, for your own good. If anything should happen to Enrico Cosi I shall know it was not an accident. An idol can be a dangerous plaything. I am convinced you will heed this warning, but it would ease my mind if you gave your consent to your daughter's marriage. I advise you to do so.

It had been quite enough for Biagini. Even now he must be wondering how the secret had leaked out. But, in the circumstances, he wasn't likely to worry Captain Tranetti with the matter of the forged five-thousand lire note. He would not be anxious to meet Captain Tranetti for quite a time.

Carlo sent the gondola smoothly over the water, raising his voice in a famous and traditional love song.

THE
Dancing Man

JOHN SALT

The Basque presented Rosewarne and Manbre with a curious problem, curiously resolved

YOU HARDLY ever see a good tango danced these days. It is something that has tended to die out over the years, along with the Flying Flea and the Hot Club de France. Valentino once claimed that the tango can only be danced properly on a black glass floor and there aren't so many of them around, any more. For example, the floor of the Matinée Club in Floral Street, Covent Garden, was of pain deal roughly chalked. But a tango was being danced on it, and at the unlikely hour of five on a dark January afternoon.

It had all begun quite accidentally, the way things most often did at the Matinée. The place was not too crowded at that hour. Most of the custom was at the bar and only a few people sat round the small tables in the shadows. The little jazz combo had been playing at music, more for their own amusement than that of the scant audience. They were just limbering up, getting the moving parts warm. It was the guitarist who first picked up *Perfidia*, the drummer gave it a beat but idly, then the piano player tried a few runs, liked what he heard and began to lush up the melody. Even then it wasn't *Perfidia* until the swarthy little man with the glossy sideboards came out from behind his table, stepped across to a tall, blonde girl and led her on to the floor.

He was one of those dancers who take charge. Not in the stiff, staccato way that can make a tango ludicrous to watch, but swiftly and smoothly, moving with the music, moulding

the dance to his own form of will and self-expression. The blonde was no copy-book dancer; she could follow him and even cut a pattern of her own, thanks to that natural rhythm of body that is the special gift of the Cockney girl. Between them they built up the dance until, finally, the band caught the mixture too and began to play the music the composer had in mind when he wrote *Perfidia*.

Ernest Retallack, Special Branch retired, leaned on the bar with a pint at his elbow and watched the man over the top of his evening paper. He had seen him before and could not remember where. Retallack had the feeling that it was important to remember and stared more heavily than he would ever have done while still a serving member of the Metropolitan Police.

The dancer was lightly built and he moved like an athlete on his small feet. His features were of a Spanish mould, the hair dark, profuse and brushed to a gloss, the cheekbones high, the eyes dark-ringed and shadowed by heavy lashes, the nose and mouth neat and regularly placed, the chin with a tiny cleft to it. There was something oddly dated about the man. Retallack meditated his age—late forties, maybe just on fifty, he decided.

At that moment the eyes of the two men met and both remembered. There was no panic to the dancer's reaction but it was swift. He put the girl aside in one movement and in the next was striding towards the exit. Retallack started after him and collided at once with the angry girl. She cursed and swung at him, right-handed. Retallack ducked the blow and skipped up the stairs to street level. Behind him *Perfidia* died in discord.

★

Floral Street was crowded with home-going office workers; the dancer had lost himself among them without even having to try. Retallack shrugged, filled and lit his pipe, then strolled to a telephone box in the Garden. A sullen queue had formed by the time he came out. He gave it a disarming grin and set off down Drury Lane. Five minutes later he was sitting with his friend, Edward Rosewarne, in the Divisional Superintendent's office on the second floor of Holborn Central police headquarters in Otway Street.

Rosewarne gazed quizzically at the stout, active man in his visitor's chair. They had known each other for twenty years, and a deep, if derisive, affection subsisted between them. Rosewarne said: "You're quite sure of your facts now, are you, Ernie?"

Retallack tamped coarse tobacco into his pipe. "Quite sure, Ted. I never forget a name or a face."

"Only sometimes it takes you a little time to remember."

"Have a heart. It must be twenty years and more since I last saw Juan de Mesa. He remembered me, anyway."

"He certainly seemed in no mood for conversation."

Retallack sniffed. "He's up to no good, depend on it."

"You're telling me that as a fact?"

"I'm not in the business now, Ted. I grow roses in Hampstead Garden Suburb. But if I was in your chair and knew de Mesa was in town, well, I'd watch it."

"What's his form?"

Retallack waxed enthusiastic. "A dab hand with any kind of safe. You name it, he'll open it."

"On the run, do you think?"

Retallack shook his head. "I don't think so. I still have a few friends at Records, so I made a phone call after I left the club. De Mesa was released from a Canadian prison five months back. His slate has been clean since then."

"What brings him here, do you suppose?"

Retallack shook his head. "Your guess is as good as mine; de Mesa is a very devious character. The funny thing is, I liked the bloke."

"Charlie Peace had friends as well."

"Look, Ted—all I'm saying is that de Mesa never does anything without a reason and he obviously had one for coming here. I think you should look into it."

Rosewarne grinned suddenly. "I'll do that, Ernie, since you make it so pressing. Do you think he knew the girl he was dancing with?"

"Might have done. Somebody had to get him into the club."

"Clubs aren't too particular, you know that. Still, hang on a minute." He flipped a key on the intercom set and spoke briefly. Retallack rose and went to the window while his friend talked.

Rosewarne said finally, "I've sent Jack Manbre round to the club to talk to her; meantime do you fancy a pint?"

Retallack glanced ruefully about the warm, shabby office. "God knows why I miss places like this, Ted, but miss them I do. It was a nostalgia for the mud that took me back to the Matinée this afternoon. Where's the local—still the Hercules?"

Rosewarne nodded. "I'm off duty now. Manbre will drop into the pub if he picks anything up."

Retallack, massive and for a moment indolent, had settled himself at a corner table. Rosewarne carried the beer over to him. "All right," he said grimly. "Now tell me the rest of it."

His friend leaned back in his chair and fixed a mildly reproachful gaze on a neon-lit alcove which sheltered a vase of plastic roses. "I never told you much about my war, did I?"

"Official Secrets, wasn't it?"

"Never mind that now. I was in Marseilles in nineteen forty-one with a long-distance job to do. The top brass in Gib were screaming for cracksmen to open Nazi safes, and they weren't too particular where we found them. The two we wanted were in Fresnes prison; fortunately they were bona fide cons and not politicals. I won't tell you how, but we got them out, and I met them in the Vieux Port. One was the Basque, Juan de Mesa, the other a French-Canadian called Richard Saguenay. At that stage nobody knew whose side they were on, but I didn't think it would be the French. They'd been pinched for a bank job in thirty-nine, just before the big trouble broke. Both were hell-bent to get out of Europe."

"Then you showed them money?"

Retallack said imperturbably: "So we did. But it wasn't only the money, at least not in de Mesa's case; I'm not so sure about Saguenay. Anyway, they signed on and in the event they never left France. I was moving about a good deal, as you can imagine, but I got the reports. If ever two men had a tough war, they did. De Mesa was crafty as a fox and brave as a lion. He and Saguenay lifted documents all over France and when the Gestapo finally tumbled them they stood off a detachment of *Waffen S.S.* with automatic pistols in an apartment house in Menilmontant. De Mesa was badly shot about, but he managed to keep on the move even then."

"But they went into the bag?"

"Retallack shook his head. "De Mesa did but not until after

he and Saguenay had jumped off a train and holed up somewhere in the Doubs. Saguenay got back to Marseilles in the end and lay low until the landings. De Mesa was picked up and ended the war in a camp. The Americans liberated him, then put him away six months later for breaking the safe of the Provost Marshal. Old habits died hard with him; he has spent the rest of his life in and out of prison in Europe, Canada and the States."

"And Saguenay, after the war?"

"I heard he got a special service commission with the Canadians, then I lost touch completely. Went back to Quebec and lost himself, I suppose. It's a long time ago."

"De Mesa went back to Canada, too," Rosewarne mused.

"He could have gone to see his friend."

"So he could, but apparently they never did business again together, according to the record that is. You said you liked de Mesa, Ernie; why was that?"

Retallack gave him a crooked grin. "Pure selfishness, the base impulse of self-preservation. De Mesa could have shopped me at any time and bought his own skin."

"So could Saguenay," Rosewarne reminded him.

"I'm not at all sure that he didn't try," Retallack said tightly.

"We'll leave that then and just examine what we know about de Mesa. He is brave, you say, and tenacious, not very young any more. He appears to put honour above money but is an expert safe cracker and has a long prison record. He is plainly an incorrigible offender but you like him. Is there anything else you would care to add?"

"A rare talent for espionage, and a long memory. You could hide something on the highest mountain or in the deepest mine, and de Mesa would find it."

Rosewarne nodded. "Here's Manbre. What news, Jack?"

The young, fresh-faced detective-sergeant drew up a chair between them. "Not a lot, sir. The girl knew him all right but it was a scratch acquaintance. She had met him in a pub in Bedfordbury a week or two back and introduced him at the club. He spent most of his days there after that, didn't drink much but liked to dance. That was the only time they ever got together, she said, when the band played a tango. She said he was square and a bit screwy but a gentleman and she liked him."

"No idea where he lives?"

"She thinks it must be somewhere local because she has seen him walking the streets in the mornings. One other thing, what little money he had was Canadian and he cashed the notes over the bar. That's about all, sir. Is he a hook?"

"A peter-man anyway, Jack," Rosewarne told him. "But his nose is tidy so far, and the best we can do is keep an eye out for him."

Retallack said suddenly: "You don't feel the slightest stirring of a hunch, Ted?"

"Metropolitan police officers do not operate on hunches, ex-Chief Detective-Superintendent Retallack," Rosewarne said sententiously.

Retallack laughed at him and stood up, shrugging into his coat. "The day you ignore one, I'll send you a case of Scotch, Ted, and that's saying something from a copper on retirement pay. Good night to you both and don't forget the gipsy's warning."

★

Jack Manbre in his years as Rosewarne's sergeant had made a number of mistakes and was the better policeman for them. But fewer of his mistakes as the time of seniority drew on were due to any lapse of memory or inattention to detail. He had learned to take nothing for granted and to believe nothing that was insusceptible of proof by mind or heart. Nor, and in this he resembled his chief for all Rosewarne's occasional irascibility, had he ever erred on the side of inhumanity. Retallack's talk of de Mesa had engaged his interest and to some extent his sympathy. For the next several days he walked the Holborn manor with eyes and ears alert for news of the Basque. But in fact it was the great British public that learned the next big news of Juan de Mesa.

Manbre, returning from abortive inquires concerning a confidence trickster in a Strand department store, had an evening paper slammed down in front of him by an irate Rosewarne. A five-column picture occupied most of the front page. In it a slightly-built dark-haired man struggled to open the door of a car whose driver brandished an automatic. Two men on the pavement, also waving guns, carried large canvas sacks. A banner headline screamed, "Unknown hero foils bank raiders".

"De Mesa," Manbre said.

"The same. I called Retallack; he identified at once."

"Was he in the raid?"

"God alone knows. This picture was a lucky shot by a passer-by. We've talked to him and he says the Spaniard rushed up to the parked car just as the other two were coming out of the bank. The driver pulled his gun and fired wildly, a woman was grazed but that was the worst of it, praise be. De Mesa got the door open, then the car started off before the other two could get in. The driver panicked, rammed a shop window and our people picked up the lot."

"So we've got de Mesa?"

"No, dammit, I'm running past myself. In the scuffle he got away and now he's a perishing hero. The others are in custody and deny to a man knowing anything about de Mesa. I tend to believe them."

"But what on earth was he up to?"

"Search me, Jack. The thing to do now is to find him, since you have so conspicuously failed to do so. Get your coat on. We're going calling to West End Central."

The driver of the getaway car was a thin, sallow youth with a twanging, metallic voice which he used as little as possible. Rosewarne's presence at the station was a courtesy extended by his opposite number there; but though he sat in on the questions and put a few of his own, nothing could be elicited from the boy. Rosewarne gave up in disgust after an hour. "Anything known?" he asked the station superintendent.

"The other two have records a yard long. The kid has a small dossier, all very recent. Can't trace his background so far."

"What do you make of his accent?"

"Mid-Atlantic; all the kids talk like that. TV and pop singers, I suppose."

Rosewarne nodded. "You're probably right but I'll go home and do a little checking."

The answer to Rosewarne's call to police headquarters in Quebec came through in the small hours. Manbre and Rosewarne sat in the upstairs office with only the green-shaded lamp over the superintendent's desk to light the shadowy room. Rosewarne took the call while Manbre plugged the extension into a tape machine.They listened again in silence to the play-

back. Rosewarne put out a hand and shut the machine off.

"That's it, then," he said to Manbre.

"How the hell did he know where to find him?"

"Not too difficult; remember de Mesa has been in the game all his life. He kept his ear to the ground and he picked up the squeak. He didn't know where the boy was to begin with, but he knew here he was going to be at a certain hour on a certain day. What he wanted him for is another question. The only thing certain is that we still have no case against de Mesa and we still don't know what he is up to."

"We could see the girl," Manbre suggested.

"Young Richard's sister. Yes, she's the next on our visiting list. Get a car, Jack, we'll go out to Brixton right away."

★

Dawn lurked weakly in the wet, dark air as the squad car wheeled around the road works at the Elephant and Castle and headed up the Brixton Road. The driver pulled over to the kerb at the junction with Water Lane. Rosewarne and the sergeant got out. Yellow light gleamed behind a leaded fanlight as they walked up a garden path.

"Somebody gets up early," Manbre said.

"Or hasn't been to bed," Rosewarne replied.

The door was opened by a tall young man wearing a dressing gown over shirt and trousers. His face was white and strained and he shivered in the morning breeze. "You're from the police?"

"Were you expecting us?"

"I hoped you'd come. Leonie, my wife, wouldn't let me call you but I recognised her brother's picture in the paper."

"De Mesa has been here?"

"The Spaniard, yes. You'd better come in. Try not to make a noise, there's a baby asleep upstairs."

He led them through to a pin-neat front room. "Leonie is making some tea. We'll both be back in a minute."

Rosewarne picked up a cabinet-sized colour photograph of a youngish man in an army captain's uniform which stood on a round pedestal table of imitation rosewood. It was a good-looking face with a dated pencil-line moustache which emphasised a small, womanish mouth and the kind of chin that will

droop over the years. He tilted the picture towards Manbre. "Meet Richard Saguenay."

"He's the one all the trouble is about?"

"I imagine so."

A young woman came into the room carrying a tray. She was very like her father except that in her face the weakness was turned to strength. She had plainly been distressed but was over it now and ready to talk. Her husband took the tray from her and set it down on a long stool with a woven rush covering. The tea was poured, offered and received, all in silence. They stood around drinking it and watching each other.

The girl's glance travelled to the picture which Rosewarne had replaced. "That is my father; you know that, don't you?"

And the driver in the bank raid is your brother?"

"Yes, Richard is my brother. Did he tell you about us?"

"No, Mrs. Allen, he didn't tell us anything. I learned about your father's children from police headquarters in Quebec Province. They also told of your brother's previous convictions in Canada."

"Then you have all you need to know."

Rosewarne shook his head. "I am afraid not. You see, in my job we often have to know things and to ask questions about them which may seem unimportant. They can also be painful, I have to warn you of that. My sergeant and I will not trouble you long, but there is an urgency here and I want you to try and answer me as carefully as you can."

Leonie Allen put out a hand and rested it on her husband's arm. "What do you want to know?"

Rosewarne's voice was gentle but authoritative. "About your early life, your brother and your father and how you came to settle here."

★

She began in a small voice that strengthened and grew louder as the story took hold of her. "Richard and I are twins. We were born in Quebec and mother died soon afterwards. Father brought us to England when I was five. That was almost the last time I ever saw him. All I ever had was that picture. I took it with me to all my foster parents." She made the remark without bitterness but her husband reached out and took her hand, cradling it between his own. "Richard went back

to Canada with his father for a time. There were one or two trips back and forth while he was growing up but finally they separated. Father came back to London to live and Dick took a job in Quebec. That did not last long and he went to prison as you know. I used to see him about once a year on his visits to London. He borrowed money from me when he was in trouble but sometimes he brought me the most wonderful presents. I suppose he got them with the money he stole."

"What happened when you married?" Rosewarne asked her.

"I told John all about us and he went to see my father."

Rosewarne looked at the young man. "How did you find him if he had not been in touch with his daughter all those years?"

John Allen shook his head. "It wasn't easy; we had no address. Then I talked to Dick, who was over here, and he arranged a meeting in an East End café. Leonie's father looked very seedy and run-down, not a bit like his picture."

"Did he raise any objections to the marriage?"

"None at all. But he didn't welcome me and I got the impression he was trying to make a complete break with his children."

"Why was that, do you suppose?"

The girl broke in: "Father was always like that. It was as if he wanted no links with his past."

"He was hiding, do you think?"

She considered it for a moment, then shook her head. "I only know that he forbade Richard ever to mention where he lived after that. But Dick told me that he moved around a lot of the time and never stayed long in one place."

"Then how did he live?"

"Dick kept in touch with him," Allen said. "He gave him money, I think." He hesitated for a second, then added: "He was a haunted man, Superintendent. That was the feeling I had."

"Or a hunted one, Mr. Allen. Now I have to ask you about Juan de Mesa. How long since he left you?"

"Not more than an hour," the girl said. "He came late at night. We fed him; he was very cold and tired and hungry."

"What did you talk about?"

"After the important things were over he talked only of the past. How happy he had been as a man of action and how much he loved to dance."

"And you like dancing, too?"

She smiled suddenly and too brightly. "I used to win prizes at it and I met my husband while dancing."

Rosewarne looked at her hard and realised that her present calm was no more than a breathing spell. He hurried on. "You have to tell me everything and then it will be over."

She nodded gratefully. "I know and I don't mind. Only you must give me a moment." Manbre watched her thoughtfully. He felt a strange sense of unreality to be sitting here drinking polite tea in the chill, early morning room with his own skin prickling with the stubble and still stiff with yesterday's face. After a moment the girl went on:

"I don't blame Juan de Mesa, don't think that. He would not have come to me if he could have helped it. But when the police took my brother there was only me to turn to."

"I see that." Rosewarne spoke gravely as if to a child. "But it was your father he really wanted."

"I told de Mesa where to find him, Superintendent."

Rosewarne said crisply: "You had to, Mrs. Allen, you cannot blame yourself for any of it."

She shook her head. Rosewarne stood up and on a sudden impulse bent forward and patted her hand. She let him get to the door, then spoke again: "I shall keep the picture and when my children grow up I shall tell them how brave their grandfather was. Would you blame me for that?"

He smiled back at her. "Not for that either, Mrs. Allen."

"And you mustn't blame Juan de Mesa," she told him.

"I am not aware of any crime for which de Mesa could be indicted in this country. Has he gone to your father now?"

"I believe so."

"Does he have any money?"

"He would take none from us. He came on foot. I think he will be walking still."

"You must get some sleep now, Mrs. Allen." Rosewarne turned to her husband. "Stay with her for the rest of the day, if you can."

The young man came with them to the front door. Rosewarne fidgeted with his hat. "Did she see her father?"

Allen nodded. "A week ago; there were formalities. We sent air mail to Quebec. You knew that, of course."

Rosewarne looked at him squarely. "I think you can forget it now, all of it. We shan't trouble you again."

In the street Manbre glanced at his watch. "He has a long walk; he won't be there yet."

"I know it. The trains are running by now though, Jack. Why don't you shoot off home?"

"I'd rather see it out, sir."

The squad car took the long way, going slowly through the Borough and across the Bridge, through Shoreditch and Canonbury, Highbury Barn and Holloway and up the long hill to the Village. Even so, they were at the place before de Mesa, and it was Rosewarne who knocked up the gatekeeper and thumbed through his register. Manbre stabbed a finger at the neat entry. "There it is, sir. Tuesday, 22nd. Pretty ironic timing."

"I see it, Jack. We'll go back and wait in the car."

An hour passed before the slight figure in the waisted blue overcoat and narrow trousers toiled past them without a glance and through the open gates. Rosewarne and Manbre gave him ten minutes then followed the path up the monstrous mountainside of grave and mausoleum, crowded beyond imagination with its shattered columns and vacant chairs and marble angels. They found de Mesa in a far place where the noise of London was not even a murmur, only the tiniest vibration of the inner ear. Rosewarne and his sergeant waited at ten paces for what seemed as many more minutes before de Mesa broke the silence.

"When did it happen?"

"About a week ago, they buried him yesterday. The boy attended, then went on to take his part in the raid."

De Mesa hunched his narrow shoulders and drove his hands deep into his overcoat pockets. "Do you have a cigarette, Inspector is it?"

"Superintendent in fact; the name is Rosewarne. I don't use cigarettes, I am afraid, but my sergeant might help."

Manbre held out a paper packet. "You can keep these, if you don't mind Caporal."

De Mesa smiled with faint malice. "I find that disingenuous, Sergeant. I fancy that you and your superintendent have been investigating my simple tastes. However, it is the thought that counts, as you English say when deprecating gifts."

Rosewarne held a pipe lighter to the cigarette and de Mesa

drew in smoke with deep hunger. The two men looked down again at the angry clay of the new-made grave. "He betrayed you in the Doubs," Rosewarne said quietly.

"Indeed he did, and for ten thousand *Reichsmarks* which turned out to be counterfeit. The elder Richard was not a good businessman, but then his life was at stake."

"His daughter said that he was a brave man."

"Ah, yes, poor Leonie. And she was right of course, but not as brave as herself."

"I believe that. You came to kill him, I suppose."

De Mesa gave him an amused glance. "I expect so, yes. I certainly began with that idea and nursed it for a very long time."

"Why so long?"

"Circumstance, my dear superintendent. At first I did not know that I had been betrayed, and when it was proved to me it still took time for me to believe it. By then Richard had vanished and I, alas, was detained in various parts of the world for increasingly long periods."

"And how did you finally trace him?"

De Mesa laughed with real pleasure. "You do not really expect me to tell you that?"

"Tell me at least what you meant to do with the boy."

"Do? Nothing, simply to ask him about his father. The younger Richard is not greatly talented, I fear. He was easy to trail. But I tell you, Superintendent, yesterday afternoon in Oxford Street was the sheerest opera buffa. I recognized him, you see. It was his father all over again, sitting there in the parked car just as he had waited for me so often back in Paris under the Occupation. For a moment I was back there, too. And then young Richard turned a gun on me, and that too, in the end, was like his father."

"So you went to the sister?"

"As a final throw. Where else was I to go?"

"To me, or to your old friend, Retallack."

"And what could you have done?"

Rosewarne sighed. "By late night or early morning I could have told you that Saguenay was dead. I had to telephone Quebec to find it out. The information was sent by Leonie Allen as a required formality. Your enemy was still a Canadian subject."

De Mesa looked at Rosewarne with something approaching admiration. "You were close on my heels, Superintendent; you made a guess and you acted on the guess."

Rosewarne's face darkened. "I had a hunch," he admitted. "It isn't really allowed under the rules."

"You make one mistake, however. Saguenay was not my enemy, only a foolish, rather unfortunate fellow of my ancient acquaintance. Did his daughter tell you how he lived in those last years? Like a hunted animal, Mr. Rosewarne, the victim of his obsession and his fear. For he knew me, you see. De Mesa, the man who never forgets." He laughed at himself, gently. "And so he died, my ancient companion, without family, without friends and finally, without hope. I could not hate a man like that."

Rosewarne shivered in the morning wind. "Shall we walk to the gates?"

"With the greatest pleasure in life, Superintendent."

They paced slowly back among the monuments until the road and the waiting police car came into view. Rosewarne said slowly: "I don't think you would have killed him."

"It is an uncertain bet, Superintendent. We shall always wonder about it. Will you be seeing my old friend, Major Retallack?"

"Probably today."

"Then will you tender him my apologies for my cavalier behaviour in the club a few days back and also convey my felicitations on his retirement, of which I heard from a friend? And now it is time for us to part. Unless you want to hold me for something."

"You are a material witness."

"Then I shall give your sergeant my address and you my word to attend if summoned."

"You have also been called a hero," Rosewarne observed drily.

"But only by newspapers. In my experience heroes are rarely well paid and rapidly fall out of favour; people find them so difficult to live with. But be assured that if there is a reward I shall claim it. And now, if you will excuse me."

Rosewarne put a hand on the door of the squad car. "Can I offer you a lift?"

De Mesa gave a small shudder. "Not really, Superintendent. I never travel in a police car without cogent and compelling reason. But have no fear, one will undoubtedly arise in the not too distant future." He turned and was about to walk away when Rosewarne called him once more.

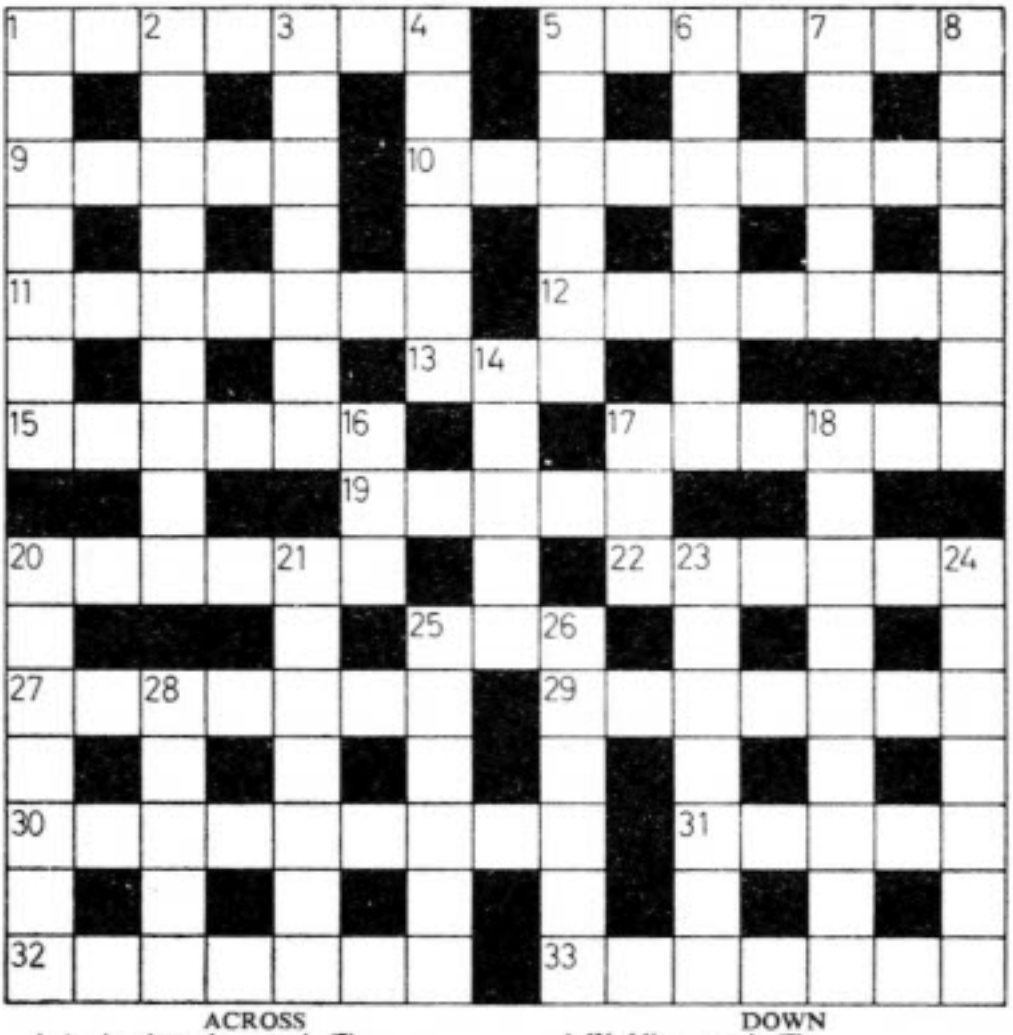
"De Mesa, do you happen to know the precise cause of Saguenay's death?"

The Basque narrowed his eyes and said warily: "I do not; does it matter?"

"I thought you might like to know. It was pneumonia following a bout of Spanish 'flu."

De Mesa stood as one stricken, then flashed Rosewarne a truly satanic smile. "Thank you, Superintendent, for telling me. The gods, you see, in their fumbling way are with us still." He sketched a half-salute that was as much self-mockery as an impudence and set off down the hill, at first very slowly like a man in pain with his legs, but then mending his pace until he strode along at a confident near-jog into the distance and out of sight.

EWMM Crossword No. 10



ACROSS

1 Again that character! (7)
5 Decides on the best policy? (7)
9 Really must! (5)
10 One like *The Man Who Knew* on a car? (9)
11 Retire but don't give up work (2, 2, 3)
12 Terrify or make senseless! (7)
13 In the street I take a rest (3)
15 The whole truth and nothing but? (2, 4)
17 Just the beast to find out (6)
19 Out of bed and having a wash? (5)
20 Like spiders' feet? (6)
22 He's fanatically enthusiastic (6)
25 Like EW's *Aces*! (3)
27 Cricket flank! (7)
29 Consume to excess (7)
30 They are adopted by those who pose (9)
31 Existing in a vile way (5)
32 One of the heads that wear a crown (7)
33 Absolutely swamps (7)

DOWN

1 Wedding arm! (7)
2 For hitting someone over the head after dark? (9)
3 Quite safe to swallow (7)
4 Triggerless weapons (6)
5 Polar shelter (6)
6 Like that novel *Countess* (7)
7 Verdict addition (5)
8 Was *The Feathered* one a boa? (7)
14 Very ill-tempered I consider (5)
16 1/1? That's very poor (3)
17 Foreign head cover (3)
18 Taking over guard duty? (9)
20 Limit of an expert writer! (7)
21 Thrower outer! (7)
23 With which to keep your eye on the ball! (7)
24 Adders, dare we say? (7)
25 Mr. J. G., not you, my dear fellow (6)
26 Put out but not evicted (6)
28 What to wear the first thing in the morning? (5)

(Solution will appear in our December issue.)

period piece

LA TETE NOIRE

CHARLES ALSTON COLLINS

Brother-in-law of Charles Dickens, Collins was born in 1824, dying at the age of 45. He had perhaps a finer sense of literature than his elder brother, Wilkie, as this vigorous suspense story shows.

IT HAPPENED that at one period of my life the path of my destiny lay along the highways and byways of France, and that I had occasion to make frequent stoppages at common French roadside cabarets — that kind of tavern which has a very bad name in French books and French plays. I had engaged myself in an undertaking which rendered such journeys necessary. A very old friend of mine had recently established himself at Paris in a wholesale commercial enterprise. He had proposed to me a certain share in the undertaking, and one of the duties of my post was to involve occasional journeys among the smaller towns and villages of France with the view of establishing agencies and opening connections. My friend had applied to me to undertake this function rather than to a native, feeling that he could trust me better than a stranger. He knew also that, in consequence of my having been half my life at school in France, my knowledge of the language would be sufficient for every purpose that could be required.

I accepted my friend's proposal, and entered with such energy as I could command upon my new mode of life. Sometimes my journeyings from place to place were accomplished by means of the railroad or other public conveyance; but there were other occasions, and these I liked the best, when it was necessary I should go to out-of-the-way places, and by such roads as rendered it more convenient for me to travel with a carriage and horse of my own. My carriage was a kind of phaeton, with a leather hood that would put up and down; and there was plenty of room at the back for such specimens or samples of goods as it was necessary that I should carry with me. For my horse — it was absolutely indispensable that it should be an animal of some value, as no horse but a very good one would be capable of performing the long courses day after day which my mode of travelling rendered necessary.

Many were the journeys we performed together over the broad acres of France. Many were the hotels, many the *auberges,* many the bad dinners, many the damp beds, and many the fleas which I encountered en route.

★

I don't know how it was that on the morning when I was to start from the town of Doulaise, with the intention of sleeping at Francy-le-Grand, I was an hour later in commencing my journey than I ought to have been. I have said I don't know how it was, but this is scarcely true. I do know how it was. It was because on that morning, to use a popular expression, everything went wrong. So it was an hour later than it ought to have been when I drew up the sheep-skin lining of my carriage apron over my legs, and establishing my little dog comfortably on the seat beside me, set off on my journey. In all my expeditions I was accompanied by a favourite terrier of mine, which I had bought with me from England.

It was a miserable day in the month of October. A perfectly grey sky, with white gleams about the horizon, gave unmistakable evidence that the small drizzle which was falling would continue.

It was cold and cheerless weather, and on the deserted road I was pursuing there was scarcely a human being to break the solitude. A deserted way indeed, with poplars on each side of it, which had turned yellow in the autumn, and had shed their leaves in abundance all across the road, so that my mare's

footsteps had quite a muffled sound as she trampled them under her hoofs. Widely extending flats spread out on either side till the view was lost in an inconceivably melancholy scene. The road itself was so perfectly straight that you could see something like ten miles of it diminishing to a point in front of you, while a similar view was visible through the lttle window at the back of the carriage.

In the hurry of the morning's departure I had omitted to enquire, as I generally did in travelling an unknown road, at what village it would be best for me to stop, about noon, and what was the name of the most respectable house of public entertainment in my way; so that when I arrived between twelve and one o'clock at a certain place where four roads met, and when at one of the corners formed by their union I saw a great bare-looking inn, with the sign of the *Tête Noire* swinging in front, I had nothing for it but to put up there, without knowing anything of the character of the house.

The place did not please me. It was a great bare uninhabited-looking house, which seemed much larger than was necessary, and presented a dirty appearance, which, considering the distance from any town, it was difficult to account for. All the doors and windows were shut, there was no sign of any living creature about the place, and niched into the wall above the principal entrance was a grim and ghastly looking life-size figure of a Saint. I hesitated whether I should turn into the open gates of the stable-yard or go farther in search of some more attractive halting-place. But my mare was tired, I was more than half-way on my road, and this would be the best division of the journey. If I was only going to stop at such places as completely satisfied me, externally as well as internally, I had better give up travelling altogether.

★

There were no more signs of life in the interior of the yard than were presented by the external aspect of the house, as it fronted the road. Everything seemed shut up. All the stables and outhouses were characterized by closed doors, without so much as a straw clinging to their thresholds to indicate that these buildings were sometimes put to a practical use. I saw no living creature: no pigs, no ducks, no fowls. It was perfectly still and quiet, and, as it was one of those days when a fine

small rain descends quite straight, without a breath of air to drive it one way or other, the silence was complete and distressing. I gave a loud shout, and began undoing the harness while my summons was taking effect.

The first person whom the sound of my voice appeared to have reached was a small but precocious boy, who opened a door in the back of the house, and, descending the flight of steps which led to it, approached to aid me in my task. I was just undoing the final buckle on my side of the harness when, happening to turn round, I discovered, standing close behind me, a personage who had approached so quietly that it would have been a confusing thing to find him so near even if there had been nothing in his appearance which was calculated to startle one. He was the most ill-looking man that it was ever my fortune to behold. Nearer fifty than any other age I could give him, his dry spare nature had kept him as light and active as a restless boy. An absence of flesh, however, was not the only want I felt to exist in the personal appearance of the landlord of the *Tête Noire*. There was a much more serious defect in him than this — a want of any hint of mercy, or conscience, or any accessible approach to the better side of the man's nature. When first I looked at his eyes, as he stood behind me in the open court, and as they rapidly glanced over the comely points of my horse, and thence to the packages inside my carriage and the portmanteau strapped on in front of it — at that time the colour of his eyes appeared to me to be of an almost orange tinge; but when, a minute afterwards, we stood together in the dark stable, I noted that a kind of blue phosphorence gleamed upon their surface, veiling their real hue, and imparting to them a tigerish lustre. The moment when I remark this, by the by, was when the organs I have been describing were fixed upon the very large gold ring which I had not ceased to wear when I adopted my adventurous life. There were two other things about this man that struck me. These were a bald red projecting lump of flesh at the back of his head, and a deep scar, which a scrap of whisker on his cheek wholly declined to conceal.

"A nasty day for a journey of pleasure," said the landlord, looking at me with a satirical smile.

"Perhaps it is *not* a journey of pleasure," I answered dryly.

"We have few such travellers on the road now," said the evil-faced man. "The rairoads make the country a desert, and

the roads are as wild as they were three hundred years ago."

"They are well enough," I answered carelessly, "for those who are obliged to travel by them. Nobody else, I should think, would be likely to make use of them."

"Will you come into the house?" said the landlord abruptly, looking me full in the face.

I never felt a stronger repugnance than I entertained towards the idea of entering this man's doors. Yet what other course was open to me? My mare was already half through the first instalment of her oats, so there was no more excuse for remaining in the stable. To take a walk in the rain was out of the question, and to remain sitting in my *calèche* would have been a worse indication of suspicion and mistrust. Besides, I had had nothing since the morning's coffee, and I wanted something to eat and drink. There was nothing to be done, then, but to accept my ill-looking friend's offer. He led the way up the flight of steps which gave access to the interior of the building.

The room in which I found myself on passing through the door at the top of these steps was one of those rooms which an excess of light not only fails to enliven, but seems even to invest with an additional degree of gloom. There is *sometimes* this character about light, and I have seen before now how a workhouse ward, and a barren schoolroom, which have owed a good share of their melancholy to an immoderate amount of cold grey daylight. This room, then, into which I was shown, was one of those which, on a wet day, seemed several degrees lighter than the open air.

Vast as it was, there appeared through two glass doors in one of the walls another apartment of similar dimensions. It was not a square room, nor an oblong room, but was smaller at one end than at the other : a phenomenon which has always an unpleasant effect. The billiards table, which stood in the middle of the apartment, though really of the usual size, looked quite a trifling piece of furniture; and as to the other tables, which were planted sparingly here and there for purposes of refreshment, they were quite lost in the immensity of space about them. A cupboard, a rack of billiard cues, a marking-board, and a print of the murder of the Archbishop of Paris in a black frame, alone broke the uniformity of wall. The ceiling, as far as one could judge of anything at that altitude, appeared to be traversed by an enormous beam with rings fastened into

it adapted for suicidal purposes, and splashed with the white-wash with which the ceiling itself and the walls had just been decorated. Even my little terrier, whom I had been obliged to take up in my arms on account of the disposition she had manifested to fly at the shins of our detested landlord, looked round the room with a gaze of horror as I set her down, and shivered as if she would come out of her skin.

★

I had ordered an omelette and some wine when I first entered the house, and, as I now sat waiting for it, I observed that my landlord would every now and then leave what he was about in the other room — where I concluded that he was engaged preparing my meal — and would come and peer at me furtively through the glass doors which connected the room I was in with that in which he was. Once, too, I heard him go out, and I felt sure that he had retired to the stables to examine more minutely the value of my horse and carriage.

I took it into my head that my landlord was a desperate rogue; that his business was not sufficient to support him; that he had remarked that I was in possession of a valuable horse, a carriage which would fetch something, and a quantity of luggage in which there were probably articles of price. I had other things of worth about my person, including a sum of money, without which I could not be travelling about, as he saw me, from place to place.

While my mind was amusing itself with these cheerful reflections, a little girl of about twelve years old entered the room through the glass doors, and, after honouring me with a long stare, went to the cupboard at the other end of the apartment, and, opening it with a bunch of keys which she brought with her in her hand, took out a small white paper packet about four inches square, and retired with it by the way by which she had entered, still staring at me so diligently that, from want of proper attention to where she was going, she got a severe bump against the door as she passed through it. She was a horrid little girl this, with eyes that, in shirking the necessity of looking straight at anybody or anything, had got at last to look only a her nose — finding it, probably, as bad a nose as could be met with, and therefore a congenial companion. She had, moreover, frizzy hair, was excessively dirty, and had a slow crab-

like way of going along without looking at what she was about, which was detestable.

It was not long before this young lady reappeared, bearing in her hand a plate containing the omelette, which she placed upon the table without going through the previous form of laying a cloth. She next cut an immense piece of bread from a loaf shaped like a ring, and having clapped this also down upon the dirtiest part of the table, and having further favoured me with a wiped knife and fork, disappeared once more. She disappeared to fetch the wine. When this had been brought, and some water, the preparations for my feast were considered complete, and I was left to enjoy it alone.

I must not omit to mention that the horrid waiting-maid appeared to excite as strong an antipathy in the breast of my litle dog as that which my landlord himself had stirred up; and that as the child left the room I was obliged to interfere to prevent Nelly from harrassing her retreating calves.

★

An experienced traveller soon learns that he must eat to support nature, closing his eyes, nose and ears to all suggestions. I set to work, then, at the omelette with energy, and at the tough sour bread with goodwill, and had swallowed half a tumbler of wine and water when a thought suddenly occurred to me which caused me to set the glass down upon the table. I had no sooner done this than I raised it again to my lips, took a fresh sip, rolled the liquid about in my mouth two or three times, and spat it out upon the floor. But I uttered, as I did so, in an audible tone, the monosyllable "Pooh!"

"Pooh! Nelly," I said, looking down at my dog, who was watching me intensely with her head on one side — "Pooh! Nelly," I repeated, "what frantic and inconceivable nonsense!"

And what was it that I thus stigmatised? What was it that had given me pause in the middle of my draught? What thought was it that caused me to set down my glass with half its contents remaining in it? It was a suspicion that the wine I had just been drinking, and which, contrary to my custom, I had mingled with water, was drugged.

There are some thoughts which, like noxious insects, come buzzing back into one's mind as often as we repulse them. It was just such a thought as this with which I had now to deal. It was well to say "Pooh!", it was well to remind myself that

this was the nineteenth century, that I was not acting a part in a French melodrama, that such things as I was thinking of were only known in romances; it was well to argue that to set a respectable man down as a murderer, because he had peculiar coloured eyes and a scar upon his cheek, were ridiculous things to do. There seemed to be two separate parties within me : one possessed of great powers of argument and a cool judgment; the other, an irrational or opposition party, whose chief force consisted in a system of dogged assertion, which all the arguments of the rational party were insufficient to put down.

It was not long before an additional force was imparted to the tactics of the irrational party by certain symptoms which began to develop themselves in my internal organisation.

First of all, I began to find that I was a little at fault in my system of calculating distances; so that when I took up any object and attempted to replace it on the table, I either brought it into contact with that article of furniture with a crash, in consequence of conceiving it to be lower than it was; or else, imagining that the table was several inches nearer to the ceiling than was the case, I abandoned whatever I held in my hand sooner than I should, and found that I was confiding it to space. Then, again, my head felt light upon my shoulders, there was a slight tingling in my hands, and a sense that they, as well as my feet, which were very cold, were swelling to gigantic size. It also appeared to me that when I spoke to my dog my voice had a curious sound, and my words were very imperfectly articulated.

It would happen, too, that when I looked towards the glass doors my landlord was there, peering at me through the muslin curtains; or the horrid little girl would enter, with no obvious intention, and having loitered for a little time about the room, would leave it again. At length the landlord himself came in, and coolly walking up to the table at which I was seated, glanced at the hardly tasted wine before me.

"It would appear that the wine of the country is not to your taste," he said.

"It is good enough," I answered as carelessly as I could, the words sounding to me as if they were uttered inside the cupola of St. Paul's, and were conveyed by iron tubes to the place I occupied.

I was in a strange state — perfectly conscious, but imperfectly

able to control my thoughts, my words, my actions. I believe my landlord stood staring down at me as I sat staring up at him.

At this time a noisy party entered the main room of the *auberge,* which I have described as being visible through the glass doors, and the landlord had to leave me for a time to go and attend to them. I think I must have fallen into a slight and strongly resisted doze, and that when I started out of it, it was in consequence of the violent barking of my terrier. The landlord was in the room; he was just unlocking the cupboard from which the little girl had taken the paper parcel. He took out just such another paper parcel, and returned again through the doors. As he did so, I remember stupidly wondering what had become of the little girl. Presently his evil face appeared again at the door.

"I am going to prepare the coffee," said the landlord. "Perhaps monsieur will like it better than the wine."

★

As the man disappeared I started suddenly and violently upon my feet. I could deceive myself no longer. My thoughts were like lightning. The wine, having been taken in so small a quantity and so profusely mixed with water, has done its work but imperfectly. The coffee will finish that work. He is now preparing it. The cupboard, the little parcel — there can be no doubt. I will leave this place while I yet can. Now or never; if those men whose voices I hear in the other room leave the house it will be too late. With so many witnesses no attempt can be made to prevent my departure. I *will* not sleep — I *will* act — I *will* force my muscles to their work, and get away from this place.

In compensation for a set of nerves of distressing sensitiveness I have received from Nature a remarkable power of controlling my nerves for a time. I staggered to the door, closing it after me more violently than I had intended, and descended — the fresh air making me feel very giddy — into the yard.

As I went down the steps I saw the truculent little girl of whom I have already spoken entering the yard, followed by a blacksmith, carrying a hammer and some other implements of his trade. Catching sight of me, the little girl spoke quickly to the blacksmith, they both changed their course, which was directed towards the stable, and entered an outhouse on the

other side of the yard. The thought entered my head that this man had been sent for to drive a nail into my horse's foot, so that in the event of the drugged wine failing I might still be unable to proceed. This idea added new force to my exertions. I seized the shafts of my carriage and commenced dragging it out of the yard and round to the front of the house: feeling that if it was once in the highway there would be less possibility of offering any impediment to my starting. I am conscious of having fallen twice to the ground, in my struggles to get the carriage out of the yard. Next, I hastened to the stable. My mare was still harnessed, with the exception of the headstall. I managed to get the bit into her mouth, and dragged her to the place where I had left the carriage. After I know not how many efforts to place the docile beast in the shafts — for I was as incapable of calculating distances as a drunken man — I recollect, but how I know not, securing the assistance of the boy I had seen. I was making a final effort to fasten the trace to its little pin, when a voice behind me said:

"Are you going away without drinking your coffee?"

I turned round and saw my landlord standing close beside me. He was watching my bungling efforts to secure the harness, but he made no movement to assist me.

"I do not want any coffee," I answered.

"No coffee, and no wine! It would appear that the gentleman is not a great drinker. You have not given your horse much of a rest," he added, presently.

"I am in haste. What have I to pay?"

"You will take something else," said the landlord. "A glass of brandy before starting in the wet?"

"No, nothing more. What have I to pay?"

"You will at least come in for an instant, and warm your feet at the stove."

"No. Tell me at once how much I am to pay."

Baffled in all his efforts to get me again into the house, my detested landlord had nothing for it but to answer my demand.

"Four litres of oats," he muttered, "a half-truss of hay, breakfast, wine, coffee" — he emphasised the last two words with a malignant grin — "seven francs fifty centimes."

My mare was by this time somehow or other buckled into the shafts, and now I had to get out my purse to pay this

demand. My hands were cold, my head was giddy, my sight was dim, and, as I brought out my purse, I managed while paying the bill to turn the purse over and to drop some gold pieces.

"Gold!" cried the boy who had been helping me to harness the horse, speaking as if by an irresistible impulse.

The landlord made a sudden dart at it, but instantly checked himself.

"People want plenty of gold," he said, "when they make a journey of pleasure."

I felt myself getting worse. I could not pick up the gold pieces as they lay on the ground. I fell on my knees, and my head bowed forward. I could not hit the place where a coin lay; I could see it but I could not guide my fingers to it. Still I did not yield. I got some of the money up, and the stable-boy, who was very officious in assisting me, gave me one or two pieces—to this day I don't know how many he kept. I cast a hasty glance around, and, seeing no more gold on the ground, raised myself by a desperate effort and scrambled to my place in the carriage. I shook the reins instinctively and the mare began to move.

The well-trained beast was beginning to trot away as cleverly as usual, when a thought suddenly flashed into my brain, as will sometimes happen when we are just going to sleep — a thought which woke me up like a pistol-shot, and caused me to spring forward and gather up the reins so violently as almost to bring the mare back upon her haunches.

"My dog, my dear little Nelly!"

To abandon my little favourite was a thing that never entered my head. "No, I must return. I must go back to the horrible place I have just escaped from. He has seen my gold, too, now," I said to myself, as I turned my horse's head with many clumsy efforts. "The men who were drinking in the *auberge* are gone; and, what is worse than all, I feel more under the influence of the drugs I have swallowed."

As I approached the *auberge* once more, I remember noticing that its walls looked blacker than ever, that the rain was falling more heavily, that the landlord and the stable-boy were on the steps of the inn, evidently on the look-out for me. One thing more I noticed; on the road a small speck, as of some vehicle nearing the place.

"I have come back for my dog," I said.

"I know nothing of your dog."

"It is false! I left her shut up in the inner room."

"Go there and find her, then," retorted the man, throwing off all disguise.

"I will," was my answer.

I knew it was a trap to get me into the house; I knew I was lost if I entered it; but I did not care. I descended from the carriage, I clambered up the steps with the aid of the rail. I heard the barking of Nelly as I passed through the outer room and approached the glass doors, steadying myself as I went by the articles of furniture in the room. I burst the doors open, and she bounded into my arms.

And now I felt that it was too late. As I approached the door that opened on the road I saw my carriage being led round to the back of the house, and the landlord appeared in the doorway blocking the passage. I made an effort to push past him, but it was useless. Nelly fell out of my arms on the steps outside; the landlord slammed the door heavily; and I fell, without sense or knowledge, at his feet.

★

It was dark, and very cold. The little patch of sky I was looking up at had in it a marvellous number of stars. To lie thus was, in spite of the cold, quite a luxurious sensation. As I turned my head to ease it I felt stiff and weak. At this moment, too, I feel a stirring close beside me, and first a cold nose touching my hand, and then a hot tongue licking it. As to my other sensations, I was aware of a gentle rumbling sound, and I could feel that I was being carried slowly along, and that every now and then there was a slight jolt; one of which, perhaps, more marked than the rest, might be the cause of my being awake at all.

Presently, other matters began to dawn upon my mind through the medium of my senses. I could see the regular movement of a horse's ears walking in front of me; surely I saw, too, part of the figure of a man — a pair of sturdy shoulders, the hood of a coat, and a head with a wideawake hat upon it. I could hear the occasional sounds of encouragement which were addressed to the horse. Surely, too, I heard a rumbling sound behind us, and the tread of a horse's feet — just as if there were another vehicle following close upon us.

In the distance I was able to detect the twinkling of a light or two, as if a town were not far off.

As I lay and observed these things there was such a languor shed over my spirits, such a sense of utter but not unpleasant weakness, that I hardly cared to ask myself what it all meant. A conviction that all was well with me lay like an anodyne upon my heart and it was only slowly and gradually that any curiosity as to how I came to be so, developed itself in my brain. I daresay we had been jogging along for a quarter of an hour during which I had been perfectly conscious, before I struggled up into a sitting posture and recognised the hooded back of the man at the horse's head.

"Dufay?"

The man with the hooded coat who was walking by the side of the horse suddenly cried out, and then we came to a standstill. He mounted on the step of the carriage and had taken me cordially by the hand.

"What," he said, "awake at last? I had almost begun to despair of you."

"My dear friend, what does all this mean? Where am I? Where did you come from? This is not my *calèche*, that is not my horse."

"Both are safe behind," said Dufay heartily, "and having told you so much, I will not utter another word till you are safe and warm at the *Lion d'Or*. There are the lights of the town. Now, not another word." And pulling the horsecloth under which I was lying more closely over me, my friend dismounted from the step, started the vehicle with the customary cry of *"Allons donc!"* and a crack of the whip, and we were soon once more in motion.

★

Castaing Dufay was a man into whose company circumstances had thrown me very often, and with whom I had become intimate from choice. Of the numerous class to which he belonged, those men whose sturdy vehicles and sturdier horses are to be seen standing in the yards and stables of all the inns in provincial France — the class of the *commis-voyageurs*, or commercial travellers — Castaing Dufay was more than a favourable specimen. I was very fond of him. In the course of our intimacy I had been fortunate enough to have

the opportunity of being useful to him in matters of some importance.

The town lights were, indeed, close by, and it was not long before we turned into the yard of the *Lion d'Or* and found ourselves in the midst of warmth and brightness, and surrounded by faces which, after the dangers I had passed through, looked perfectly angelic.

I had no idea, till I attempted to move, how weak and dazed I was. I was too far gone for dinner. A bed and a fire were the only things I coveted, and I was soon in possession of both.

I was no sooner snugly ensconced with my head on the pillow, watching the crackling logs as they sparkled — Nelly lying outside the counterpane — than my friend seated himself beside me and volunteered to relieve my curiosity as to the circumstances of my escape from the *Tête Noire*. It was now my turn to refuse to listen, as it had been his before, to refuse to speak.

"Not one word," I said, "till you have had dinner, after which come up and tell me all I am longing to know. And stay — you will do one thing more for me, I know; when you come up you will bring a plateful of bones for Nelly; she will not leave me tonight, I swear, to save herself from starving."

"She deserves some dinner," said Dufay, as he left the room, "for I think it is through her that you are alive at this moment."

★

The bliss in which I lay after Dufay had left the room is known only to those who have passed through some great danger, or who, at least, are newly relieved from some condition of severe and protracted suffering. It was a state of perfect repose and happiness.

When my friend came back, he brought not only a plate of bones for Nelly, but a basin of soup for me. When I had finished it Dufay spoke as follows :

"I said just now that it was to your dog you owe the preservation of your life, and I must now tell you how it was. You remember that you left Doulaise this morning —"

"It seems a week ago," I interrupted.

—"This morning," continued Dufay. "You were hardly out of the inn-yard before I drove into it. I heard where you were gone, and, as I was going that way too, I determined to give my horse a rest of a couple of hours, while I breakfasted and

transacted some business in the town, and then to set off after you. 'Have you any idea,' I said, as I left the inn at Doulaise, 'whether monsieur meant to stop en route, and if so, where?' The boy did not know. 'Let me see,' I said, 'the *Tête Noire* at Mauconseil would be a likely place, wouldn't it?' 'No,' said the boy, 'the house does not enjoy a good character, and no one from here ever stops there.' 'Well,' said I, thinking no more of what he said, 'I shall be sure to find him. I will inquire after him as I go along."

"The afternoon was getting on, when I came within sight of the inn of the *Tête Noire*. As you know, I am a little near-sighted, but I saw, as I drew near the *auberge*, that a conveyance of some kind was being taken round to the yard at the back of the house. This circumstance, however, I should have paid no attention to had not my attention been suddenly caught by the violent barking of a dog, which seemed to be trying to gain admittance at the closed door of the inn. I knew the dog to be yours. Pulling up my horse, I got down and ascended the steps of the *auberge*. One sniff at my shins was enough to convince Nelly that a friend was at hand, and her excitement as I approached the door was frantic.

"On my entering the house I did not at first see you, but on looking in the direction towards which your dog had hastened as soon as the door was opened, I saw a dark wooden staircase, which led out of one corner of the apartment I was standing in. I saw also, that you, my friend, were being dragged up the stairs in the arms of a very ill-looking man, assisted by a still more ill-looking little girl, who had charge of your legs. At sight of me the man deposited you upon the stairs and advanced to meet me.

" 'What are you doing with that gentleman?' I asked.

" 'He is unwell," replied the man, 'and I am helping him upstairs to bed.'

" 'That gentleman is a friend of mine. What is the meaning of his being in this state?'

" 'How should I know?' was his answer. 'I am not the guardian of the gentleman's health.'

" 'Well, then, I *am*,' said I, approaching the place where you were lying, 'and I prescribe, to begin with, that he shall leave this place at once.'

"I must own," continued Dufay, "that you were looking horribly ill, and as I bent over, and felt your hardly fluttering

pulse, I felt for a moment doubtful whether it was safe to move you. However, I determined to risk it.

" 'Will you help me,' I said, 'to move this gentleman to his carriage?'

" 'No,' replied the ruffian, 'he is not fit to travel. Besides, what right have you over him?'

" 'The right of being his friend.'

" 'How do I know that?'

" 'Because I tell you so. See, his dog knows me.'

" 'And suppose I decline to accept that as evidence, and refuse to let this gentleman leave my house in his present state of health?'

" 'You dare not do it.'

" 'Why?'

" 'Because,' I answered slowly, 'I should go to the *Gendarmerie* in the village and mention under what suspicious circumstances I found my friend here, and because your house has not the best of characters.'

"The man was silent for a moment, as if a little baffled. He seemed, however, determined to try once more.

" 'And suppose I close my doors, and decline to let either of you go; what is to prevent me?'

" 'In the first place," I answered, '*I* will effectually prevent your detaining me single-handed. If you have assistance near, I am expected tonight at Francy, and if I do not arrive there I shall soon be sought out. It was known that I left Doulaise this morning, and most people are aware that there is an *auberge* on the road which does not bear the best of reputations, and that its name is *La Tête Noire. Now* will you help me?'

" 'No,' replied the savage. 'I will have nothing to do with the affair.'

"It was not an easy task to drag you without assistance from the place where you were lying, out into the open air, down the steps, and to put you into my conveyance which was standing outside; but I managed to do it. The next thing I had to accomplish was the feat of driving two carriages and two horses single-handed. I could see only one way of managing this. I led my own horse round to the gate of the stable-yard, where I could keep my eye upon him, while I went in search of your horse and carriage, which I had to get right without assistance. It was done at last. I fastened your horse's head by

a halter to the back of my carriage, and then leading my own beast by the bridle I managed to start the procession."

"I feel as if I should never be able to think of this adventure, or to speak of it again. It wears, somehow or other, such a ghastly aspect, that I sicken at the mere memory of it."

"Not a bit of it," said Dufay cheerfully. "You will live to tell it as a stirring tale some winter night, take my word for it."

Gentleman, the prediction is verified.

EWMM TRUE CRIME CLASSIC

THE PORT-HOLE MURDER

NIGEL MORLAND

The strange case of a murder without a body is solved brilliantly by the use of science

WHEN A GIRL disappeared from a liner bound from South Africa to Southampton, the concrete evidence that solved a remarkable mystery was provided by science. The tenuous traces left by one human being, after a casual pause of one week as a transient, were enough for scientific criminological experts to bring into court evidence so strong and clear that the jury was to reach a verdict for conviction in under an hour.

The case began on the Union Castle liner *Durban Castle*, October 18, 1947, when the ship was 140 miles from the Guinea coast of Africa.

Two night-watchmen were talking in the first class pantry when a buzzer sounded. It meant that a passenger needed service.

Watchman Fred Steer went to check the numbered cabin-signal, assuming one of his charges was suddenly unwell. The board surprised him by showing red and green lights over the flasher for Cabin 126. It meant the separate bell pushes for both the steward and stewardess had been pressed, perhaps the action of a passenger in frantic need of immediate help.

Steer hurried the few yards to 126. It lay at the end of a short alley off the main passage on B-deck, the half of the ship known as the shade side.

The wooden grille above the cabin door enabled Steer to see

the inside lights were on. He knocked, then began to open the door, at the same time intending to ask if anything was wrong. The door only went back a few inches; a man's right hand appeared and shut it. Fortunately Steer was very much on his toes and managed to see that the man inside was wearing a singlet, and blue trousers held up by a brown belt. He also recognised the man, who muttered 'All right' as he thrust the door shut. It was a deck-steward named Camb, who should not, under any circumstances, have been in a passenger's cabin.

Steer returned to the pantry to fetch Joe Murray, the head-night-watchman, telling him what he had seen. They went at once to the cabin where the inside lights were now out. They listened for any sounds of movement.

In the end the matter was reported to the bridge as routine required. Because Murray had no desire to get one of the crew into trouble, he foolishly mentioned a visitor had been in Cabin 126 without saying it was Camb.

At 7.30 in the morning Stewardess Field, having 126 as one of the group of cabins in her charge, knocked on the door and went in to call the occupant, Miss Gibson. The cabin was empty and the port-hole open, which was hardly surprising in the prevailing heat. The stewardess was not alarmed, for the passenger could easily be having her bath.

The only odd things obvious at the time was the fact that the door of 126 was usually locked in the morning and only opened by Miss Gibson when the knocking woke her; the second thing was the condition of the bed. There was a certain amount of disarrangement.

When, by 10.20 that morning, there was still no sign of the missing lady passenger, the ship's captain became really troubled. He put about to search the shark-infested waters.

Eileen Isabella Ronnie Gibson, known as Gay, boarded the *Durban Castle* at Cape Town on October 10, 1947 — eight days before she disappeared from it.

She was a good-looking girl who had packed quite a lot of adventure into her 21 years of life. Born in India in 1926, she had spent much time abroad owing to her father's business interests in India and Persia, and, in 1947, in South Africa.

After an education in England, she was called up for National Service in World War Two, and eventually got into the Auxiliary Territorial Service where she made no secret of her intense desire for a theatrical career. She was put within

reach of this ambition through a flash of the practical kindness the Forces could at times display when she was transferred to a well-known wartime touring show of Service personnel, *Stars in Battledress.*

Granted compassionate leave in February, 1947, Gay Gibson went with her mother to join her father near Durban, where his work now was.

She left the A.T.S. well thought of by her superiors, and graded A.W.1, after the usual severe medical examination given to all outgoing girls — it was the highest possible category of perfect health. The only thing wrong with her was a slight ear infection.

In April she was in Johannesburg with a repertory company and broadcasting for a South African radio network. By July she had been offered the lead in a play and did so well that she was off to London the following month to seek dramatic success.

The *Durban Castle* was almost empty on the voyage and Gay Gibson spent much of her time with a Union Castle Line official named Frank Hopwood, and a Wing-Commander Bray. Both men were considerably older than she was and were probably excellent company for a young and exuberant girl on a ship possessing few others of her age.

She was usually in bed well before midnight, Mr. Hopwood generally seeing her as far as her cabin door.

On the night before she vanished her evening was more or less as usual. Stewardess Field saw her just before seven o'clock wearing a black evening frock and silver shoes.

Gay Gibson had dinner with her customary companions, and later, at about eleven, the heat of the night raised a general inclination for swimming in the minds of several passengers. The girl went to her cabin to find a swimming costume and was absent from sight for about thirty minutes. She returned to say the costume could not be found.

During this half-hour Jim Murray, the night-watchman, saw and heard something both strange and puzzling. In a galllery off the promenade deck he saw Gay Gibson talking to Camb, the deck steward. One sentence he uttered was plainly heard by Murray: 'I say, I have a bone to pick with you, and a big one at that.'

The girl gave no indication she had been anywhere except to her cabin for the swim-suit when she returned to her friends.

She stayed and talked until nearly one o'clock, when Mr. Hopwood accompanied her to the cabin door, bidding her goodnight.

She must have left the cabin almost immediately. A boatswain's mate, in charge of a deck-washing party, saw her leaning on a deck rail, smoking, at one o'clock; it was only when he mentioned she might get splashed by the hoses that she went in and, except by her murderer, was not seen again.

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Ships in the vicinity of the *Durban Castle* were asked to search the area for Gay Gibson, but at last it was clear to the commander, Captain Arthur Patey, that his passenger was no longer alive.

Cabin 126 had been locked and a rigorous investigation was instituted. As was only night, night-watchman Steer could no longer protect a mate. He explained who it was he had seen in the cabin, and consequently James Camb was called before the master.

He was a dark, good-looking married man of 31, with a small daughter, and a sea service of some 14 years, usually as a steward on big liners. He was none too popular with the *Durban Castle's* crew, while his reputation with women was distinctly unsavoury.

Captain Patey was not aware of these facts when Camb came before him and was told there was a suspicion existing of his being near Gay Gibson's cabin at a crucial time. This was flatly denied; he claimed he had gone to bed by 12.45. A fellow steward noticed that morning a most unusual circumstance when Camb was at work in a white jacket with long sleeves — in the prevailing heat it was customary to wear a singlet.

The following day Camb complained to Captain Patey that there had been gossip about him submitting to a medical examination. Later he sent two letters to the commander, one being a statement about the evening and how he had gone to bed as usual, the second mentioning a visit to the ship's surgeon. This medical man discovered scratches on Camb's shoulder and wrists which were explained away as self-inflicted when feeling hot. There were marks on his neck caused, Camb said, by too vigorous use of a rough towel and chafing by his high collar.

Stewardess Field, who had partially tidied Gay Gibson's cabin when she had gone to call her, noticed one or two stains on the bed. At the bed-end was the girl's black frock. Miss Field was troubled when she saw the black pyjamas and dressing gown belonging to her charge were completely missing. She recalled that Camb had told her, three or four days out of Cape Town, that Miss Gibson had claimed to him she was pregnant for the past three months. Miss Field very properly told him that even if true it was still a dangerous thing to repeat.

Camb's remark to Steer in the crew wash-room a couple of days later that he was 'in a tight jam' was sound prophecy — the *Durban Casle* was met by Police-Sergeant (acting Inspector) Quinlan at Cowes Roads, Southampton. He interviewed Camb, and almost immediately took him into custody.

The case was given very full newspaper coverage. It had begun to achieve front page status while the *Durban Castle* was still at sea; this was amplified by the attractions of the missing girl.

Camb was indeed in a tight spot, but not so tight that he failed to ignore a perfect opening given to him by a detective who interviewed him at Southampton Borough Police Force headquarters. The deck steward reacted shrewdly and intelligently.

Detective-Sergeant Gibbons explained that Camb's constant denials of having anything to do with Gay Gibson were doing him no good. He elaborated this by stating if it could be proved conclusively that Camb had been present in Cabin 126 and that Gay Gibson had gone through the port-hole, his refusals to admit anything were not of much avail. The scratch-marks on his body might have a certain significance, therefore whatever explanation Camb could give was of vital importance.

When it was emphasised that the continuation of these denials made the position no easier, Camb suddenly said, "You mean that Miss Gibson might have died from some other cause than being murdered; she might have had a heart attack or something?" He was told the sergeant was satisfied no one else had been in with the girl and no one else could give an explanation of her death and disappearance. This concluded with: "It is for you to decide whether or not you want to make an explanation . . ."

In the statement he gave to the police Camb mentioned

frankly, among other things, 'I then returned to Miss Gibson's cabin at about two o'clock and found her there. After a short conversation I got into bed with her with her consent. Intimacy took place.' He claimed she suddenly clutched him, foaming at the mouth, and died; he could not understand how the bells had been rung but panicked after Steer had knocked and been shut out.

Camb said he tried artificial respiration on the girl. When he could not find any sign of life he pushed the limp body, wearing a dressing-gown and no more, through the port-hole to the sea: "I am fairly certain that at the time she was dead, but I was terribly frightened."

★

On March 18, 1948, the trial opened at Winchester Assizes before Mr. Justice Hilbery; Mr. G. D. Roberts, K.C., led for the Crown, and Mr. J. D. Caswell, K.C., for the Defence. It added to the grimness of the tiny courtroom that among the exhibits was Gay Gibson's bed, the port-hole mounted on a wooden frame, and the bell pushes from her cabin.

The prosecution made it clear how the absence of a body in a murder trial was by no means unprecedented, and there two questions for the jury to answer: was Gay Gibson dead, and has it been proved that the prisoner murdered her? It would be submitted that the inference was that the girl had objected to Camb's advances, pressing the bells for outside help, and had then been strangled for the prisoner's self-preservation.

There was no denying he had been with the girl when she had died, nor was there any dispute that he had got rid of her body through the port-hole. What stood was the problem of whether he had killed her or whether she had died a natural death.

In due course came the scientific evidence, the keystone of the case. It was to be in some ways a fine example of how experts can draw sound and logical conclusions from passive traces, and construct from them a clear deduction which, with the support of existing circumstantial evidence, could be almost infallible proof.

Dr. Anthony Griffiths, ship's surgeon of the *Durban Castle*, testified as to marks on three parts of Camb's body when he examined him on October 19 — on the right side of the neck,

over the rear part of his neck overlying the shoulder (the posterior triangle), and on the wrist.

There were scratches about an inch in length, 'fine, and similar to those inflicted by a cat's claws. They were in parallel lines from before backwards and downwards'. There were some underlying abrasions possibly inflicted by a rough towel but the scratches were not. The superficial lesions on the front of the left wrist 'suggested scratching with finger-nails' which looked as if they could have been obtained before the night of the girl's death, but on the front of the right wrist 'were several scratch abrasions. . . . They went across the front of the tendons and tended to radiate obliquely towards the thumb, running across the wrist.' These marks, nearly a dozen in number, were consistent with the effect of fingernails and could have occurred at the time of Gay Gibson's death. There was no sign of any skin disease or anything that might have caused irritation resulting in the prisoner's action of scratching himself.

Dr. Griffiths did not think the marks on the shoulder could have been caused by female fingernails sharpened to a point, and, apropos, the girl's mother later testified as to the excellence of her daughter's moral character and health (which an A.T.S. officer bore out). She mentioned that while in South Africa Gay had let her fingernails grow pointed and longer than usual.

★

The first of the scientific factors entered with the evidence of Dr. Walter Montgomery, of the Metropolitan Police Laboratory, then at Hendon.

He had received, as removed from Cabin 126, the top and bottom pillows, sheets and a counterpane; a hair; fibres from the port-hole edge; lipstick; powder puff, boot polish; a hair-brush bearing Miss Gibson's name; a sample of blood; and three samples of hair labelled as taken from Camb.

Examination revealed brown stains, apparently of tea, on the top pillow, the lower one bearing lipstick marks and perspiration. The counterpane showed marks certainly made by brown boot polish.

On the top sheet were small blood stains, from *O*, the most common of four classifications. There were also brown boot polish stains and black marks. The bottom sheet bore as well

a yellow stain which could not be qualified in origin; Dr. Montgomery mentioned that Camb's blood group was *A*.

The human hair, taken from the bed, was identified by comparison with her hairbrush as Miss Gibson's, the fibres from the port-hole resembled fragments of feather stuffing such as was in pillows.

Dr. Donald Teare, the pathologist, mentioned that in strangulation there could be a discharge of blood from the victim sometimes happening as through the tongue being forced against or between the teeth: 'it sometimes occurs as the result of scratch marks by the victim in attempts to release herself or himself; it sometimes occurs as part of the general picture from asphyxia which is characterised by small haemorrhages in the more delicate linings of the body, the gums, the back of the throat, the lungs, the lining of the nose and occasionally the ears.'

In cross-examination by the defence, Dr. Teare's views on the blood spots should be quoted in full :

Q. With regard to the spots of blood, I suggest that although small they were more than you would expect to find from a mere compression of the larynx.

A. I would not agree with that.

Q. Two are said to have been the size of a sixpence and two were smaller?

A. I did not see them myself.

Q. I suggest that although small they were too large to be consistent with a compression of the larynx?

A. I do not agree, but perhaps my meaning would be better expressed if I said they are not too small to be consistent with manual strangulation.

Q. I did not put it that way; compression with the thumb and finger?

A. They are not inconsistent with compression by thumb and finger. It is possible to produce strangulation with very small pressure if it is applied in the right place.

Q. If a violent death has taken place would you expect to find some signs of it in the bed, for instance, deep creases in the sheets?

A. I think it is likely.

Q. Especially if these sheets were heavily starched?

A. With regard to these spots of blood, Dr. Hocking finds that they did in fact come from the mouth, in that they show saliva and small flecks of lipstick. That would be consistent with frothing at the mouth?

A. Yes.

Unconsciousness, if the throat were clasped by fingers, would come within a matter of seconds, but Dr. Teare did not think anything in the exhibits pointed to rape or attempted rape.

All the common features of strangulation were present in the bed and on the body of Camb, is how the scientific evidence can be summarised, but of course Dr. Frederick Hocking, for the defence, showed the material from the bed could be taken in two ways : he could conscientiously say the girl may have died of heart disease, but just as conscientiously he could say she may have died by strangulation.

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Professor James Webster, of the South Midland Forensic Laboratory, also spoke for the defence, offering considerable support for Dr. Hocking's views.

Scientifically it was sound and detached opinion; it has had effect on the minds of many who continue to remain uncertain about Camb's guilt.

Answering questions, Professor Webster underlined some of Dr. Hocking's statements :

Q. Let us consider in a little more detail the various causes of death which might have a bearing on the evidence we have here. In such a case would you include shock?

A. I do not think this was a case of death from shock, from what I have read. My reasons for saying that are the presence of blood and the marks upon the accused's arm.

Q. Would you expect to find any blood if shock were the cause of death?

A. No; death would be too quick for blood to well up, and for the deceased to inflict a number of scratches which were found on the arm of the prisoner.

Q. As regards strangulation as a cause of death, have you had personal experience of many cases of that sort?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you find anything in the scratches or marks in this case which fits in with your experience of previous cases of strangulation?

A. I want to make it quite clear, with regard to the scratches on the accused's arm, that I cannot exclude the possibility of their having been caused during strangulation, but, in my experience, they have certain peculiarities — one, that they extend so far up the arm without there being anything on the hands; I have never seen scratches so far up the arm in strangulation. In manual strangulation, where scratching does take place is the region of the thumb, the back of the hand, and in fact the scratching of the victim's neck in an effort to relieve the pressure; these are the places where I have found scratches.

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A synopsis of the medical evidence was to the clear effect that death could have been caused by strangulation, or it could have been due to natural causes. Dr. Teare thought strangulation more likely; Dr. Hocking thought both possibilities were about equal and Professor Webster was of the same opinion.

Gay Gibson had been freed in good physical condition from the A.T.S. a few months before death. Her mother, who was a trained nurse, maintained the girl had always enjoyed good health.

According to Camb there was the girl's willingness to receive him in her cabin with its alleged tragic outcome; she had worn only her dressing-gown, he said, on admitting him. He could not explain the absence of the black pyjamas nor had he ever seen them.

Had she died of natural causes it would have been far more intelligent of him to admit his wrong and show the body in support of what had happened — being guilty of immorality and breaking ships' rules were vastly different from murder. But if Gay Gibson had resisted him and had been strangled, it would have been natural to dispose of her body, when of course she would have been wearing her black pyjamas and

dressing gown in perfect propriety when she admitted him to the cabin.

The bell pushes could have been hit by the girl's flailing hands in her panic at attack or when she was actually being strangled, or even by Camb's body as she thrust him away. This action seems unlikely. It would have been difficult in the available space for Camb's body to hit the bell pushes. To do so in the act of strangling the girl by holding on to her throat would have certainly resulted in the bed being far more untidy and creased than as the stewardess had found it — had the girl broken away from him altogether she could have perhaps reached the cabin door or at least screamed for help. There remains the fact that perhaps she had invited him innocently to visit her in the usual manner of young girls playing with danger.

When this ended in something she could not control, she may have rung suddenly for help to have him ejected, keeping silence otherwise in order not to reveal to her fellow passengers how an apparently worldly actress had behaved so foolishly. Her Forces' service suggests she probably thought, which was to some extent justified, that she was both physically and mentally capable of fighting her own battles.

Whatever may have been the truth of it, Mr. Justice Hilbery summed up unfavourably to Camb. The evidence of the scratches came in for considerable attention, and the learned judge considered them from every possible angle so that the jury's mind would be quite clear regarding them.

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The jury appeared to have no doubts, for its consideration took only 45 minutes. James Camb was sentenced to death for the crime.

He was remarkably lucky in being reprieved four days after his subsequent appeal was dismissed. This was brought about by the fact that the 'no hanging' clause of the Criminal Justice Bill was floating uneasily between Lords and Commons. The Home Secretary decided that all persons condemned to death should be reprieved while Parliament was pondering its next step in the matter of capital punishment.

The appeal had been heard before Lord Goddard (the Lord

Chief Justice of England), Mr. Justice Humphreys and Mr. Justice Pritchard. In his excellent *A Book of Trials* the late Sir Travers Humphreys deals extensively with the Gibson case and says bluntly: 'As it seems to me [Sergeant] Gibbons was actually suggesting to Camb that he should put forward the defence which was ultimately adopted, and Camb appears to have understood it. . . .'

His final view was 'To question after question he [Camb] had to admit that he had no explanation to offer, no suggestion to make, while his own story of his conduct towards a girl he believed to be dying, his failure to call in the doctor, who was close handy, or to seek aid from Steer, who was actually knocking at the door, are instances of selfish and callous brutality not easy to parallel in the annals of crime.

'No one who had heard his evidence could credit for one moment that James Camb would "panic" as he said, no matter in what predicament he found himself. No wonder that the summing-up of the learned judge was adverse to him; the facts to be summed up made it so.'

According to recent news James Camb, in the best of health, is living on the south coast and leading a full and useful life, after his release from prison in September, 1959. He has paid his debt to society as the law requires and is therefore free from the tongues of men, but for many years to come the 'Port-hole Murder' will continue to excite discussion as to what *really* happened.

The MALMSEY JEWEL

Never published in this country, and last in the series, an adroit country house whostoleit

A HUSHED SILENCE fell when Sir John stopped speaking, and placed the open jewel-case on the table. Every person in the coffee-room of the old manor house concentrated on the glittering ornament.

Jill broke the spell. "But, Daddy," she protested, "the Luck of the Malmseys has never left the family since King Charles gave it to us."

"If you'd been a boy," Sir John answered, "it would have come to you to-night by the old tradition. You're a girl, and the last of us. So, the Luck is yours."

Jill Malmsey, staring at the jewel, grasped the arm of Molly Hatherton, her old school friend. "Isn't it lovely?" she whispered, then turned to Mrs. Ordley, her mother's sister. "I've never seen anything like it, Aunt Prue!"

Mrs. Ordley was neither a soft nor a sentimental woman. Her conversation had a harsh flavour. "I have seen it many times, child, when your poor mother wore it. I have always thought it was a sinful, evil jewel."

Dr. Don Greydon watched Jill Malmsey's expressive features. He remembered her mother well, for the two families were neighbours. Lady Malmsey had died during his first

term at Oxford, and it was at that sorrowful reunion when he began to realise how he felt about Jill. Their engagement would be announced at the same time as his appointment to an important research post at London University.

Don stared at the Luck again and noticed that Phillip Engold, the London financier who had bought nearby Rowall Hall, was examining it closely.

"An exceptionally fine diamond, Doctor," Engold said. "Rose-cut with the rare blue tint. I can detect no flaw. I should judge it close on eighty carats, or I don't know diamonds."

Sir John smiled. "My dear Engold . . ." He lifted the jewel —a pendant suspended on a slender chain. "Even cut up, it would fetch a small fortune."

"And here we are," Jill broke in, "camping out in the old manor house. Twenty-nine rooms, twenty-two locked—and a diamond worth millions!"

"Hm. Let's say—enough," Engold conceded, "to make you, and the fortunate man you marry, independent for life."

Don noted that it was at him, and not at Jill, that Engold was looking.

At that moment the lights began to flicker.

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"Daddy!" It was a cry of mock despair from Jill. "That wretched engine! "Oh, it's awful to live so far in the backwoods we have to generate our own electricity."

The light went out, leaving the room in darkness. There were concerted gasps of dismay. Then came Mrs. Ordley's voice, on a note of nervous annoyance. "Jack Malmsey! Is this one of *your* foolish tricks?"

Sir John's chuckle sounded in the darkness. "It's the foolish trick of the fellow who installed a lighting system which flops on the slighted provocation. Anybody carry matches? Can't find mine."

There was the sound of muffled movements and fumbling; then a clicking sound and finally someone struck a match. Its faint glow revealed the face of William Ordley, docile husband of the formidable Prudence.

"Candles behind you, Willy," Sir John directed, and Ordley lighted three candles set on the mantel. Sir John picked up a box of matches from a coffee table and lighted several more.

He turned in a flash, at the sound of Don's cry: "The pendant's gone!"

The faces of most of the eight persons present registered various degrees of alarm and embarrassment. Sir John was glaring from one to another. Dick Hatherton looked around with a nervous smile. Molly's husband was a young chartered accountant and, alone among them, he and Phil Engold seemed to regard the incident as a joke. But all eyes kept turning furtively toward the empty jewel case.

The case was on a large table near the centre of the room. The room's only window overlooked the garden and it was fastened and draped. The door was closed.

"It's quite clear," Engold stated smilingly, "that wherever the Luck has gone, it can't have gone far."

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"I agree, Engold." Sir John's deep voice had an edge to it.

There was a rap on the door and Searle, the butler-handyman-gardener who, with his wife, constituted the staff of the old manor house, appeared carrying a three-branched candlestick. Sir John signalled to his guests to be silent.

"Thanks, Searle. But we have light enough until you get the infernal machine to function again. Switch off everything upstairs and cut on down the garden to the engine shed."

"Very good, sir."

And Searle, who had been Sir John's batman in war days, turned and went out, re-closing the door.

Don looked from face to face. "May I suggest," he said, "that we search the room first?"

"All right," Sir John agreed. "Except that the Luck, not being a frog, can't very well have jumped away."

The searched the coffee room—a simple matter. The search was completed in a few minutes. The electric lights revived reluctantly, expired again, and then burst into a startling brilliance.

"Good for Searle!" Jill said. "He's fixed them."

Don was watching Sir John in silence as he snuffed out all the candles. The other man turned.

"Greydon, the switch controlling the lights is beside the door. When I say 'lights out', be good enough to switch them

off. Now, I'm going to give whoever played this silly joke just half a minute to put the pendant back again. Lights out!"

Don put the lights out. In the sudden darkness all he could see was the dimly illuminated dial of Sir John's watch. An almost unendurable sense of tension pervaded the room. He knew his silent companions must feel it, too.

"Ten seconds!"

The tension mounted. But Don could detect no sound of movement.

"Twenty!"

Now, he could hear people breathing around him. He thought he could hear his own heartbeats.

"Thirty . . . lights up!"

He pressed the switch — stared across the room. There came a sort of frightened murmur, a muffled cry of consternation.

The open jewel case remained empty.

Sir John seemed to be in a constrained silence of anger. Don hastily put the situation into words.

"Very well," he said, "the pendant is still here. If the ladies will stand on the hearthrug and turn their backs, we must all submit to being searched."

"Really, Dr. Greydon!" Mrs. Ordley's voice was more than usually acid.

"I know it's terrible, Auntie," Jill said. "But can't you see that what Don says is true? The Luck simply *must* be in this room. None of us could possibly want to leave until it has been found."

"Be reasonable, Prudence." Sir John peeled off his dinner jacket and tossed it to Don. "Empty everything on the table, Greydon. Give me a thorough going-over."

The examination was completed, and Sir John put his coat on. "Now, go over *me*," Don invited, and went through the same procedure, as did the other men.

Philip Engold was the last to be searched, and when he took his coat off Don drew his attention to the fact that his right shirt cuff was unfastened. Part of one link — they were of the press-stud pattern, onyx with a platinum monogram — had snapped open and was missing.

There was a brief search, but the Luck could not be found. A more serious problem awaited solution. Although everyone knew it to be a physical impossibility for the pendant to have

been removed from the coffee room, it was not in the possession of any of the men present.

So, over half-hearted protests, Jill led the ladies into the adjoining library where they submitted to a search that yielded nothing.

★

Later, when Sir John had called the police, an awkward fifteen minutes followed. Mrs. Ordley and her husband retired to their room. Dick and Molly Hatherton sat side by side in the library glancing at magazines. They looked like uneasy patients in a dentist's waiting room.

As Don passed them, Dick got up nervously. "I say, Greydon," he said, "do you suppose I could have a word with you later?"

"Any time you like."

Sir John sat in his favourite armchair in the coffee room, meditatively smoking his pipe. He did not stir when Searle came in to collect cups and glasses, reassembled a nest of tables and retire with the laden tray.

Phil Engold wandered about the house hunting for the missing stud of his onyx cuff link. And Don and Jill were in a cushioned alcove which adjoined the dining room.

"You know, Jill," Don murmured presently, "this is a devilish serious business, and utterly mystifying."

"Yes." Jill's voice changed. "I know. And it frightens me. . . . What was that?"

"What?"

"Didn't you hear — *feel* a sort of a thud?"

"No. You're getting jumpy. But I can hear the police car on the drive. Here they are."

The muted ringing of a bell sounded from the direction of the kitchen. Nothing happened. The ringing was repeated.

"I bet Searle has gone down to look at the engine." Don stood up. "I'll go and let them in."

As he entered the lobby, Engold came out of the cloakroom and started for the front door. Voices were audible outside. Engold turned, hearing Don.

"Hullo, Greydon. I was searching the pockets of my overcoat when I heard the police. I wonder where Searle has got to?"

Don opened the door to admit two men and a woman.

"I'm Inspector Rigley," the taller man announced. "This is Sergeant Lake and Detective Officer Mary Rollins. Sir John Malmsey?"

The inspector, a red-haired, business-like country officer, insisted upon the attendance of Mr. and Mrs. Ordley.

The party being completed, they were directed to sit, or stand, in the positions they had occupied when the light went out.

"Did any of you hear any sound?" Rigley asked.

"Yes," Don told him. "I heard a clicking sound."

"That was me!"

Everybody turned towards Dick Hatherton. The young financial expert had taken out his lighter. He looked embarrassed.

"What were you doing, sir?" the inspector asked.

"Trying to spark this beastly thing. It let me down."

"Hm! It will be necessary for everyone to submit to a further search," the inspector announced. "What servants do you employ, Sir John?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Searle."

"I should like to see them, sir."

"Mrs. Searle is out, Inspector," Jill told him. "After she had cleaned and washed up the dinner things, I let her go down to the village to visit her niece."

"She can be written off, then. Would you mind ringing for Searle, sir?"

But there was no response from Searle. Sir John rang a second time — a third, unsuccessfully.

"Shall I go back and look for him?" Don volunteered.

"Yes." Rigley nodded. "We'll go together, Doctor." He turned to the sergeant. "Lake, you can search the gentlemen present. A mere formality, for which I must apologise, of course. And, Mrs. Rollins, take the ladies upstairs and do the same, please."

Don led the way to the kitchen. In the doorway he pulled up — so suddenly that the inspector bumped into him.

Searle lay face downward on the floor, his arms at his side. A tray, with decanter and liqueur glasses, stood on the draining board, a silver coffee-pot lay in the sink.

"What the devil's this?" Rigley went forward. "Has he had a stroke, or what?"

"It doesn't look . . ." Don knelt beside the prone man. "No, this man has been clubbed!"

It was two hours after the discovery of Searle before a conviction of the truth began to dawn upon Don. He had attended to Searle, who had revived from the blow on his skull. The man's sleeping quarters were next to the kitchen. Don had put him to bed and told his wife, when she returned, to stay up until he had paid the patient a final visit. "And don't wash or clear anything away," he added. "Disturb nothing. Leave it just as you see it."

Searle's evidence led the police nowhere. He had just put the tray down, he told Rigley, and was about to empty the coffeepot when the room vanished — someone had crept up behind him and knocked him unconscious. He knew no more until he woke up in bed. The kitchen door had been found locked, with no key inside or out. But this was explained by Searle. His wife had taken the key with her.

Inspector Rigley had a theory that someone had planned to escape that way, but had been frustrated by the locked door. He stated that no one must leave the house; and so accommodation had to be found for Engold, who displayed a certain reluctance to — as he put it — impose.

★

Midnight was near when the police completed their search of the guest rooms and visitors' luggage. They found nothing. Posting Sergeant Lake on duty on the porch, the inspector and his female assistant left.

Don had just said goodnight to Jill and was on his way to Searle's quarters when Dick Hatherton detained him. And it was what Hatherton had to tell him, added to certain things he had observed personally, which suggested a solution of the mystery.

Don found Mrs. Searle knitting in the kitchen and her husband sleeping soundly. There had been several visitors, she reported, to inquire about Searle. "Mr. Engold, he was particularly worried about him. Came in three times. A very kind gentleman he is. Offered to help me wash up, if you please. But I told him I had other orders."

"Quite right, Mrs. Searle." He nodded his approval, and she retired.

At the moment he heard the faint click of the Searles' lock, Don partly closed the kitchen door and stepped across to the sink. Even if his theory proved to be correct, the odds were a hundred to one against finding the evidence.

Some coffee still remained in the silver pot. He tried to pour it out, but the spout seemed to be stopped up. He turned the pot upside down, emptied it, and looked at the dregs and then inside. He found nothing. He took a thin wire brush from a hook and poked it down the curved spout. It met some obstruction at the bend. He went on pushing until the obstruction moved and something rattled down into the empty pot.

He had just pulled this small object out, when a faint sound brought him to the alert, the sound of cautious footsteps on the stairs.

He replaced the wire brush, and switched off the light, then snapped on a small pocket flashlight and stepped into the broom-closet. He turned the light out. He did not have long to wait.

The kitchen door was pushed open by someone he could not see. Then the intruder put the light on. He wore pyjamas and a silk robe. On a shelf stood a row of white enamelled canisters. The man took one down.

Removing the lid, he pulled out a glittering object. It was the Luck of the Malmseys.

The pendant was evidently wet, for he dried it on a roller towel attached to the door. Don remembered that he had noted dark stains on this towel when he and Rigley had discovered Searle. But the inspector had apparently attached no importance to them.

Now came the expected move. Dropping the pendant into a pocket of his robe, the man crossed to the sink. He bent over the coffee-pot, shook it, peered down into the grating of the drain in the sink. Then, noticing the wire brush, he unhooked it and poked it into the spout of the pot as Don had done.

Don Greydon stepped out of the cupboard.

"Hullo, Engold!" Engold spun around. "Thanks for showing me where you had hidden the Luck," Don said. "Don't bother about the broken link. I have that. . . And don't start any funny

business. If you try to run for it you won't get far. There's a policeman outside. . . ."

★

Grey light had begun to show through the slats of the blinds before the conference of three in Sir John Malmsey's study broke up.

"He deserves whatever happens to him," Jill said firmly. "It was such a crazy thing to attempt, Don."

"No doubt a sudden impulse, Jill. The black-out made the temptation too strong. He took the pendant, realised at once we'd all be searched, and dropped it in the coffee-pot. If it had been found there, he reasoned any one of us could be responsible. If not, he hoped to recover it. What he didn't know, until later, was that the act of pulling his sleeve up so that he could reach down into the pot had snapped his link open, and that half of it, as well as the pendant, had dropped into the coffee."

"I wonder when he began to suspect what had become of it?" Sir John chuckled. "The blackguard!"

"Whenever he saw what I had seen, a thin, brown stain on his shirt cuff. The cuff must have touched the coffee-pot when he lowered in the Luck. Engold had only one chance before the police arrived. You, Sir John, never left the coffee-room. But when Searle took the tray away, Engold *had* to act. He was faced by certain exposure. Naturally, he was keeping an eye on Searle, and when Searle took the pot away, he followed him.

"With Searle safely put to sleep, Engold tipped up the coffee-pot and out fell the pendant . . . but no link! He may have decided he was wrong — that the link had been lost somewhere else. In any case, he had to get away — the police had arrived. He dropped the Luck in a canister on the kitchen shelf."

"Why didn't he keep it?"

"He couldn't hope to get free, with the police at the door, and he guessed everyone would be searched again. So he scooted out to the lobby and into the cloakroom. You know the rest. Only tonight I got a line on his motives."

"What were they?" Sir John demanded.

"In the first place, according to Dick Hatherton, Engold's

reputation in the City is more than shady. Some of his recent transactions have attracted the attention of the City Police. They were waiting for him to go too far, as was inevitable. His credit is nil . . . and he's on the verge of bankruptcy!

"In the second place, Hatherton told me he had it from Molly that Engold had asked you to marry him, Jill."

"I didn't want you to know, Don," Jill explained. "I thought it might — uh — upset you."

"It did! But after all, he's lost two jewels . . ." he paused, and chuckled at her expression of amused pleasure.

Vignette from Life (7)

The Careless Wizard

MAX MUNDY

Mixing archaeology, wizards and smoking can have unforgettable results

THE ACTUAL CRIME itself wasn't particularly serious. But the circumstances were a little unusual.

It was the early part of 1947, just before Partition, and I was spending a few weeks with the Political Agent of Chagai District, one of those splendid types who administered vast, remote areas of the Empire where the P.A. reigned as undisputed monarch.

Chagai is a large strip of no-man's land dividing what was then the princely State of Kalet from Afghanistan, and had been leased to the British by the ruler, the Khan of Kalat, in perpetuity. After Partition the whole of this area was absorbed into Pakistan.

Nushki is the district headquarters, a hot, dusty little hamlet, only a few miles south of the Afghan border, and it so happens that I'm particularly interested in archaeology. In fact, it was the prehistoric mound at Nushki, on which the P.A.'s bungalow was built, that really started my active study of archaeology.

I read during researches that Sir Aurel Stein, the famous archaeologist, had noted pottery dating from about 2000 B.C. being unearthed from the foundations of the bungalow when he passed by about 1905, so I at once had a look round and soon found distinct traces of old mud-brick walls, burnt layers, potsherds — the lot. All of it visible in a kind of fissure split down the side of the steep mound, and used as a natural rubbish dump by a succession of servants.

My precarious scrabblings on the edge of this 70-foot drop naturally earned me the reputation of being 'Diwani' — utterly mad, and therefore under the protection of Allah, which as you'll see, was most certainly the case — the protection, I mean.

One morning when I was about to start my day's pottering, I was appalled to see part of the squared-off walls I'd been uncovering was ruthlessly torn down, a large hole dug in the sandy soil and a pile of broken prehistoric pots and figurines slung to the side.

Furiously I stormed into the P.A.'s office and demanded, "Who's been tampering with the mound? The work's ruined, completely ruined!"

The servants were summoned but nobody knew a thing, naturally. I went back to find another starting place with the sun beating down on my back and clouds of fine, sandy dust coating me, until I looked like a nebulous khaki ghost.

When I went in to luncheon the P.A. said, "You remember old Dur Mahommed, the old Brahui tribesman who claims to be about a hundred and thirty years old?"

I remembered him all right. He was just about the most ancient man I'd ever encountered, with a bulky white turban sitting on top of his grey ringlets like a pile of grubby washing, and an infinitely old and weather-beaten face deeply furrowed by the drifting sand of Baluchistan. But active — oh, very active. He'd scrambled up the steep slope of the Nushki mound and squatted down to watch my delving with an intense, unwinking and somewhat unnerving stare from brilliant blue eyes.

"It seems he's bringing a court case against a wizard and I wondered if you'd like to come along this afternoon and hear it?"

I thought it was as good an excuse as any for giving my back a rest. That afternoon we walked down the side of the mound to the little mud-brick court-house where the old Brahui was squatting patiently in the scanty shade of the wall. There was another case to be heard first, a meek little widow complaining that her only daughter had been kidnapped. She didn't particularly want the daughter back, but she *was* peeved because she'd been done out of the bride money due to her. The P.A. settled that business and then came Dur Mahommed.

Since he spoke only Brahui, a language the P.A. didn't know,

an interpreter translated into Urdu. About a week previously somebody had broken into the old man's house and stolen his most precious possession, a rifle.

"Yes, yes, I know all about that," said the P.A. "He came and complained at the time and we found the culprit. Bring in Nasir Khan."

Nasir Khan was brought in, escorted by armed Levy Corps men in grey uniforms and stiff turbans. The prisoner was a sturdy-looking young man with a defiant, flamboyant manner, a dashing cerise and tangerine velvet waistcoat and a red rose tucked behind his ear. The old man burst out into a fury of speech and shook his fist at the P.A.

"Now what's the matter?" asked my host.

"Your Honour, he says he went to consult a wizard and the wizard told him it wasn't Nasir Khan who stole the rifle, it was Yar Mahommed."

At the mention of the last name the old man nodded vigorously and repeated the name with venom.

"But that's absurd. I know for a fact that Yar Mahommed was in Quetta that night, and we actually found the missing rifle in Nasir Khan's house. There's no doubt at all about his guilt."

There was another angry outburst from Dur Mahommed, and suddenly the old boy pointed a skinny finger at me and then Nasir Khan burst in. The interpreter tried vainly to translate both speeches at the same time.

I wasn't feeling too comfortable by this time; it struck me that the ancient Brahui might well be casting a spell himself. He looked distinctly unfriendly.

★

"It seems that in a way you're to blame," at last announced the P.A. with a certain amount of relish. "Old Dur Mahommed has been watching you on the side of the mound and he's convinced you're on the track of a huge treasure. He says that Nasir Khan the Great — you know, the one who conquered this territory about two hundred years ago — stopped in Nushki for shelter and buried his personal treasure somewhere in the vicinity. Now this other fellow, Dur Mahommed's great-nephew, Nasir Khan, claims he's a descendant of *the* Nasir Khan, and he and his uncle got together and were both out

searching for treasure on the mound the night the rifle was stolen. It looks as though it couldn't have been Nasir who was the thief — if the old boy's telling the truth. I think they're trying to say it's a frame-up, that Yar Mahommed put the rifle in Nasir Khan's hut to throw the blame on him. Anyhow, now both Dur Mahommed and his great-nephew are quarrelling over division of the treasure, if any — each claims the entire ownership!"

Well, at least that explained the mysterious holes and the damage done to my dig.

I took another look at Dur Mahommed. He was pretty depressed. I think he was just beginning to realise that it might have been more to his advantage to have let Nasir Khan take the blame for the theft of the rifle as this would have left the field clear for him. And I could certainly see his point of view as far as my efforts were concerned. None of the tribesmen could understand why I should voluntarily endure the discomfort and hardship of spending all day long under the blazing sun, scrabbling perilously on the steep slope, unless I was looking for something extremely valuable — which hardly described my old, broken potsherds.

Just in case this talk of treasure sounds wild, there are undoubtedly many legends and traditions concerning past emperors and semi-bandit chieftains who buried their loot in earthernware pots in the sandy soil here. Naturally Dur Mahommed took great care to break open every prehistoric vessel he found in case it concealed gold and jewels.

In the end it was decided that we would all go and visit this wizard, who lived on the very frontier between Afghanistan and Chagai, and we'd hear what he had to say. The frontier was nothing more than a wild tangle of bare mountains and patches of arid desert. It could well have been that we crossed into Afghanistan to the wizard's village, without being aware of the fact.

Anyhow, next day the P.A., the three Brahuis and I mounted fine white piyunda camels belonging to the Chagai Levy Corps, and rode the ten or twelve miles northwards to the village of Siah Khan. It sounded promising as another archaeological site since the name meant Black Mound, a description often given to mounds covered with the darkened prehistoric potsherds that gave a black appearance from a distance.

And I was right — potsherds there were in plenty. To judge from the patterns on them, they were all about 3000 B.C.

The Wizard was a middle-aged man, a Pathan, with straight black hair cut in a bob, and a wicked swagger about him. We'd arrived in the midst of a wedding celebration. All the women were gathered with the bride in one of the mud houses, and the menfolk were having a fine time in the bridegroom's hut. We were all invited inside and crammed with about fifty other men into a dark, unventilated square room. The other guests were squatting on rugs on the mud floor, replete after a splendid feast. Everyone was most put out that we hadn't given due notice of our arrival so that they could have welcomed us with the ceremony due to the Political Agent. Small boys were sent running to the women's huts to try and rustle up some food; sticky sweetmeats and sherbert made of rose petals soon made an appearance. While the P.A. tried to cross-examine the Wizard, I wandered outside to look at the slopes of the mound.

Some ten minutes later the P.A. walked out of the hut, exasperated.

"It's no good," he told me. "I can't get any sense out of him now. We picked a bad day — I should have summoned him to the court-house. As it is, he'll come along when the wedding's all over, in a couple of days' time. I really only came out here because I thought it might give you a chance of finding some more of your old pots."

He walked down the slope with me and we both crouched down while I showed him a particularly interesting-looking rim sticking out of the side of the mound. Suddenly we were rocked by the most tremendous explosion. The sky darkened as it rained mud-bricks and pieces of clothing and other things rather more gruesome. And when we straightened up cautiously a few minutes later and scrambled to the top of the slope, it was to see a gaping crater where the bridegroom's hut had stood.

★

We pieced the story together afterwards. I had noticed, when I first went into the hut, that the only man not squatting on the floor had been the Wizard, who was perched on a barrel.

"I've told them again and again about the dangers of using

dynamite up here," said the P.A., "but they won't listen. It's stuff left over from the war and they think it's a wonderfully easy way of getting coal, marble and sulphur out of these hills without having to dig for it. But they've no conception of the perils involved."

What had happened was that the Wizard had felt like smoking a hookah and had sent one of the small boys to the fire in the women's quarters to bring back some glowing charcoal for his pipe. The small boy, with more common sense than his elders, had at first protested, but the Wizard insisted. Finally the child had brought the charcoal, then rushed for the door — and lived to tell us the tale.

The Wizard, after applying the coal to his hookah, had apparently carelessly tossed it over his shoulder, right into the open barrel of dynamite he was sitting on.

And incidentally, there's a new name for the village of Siah Khan — it's now known as 'The Place Without a Man'.

What we saw in the Wednesday Thriller wouldn't frighten a canary. Wake up, BBC. Hasn't anyone ever heard of a *real* thriller? . . . it's time the [TV] writers browsed through some of the works of Edgar Wallace . . .

— Irate viewer in the *Sunday Mirror*.

ROOM-AND-BOARD

MORRIS HERSHMAN

A cautionary tale that hides a mule's kick under its irony

KANE was covering the lower part of his face with a handkerchief when he got out of a cab and walked into a shabby old building by the back entrance. He didn't put the handkerchief away till he was in front of a door with a sign on it that said Room 107 — Private. Then he knocked.

A woman's voice called, "C'min."

It was a small, dirty room with fly-specked windows. A heavy grey-haired woman back of the scarred desk was talking cheerfully to a man who looked as if he was down to his last penny. In spite of Kane's urgent gestures indicating that he wanted her to get the man out of here, she talked for what seemed like a long time before suggesting that the old guy ought to leave.

Kane locked the door as soon as the other man closed it from the outside, and walked across the small room to pull down the dusty window blind. The woman watched him all that time, drumming a thick hand against one shapeless hip. She might have been judging a chunk of meat on a hook in a butcher's shop window.

"I'm Molly Fleming," she said finally.

"You know who I am," Kane snapped. "You know who told me about this place, and you know what I want."

She nodded. "You want to hole up here. The rent's a hundred a day."

Kane's lips were tight against each other, almost as if he had puckered up for a kiss. "Pretty steep, isn't it?"

"If you don't like my rates, try the Waldorf."

Kane didn't make the sort of cruel remark he'd have passed years ago to a woman who was giving him a hard time. Instead he asked :

"What do I get for the money?"

"Food, clothing, and shelter. Especially shelter, which you need pretty badly."

He reached into a pocket of the overcoat he had stolen an hour ago and took a hundred dollar bill out of a thick wallet; the money had come from the place where he'd stashed the loot of his last job, seven years ago. That bill disappeared from Molly's hand before he could get the wallet back in place.

"C'mon upstairs," she said casually, standing up for the first time since he'd met her. "I'll take you to the room you're in."

"Just one room?" Kane didn't have much sense of humour, but he said something he thought was funny in a grim way. "It sounds like the accommodation I just left."

"If you want to go back instead, I'm sure the warden won't mind a bit." Molly shrugged those tremendous shoulders. "I'll show you the — uh, cell."

She led the way up a narrow creaking staircase. The noise their steps made nearly drowned out the voice of a man nearby singing off-key and accompanying himself on what sounded like an accordion. Kane's footsteps and Molly's were loud enough to bring several fairly pretty girls out of small rooms to look him up and down. Molly waved them off.

"Forget about him, girls," she said quickly, "till you hear different."

They turned around almost as if they were part of a regiment, then walked back to their rooms. Molly took Kane to the door of the last room in the back, and opened it. There was a big old-style bed, an old-style bureau and a Gay Nineties-type mirror with chipped little curves at the edges. One big window showed part of the street below on a mild spring evening. At least the phone on the night table didn't date back to the 'nineties.

Molly said, "I'll be here again in a little while," and closed the door on him and locked it. Kane cursed as he tried to bust the door open, throwing his weight against it half-a-dozen times before he gave up. He was on his way to the window when he heard Molly coming back.

She was walking even more clumsily than usual, this time, because she carried a tray with food. After she had kicked the door shut, she brought the tray over to the bed. She put it down and breathed softly in relief that the trip was over and done with.

Kane looked annoyed when he saw the tray. "That's how I was eating in prison, off one of those things. I didn't break out and grab the hidden loot from my last job so I could come here and keep eating the same way."

"That's tough."

"Something else bothers me a lot more," Kane said. "You locked the door on me and I don't want that."

"You'll get used to it," Molly told him. "I won't have you on the loose around here, or I might be hauled off to the cooler as an accessory, and I'd sure lose my licence to run a boarding-house. So you stay where you are."

"Get me something to read, at least." He paced the room. "A newspaper and some joke books."

"That'll cost you a buck extra."

"Same price as on the inside," he couldn't help saying. "And I want a radio."

"Twenty bucks for that."

"Standard prices, huh? And I want a suit, a shirt and a tie. This set-up isn't much improvement on what I had."

He paid up, and Molly left. The newspaper came first, and the prison escape story hogged the front page. The cops were saying that they'd have him under arrest again in a few hours.

Kane took off his overcoat at last, and then took off the grey prison suit with numbers in black on the left breast. First off he was careful with it, but halfway through the job he started ripping it to shreds. The new green suit Molly had got for him didn't fit half as well, but he told himself that his next suit was going to be a pip, one of those real expensive jobs.

There was a knock on the door at half-past nine, and Molly came in.

She glanced towards the night table. "Play the radio more quietly, will you? This room isn't taken, according to my records, and don't forget it."

After Molly brought him breakfast in the morning, Kane decided to kill a little time by cleaning the room just the way he'd have done with his cell. He made the bed, swept, aired the linen and took a few swipes at the window with a dirty rag. He worked a different rag along part of the wall, trying to clean as much of it as he could.

He shaved himself three times during that afternoon and

took a bath every hour and a half. He combed his hair so many times he broke the teeth of two combs.

It was his first full day at Molly's.

★

He had to invent ways of killing time. When he ordered a pair of house slippers — they cost five bucks — he took an hour to make up his mind what colour he wanted. When the radio suddenly went on the blink, he tinkered around with it as if he had the slightest idea of what he was doing and knew one part from another. He didn't, but a few hours had dragged by before he gave up on it and asked for a different radio.

He was giving a lot of thought to the subject of meals. If his phone had worked, he'd have called downstairs to ask Molly what she'd be bringing up next time. He finally hit on the idea of planning meals for himself; but he hadn't decided about as much as one single course by the time Molly panted upstairs with his dinner tray.

"You look nervous," Molly said after she caught her breath.

"I'm in bad shape," he admitted. "This room is as big and dirty as a cell. I can't go out — and this fuzz wouldn't fool nobody yet." He gestured almost angrily towards the ragged-looking moustache he had started to grow.

"Like I told you before," Holly said, hands on hips, "you can always go back if you want."

"Being in this room is like solitary confinement for me. It's going to drive me bughouse if something doesn't happen soon. Do you want to have a nut on your hands?"

"All right," Molly said, giving in for once. "I'll bring you something to pass the time."

What she bought up was a set of checkers and a board. Kane actually played some games by himself before throwing the whole business into a corner on the night table. Molly brought up a set of chessmen next time he complained, along with a book of instructions on how to play the game. Kane didn't have any patience for that, either. He gave up on it after twenty minutes, and went back to pacing the room. He would take six steps, then turn and take another six steps. He'd only been able to take that many steps across the length of his cell, he remembered.

He didn't sleep much. At about three o'clock in the morning he found himself looking out the window and wishing he was

with some old rummy who happened to be swaying across the street just then. There was another tramp outside who looked from here almost exactly like the creep that Molly had been talking to when Kane had first come to this place. If Kane had been a drinking man, he'd have tanked himself up good, this time.

★

When Molly brought his lunch next afternoon, he told her he couldn't help feeling he was back in prison again.

"What do you want to do?" she demanded. "Hopscotch around town?"

"It's not a bad idea."

"It's a lousy idea," she said firmly. "If nobody but me or a girl here gets to see you, Kane, you're safe. That's what you're paying me for, to make up your mind about how to keep you away from the cops."

"Hell, I have to take a walk once in a while."

"I can't stop you from walking out, Kane, but I won't have you back here if you do. I'm not going to take any extra chances that you might be followed."

Kane made a point of nodding as if he agreed with her, after all. He sounded as if he'd been convinced, as if he'd learned his lesson. He promised he'd try not to give Molly any more trouble.

If he'd had any friends in town, he would probably have asked for advice; as it was, he made up his own mind about stepping out for once in his life. He figured he ought to get something in return for all the misery he'd been through. One night on the town wasn't going to do any harm if he was careful.

He didn't start getting ready for the trip till after dinner. Then he shaved himself, took a bath, shined his shoes two times and got dressed carefully. Listening to a news-cast on the radio made him feel even better. For the first time he could remember, his name wasn't mentioned. The heat was easing off. He'd be okay, after all. He would get a job somewhere later on and live quietly. He'd even go to a bug doctor and try to iron out the kinks in him so that he'd be happy from there on.

When he looked out and down the street below, it struck him that many people were doing different things. A boy and

girl locked in close embrace not too far off, for instance. Then there was that bum — not the same one who'd been talking to Molly when he'd got here; in the darkness all bums and all cats look alike. This one was sleeping in a store alleyway, a bottle clutched in his hands. Three or four people were sitting around in front of a semi-private house down the block, talking. Occasionally he could hear a television set growling; Kane had never seen television, and had forgotten to ask Molly for a set. But it wouldn't have helped him much, anyhow.

★

By half-past eleven he was ready to go. He shut the radio, turned down the window blind and clicked the light off. With a hairpin he'd found in a drawer, he started to work at the lock. Softly, he opened the door — and stopped cold. Molly Fleming stood in front of it, glaring at him. Her hands were clenched as if she was going to hit out. The bamboo-coloured eyes were glazed by dislike if not out-and-out hatred.

"Get inside, Kane," she snapped. "We've got some talking to do."

He took a step back. She followed him, leaving the door open. Kane got upset at that, and closed it himself. Molly Fleming smiled acidly.

"You want to go out?" she said, taunting him. "Why do you care if the door is open?"

"Never mind that. What do you want? Are you afraid you won't be able to rob me if I take a few steps outside?"

"That's one reason, but there's something else, too," she told him. "I've been trying to make things easy for you and sort of let you think that I was the villain and that whatever might be wrong was all my fault. But now you have to hear the truth."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Listen hard, Kane. You were in jail for years and that makes its mark on a man's willpower. It gets rusty. He's not able to think much any more, not able to make decisions."

"I've decided to get away from here for tonight."

"Have you?" She leaned forward. "You've got exactly the sort of deal you're used to. You know what you can do and what you can't. You've got three meals every day and a linen change once a week. And you know you always *can* escape if you get your nerve up. The point is that if you do escape

you won't be able to think for yourself any more. You've lost the habit."

"Molly, you're nuts! That isn't what I'm paying a hundred bucks a day for."

"Sure it is," she said firmly. "It's security; the only kind you can really know after so many years in a cage is another cage."

"You're nuts," he said again, more strongly this time. "Watch me get out of here."

"Now that I know you're doing it, Kane, it's not an escape any more." She sighed. "And when you get out there, if you do, you'll have to think for yourself. You'll have to decide where to go, what to do, and how long to keep doing it."

"I'll take care of that."

"All right," Molly nodded. "The heat is pretty well off you by now, and you can come and go as much as you want. If you want to scram out of here, go ahead."

She opened the door again and left it that way as she walked out and down the corridor. Air coming through the open door hit him like something physical, and he fell back. Somebody in the hall was talking, and the noises were so loud he had to cover his ears. He found himself looking apprehensively above him as if he expected to see guards with machine-guns aimed at him for having broken a rule. His hands started to shake.

He knew he'd feel worse and worse when he got outside, and he didn't know what was wrong with him. Was he really so scared of making choices that he couldn't give Molly a suggestion for dinner? It had taken him hours to decide what colour carpet slippers he wanted What had happened to him, for Pete's sake? What had they done to him in prison? All he could look forward to was spending the loot from his last job day by day as it was handed over to Molly till he went broke and then — and then —

And then nothing . . .

★

"I really had a rough time keeping him here," Molly Fleming said.

There was a respectful tone to her voice, even though the man she was talking to looked like a bum. He was the same bum Molly had been talking to at the time Kane had arrived.

The man said, "Between you taking his money and me in

the neighbourhood twenty-four hours a day to get it from you, we're probably both a pair of nervous wrecks." He smiled wearily. "It takes a cop like me quite a long time, occasionally, to figure out some way of getting back the loot from a robbery; but it's a good feeling when a scheme like this one works out."

Morris Hershman, 1965.

CLASSIFIED

NEW BOOKS

JOHN de SOLA

BLUE MIRROR, THE, James Turner *(Cassell, 16s.).*

Not this reviewer's favourite among Mr. Turner's books. It tells the story of a girl whose flower-decked corpse is a sort of 'Lady of Shalott' stand-in, and as Carmela Wilson's life is sorted out many nasty and shabby facts emerge. The tale has a most curious air of what once used to be designated as '*fin de siècle*' about it.

DANGER FOR BLACKSHIRT, Roderic Graeme *(John Long, 15s.).*

Possibly the only fictional character who was passed from father to son, for Bruce Graeme invented the famous cracksman, and handed him over years later . . .it is quite a thought, possibly of Graemes unborn who will carry on the 'Blackshirt' banner! This presents the cheerful and ingenious Mr. Verrell, who finds the simple theft of a pearl hides a lot of crookery. Brisk, vigorous, and highly entertaining.

DEATH IS THE END, G. Walter Cooke *(Bles, 15s.).*

An apparently ingenuous tale that creeps up on you, as they say. A simple garage fire appears to be just that, until owner Peter Mitchell finds himself up to his neck in a new kind of blackmail (for want of a better word). He does not knuckle under and gives as good as a most unpleasant gang is giving him. Full of life, and excellently told.

DIAMOND BUBBLE, THE, Robert L. Fish *(Boardman, 13s. 6d.).*

Another of those engaging yarns featuring Captain José Da Silva, of Brazilian *Interpol*, and his friend, Wilson, of the American Embassy staff. Set in Rio de Janeiro, the story starts when a trigger-happy longshoreman, who is involved in a racket, needlessly uses his gun. From there the mystery follows a predictable course to a smash ending, but the writing is very good and the colour outstanding.

FILE ON DEVLIN, THE, Catherine Gaskin *(Collins, 21s.)*.

This sort of book makes the world of 007 as bogus as a sixpenny diamond ring. It starts reasonably with the disappearance of a Nobel Peace Prize winner and, through a unusually well-drawn journalist, the 'file' progresses, adding something here, something there. At the halfway mark comes the point of Devlin's being alive or dead, and the journalist's feelings for his daughter, then the story moves to Switzerland and goes from third into top gear. From the beginning of the second half it races with constantly increasing speed — fascinating, thrilling, notable. Believable people, strong but not hard writing, and real knowledge — these are here, and a fine story.

GENTLY WITH THE LADIES, Alan Hunter *(Cassell, 16s.)*.

A good, stolid, very British whodunit. Gently is the solemn epitome of the Metropolitan Police; his story is well told and

he is no doubt a very worthy and carefully presented hero. A beautiful young woman of extremely peculiar tastes is the victim, and her erotic and equally peculiar life fits nicely into the well-observed Chelsea background. Chief Superintendent Gently sorts everything out with his customary, pipe-smoking patience. If there is any complaint at all, it is to wish a good half of the book was not in what could be called two-line 'takes'.

GRAND CENTRAL MURDERS, THE, Slater McGurk *(Hammond, 15s.).*

The great New York rail terminal is the scene for what appear to be some wholly senseless murders, cleverly committed with an old-fashioned gun, and, for clear reasons, unobserved. Cardona, the Puerto Rican detective, is the hero, working under a very tough old-time detective officer. The mystery is to some extent conventional, but brisk and expert. The denouement is old hat but the author is forgiven because he does it so well, and is so eminently *reasonable.*

HANGING WOMAN, THE, Jan Roffman *(Bles, 15s.).*

A curious but clever story, definitely feminine, but pulls no punches because of it. At the beginning a pretty and deftly drawn young woman, with a sick small boy, goes off about her business and is rather alarmingly dead in a short time. The gradual working towards the solution is achieved by the memory of things past, and very unpleasant things they are. A good, workmanlike book, well worth reading.

HOT SPOT, THE, Charles Williams *(Cassell, 16s.).*

This is an earlier book but only just published in this country; it comes before *The Sailcloth Shroud* and *The Catfish Tangle.* But the same magic, not quite so polished, is still there — Mr. Williams could not write a bad book if he tried, and this has every quality of enormous excitement and repellently interesting people. Briefly, the plot concerns money stolen from a bank in a neatly planned hand-is-quicker-than-the-eye gambit. Madox, the villain, then gets into a chaos of cross-purposes. Admitted evil should be punished, but to this reviewer's thinking Madox would have been better off executed than as he is when the story ends.

LIVE, LOVE AND CRY, George B. Mair *(Jarrolds, 18s.).*

As if life isn't difficult enough with hell-bombs and nerve desiccators, pawky Mr. Mair has to invent 'the Pill', a nasty object little to do with the 'Pill' now being widely discussed. Agent David Grant is the protagonist, fighting for the right against the Society for Activation of Terror, Anarchy and Nilhilism (work out those initials!), via a fetching blonde on the way. Violence and vigour seem the best words to sum up this expert thick-ear drama, which almost drowns in the mass of initials which seem to be part of every novel about official worlds today. One wonders what blunt Lord Salisbury would have made of NATO, UNO, ADSAD, VIPS and all the rest of the alphabetical wilderness.

MURDER IN WONDERLAND, George Bagby *(Hammond, 15s.).*

George, if one may be so familiar, and immensely appealing Inspector Schmidt in the strange case of the little boy in the park. With a sort of queer rationality the child insists that 'Alice' had gone down the rabbit-hole, and this, oddly enough, turns out to be the truth. There is a sort of Lewis Carroll-like madness about the story, which is also held down by the strong common-sense of Schmitty, of Homicide, quite the nicest American cop. Very good indeed.

NOT DEAD ENOUGH, Clay Henry *(Boardman, 13s. 6d.).*

This really outstanding crime novel has a first-rate story in teenage idol, Buddy Buck, who crashes in his car at a hundred miles an hour. But the story is not quite as simple as it seems. Fadden, the famous journalist who falls through a massive libel suit, probes deeply towards the incredible truth, by way of hoodlums, danger and thrills. The primary thing about this book is its blood-curdling picture of the teenage world (and its idols), revealed with a biting irony and an expertise which make this old man wonder just why youngsters tick and what they can get out of so much falsity.

ONE AMONG NONE, Roy Stratton *(Boardman, 13s. 6d.).*

A readable story on somewhat conventional lines. It is told strictly from the view of the State Police of Massachusetts. A scientist disappears and various government agencies combine

to find him. A car dealer is the villain in the woodpile who leads to some surprising discoveries. A good novel, which moves steadily to a predictable conclusion.

A SCATTER OF PAPERBACKS

BEAUTY FOR INSPECTOR WEST, A, John Creasey *(Hodder, 3s. 6d.).*

And a winner for Mr. Creasey, this story of a beauty queen who is murdered. 'Handsome' West takes over the case but is almost outshone by Inspector Turnbull.

BORN VICTIM, Hillary Waugh *(Pan, 3s. 6d.).*

A young girl disappears after her first dance. Foul play is suspected. The guilty party in a weird crime is both unexpected but remarkably logical. Suspense plus.

CRY OF THE OWL, The, Patricia Highsmith *(Pan, 3s. 6d.).*

The story of Robert Forrester which opens with an indication that he is a Peeping Tom. Before long he appears to be a victim, and a man to whom things happen. Taut and readable.

MERRY HIPPO, The Elspeh Huxley *(Penguin, 4s.).*

Basically the story of a Royal Commission in Africa, but actually a riotous, ironic yarn filled with murder, attempted suicide and assorted rascalities and emotions. A must.

Mr. J. G. REEDER RETURNS, Edgar Wallace *(Hodder, 2s. 6d.).*

Long out of print, companion book to *The Guv'nor*. Comprises 'The Treasure Hunt' and 'The Shadow Man'. Gold and a reformed bank robber in one, and a sinister Dutch villain in the other. Vintage Reeder; brilliant.

WOMAN IN THE CASE, The, Edgar Lustgarten *(Mayflower, 3s. 6d.).*

The author at his glittering best. Alma Rattenbury, Helen Lambie, Harriet Staunton and Madeleine Smith. Contrast and superb characterisation, and some very blunt appraisals.

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.*

The Hanratty Case

I am one of those who does not believe in Evans' innocence, but I am deeply shocked at Mr. Justice's article [September] and the details he offers. *Why* has nothing been done to re-examine the case of James Hanratty?

Maidstone, Kent. F. E. MITCHELL-EDGE.

When Hanratty was tried, I attended every day. I followed the case with great interest and spoke to many people 'in the know'. It was an almost general belief, to which I add my own, that Hanratty was innocent. It was so obvious that I felt deeply ashamed and terribly helpless when he was found guilty.

Luton, Beds. (Miss) E. A. DILLY.

It is all very well for Mr. Jean Justice to raise the points he does in his article. I have not read his book but it would seem to make the same points. Very well. Does he argue that justice *today* still condemns innocent men to death? I don't believe it! And if there is any doubt at all, why has the Home Office done nothing about it?

Great Missenden. FRED BENTLEY.

● *The Home Office (as the Evans' case shows) moves very slowly indeed. Perhaps, in years to come, an inquiry into the Hanratty case may take place. Several letters about the Hanratty article were received, but some of them were unpublishable because of libellous comment.*

As a journalist, I covered the Hanratty trial. As most of us who report trials know only too well, the secret is in the presentation. The certain way of opening eyes would be for a book to be published (about any notorious murder trial). In it would go *every* detail of the police investigation; *every* written and spoken word from the files of the lawyers on both sides; every witness statement in *full*, and statements from every witness *subsequent* to the trial after the witness had read all the presented evidence, and remembered what he did not say, was not asked, or failed at the time to remember. In brief, *every single thing* about the trial. Boring, repetitious, dull, but, I would bet, shocking. There is nothing basically wrong with British justice, but nobody expects a ham-strung, half-blind man to be the equivalent of one who is one hundred per cent fit.

Liverpool, 1. JOHN KATONA.

Bouquets

Bravo Rose Million Healey [August] and Christopher Curtis [July] for two crackling yarns. In the August issue I also liked *Town Cop* and *Country Cop*. A neat idea.

London, W.10. J. R. SWAN.

Mr. Garnett's marvellous article, *Again the Ringer*, in your August issue recalls my meeting with EW when I was a young man. I was at Hurst Park Racecourse, a washed-out loser. EW saw me sitting there, miserable, without the fare home. He gave it to me, and a 'fiver' to try my luck again ! I won, several pounds, and tried to make him take it back. He would not, bless his kind heart. Even if *EWMM* was bad I would 'sell' it to everybody I know. However, it's so good that I shall keep on at my friends until they all become subscribers.

Kingston-on-Thames. R. S. BENNETT.

● *For such friendly comments, all thanks. Readers who send us bouquets and who have friends in the United States could perhaps help us to reach new friends by mentioning our American edition which will appear in New York early in 1966.*

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