THE TOP SELLING BRITISH CRIME MAGAZINE

Edgar Wallace

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

EDGAR WALLACE
Angel Esquire

MARGERY ALLINGHAM
The Man with the Cuckoo Clock

EDGAR LUSTGARTEN
The Vaquier Case

SAX ROHMER
The Word of Fu Manchu

and other outstanding stories and features

No. 19
Vol. 3

Edgar Wallace

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Mystery Magazine

Vol III No. 19 February, 1966

Mystery, Crime, and Detection for the Aficionado

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Edgar Wallace Mystery Magazine *is published monthly by arrangement with Edgar Wallace, Ltd., on the 1st of each month by Edgar Wallace Magazines, Ltd. Printed by The Rugby Advertiser Ltd., Albert Street, Rugby. Distributed by Representation Services, 130, Hither Green Lane, London, S.E.13. Sole agents, Australia: Gordon and Gotch (A'sia) Ltd.; New Zealand: Gordon and Gotch (N.Z.) Ltd.; South Africa: Central News Agency, Ltd.;* *© 1966 Edgar Wallace Magazines, Ltd.,* *4, Bradmore Road, Oxford.* NIGEL MORLAND, *Editor.*

FROM TIME TO TIME some readers like to dig figurative pits, either in the hope of seeing an editor manage a last minute leap and make it to the other side, or of watching him crash into a dilemma from which there is no escape. There is no malice in it, but just so long as editors use that omnipotent ' we ' then readers will contrive their traps.

Briefly

A trap, for example, exactly like the current one which has often been delivered to *EWMM* in readers' letters: Do you like women crime writers and are they better than men crime writers? This is about as loaded a question as can be devised.

After all, to say ' no ' is to invite the wrath of women writers; should preference be for men writers then this editorial name will be unmentionable where females gather.

Murmur about Edgar Allen Poe and Conan Doyle and instantly the names of Anna Katharine Green and Dorothy Sayers come hurtling back; tentatively name Edgar Wallace, Raymond Chandler, and Ellery Queen and up jump the partisans of Margery Allingham, Josephine Tey, and Mignon Eberhart *and* Josephine Bell and Christianna Brand and Agatha Christie and Ursula Curtiss and Elizabeth Ferrers and Ngaio Marsh and Helen McCloy and Gladys Mitchell and Mary Roberts Rinehart and Sara Woods and all . . .

Some crime fans, let's face it, will not under any circumstances read a book by a woman, either because they are misogynists or are just plain awkward; others will read nothing else.

It must be obvious, even to their detractors, that women crime writers have a built-in ingenuity of their very own, and a knack for cunning plots. They don't — unlike too many of their sisters of the ' straight ' novel — permit their sex to intrude into their stories.

We admire them immensely, and have no intention of rushing into any sort of a sex war, and suggest, if the author's name is masked, that it is hard to know in the best crime novels who is writing what so far as male or female authorship is concerned.

A Frenchman once maintained there is little difference between man and woman but cried, ' *Vive la différence* !' to which we subscribe in part, for there is no difference when it comes to talent.

The Editor.

MARGERY ALLINGHAM

The Man with the Cuckoo Clock

Mr. Campion and Mr. Luke in the vivid and remarkable tale of the Father of all Fish and the Men from Mars (an EWMM *special reprint)*

"ALWAYS take notice of a woman," Divisional Detective Chief Inspector Luke said, casting a shameless glance at the very pretty girl who had come in with Mr. Campion. He was in tremendous, not to say outrageous, form that evening and sat there on the narrow table in the upstairs private bar of the Platelayers' Arms looking like some magnificent black tom-cat in his tight sharp clothes.

It was one of those raw spring nights when the city's traffic noises sound unnaturally close and there is a warning blast of freezing air whenever anyone opens an outside door. The rush hour was at its peak and it was just a little too early to go home, altogether the right time for story-telling.

"It was listening to a woman who could hardly speak, bless her, save to say, 'yeth' which got me my first real promotion," Luke was saying, and as we watched he let his eyes slowly cross, blew out his cheeks into dumplings and favoured us with a simper which was both innocent and arch, so that the valuable young person appeared before us.

"She worked in a tobacconist's and paper shop just behind the old St. Mary's Road police station," he said. "We called her Mossy, and she looked it — soft, you know, and green — she lived for the movies and thought I ought to be a film star. I used to go round and talk to her when old George Misery Bull, who was the C.I.D. sergeant there in those days, got us both crying with the dreariness of life."

He gave us a fleeting glimpse of a sad, fat man with a forehead like a bloodhound's and sketched him a vast and pendulous stomach with a fluid hand.

"It was a long winter that year and that brought out the lunatics," he went on cheerfully. "The cold does, you know. At the end of September they start getting a grievance, by Guy Fawkes Night they're writing to the papers, and after Christmas they start coming to the police. I'm not kidding. If you feel it coming on you want to watch out. Our particular headache that winter was Burbury Square. Do you know it?"

"The Society of Marine Research," murmured Mr. Campion whose knowledge of London was phenomenal.

"That's the place." Luke shot him a swift, respectful glance, "on the north side; great tall houses all dust stairs and bad improvements. George used to call it Nut Row. It wasn't residential except for one or two hideouts in the attics." He bent his head smartly sideways to avoid an imaginary sloping ceiling and one or two other people did the same thing, his pantomime was so vivid.

"At the time I'm talking of, there was only one old fellow actually living in the entire central block," he rattled on. "He was up under the roof in the house next door to the Society of Marine Whatnot and he had quite a snug little place there. But they were a fine old houseful; beneath him were the offices of a vegetarian magazine; under them a postage stamp exchange; and on the ground floor and in the basement a collection of old ladies sorted bundles for the Solomon Islanders every afternoon except Saturdays. In the next house there was this Marine outfit; they had the whole building, gave lectures and conducted a private war with their rivals, the Guild of Aquatic Science in Victoria."

He glanced round, his brows two circumflex accents. "You can see they were all a bit *funny*," he said seriously. "Even the society which are well known and quite the ticket seemed to be going over the edge. They had just got hold of a prehistoric fish which had landed them with a lot of publicity. It was older than the Coelacanth — that's the one without the lungs, isn't it? Well, this one hadn't got a stomach either. Just solid fish all the way through, or something of the sort."

He was not exactly depicting the unfortunate beast but a fleeting expression of acute introspection did suggest such an unhappy brute most vividly.

" It was alive, too," he continued, the words pouring out of him as they did when he grew excited. " I saw it myself. Some Chinese had got hold of it while he was doing his laundry in some sort of river they've got out there. It had been flown back at great expense and the society was trying to keep it alive in a specially heated and polluted tank.

" They didn't exactly put it on show but they'd let you have a dekko if you were interested and wanted to subscribe.

" I knew about it because Sir Bernard Walfish who was the president of the society, had a row with Sir Thingummy Something, who was the head of the guild at Victoria. Sir Thingummy wanted to dissect the thing in the cause of science and it came to raised eyebrows on both sides. Finally I was sent down to explain to Sir Bernard why the Metropolitan Police didn't feel his pet needed a police guard unless he felt like paying for one. That's how I knew about the place and why the address wasn't new on me when we had the complaints from Mr. Theodor Hooky in the roof next door."

" He was the man who lived over the vegetarian magazine?"

" That's right. We didn't know he was there at all until he telephoned one morning. As we listened to him we thought he couldn't be *all* there, and then, just about lunch time when he called in, we knew darn well he wasn't."

He paused, glanced sharply behind him and came back to his audience with an expression in which belligerence and suspicion were quite horrifically blended.

" He complained of saucerites," he said.

" Oh, dear," protested Mr. Campion. " Not *flying* saucerites, I hope."

" No error!" Luke's grimace confirmed the diagnosis. " He seemed to us to have it badly. We started off by thinking what a nice old boy he was, so polite and so sensible, and then just when we were eating out of his hand an extraordinary expression came over his face and out it all came — Men from Mars.

" He didn't mind them himself, he said, but he couldn't think they'd do the country any good. The alarming thing was that he made it all sound very factual. According to him, sometimes they made a mass descent on to the roofs, sometimes they sat on the stairs outside his flat and wouldn't move, sometimes, he

only heard them making a wet sort of whistling which was their way of trying to talk. He said they had globular eyes, scaly skin and great splay feet like ducks, and all the time he had this insane look on his face."

" Poor fellow!" Mr. Campion spoke with feeling.

" Weren't we all!" Luke was unrepentant. " We had troubles of our own and after we had heard the tale the third time and he began to telephone us in the small hours the novelty had worn off. We started to think we'd have to pull him in and that meant doctors and committal orders and angry relatives probably." He shook his dark head.

" We made the well-known ' discreet inquiry ' and the more we learned about him the stickier it looked. He was a bit of a recluse but he was in all the reference books with letters after his name and he belonged to several of the better clubs. We waited but there were no other complaints. He kept his troubles for us. We didn't go round to his place but fobbed him off with promises — and it was all we could do — and after the first few days we sort of got used to him. He became just one of those things."

He sighed: " And then, one day I went into Mossy's for some cigarettes and ran into him coming out. I was surprised because I hadn't seen him in the street before. I said ' Good evening,' but he only stared and eyed my feet in his crazy way and shot out, leaving me slightly uncomfortable."

He glanced down at his huge black shoes and grinned. " Quack quack," he said. " That's all I was thinking when Mossy started up.

" I didn't listen to her at first but after a bit I heard her say: ' *He was the surgeon and she didn't half look lovely: You could see his hand shake. It was in colour and they were both green. Sinister it was.*' He gave a remarkable imitation of a soft thick London voice, trembling with remembered thrills, and there was an innocent glee in his bright eyes which was infectious.

" That caught me," he said. " I don't know why, and I said, ' Who was?' ' Why *he* was,' she said. ' That man who's just gone out. He's an actor.' I said, ' Get away!' but she stuck to it. She said she had seen him on the films and his name was Martin Treower and he played small parts. ' He's always the one who's

all " strung up " ' she said. ' He's in my annual; I'll show you.' She did, too." Luke's eyes widened to their fullest extent.

" It took a bit of time but she got down under the counter and came up with the film paper annual, and we went through it together. I didn't believe her, you know, but she found what she was looking for, a half-page illustrated article. I couldn't believe my eyes, but there was no getting away from it. There he was, *Martin Treower; The Man with the Lunatic Face*. He was a character actor specialising in neurotic parts, and they gave a line of thumb-nail portraits of him each showing him in different costume, but all with the same unforgottable crazy expression. He was the ' Mad Surgeon,' the ' Insane Butler,' the ' Demented Executioner.'

" He had made a study of it. As soon as he put on that expression, the least intelligent member of any audience understood at once that he was round the bend and nothing he said was reliable."

Luke began to laugh. " I was standing there gaping when Mossy lit a squib under me," he observed. " Suddenly she said: ' He's just finished a part I expect because he came in for a copy of the paper they take when they're out of a job.' Blow me down! I didn't stop running!"

He rubbed his long hands together and the vigour of the gesture brought the bustle of the long ago evening into the room with us.

" We got 'em all right," he said. " But it was touch and go because I couldn't get George to believe me at first. He thought we ought to go round to the flat and contact the real Theodor Hooky first, but that would have been fatal. As Mossy had pointed out there simply wasn't time. At last he gave way and we did the thing properly. We had three men outside the building and my mate and I went into the society's house and waited. At two in the morning they came up the fire-escape — four of them — right into our arms."

" What *are* you talking about?" The pretty girl who had been watching Luke's excitement with growing bewilderment spoke involuntarily. " Who came up the fire-escape? Where? What for?"

Luke beamed at her. " You've forgotten the Father of All Fish," he said happily. " The guild wanted it, remember. The society wouldn't part. So strictly in the cause of science, as they explained to the magistrate, a party of interested young gentlemen decided to nip in and take it. They made most elaborate pre-

parations. The tank was twelve feet deep, so two of them had to wear suitable kit for the operation. By the time we got hold of them they didn't look at all unlike Men from Mars. They decided to come through the roof because the doors were too public, the locks were too good and the windows were barred. It was as simple as that."

Mr. Campion took off his spectacles and his light eyes were interested.

"How very ingenious of them to employ the actor to prepare the ground," he said. "Mr. Hooky was the only witness who was almost certain to see them on the roof and his natural instinct would have been to telephone the police."

"Who would have given him a rocket of which they would never — repeat never — have heard the last," put in the D.D.C.I. with relish. "All because their simple minds had been readied for just exactly that sort of call at that sort of time by the Man with the Lunatic Face, as the fan magazine called him." A smile narrowed his wide mouth and he glanced at the girl.

"No one felt like advertising that bit; perhaps that's why Mr. Martin Treower was never prosecuted," he said. "We just re-christened him and filed him for future reference."

"Re-christened him?" She took the cue he offered her and his eyelids drooped. "Maybe it's because we're Londoners," he quoted contentedly, "but he's down under *Treower, Martin, actor*. *The man with the cuckoo clock*!"

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BINDERS. Our new *Easibinders* are now ready. These will hold six issues of *EWMM*. They are strongly made, stamped with the magazine's name in gold, and the famous Edgar Wallace insignia in red and gold. Price per binder, stoutly packed and post free, is 15s. with order to: The Publisher, *EWMM*
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The Lady of the House

JOHN SALT

The photograph proved to Rosewarne and Manbre that remembrances can cast long shadows

A NUMBER OF PEOPLE had every reason to be thankful that Mrs. Maud Arrowsmith was never a woman to ask too many questions. Nor was she any great hand at answering them as Edward Rosewarne was presently to discover. They sat facing each other across the fireplace of Mrs. Arrowsmith's back sitting room with its view of the stunted garden and the yellow brick boundary wall which fringed a canal. In the middle distance traffic boomed, and shunted trucks quarrelled in a nearby railway yard but the room itself was quiet. Hot, too, Rosewarne, with great-coat unbuttoned, edged his knees away from the high-banked grate, though the day outside was raw November.

" Take your coat off, if you're hot," she said flatly. Rosewarne thanked her and she shrugged her shoulders; the matter was plainly of no importance to her. He struggled free of the heavy coat and returned to the subject at hand. " You understand that it is your duty to help the police, Mrs. Arrowsmith."

" So they tell me, Inspector."

" Superintendent."

Again came the shrug that was almost a jeer. Rosewarne began to study her in some detail. There was no need to be careful about it. So far as he was concerned it was evident that the lady of the house considered herself to be alone in it. Even her gaze was fixed not on him but on a point beyond and above his left shoulder, out in the garden somewhere among the blackened and twisted sticks that had been the summer's crop of phlox and Michaelmas daisy.

She was neither beautiful nor young. Rosewarne placed her

around the sixty mark though her black hair showed no trace of grey. Mrs. Arrowsmith wore it drawn tightly back into a bun of the kind that Rosewarne remembered his mother had preferred. Her forehead was high and broad, her eyes protuberant, yet oddly without depth. Her face was long and fleshy, pasty white as to forehead and jowls but with streaks of pale colour in the cheeks and beneath the eyes. Her mouth was wide and ruler-straight, her chin cleft and masculine; she wore a black velvet band about her throat and a long dress of some rough purple stuff that buttoned high at the neck. There was about her an odd quality of stillness — she sat in the brown rexine-covered armchair as though no power on earth could move her.

Rosewarne took out a folded sheet of paper. " I have a list of the articles; shall I read them to you?"

" Not unless there's something you haven't mentioned yet."

" Mrs. Arrowsmith, these things were bought by a jeweller in Theobalds Road, who subsequently realised that they tallied with a list of stolen property. We arrested the vendor, who proved to be a known criminal. He told us that he took this property from you while a lodger."

Mrs. Arrowsmith stared out at the garden; Rosewarne thought that her lips twitched slightly. " I suppose that makes me a receiver of stolen property, Superintendent."

" I take it you wish to make a statement along those lines?"

She focused her eyes briefly on him.

" There are some people who talk about doing good and others who try to put the theory into practice."

Rosewarne blinked. " I fail to see the relevance of that remark, Mrs. Arrowsmith."

She grinned at him openly. " It was Edward Willow who tried to sell that silver tea-set, I suppose."

Rosewarne nodded. " We call him Eddie the Dip."

" You would. I suppose you are wondering why I should take that type of person as a lodger."

" I admit that I find it curious."

" It so happens that I like to help a man who is down on his luck."

" Our Edward pushes his luck a little hard. He has had thirty convictions." Rosewarne's voice was dry.

" Willow's a fool," she said tartly. " That doesn't mean I run a thieves' kitchen."

" Did you know the silver was stolen property?"

Mrs. Arrowsmith resumed her contemplation of the garden. " I had no reason to think so. It was left here by a tenant in lieu of rent some years ago. When Willow went I saw it was missing and guessed he had taken it."

" But you didn't report it?"

" One expects risks in this business. Whoever originally owned the property it certainly wasn't mine. And now, Superintendent, I really don't see that I need detain you longer."

Rosewarne stood up. " That's a matter of opinion, Mrs. Arrowsmith; my own is still undecided. However, I am a busy man and I won't trouble you further at this stage."

" But I shall be hearing from you again?"

" That is highly probable."

Rosewarne opened the door, grateful for a through draught. He paused with his hand on the knob. " Do you have any more interesting items your lodgers may have left behind?"

She said softly without turning her head, " You are welcome to search but I am sure I should have remembered."

" Do you remember the man who left the silver tea-set?"

" Quite well. His name was Brown, or it may have been Green."

" The law requires you to keep records, Mrs. Arrowsmith."

" Then it will be in my records. A Mr. Brown or a Mr. Green."

Superintendent Rosewarne returned to his headquarters in Otway Street, off Drury Lane, in a mood which his aide, Sergeant Jack Manbre, recognised glumly as the slow burn. Rosewarne disburdened himself rapidly. " Thug of a woman; back like a grenadier and a complexion like Canterbury lamb. She pretty well ordered me out of the house and the devil of it is that I more than half believed her story. Fat chance we have of pinning anything on her." He paused then added hopefully, " Any more from Willow?"

A puzzled expression crept over the sergeant's more than ordinarily open and ingenuous face. " Shut up like a clam, sir. Won't say a word more about his landlady; seems a bit afraid of her."

" He's not the only one. Not much more we can do in that quarter. See that we get a statement from Mrs. Arrowsmith but the Lord help us if Willow calls her as a character witness. When is he due up, by the way?"

" Next Tuesday — Clerkenwell, we got a remand for further enquiries."

" Hm! Gives us three days and the week-end."

" Anything in mind, sir?"

" Dunno, yet. What else is there on the cards, Jack."

" Not much, sir. I gather West End Central have given the bank van job best. Looks as though Charlie Burnett got clear away with his share of the loot."

" Queer business that one. Five of them on the job and they pick up four. Some good police work there but the brains of the outfit got clear. What was his share?"

Manbre looked thoughtful. " Hard to say. They lifted the better part of eighty thousand quid in used notes. Burnett would take the lion's portion. I reckon he copped fifty thousand, give or take a fiver."

" Beats me how he did it. The boats and airports were sewn up within three hours of the raid."

" Private plane, maybe, sir. He's probably living like a king in some place without an extradition treaty. Me, I'd pick Mexico."

Rosewarne yawned. " I'd settle for a couple of nights on early turn. Oh well, let's leave West End Central to worry about Charlie Burnett while we concentrate on the really big stuff. Like Eddie the Dip and a stolen Georgian tea service. Damn it! You know that old girl made me angry. I suppose I don't like being laughed at. I wish I could pinch her for something if only to take that smug grin off her face. Non-payment of a television licence, something really heinous like that."

" That's a civil offence, sir, not our pidgin at all." Manbre said it with a straight face and after a shocked moment Rosewarne grinned at him.

" Just the same, Jack, there's something here that's not quite kosher. I think you'd better get busy on it."

Manbre sighed. " Nosey Parker."

" That's the ticket; glad to see you so bright. Mrs. Arrowsmith is a woman who would not be greatly loved, so talk to the neighbours, the man at the paper shop, the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker. See if we can't get a rundown on her comings and goings, especially on those of her lodgers. She has an empty house at the moment, I don't know just why — close season for old lags, I suppose. And, Jack, don't spend too much of the nation's money on it."

"As you say, sir. How long can I have?"

"It would be nice to have your report by this time tomorrow afternoon."

The remark was not meant nor taken seriously. Rosewarne expected no more than tittle-tattle and a certain amount of malicious gossip. But what he got from Manbre, not the next day but the Saturday following Willow's arrest, was considerably more startling. Manbre himself was wide-eyed about it. "I've traced Burnett, sir, or rather I can tell you where he was until the day of the raid."

Rosewarne said sourly, "Burnett's not your pidgin, Jack. I want to know about that fish-eating eagle out at Kentish Town."

"But that's it, sir. Burnett was at Mrs. Arrowsmith's."

"Take it slow. How the blazes do you make that out?"

Manbre reddened and pulled a fistful of police identification photos from his pocket. "You gave me the lead, sir. The old girl took in ex-cons. I lifted these from the files and put in the Burnett picture on a hunch. I hawked them round the neighbourhood and finally met up with an old biddy called Elise Moss, who lives across the street from Mrs. Arrowsmith. She's a lace-curtain peeper."

"Where did you meet her?"

"In the jug-and-bottle of a spit-and-sawdust pub on the corner. She picked out two, both old lags; you'd remember them. Then she made a dead set at the Burnett picture. Said she'd know him anywhere, only he was much smarter when she saw him last."

Rosewarne pursed his lips. "Seems a pretty casual identification, Jack."

"I can do better, sir. The landlord came over. He'd tumbled me and made no bones about identifying Burnett. Said he knew him as Ronald Stebbing; remembered him because he'd chalked up a slate and never paid his reckoning."

"So why haven't we heard from these helpful people before?"

"The A.C. was against issuing a picture, sir," Manbre reminded him. "They couldn't have made the connection with Burnett."

"True enough. Right then, let's pay another call on the Gorgon. I am going to enjoy this one."

But Rosewarne derived very little pleasure from the interview. Mrs. Arrowsmith, unyielding as ever, denied all knowledge of Burnett but identified Stebbing at once as a mild-mannered man who had stayed with her until some three months previously and

had then left without giving a forwarding address. Rosewarne pressed her hard and Mrs. Arrowsmith began to choose her words with some care. She admitted to having doubts — what woman in her position would not. Possibly Mr. Stebbing had a past; she would not hold it against him if he had. She was a Christian woman, she hoped — but, a violent criminal? Really, now, she could not see that. And yet . . .

" And yet," Rosewarne repeated sharply.

Mrs. Arrowsmith appeared to take counsel with herself, then her words came in a lucid flow which neither Rosewarne nor Manbre attempted to stem. Stebbing had spent the week before his departure shut up in his bedroom, going out only after dark. She had suspected the worst; he had lost his job and there would be trouble over the bill. But on the Friday he had gone out in the morning about eleven and not returned until shortly after five. He had gone straight up to his room and she had not seen him until seven when he came down dressed for departure and carrying a small brown attache case. He had seemed excited, even apprehensive, quite unlike his normal self. He had paid her with a five-pound note and two half-crowns, the exact amount of his bill. Mrs. Arrowsmith had offered him a cup of tea and remembered how the cup and saucer had clinked together in his trembling hands. " I asked him if anything was wrong and he told me his mother had been taken ill up North. He was leaving London to look after her. Then he shook hands with me, picked up his case and went. I haven't seen or heard from him to this day."

Rosewarne took a deep breath. " You have the date of all this?"

She stubbed a masculine forefinger against an entry in her ledger. " August nineteenth, we had a cloudburst that day."

Manbre said slowly. " The bank van was held up at three o'clock on the Staines bypass. The rain delayed the squad cars."

Rosewarne gave his sergeant a curious glance. Manbre had been staring at the old woman throughout the interview with a puzzled expression on his face.

" He had no other luggage, just this one small case. How about his other clothes?" Rosewarne asked.

" He could have put all he possessed into it and still had room to spare," she said grimly.

" I don't think he had clothes in it at all, Mrs. Arrowsmith."

She smiled without joy. " What then, the Crown Jewels?"

" Something more readily negotiable. Say fifty thousand

pounds in used ten- and five-pound notes. But you didn't know that, of course."

She went back to her chair and stared out into the garden where the dead sticks were growing limp beneath the sleety rain.

"If you are going to make suggestions like that, Superintendent, you had much better prepare a charge and I will communicate with my lawyer. In the meantime I have nothing more to say."

Rosewarne watched her irritably. "You are creating unnecessary difficulties for yourself, Mrs. Arrowsmith."

"I am a difficult woman. It should have dawned on you by now. Well, if you don't plan an arrest or something equally stupid, you'll oblige me by taking yourselves off because I am becoming the least bit tired of being stared at by that red-faced assistant of yours, Superintendent."

Rosewarne gave her a surprisingly cheerful grin. "Very well, Mrs. Arrowsmith. You'll have gathered that I am not completely satisfied with your statement regarding Stebbing but there will be time and opportunity to discuss the matter further. Meantime I should be obliged if you will communicate with the local police before undertaking any journeys out of London. That's a formality, you understand. It makes it so much more convenient if we know just where to find you."

He was chuckling as he and Manbre reached the street. "That should give the old besom something to think about, Jack."

"You could have pulled her in, sir."

"Couldn't have held her, though. She's a pretty tough old bird and police procedure doesn't scare her."

"You still think there's something queer?"

"Can't be sure. Our Maud is a new one on me. Her story is as thin as they come but she seems so sure of herself. It's as if she's been there before and knows all the answers before we put the questions. No, we need to know a lot more about her before we start thinking of arrests. Which reminds me, Jack, what do you know about her? You were staring hard enough."

Manbre shook his head, bewilderment in his voice. "I have the feeling that I've seen her before. A long time ago and not in the flesh."

Rosewarne snorted. "Spare me your views on psychic phenomena."

Manbre looked startled. "Nothing like that, sir. It's just that I have this picture in my mind of a marble mantelshelf in a farmhouse years ago. There was a photograph in a leather frame, red

I think; anyway, it stood between La Force and Le Pouvoir." He shot the superintendent a wary glance. "I'm sorry, sir, you won't know what I mean. They were a couple of metal figures in Greek draperies that stood on vulcanite bases with their names engraved on silver plaques. They represented something. Strength and Power, I think it was," his voice trailed off lamely.

"Highly allegorical," Rosewarne said acidly. "And the photograph, does memory tell you that it was of Mrs. Arrowsmith?"

Manbre looked hunted. "It was very like her but a much younger woman. This is getting on twenty years back of course."

"Of course, so it can't have much bearing on the matter in hand, can it?"

"Not really, sir."

"That being so, let's get back to the present. First of all, I want another chat with Eddie Willow then we shall need to trace those other two old lags, the man and woman in the pub identified. We'll start a new line of enquiry into the Burnett case starting from the time he allegedly left the Arrowsmith house. West End Central can handle that end. I'm bound to say that I don't expect any very startling developments but it will be as well to keep tags on the old lady herself. She might just lead us on to something we haven't thought of yet." He paused then added, rather grudgingly, "About that photograph, Jack. There'd be no harm in looking into it. You're a country boy, aren't you?"

"Essex, sir. My old man was the sergeant at Bedenhoe for twenty years."

"I know it, just across the water from Point Clear. Have you any connections there now?"

"A sister. She married locally."

"She'd remember it, this farmhouse?"

Manbre looked doubtful. "It might have been on one of my own private scouting expeditions, sir. It was over Great Bromley way, I do remember that. And there was a story about the girl in the picture that keeps slipping in and out of my mind."

"Take a trip down there tomorrow. See what you can turn up but don't enlist any local help; country coppers have their own troubles. Don't worry about this end. I'll get young Bill Allis on to it."

Sergeant Manbre took the 9.40 train from Liverpool Street. He was back in London by early evening, having tried and failed to contact his superior by telephone that afternoon. He burst into

Rosewarne's office full of his news. The superintendent sat at his desk, irritably flicking over the leaves of a file. The young plain clothes constable, Allis, stood at his side, somewhat pink about the ears. Rosewarne glared at Manbre. " Where the deuce have you been? Never mind, I remember."

" I think I struck oil, sir. At all events I found out some queer things this afternoon."

" Not half as queer as the ones I've been hearing about, I'll take my oath on that. Look here, Manbre, how well did you check those identifications in Kentish Town?"

" I told you, sir. The woman, Elise Moss, picked out two of them, then she and the landlord both pounced on Burnett. Why, what's wrong?"

" Every damned thing. We can't trace them for a start. They haven't been in trouble for a year past, which is strange enough in itself, quite apart from the fact that neither one has reported to a police station during the same period. They were both on parole, remember. I've talked again to Willow and the Arrowsmith woman and they were as helpful as ever. So either those two witnesses of yours were up a gum tree or these men have vanished as completely as Burnett. To all intents and purposes the three of them might never have left the Arrowsmith house."

He slapped his hands angrily on the desk top and the room grew quiet. Manbre said soberly, " I think you had better listen to me for a moment, sir."

Snowflakes swirled past the high window as Manbre's quiet voice murmured on but a chill had entered the room that was not of the weather's making. The desk lamp shone down on Rosewarne's iron grey head and the planes and angles of his strong, bony face but threw his half-closed eyes into deep shadow. He was silent after Manbre had finished speaking then fixed a bleak gaze on the sergeant. " We'll pull her in, Jack," he said. " See about a car."

Manbre went out, Rosewarne dictated a series of rapid instructions to Allis then put on his coat and hat. The intercom buzzed. Allis picked up the receiver and glanced at Rosewarne. " They are ready for you, sir." His chief nodded and hurried out.

Mrs. Arrowsmith had closed her curtains against the night. The heavy folds of magenta velvet shut out the drifting snow and dulled the tapping of a bramble against the glass. The heat of the room was all but overpowering but Mrs. Arrowsmith wore a heavy woollen cardigan buttoned over her dress. Rosewarne said briefly,

" It will be necessary for you to come down to the station, Mrs. Arrowsmith. Will you get your coat; it is snowing heavily."

The woman's cheeks flamed with sudden colour; she opened her mouth to speak but Rosewarne said firmly: " There is really no argument about this. I have a car waiting outside."

" Surely you could not be so foolish as to arrest me!"

" There is no charge as yet. I will join you at the station. Sergeant, will you help Mrs. Arrowsmith with her things and see her to the car."

When Manbre returned Rosewarne had drawn back the curtains and thrown up the lower sash of the window. He stood there in half a gale, unconscious of the snowflakes that drove in and the pendant ornaments that clashed and tinkled all about him. He said softly to Manbre, " Heaven help us if this goes wrong, Jack, and the papers get hold of it."

Manbre shivered and Rosewarne slammed down the window. " The room needed an airing; the house will be getting one in a moment or two."

Manbre said: " The van is here. They are bringing in the heavy stuff. I saw the divisional surgeon, too."

" He won't be pleased on a Sunday night. Call him in, Jack."

A tall, heavily-built man with a shock head of red hair strode into the room. Rosewarne gave him a friendly glance. " Sorry about this, Bob, but I may need you."

" You had better," Dr. Macrae growled. " Can I do anything at the moment?"

" Kitchen and bathroom I fancy, then the bedrooms. Bring me anything you find."

Heavy feet began to tramp through the house, some climbing to the upper floors, others descending to the cellar. Rosewarne put his head through the doorway and called " Allis!" The young plain clothes man appeared with two uniformed constables close behind him. Rosewarne jerked his head towards the back of the house. " You have the right night for it," he said tersely.

Allis nodded and went on down the passage. The other two followed him, clinking metal. Rosewarne rattled the curtains back across the window, came back to the fireplace, glanced once at Mrs. Arrowsmith's chair then sat in another. " You'd better take a seat, Jack; it could be a long wait."

Dr. Macrae came in and handed Rosewarne a small bottle wrapped in tissue so that only a part of the label showed. The doctor did not speak. Rosewarne glanced at the bottle then put

it on the table. " O.K. Bob, carry on, do what you can."

Gradually the collection on the table accumulated as more things were brought in — another bottle, a key-ring, a single key with a metal tag attached, an iron coal shovel and an axe. Rosewarne sat and watched the pile grow. He took out his pipe, filled but did not light it. Suddenly he broke the silence: " This is your first time on this sort of caper isn't it, Jack?"

The sergeant inclined his head.

" Well, there's nothing to do about it but wait. Your turn comes at the very end and when that part is over you take a stiff drink if you have any sense, go back to the wife and kids and try to get a night's sleep."

" It may not be as bad as that, sir."

Rosewarne said savagely, " Either way it couldn't be worse. If I'm wrong—" He was interrupted by the crash of rending wood and an awed exclamation from upstairs. Rosewarne's hooded eyes snapped wide, his face was taut and alert as he ran to the door. Macrae stood on the landing. " Better come up, Ted."

Rosewarne hurried up the stairs and into a bedroom. Paper had been stripped from one wall exposing the shattered door of a concealed cupboard. He took a flashlight and peered inside at what remained of the late Charles Burnett. He nodded then and turned to Macrae. " Your pidgin now, Bob. Soon as you like." He and Manbre went downstairs again. Allis, ashen-faced, met them in the hall. Rosewarne leaned to hear his urgent whisper, then jerked away, one hand half-raised as though to ward off a blow. Manbre was close enough to hear his harsh exclamation. " Oh, my God!"

Edward Rosewarne carefully rearranged the articles on his desk in a manner that Manbre had come to know well. Then he stood back from them and nodded to the sergeant. " Send her in now, Jack."

Mrs. Arrowsmith was attended by two uniformed constables. She was calm, slightly contemptuous, no whit dismayed. Rosewarne contemplated her with a strange wonderment, much as a man may examine in retrospect some frightful danger or evil that has passed him by. He moistened his lips and said quietly, " Mrs. Maud Arrowsmith, I arrest you on a charge of murdering Charles Richard Bnrnett by poison on or about the nineteenth day

of August this year at a house in Ashmore Gardens, Kentish Town. It is my duty to warn you that you need say nothing now but that anything you do say may be taken down and used in evidence at your trial."

For a moment there was no other sound in the room beyond the scratching of a pen as Constable Allis set down the words of the formal charge. Then Mrs. Arrowsmith spoke: " I have no knowledge of the event you mention, Superintendent. Really, I can only suppose you to be out of your mind."

Rosewarne said in the same quiet tone, " We also inspected the garden, Mrs. Arrowsmith."

" The garden." Her voice rose suddenly and cracked on a high note. " You exceed your powers, police in my garden, digging, and in the snow. You are mad, all of you, do you realise that, utterly and completely mad." She began to laugh stridently, was still laughing as they led her away.

Dr. Macrae came in. Rosewarne gave him a rueful grin. " You'll have a bad taste in your mouth, Bob, so has my sergeant. And we all have a lot of work to do before this night is over. So now I'll buy you both a large one at the Pillars of Hercules and then we'll get down to it."

But it was Macrae surprisingly who insisted on buying the drinks on the grounds that the Superintendent's nerve had been put to a stiffer test. " I still don't understand what put you on to it," he complained.

" Concatenation of circumstance," Rosewarne said largely. "I won't pull your leg, though, Bob, because I'd be the first to admit that the whole thing was pretty thin. Anyway, its Manbre's story, so he had better tell it."

Manbre took the top off his drink. " You wouldn't remember Florence Addinsell?"

" Should I?"

" Well, the point is that I should have done because it was a local story when I was a boy though it all happened back in the 'twenties. Florrie and her father came to live in an Essex village. Pretty soon the old man died and Florrie married a local farmer in a fair way of business. He was a widower, well on in years with a grown-up family of his own. Naturally, there was talk and a great deal more of it when the farmer died after the first year of marriage. So much talk in fact, that they had him up and discovered a fair intake of arsenic. It was the old weed-killer story again and they put Florrie on trial. Fortunately for

her there was a lot of prejudiced evidence and some perjury on the part of the chief prosecution witness, who happened to be the farmer's daughter. That put the jury off its stroke for a start and by the time the judge had fallen over backwards to give an impartial summing-up, Florrie got an acquittal.

"But while all this was going on, as they say, the local constabulary had a few thoughts of its own and they dug up Florrie's father. Lo and behold, another load of weed-killer. But after a report by a tame geologist on the arsenical content of the soil in the churchyard and then the result of the first trial, the DPP lost his nerve and would not recommend for a committal. So once again Florrie got the benefit of a reasonable doubt while also collecting her late husband's substantial estate, which she took to South Africa."

Macrae's patience was sorely tried. "We keep hearing about Florence Addinsell," he said.

"And you want to know about Maud Arrowsmith," Rosewarne put in. "We are coming to that. I sent Jack down there on the strength of a photograph he had once seen of Mrs. Arrowsmith as a young woman. Some young farmer had been sweet on her before her first marriage, and he kept the picture. He never married and when Jack located him this morning he told him the whole story, with some interesting additions. He'd been in Durban briefly during the war and tried to trace his old flame. He didn't find her but he turned up something else that soured him for good and all. There had been another husband, name of Arrowsmith and another death over which a certain cloud of unknowing had descended. In any case the merry widow had decamped fairly rapidly. Q.E.D. thinks our friend and doesn't give Florrie another thought until Jack turns up on his doorstep."

"Her second name was Maud," Manbre said. "After that I felt I had all the identification I needed."

Macrae whistled and looked at Rosewarne with something approaching awe. "Just the same, you took an awful chance, Ted. I can just see those headlines screaming about victimisation."

"I know it," Rosewarne agreed soberly. "But there was the devil of a lot of circumstantial evidence to go on as well. I should have had to pull her in sooner or later for further questioning on the Burnett case. That story of hers never held water."

"What do you think happened there?"

"She either knew or guessed about the mail van job; she may even have been the prime mover. I think she tried for a bigger

cut and when that failed she fed him tea, with strychnine in it."

"What about the others?"

"In the garden? I don't know. Maybe they had something she wanted as well." He added thoughtfully. "We don't know by the way, how many there are."

Macrae said firmly, "I can tell you one thing, she'll never take the morning walk, even if there was one now."

"Why do you say that?"

"Well, look at it, man—mass murder. And the way she was at the station just now; that's raving lunacy."

Rosewarne shook his head. "The number doesn't count. Landru wasn't mad, nor was Petiot, nor, nearer home, were a number of other people we can all remember. This was cold, calculated homicide. Those other murders in Essex, if they were murders, resulted in a capital gain. And so did the ones in Kentish Town."

"You can prove that, Ted?" Macrae said quizzically.

"I can prove it. We found a safe deposit key. Mrs. Arrowsmith was worth slightly better than one hundred thousand pounds in banknotes and specie. The house was up for sale and she would have been out of the country as soon as her cautious cash register mind told her the time was right. Little Eddie Willow spoiled it all for her but even then she didn't panic."

Macrae chuckled. "I like that — specie," he repeated. "Well, I have work to do." Rosewarne got up too. "So have I. You hang on here and finish your drink, Jack. Get your typing fingers ready while you're about it."

Manbre nodded and sank his face in his mug. When he raised it the two older men had reached the saloon bar door. A gust of snow-laden wind swept in and rustled the leaves of an evening paper lying on the bar. Manbre watched Rosewarne's departing figure and wondered if there would ever come a time when he would risk a reputation and a lifetime's experience on the chance of being right. And then be right.

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DESPITE the introduction of crime squads, improved mobility, specialisation, and other administrative improvements, one cannot overlook that the burden of day-to-day policing still falls on the shoulders of the man on the beat.

— *E. W. C. Pendleton*, Chief Constable of Coventry.

The Word of Fu Manchu

Sax Rohmer

Unpublished in this country, here is the second round between Sir Denis Nayland Smith and the Devil Doctor

MALCOLM GLANCED aside at his companion, who drove the Jaguar both deftly and quickly. He studied the tall, lean man at the wheel, a clean shaven man, whose tanned skin and crisp, dark hair gave startling emphasis to the silver at his temples: he was sucking a briar pipe.

"I know what you're thinking, Forbes." The words were rapped out. "When I was a commissioner at Scotland Yard, speed limits never troubled me. I formed bad habits."

"Is there so much hurry, Sir Denis?"

Sir Denis Nayland Smith grunted and swung out to pass a taxi, then:

"There is!" He snapped. "I asked you to join me to-night because I want someone with me where we're going. Also, as a young free-lance journalist, you may be on the big story Fleet Street is waiting for."

"What's the story?"

"Dr. Fu Manchu. We're going to see Sergeant Jack Kenealy, of the C.I.D. He's been on the case best part of the year. We have kept in touch. He called me an hour ago; said he had things to tell me which he couldn't put on paper. Rather alarming. Hence the speed."

"You think —"

"Nothing to think about until we get there."

And Malcolm knew that Sir Denis didn't want any further conversation to interfere with his urgent journey.

Ten minutes later they were skirting the north side of Clapham Common, a place of mysterious shadows this moonless night. He became aware of bottled-up excitement as Nayland Smith parked the car at a garage and took Malcolm's arm.

" This is where we walk," he announced.

They set out on the side opposite the Common. Sir Denis was silent, but Malcolm noted that he often glanced across at the shadowy expanse, as if, during his long battle against the Chinese genius who dreamed of becoming master of the world, he had learned that Fu Manchu was a superman who might materialise from space anywhere, at any time. Malcolm's excitement increased. They came to the next corner.

At which moment Nayland Smith, in the act of turning in, grabbed his arm again in a grip that hurt.

" Forbes, we're too late. Look!"

They had not passed a single pedestrian so far. But now — this side street was crowded.

The crowd had assembled in front of a house not far from the corner. Malcolm recognised the magnet which had drawn it together — two police cars, an ambulance, and uniformed men on duty before the door.

" Is that where Kenealy lives, Sir Denis?"

Nayland Smith nodded grimly, and began to hurry.

They forced a path through the group of curious onlookers. Then, a police sergeant barred the way.

" No one can go in, sir."

" Who's in charge?" Nayland Smith snapped.

" Inspector Wensley is here. But —"

" Wensley? *My* name is Nayland Smith — Sir Denis Nayland Smith."

" Sorry, Sir Denis," the sergeant answered. " I didn't recognise you, sir. Go ahead."

Sir Denis and Malcolm went up the short path to the open front door. Inside an elderly woman was trying to pacify a girl who was weeping in her arms: " There, there dear, I know how you feel. But orders are orders, and they have orders to let nobody see him."

" I shall die if I came too late!" the girl moaned.

Nayland Smith pulled up. " Madame —" he addressed the older woman —" please tell me, is this your house?"

"It is, sir. Mrs. Sefton is my name; and my top floor was let to Mr. Kenealy — as nice a young man as I'd wish to meet. Even now, I can't believe it's happened."

"What *did* happen, Mrs. Sefton?"

"I was sitting sewing, not more than half an hour ago, when I heard him cry out. It echoed through the place. It was terrible. It was more of a scream than a cry. I knew he had nobody with him but I was alone in the house and so frightened I had to force myself to go up to his sitting-room. I called to him. But he didn't answer. So I tried to open the door. It was locked."

"Then, what did you do?"

"I ran downstairs and out to the street, meaning to ask the first man who came along to try to force Mr. Kenealy's door. As luck would have it, the first one was a policeman."

While this conversation went on, Malcolm was watching the girl. She had persistently kept her face pressed to Mrs. Sefton's shoulder. But now she turned suddenly, and cast a swift glance of amber eyes at himself and Nayland Smith. She was a strikingly pretty brunette and appeared to be in a state of terror rather than sorrow.

"The door was forced by the policeman and you found Kenealy," Nayland Smith said. "Tell me —"

"He was dead, sir!"

The dark girl turned and faced Sir Denis.

"So I understand," he said. "Details I'll gather for myself. And now, Mrs. Sefton, who is this young lady?"

The girl fixed her strange, but beautiful eyes upon Nayland Smith as Mrs. Sefton replied, "It's Miss Rostov, sir, a friend of Mr. Kenealy's, who often called. She came to see him ten minutes ago, and the police wouldn't let her go up."

"Miss Rostov," Sir Denis met the fixed regard of the girl's eyes, "how did you know Jack Kenealy was dead?"

"I didn't know!" she cried. "I didn't know! How could I know?"

"Was he expecting you?"

"Yes. But I was late."

"How long have you known him?"

"For a long time. Three or four months."

"When did you see him last?"

"The day before yesterday."

"Where?"

"At the restaurant."

" What restaurant?"

Momentarily, she hesitated, then: " The Café Stambul."

" And you haven't seen him or spoken to him since?"

" No."

Nayland Smith considered her for a while, and the amber eyes evaded him. " Very well, Miss Rostov. You have all my sympathy. I'm afraid we shall want you as a witness." He turned to Mrs. Sefton. " Please look after her. She mustn't leave at present. Just a moment, Forbes."

He went to the street door.

" I'm so sorry, my dear." Mrs. Sefton put her arm round the girl, and included Malcolm in the invitation: " Come into my sitting-room and make yourselves comfortable."

Malcolm found himself seated in a small, cosy room, overcrowded with antique furniture, facing Miss Rostov, who reclined upon a couch which might have dated back to Queen Victoria. Mrs. Sefton bustled out to ' make a nice cup of tea.'

The girl's eyes, in which he read fear, were turned upon him.

" I don't know your name," she said softly; she had a slight, unfamiliar accent. " But I feel I can trust you. Why am I to be kept here? Please tell me. Are you of the police?"

" No." Malcolm felt embarrassed. " But I can only tell you what Sir Denis told you — that you'll be required as a witness."

" Sir Denis — who is he?"

" Sir Denis Nayland Smith, a former commissioner of Scotland Yard."

" Oh! But shall I be allowed to go when he has talked to me again?"

" Of course."

She sighed, stretching out her slim body languorously. She had removed a black coat with a wide astrakhan collar; under it she wore a dark green dress. A striped silk scarf concealed nearly all her hair. Malcolm became uncomfortably conscious of her beauty.

" If I have to go to a court," she murmured, " I hope you will come with me. I have, now, no friends in London."

Before he could think of a reply, Nayland Smith came in.

" Come along Forbes."

Malcolm met a lingering glance of amber eyes and followed Sir Denis from the room. As they went upstairs:

" I gave her a chance," Nayland Smith said shortly. " Did she try the glamour treatment?"

Malcolm felt his colour rising. "I rather think," he confessed, "that she did. She's really a beauty, isn't she?"

"*All* Fu Manchu's women are beauties."

"'Fu Manchu's women'? You mean, you suspect this girl to be one?"

"We shall see . . . Hullo, Inspector Wensley! I had an appointment with Kenealy tonight, but unfortunately arrived too late . . ."

Sergeant Kenealy lay on a couch. Evidently a good-looking man in his early thirties, his present appearance made Malcolm shudder. This gruesome shell might be that of one dead, not for less than an hour, but for more than a week. The divisional surgeon, Dr. Abel, was examining the body.

"We've ruled out the possibility of homicide, Sir Denis," Inspector Wensley declared. "The window, which overlooks the street, was fastened. The door was locked. I have checked every possibility, and I'll stake my job on it — no one else was in this room when he died."

A fire burned in a small grate, and the room was insufferably hot. Nayland Smith twitched the lobe of his ear, a trick of his when concentrating.

"Poor Kenealy had an enemy, Inspector, who uses strange allies — not necessarily human. You have searched the rooms, furniture closets — wherever any living thing could hide?"

Inspector Wensley looked troubled. "We've searched the place of course, sir. I don't think anything that moved could have escaped us."

"There seems to be a quantity of charred paper on the fire and in the hearth?"

"He had evidently been burning every bit of paper in his possession," the inspector told him. "In fact, we shouldn't have known his identity if West here —" he indicated a plain clothes man talking to the doctor —"hadn't recognized him. I was shocked to learn that he was one of us."

Nayland Smith glanced at Malcolm. "We're in very deep waters." He crossed to the couch; Malcolm followed.

Dr. Abel looked up at Sir Denis.

"Are there any marks on his body, Doctor, to suggest that he had been bitten by a reptile, for instance?"

" There are no such marks, sir. I cannot imagine why there should be."

" He was murdered. I'm here to find out how."

" Murdered! I disagree."

" Then what's the diagnosis?" Sir Denis demanded.

Abel shook his head angrily. " A sudden seizure of some kind. But look at his colour. Feel the rigidity of the body."

Kenealy's features were of a uniform leaden grey, his limbs stiff as if he had been dead for hours. The features were frozen in an expression of horror.

" Cerebral haemorrhage?" Malcolm suggested.

" My dear sir!" Dr. Abel snorted. " Look at his colour — look at his eyes."

" Heart?"

" What kind of heart? Only an autopsy can help us there. But I may add that I never knew a heart case, except angina, where the patient cried out at the moment of the attack. What's more, this muscular rigidity doesn't fit. A powerful electric shock might have accounted for it. But he was sitting in that easy chair when I arrived, and no contact was possible. This strange rigor had already set in. The man might have been struck by lightning . . ."

Nayland Smith turned away, his expression grim. " Show me what was found on him."

" Here you are, Sir Denis." Detective West drew his attention to a number of objects on a small table. " He must have had some other base he'd been working from. Mrs. Sefton says he was often away for two or three days. There isn't a thing here to prove his identity."

" That doesn't surprise me," Nayland Smith said. I see you have explored this bureau."

" Complete search, sir," Wensley assured him. " Nothing to help."

Sir Denis glanced over the exhibits, and:

" Where did you find this automatic?"

" Drawer in a bedside cabinet," West told him. " It's fully charged."

" H'm. And what about this?"

He was holding up a disc of some dull metal attached to a thin broken chain.

" That was fastened around his neck," Wensley explained. " I thought it was a religious emblem. We could find no way of unfastening it, so I had the chain filed. The loop was too small

to go over his head."

Nayland Smith studied the desk with keen interest.

"There's some sort of hieroglyphic stamped on the metal," Malcolm pointed out. "I wonder what it means?"

"I think I know," Sir Denis answered. "With your permission Inspector, I'll take this thing with me for expert examination. There's nothing more to be done here, Forbes. First score to Dr. Fu Manchu. A further chat with your charming acquaintance, Miss Rostov, might bring a little light on things."

In Mrs. Sefton's sitting room the dark girl reclined on the sofa as they had left her. She was alone. A cup of tea stood on a table near her. She raised her eyelids languidly but otherwise did not move.

"I'm sorry to have detained you." Nayland Smith spoke drily. "But I thought you might be able to give me some information about this."

He extended the metal disc on his open palm.

The effect was electrical. The girl sprang up in one lithe movement, her remarkable eyes widely opened.

"Ah! It is mine! Thank you very much."

"Yours?" Nayland Smith snapped. "Then why was it chained about his neck?"

"There is a way to unfasten the chain. It is mine. Please give it to me."

"If that is the case, you shall have it — but not yet. What is it?"

"It is an Eastern charm. To me," suddenly her eyes were brimming with tears, "it meant so much. To you it can mean nothing."

"H'm, very interesting." He dropped the disc back into his pocket. "I should be obliged, Miss Rostov, if you would give Mr. Forbes your address while I go and arrange for you to be driven home."

Nayland Smith went out, closing the door. And at the same moment that he did so, the girl moved forward and clutched Malcolm, raising tearful appealing eyes to him.

"Listen to me," she whispered. "You *must* listen to me! Persuade him to give me my amulet."

Malcolm tried, gently, to detach her hands. "I assure you,

Sir Denis will do so. He —"

" My name is Nadia. Be my friend. I have no one but you to help me."

Malcolm's natural chivalry, and Nadia's beauty, might have conquered discretion if he had had it in his power to do as she asked. But she asked the impossible.

" I'd gladly help you, Nadia, but Sir Denis wouldn't listen to me."

She drooped against him, her head on his shoulder. Her hair had a subtle fragrance.

" I am sorry. I think you would help me, if you could."

Footsteps sounded on the stairs. Nadia drew back.

Malcolm pulled out a note-book awkwardly, and tried to force his mind back to normality.

" Please give me your address, now, Nadia."

" Eighty-five Westbourne Terrace," she told him in a toneless voice.

The door opened and Nayland Smith came in, followed by West.

" Mr. West will drive you home, Miss Rostov. You have the address, Forbes?"

On the way back from Clapham, Sir Denis said: " I hoped your friend, Nadia, might give something more away to you if I offered her the chance, but as a Don Juan you're fired, Forbes! She's some sort of Eurasian, and although devilishly attractive, I don't believe for a moment that there was any real attachment between her and Kenealy. We have what she came tonight to recover — the disc."

" That's clear, Sir Denis. But have you any idea what it is?"

" Except that it's stamped with the sign of the Si-Fan, none whatsoever."

" Sign of the Si-Fan ? What is the Si-Fan?"

Nayland Smith laughed shortly. " It's a world-wide secret society of which Dr. Fu Manchu is president."

" Then why did Kenealy —"

" The disc chained around his neck? Top marks to a brave man. He had joined the Si-Fan."

" Good heavens!"

" He had brains and nerve. But he must have slipped up. He

was expecting another visitor tonight. And it wasn't Nadia. To the end, he hoped to bluff it out. Hence his destruction of all evidence against him. Is this clear to you, Forbes?"

" Yes — now it is. And it's horrible."

" The ways of Dr. Fu Manchu are always horrible."

The door of Nayland Smith's flat in Whitehall Court was opened by a manservant whose prominent jaw and grim expression inspired confidence.

" Good evening, Begby," Sir Denis said. " Any messages?"

" Yes, sir. A Mr. West reported at ten-thirty-three."

" Good. Drinks in the study."

A moment later Malcolm was in a room which he could have recognized with his eyes shut from its overpowering smell of tobacco. As Sir Denis began to re-fill his hot pipe from a very large pouch, Begby came in with whisky and soda on a tray.

Begby put the drinks down, then:

" Going by way of Bayswater Road with this lady, Mr. West got hit by a heavy truck that came out of a side-turning. He was knocked out, but not hurt, sir. The lady had vanished when he come round. They hung on to the truck-driver."

" Thanks, Begby." Nayland Smith poured out drinks as his servant withdrew, and shrugged his shoulders. " You see, Forbes? We're dealing with Fu Manchu."

He sat at his large, orderly desk, putting the mysterious disc on the blotting-pad; began to study it through a powerful lens. Malcolm crossed and bent over his shoulder.

" Might I take a look, Sir Denis?"

Nayland Smith handed the lens to Malcolm and presently:

" The hieroglyphic means nothing to me," Malcolm confessed; " but what metal is this thing made of?"

He picked the disc up, weighing it in his hand, when Begby rapped on the study door, came in and announced in a queerly muffled voice:

" Dr. Fu Manchu, sir!"

" *What*!"

Nayland Smith sprang up. Malcolm slipped the disc into his pocket. " At last, you have him!" he whispered.

" Show Dr. Fu Manchu in here," Sir Denis said quietly, sat down and opened a desk drawer.

A tall figure came into the study, that of a man who wore a black overcoat with a heavy astrakhan collar and who carried a black hat. Begby retired and closed the door.

Malcolm became lost in fascination at the most wonderful face he had ever seen. The high, scholarly brow, the incredibly long, green eyes, the lined, intellectual features, the tremendous aura of power of Dr. Fu Manchu. He stood, stock-still, watching him.

"Good evening, Sir Denis." It was a high, metallic voice, the words precisely spoken. "This gentleman I assume to be Mr. Malcolm Forbes, in whose career you take an interest. You may close the desk drawer. There will be no need for the revolver you keep there. I have taken the liberty of calling upon you only for the purpose of recovering a small metal disc which I believe you have in your possession."

Nayland Smith, his face set like a mask, watched him but did not speak.

"As I note a hand-lens, there, perhaps the disc you have been examining is in your desk. Would you be good enough to let me see it?"

Malcolm, uneasily, slipped his hand into his coat pocket. The terrifying green eyes were flashed in his direction at the very instant that Nayland Smith, his elbow resting on his desk, covered Dr. Fu Manchu, with a Service revolver.

"Dr. Fu Manchu, you are under arrest."

But, Dr. Fu Manchu, his manner unperturbed, dropped the soft, black hat on the carpet and raised his hand. He held a small dial studded with several buttons.

"Take your hand from your pocket, Mr. Forbes," he said, sibilantly. "I know that the disc is there. I have my finger on the button which will connect it with the power centre. Your shot would come too late, Sir Denis, to save Mr. Forbes. You have seen tonight how enemies of Si-Fan die."

Malcolm, seeing again the grey face of Sergeant Kenealy, obeyed. His forehead was damp. Nayland Smith still covered Fu Manchu.

"Put away your obsolete weapon, Sir Denis," the mocking voice went on, "unless you really believe my death to be worth the life of your friend. I have conquered a new vibration. The disc in Mr. Forbes' pocket is tuned to it. A recruit to our order carries such a disc. If he proves unworthy, he is removed."

Nayland Smith grew pale under his tan. "What are your terms!" he demanded.

"Make no terms," Malcolm cried out. "I'll take a chance if you will!"

" I admire your courage," Dr. Fu Manchu spoke softly. " I need such men."

" What are your terms?" Sir Denis repeated tensely.

" Your word, which I respect, as you have learned to respect mine, that you will order your man, directly I leave here, to take the disc, carefully packed, to André Messina, a guest at the Savoy hotel, and that you will take no further action until your man reports that it is delivered. I give you my word that I will take none."

Nayland Smith's grey eyes were angry, but he said, " Agreed," and pressed a bell. Begby came in. " Show Dr. Fu Manchu to the door, Begby."

Dr. Fu Manchu picked up his black hat, bowed formally and went out. Before the door had closed, Malcolm had snatched the disc from his pocket and dashed it on the floor.

Smiling wryly, Nayland Smith stooped to pick it up.

" Don't touch it, Sir Denis!" Malcolm's voice quivered. " For God's sake don't touch it!"

But Nayland Smith picked it up without hesitation.

" Forbes, you are new to the wiles and ways of Dr. Fu Manchu. Cunning and ruthless to all who stand in his way. Treacherous in all but one thing. He never breaks his word — for good or evil. In this, Forbes, lies his great strength . . ."

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If you would like your newsagent to hold (or deliver) EWMM each month, complete form below and hand to him.

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THE VAQUIER CASE

EDGAR LUSTGARTEN

This vivid and dramatic case is taken from a broadcast and now published for the first time

THE CASE of Jean Pierre Vaquier occurred in 1924 and I believe it is well worth recalling; certainly I cannot think of any other that has a more sensational and melodramatic plot. It is the sort of plot that has to be true to get it accepted — read it in a thriller and it would seem far-fetched.

To start with, there are three main figures — a woman and two men.

Mrs. Alfred Jones was somewhere about forty; her two children were practically grown up. She was a person of considerable character and great vitality, who led a busy life. She not only looked after her home and family, but was an active business-woman in the catering trade. And, for some years, she had got along very well at this, well enough to give her husband a job as manager and pay him a wage of about £6 per week.

Alfred Paynter Jones is a rather shadowy figure, much the least colourful member of the triangle. Not a lot is known about him, except that he was inclined to drink to excess, a weakness that was intensified in 1923 when the Jones's took over a country hotel and public house in Surrey, the Blue Anchor Hotel at Byfleet. It was Alfred Jones' rooted habit, the morning after his drinking bouts, to try and revive himself with a dose of bromo salts. This harmless practice ultimately led him to an unforeseen, and cruel, and terrifying death.

Soon after they moved into the hotel there came a turn for the

worse in Mrs. Jones's business fortunes — so much so that, in the end, she had to come to an arrangement with her creditors. She worried and upset herself so badly over this that soon she was having something like a nervous breakdown, and her doctor felt that she ought to go abroad. Mr. Jones could not go; he had to stay at home to run the hotel, so, in January, 1924, Mrs. Jones set out alone for France. And it was at the Hotel Victoria, Biarritz, that she fell in with Vaquier. That moment was decisive.

Forty-three year old Vaquier, the third of this ill-starred trio, was more like a comic Frenchman on the stage than any of the Frenchmen I have ever met. Not a bad-looking fellow in his way, not unprepossessing, but somehow suggesting he wasn't altogether real, that someone had invented him to put in a revue. He had a black spade beard, thick black curly hair, thick black bushy eyebrows — all carefully brushed and oiled, for he was vainer than a peacock. He was perfumed, freely perfumed. He seemed to be almost always at a high pitch of excitement, talking as if he couldn't stop. He struck attitudes, he shrugged his shoulders he pulled faces, he twirled his moustache, he laughed loudly, he wept easily. To complete the picture, and to make him more than ever like the Frenchman of burlesque, Vaquier was crazy about women — and women, it must be admitted, were not indifferent to him. Certainly he succeeded in captivating Mrs. Jones.

She first encountered him in the lounge of her hotel, where he was employed to work the wireless set and so provide wireless concerts for the guests. This may sound rather an eccentric occupation, but it was the early days of wireless; Vaquier happened to be an electrical engineer and it was his own set that he was operating. His duties did not seem to be excessive ; he had ample leisure time for his own private pursuits, and he straightaway proceeded to lay siege to Mrs. Jones. She had no other claims upon her company, and she was very likely flattered by the warmth of his attentions. It began as a conventional flirtation — with a little extra spice added to it, perhaps, because they had to converse through a French and English dictionary. Still, that seemed sufficient to enable them to grasp what was in each other's minds. In the space of a few days, they passed from acquantances to intimates, and from intimates to lovers.

While it lasted, it was a thorough-paced affair, but of course, it could not go on for long. The day came when the lady had to return home. And although there was a very emotional parting

scene, I do not think Mrs. Jones was altogether sorry; it had been a holiday escapade and she'd had enough of it. I am sure she never intended to carry it any further; she meant to leave it behind in France. It was Vaquier, the ardent impetuous Vaquier, who could not contemplate ending the romance. Twenty-four hours after Mrs. Jones got back to England, Vaquier arrived in England, too. He sent her a telegram to say where he was staying, and she came up to meet him at his Bloomsbury hotel.

Her state of mind at this stage must be fixed clearly, because it has so much bearing on subsequent events. Back in England, back in her usual workaday world, Mrs. Jones found Vaquier something of a bore and a great deal of a nuisance. She had a lot of things to do, and she did not want to be bothered by a tempestuous Frenchman, chasing her, proclaiming violent passion. Nor had she the faintest wish to break up her home and her married life because of this intrigue. She wasn't ruthless enough, though, to break with Vaquier completely. So she went on meeting him secretly in London, hoping all the while — if I have sized her up correctly — that he would leave England before there was any damage done.

But Vaquier did not leave. Instead, he suddenly brought things to a head. One night, when he had been in England about a week, without warning, without luggage, almost without means, he presented himself at the Jones's country hotel, and asked to stay. Mr. Jones had just gone off for a short break; Mrs. Jones didn't quite know what to do. She had a shrewd suspicion that Vaquier was broke, and in the light of all that had occurred in the past month, she found it rather hard to throw him out into the street. In the end she permitted him to stay for the time being, saying her husband must decide when he returned.

Her husband did return, shortly afterwards — but he returned very ill with congestion of the lungs. He retired straight to bed, and for three weeks never left his room. Meanwhile, Vaquier had settled down; he had the run of the place, he took his meals with Mrs. Jones, and generally acted like a member of the household. Mr. Jones, when he began to get about, again, did not seem to mind. He had apparently no inkling of what had been going on; he accepted Vaquier with a sort of friendly tolerance. His attitude was all that the most touchy, the most exacting individual could desire.

But Vaquier was not much concerned with *Mr.* Jones's attitude. It was *Mrs.* Jones's attitude that concerned — and worried — him.

It so plainly disclosed the trend of her thoughts. She was not hostile, she was not even unfriendly; sufficient proof of this is that Vaquier remained without being pressed to pay. But there was nothing more than friendliness forthcoming. In fact, she made it clear to this infatuated clown that, for her, the amorous episode had closed; and that, as for the future, her mind was quite made up. She was not going off with Vaquier, she was staying with her husband.

This was the set-up existing when the Joneses gave a party after closing time one night.

There cannot have been many tavern jollifications that were afterwards so closely examined by the courts. But it is enough to say now that it was pretty alcoholic, and that Jones shipped a sufficient load to guarantee himself a headache upon waking. And the next morning, he went into the bar parlour, took down his own bottle of salts and mixed himself his usual dose to cure a hangover, drank it quickly.

The consequences of this simple action are appalling. He turned round in a fright: " My God," he said, " they're bitter." Mrs. Jones hurried over to inspect the bottle; she found not only salts in it, but crystals — long, thin crystals. She called out, too: " They've been tampered with. Quick, quick, some salt and water." But a process had begun that nothing could restrain — neither purges, nor emetics, nor the doctor when he came, a process of agonising bodily convulsions racing towards the dreadful culmination of asphyxia. Inside an hour, it was all over. The luckless Alfred Jones was dead.

Almost at once, the scientists took command. They discovered a fatal dose of strychnine in the body. They discovered traces of strychnine in the bottle, the bottle, which somebody had emptied and washed out. It did not look as though the death was accidental. For three weeks the police were on the job with their enquiries. Then they decided — they arrested Vaquier.

Now what was the case they could put against him? Point one; motive — of course he had a motive as lover of the wife, but motive by itself does not get very far. Point two: he knew —

because he'd seen it happen — that Jones usually took the salts after a thick night, but there were several others in the hotel who also knew. Three: his conduct. It had been rather odd that morning; Vaquier had come down very early and sat in the bar parlour instead of in his customary haunt, the coffee room. He would not even leave while the maids were cleaning it, though for everybody's benefit they suggested that he should. It may be that he came down early to put strychnine in the salts, and that afterwards he dare not leave for fear of a mistake — for fear that someone else would help themselves from Jones's bottle; it may be so, but there was no definite proof. Point four, his statements to the police, a whole series of statements, implying that a variety of other people did it. These could be a guilty man's attempt to shift the blame, could be an innocent man's attempt to shift suspicion. All these, then, are merely the make-weights of the case: Five and six are the points that count.

Point five was Mrs. Jones's affirmation that Vaquier had actually confessed. According to her, they had been left alone together and she had charged him outright, accused him of the murder. Vaquier, she said, had answered, "Yes — for you." This would be damaging, if Mrs. Jones's version was believed.

Point six, to be the Crown's main point, was the buying of the strychnine. Strychnine is not common currency. If somebody has died of strychnine poisoning and the case against a suspect is tested, one of the things done is to try to ascertain whether any strychnine has ever been in his possession. And there was no doubt that strychnine had been in Vaquier's. A London chemist, close to his Bloomsbury hotel, recognised him as a man who had sometimes called at his shop to purchase chemicals; once he had asked, among other things, for a quantity of strychnine, a small enough quantity if expressed in grammes, but more than enough to constitute a fatal dose. By law, the chemist was required not to sell poisons to a man he did not know, but Vaquier told him it was for experiments with wireless; and perhaps the chemist allowed himself to be persuaded. He did ask Vaquier to sign his poisons book, and Vaquier signed — 'J. Wanker.'

It was up to Vaquier to explain it satisfactorily, not to deny he had the stuff, but to show his having it was consistent with his innocence.

The vital issues took shape, issues that were going to confront counsel in the case. It would be the prosecutor's duty to make sure that Vaquier did not get away with a false explanation.

It would be the defender's duty, by all legitimate means, to undermine confidence in the word of Mrs. Jones. These two factors marked out the pattern of the two big cross-examinations at the trial.

The trial began at Guildford Assizes, 2 July, 1924, before Mr. Justice Avory. Sir Henry Curtis Bennett, K.C., led for Vaquier's defence.

Curtis Bennett was what is sometimes called ' a character '; his burly figure, his plump, rather quizzical face, his touches of homely humour — they put him on terms at once with the members of a jury. But with the plumpness and the homeliness went a very agile mind and very great gifts as a fighting advocate. And, as in his own words — words he used in court — he was out to attack Mrs. Jones's credit in every possible way; it would go ill with the lady if she had anything to hide.

Nobody could have missed the sudden heightening of tension you sometimes get in a crowded courtroom as on that first afternoon when Curtis Bennett rose to question Mrs. Jones. There was something in his bearing, something in the tone of his first words, something that gave notice plainly that the gloves were off.

" Do you remember," he asked " making a statement at the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions?"

" Yes," said Mrs. Jones.

" Was that on the twenty-ninth of April?"

" Yes."

" Ten days after Vaquier's arrest?"

" Yes."

" I want to know a little about that visit to the Director's office. The evening before, had you been told to be at the local police station first thing in the morning?"

" I had a message over the telephone."

" Did the police, in fact, send a car to fetch you?"

" They did."

" When you got to the station, did you see a number of officers?"

" Yes."

" Including the superintendent?"

" Yes."

" How long were you kept waiting at the station?"

" I can't say."

" Might it have been, two or three hours?"

" I've told you, I can't say."

" It was a very important matter for you, was it not?"

" Why for me?"

" Was it not important, this day when you were going to the Public Prosecutor's office to make a statement about your husband's death?"

" It may have been important, yes, but it was not important for *me*."

" Mrs. Jones. The night before, when you were told to be at the police station, weren't you nervous that in the morning *you* were going to be arrested?"

" I? Why? Why should I be nervous?"

The suggestion Curtis Bennett was making could be seen — that Mrs. Jones may have been tempted to paint things black for Vaquier in order to divert any suspicion from herself. He went on:

" When you left the police station, what did you understand was going to happen to you?"

" That I was going to be taken to an office in London."

" Did you ask to *what* office you were being taken?"

" No."

" Who went with you ?"

" Two police officers."

" On the way up to London, did either of them sit inside the car with you?"

" One did."

" Was it a silent journey?"

" Very silent."

" Still no questions as to where you were going?"

" No."

" Or why you were going?"

" No."

" H'm. When you did arrive at the office, how did you learn it was the Public Prosecutor's?"

" From the notice on the door."

" How long did you stay there?"

" I should think — I should think about ten hours."

There was an astonished gasp, all round. Curtis Bennett waited a moment for it to subside.

" Did you say . . . about *ten* hours?"

" Yes."

" Were you being interviewed all that time?"

" I had a lunch hour; otherwise I was."

" I should think you began to realise, then, it was an important matter?"

" I simply told them what I knew."

" For ten hours?"

" Yes."

There was no doubt about it — Curtis Bennett, with very little to go on, had created an atmosphere less favourable to the witness, an atmosphere in which the advocate can launch more advantageously his general attack.

This attack proved to be sharp and many-sided. He challenged first Mrs. Jones's financial honesty, asking about a sum of £800 that had helped her husband to purchase his hotel.

" Where did it come from?" he demanded.

" I really couldn't tell you," answered Mrs. Jones.

" You really don't know at all?"

" I do not know at all."

" Wasn't there eight hundred pounds missing in your bankruptcy?"

" I couldn't tell you."

" Just think."

" There was nothing missing. Nothing that I'm aware of."

" Was it alleged that there was?"

" I don't think so."

" Really?"

Curtis Bennett challenged her morals, too, hinting at her unfaithfulness, not only with Vaquier, but with another man.

" He was a very great friend, wasn't he, and visited you often?"

" He was a friend of my *husband's*."

" Are you trying to make a distinction that he was not a friend of yours?"

" I'm not trying to make any distinctions."

Suddenly Curtis Bennett put it in blunt words:

" Wasn't that gentleman your lover?"

" Never, never."

The defender next challenged her truthfulness on oath, taking for this purpose her previous sworn assertion that she had seen Vaquier early on that morning sitting in the bar parlour while it was being cleaned. She had gone down, Mrs. Jones said, to order

some hot water.

" I suggest to you," Curtis Bennett put it to her, " that you never went downstairs to order the hot water."

Mrs. Jones, who has been having a gruelling time, was not overawed.

" I wouldn't suggest that if I were you," was her reply, " because it isn't true."

" Was there a bell in your room?"

" Yes."

" Next door to your room was there a bathroom with hot water laid on?"

" Yes, there was. But would you allow me to explain why I went downstairs to order the hot water?

" I went downstairs because my staff aren't any too smart at answering the bell."

" I have already suggested that next door there was a bathroom."

" Yes, I — I didn't think about the bathroom."

Technically, that was a score for Curtis Bennett, and it was a long way from being his only one. His cross-examination was adroitly managed and it was resolutely pursued. But just as the best of doctors cannot cure an illness the patient hasn't got, so the best of counsel cannot strip off a mask that the witness isn't wearing. This is something that should be understood about cross-examination — the *really* honest witness cannot be torn to bits, not by Russell, nor by Carson, or by anybody else. He may have an uncomfortable, even a frightening time; he may be made on occasions to look rather a fool; but he cannot be made out either a liar or a rogue if, in cold reality, he's neither. Mrs. Jones had told the court the truth, and, except for her admitted lapse with Vaquier, nothing she had done could be raked up to her discredit. So the advocate for all his skill, could not demolish her: she came through a long duel without suffering serious hurt.

It was to be exactly the reverse with Vaquier.

All through the trial he had behaved like a ham actor, fussing about his personal appearance and using every trick he could think of to attract attention. When he got into the witness-box, of course, he was in his element; at last he had the spotlight turned constantly on him. He responded with a highly theatrical

performance, so much so that he and the interpreter sometimes resembled a music-hall artist and his stooge. But, meanwhile, of course, his counsel was drawing forth his story — including his reason for purchasing the strychnine. It was to oblige someone, Vaquier said, to oblige a solicitor, a friend of Mrs. Jones. This solicitor wanted strychnine to destroy a dog. One evening in the blue Anchor he asked Vaquier to get it, and gave him a pound note to cover the expense. According to Vaquier, he did as he was asked, he handed the strychnine over and never either saw it or thought of it again.

The Attorney-General, Sir Patrick Hastings, K.C., who is leading for the Crown, had just begun to question the accused. There was nothing of the barnstormer about him. His manner was quiet, his voice smooth and rather purring. He was cool, self-contained, even it can be said, a trifle offhand. And yet he had a mesmerising quality about him — a quality which, I say at once, was no more than is fitting, for Sir Patrick Hastings unquestionably ranks among the greatest jury advocates the Bar has ever known. It was not often that you came across him in the criminal courts. But through the accident of politics, at this particular moment in 1924, he happened to be senior Law Officer of the Crown, and a tradition had gradually grown up that a Law Officer should prosecute in every poisoning trial. And so, here was Vaquier being cross-examined by one of the great masters of cross-examination.

There are two kinds of cross-examination. There is the kind that brings out facts that were not previously known, and there is the kind that puts the known facts in a clearer light, so that one can see what inferences to draw. The questioning was of this kind, the less showy kind, but in many ways the more subtle.

Just consider it, so restrained, so simple, so deceptively easy:

"Did you know that strychnine was a deadly poison?" asked Sir Patrick.

"Yes," Vaquier replied.

"When did you first meet the solicitor who asked you to buy the strychnine?"

"Three or four days after my arrival at the Jones's hotel."

"Did you speak to him?"

"No."

"When was the next time you saw him?"

"The following Sunday."

"Was that the time he asked you to buy the strychnine?"

"Yes."

"So the person who asked you to buy the strychnine was somebody to whom you had never spoken before."

"Correct."

"Did it strike you as peculiar that a person you had never spoken to in your life should ask you to buy a deadly poison?"

"No."

"At that time you spoke no English, did you?"

"At that time, no."

"Did he tell you where you could find a chemist who spoke French?"

"No."

"Does this solicitor carry on his practice in London?"

"Yes."

"Do you know of any reason why he could not buy the poison for himself?"

"He told me he was very busy."

"He wanted the strychnine to kill a dog?"

"For a dog."

"And he gave you a pound?"

"He gave me a pound."

"Did that strike you as a large sum of money to buy strychnine for a dog?"

"He perhaps had no change."

"Did you ever give him the change you must have got when you bought the strychnine?"

"No; he never asked me."

"How much did it cost, the strychnine that you bought?"

"I don't know — I paid the bill for everything together."

"Then if the solicitor had asked you for the change you would not have known how much it was?"

"No."

"Had you ever signed the book when you had been to that chemist before?"

"No."

"Did you know you were signing a poisons book?"

"I was told to sign a book."

"What did you think you were writing your name for?"

"I did not write *my* name."

"What did you think you had been asked to write your name for?"

"I attached no importance to it."

"If you attached no importance to it, why didn't you sign your real name?"

"Because I had been told that when you buy poison you never sign your own name."

"Who told you that?"

"The solicitor."

"Did it strike you as odd that a complete stranger, who wanted to poison a dog, should be telling you to sign the poisons book with a false name?"

It was absolutely courteous, absolutely fair. And absolutely deadly. It was more than clear that Vaquier was lying up to the hilt; and it was clear to the jury that tried him.

Looking at it from the logical and legal point of view, there is no cause to lament the fate of Vaquier, who ended his days upon the scaffold at Wandsworth Prison, 12 August, 1924. This is not one of the doubtful cases, never was a man's guilt more adequately proved. Justice was undoubtedly done. But that does not altogether obscure the human tragedy, the tragedy of these three people, all in middle life, two of whom met violent death and the third of whom was widowed, all as a result of an unpremeditated folly. And how slenderly wrought is the chain of circumstance. If only Mrs. Jones had gone to Monte Carlo instead of to Biarritz. If only she had stayed at a different hotel. If only the management hadn't fancied wireless concerts. If only . . . if only . . .

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Like *EWMM* . . . ?

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You will find that the *Readers Say* page welcomes letters with something worth-while in them.

And we like controversial topics, even if we do not take sides . . . say what you like (within reason !) in *your* pages.

Profit and Loss

From the account book of Captain Will Bargood, of Ipswich, is taken this absorbing story of one of his fleet of smuggling luggers

1st Voyage of	£	s.	d.
The 'Stour' — built at Dovercourt, May 28th, 1787 — purchased of Simon Simpson for £798 12s. 0d. — sailed in her myself to Lisbon, June 9th, 1787 — profitable cargo — cleared deducting all expenses	496	0	0
Ditto, September 9th, 1787 — cleared	324	0	0
November 12th: Lost spars, anchors, and part of cargo — James Jordan and Sam Smith washed overboard — profit only	23	0	0
February 18th, 1788: Appointed Charles Easto to command her — 12 men — Amsterdam — good run — cleared 283 tubs of real moonshine — 442 bales — 18 tea-chests — 6 cwt. of tobacco — profit	416	0	0
March 23rd: Heavy gale — hard pressed by the rev. cutter — tubs overboard with sunken floats and chains — ran for Helvoet Sluys — escaped — recovered cargo — landed it at Sizewell Gap — profit	223	0	0
May 10th, 1788: Valuable cargo of nutmegs cleared off, and sold well — profit	647	0	0
July 18th: Ditto — Captain Easto ashore — watched — got off — fired upon by the coastguard — wounded — unable to command — John Luff appointed — stout fellow — crafty — good! good! — well appointed — made a good hit — brought cargo of Hollands — rum — profit	307	0	0
September 9th: Caught in a gale — put back.			
September 28th: No go — hard run — lost all — vessel escaped — three men killed, Simon Keeley, Thomas Burder, Will Woodard — better luck next time!	0	0	0
January 1st, 1789: Good beginning — all ashore — cargo safe — Easto recovered — two new boats — sent a present to Squire Norris — well			

Entry						
taken — cleared profit				432	0	0
April 4th: Got aground on the North Veer — off safe — loss of rudder and mainmast — cargo damaged — carpets — cloths — linen — silk — damask — cleared, after losses, profit				98	0	0
June 27th: Mutiny on board, near the Dogger Bank — Captain Easto attacked — John Luff and five men fought for the ship — four killed, three wounded — home to recruit				0	0	0
September 10th: Sailed to the North — Baltic — cargo, skins — returned seas about — cleared profit				105	0	0
January 5th, 1790: All well — cargo landed — profit				371	0	0
April 7th: Ditto				300	0	0
July 3rd: Desperate engagement ashore — narrow escapes — two men taken — well bribed — expenses paid — kept well in prison — escaped — joined crew again				0	0	0
October 10th: Made a good voyage — lost one man — cleared profit				470	0	0
February 16th, 1791: Lost Captain Easto — steady man — shot on shore in the night — four men to eight — two coastguards killed — Luff brought cargo home — landed it — profit				220	0	0
April 3rd: Appointed Will Laud to command — John Luff mate — landed cargo Hollesley Bay — profit				340	0	0
July 3rd: All well — cleared				240	0	0
November 19th: Ship ashore — Felixstowe Beach —strong party of coastguards attacked the men — 9 killed — Luff escaped — Laud wounded — expected to die — ship taken — condemned — crew broken up				0	0	0
Total profit of this ship				5,012	0	0
Cost	789	12	0			
Repairs, pay, etc.	840	8	0			
	1,639	0	0			
deduct				1,639	0	0
paid me				£3,373	0	0

Special Blend

BILL KNOX

For Constable MacGrigor there would always be a happy memory when he thought of Loch Lomond

WHEN IT COMES to whisky there are drams and drams. And the best of the drams these days go abroad for export. I just hope the folk in those far-away places appreciate what they're getting.

I saw some of that export-only whisky this week, all right. Saw it and sniffed it — stuff like poetry. Stolen, of course. And it was young Johnny Murray, my radio-man in Car One-Five, who recovered it with a wee bit of help from yours truly, Constable Finlay MacGrigor.

There were two hundred cases of the whisky, which equals two thousand four hundred bottles. And that's well on the right side of £3,000 in anyone's money.

We began talking about it, Johnny and I, last Tuesday afternoon, just as we were leaving the Headquarters garage, to start One-Five on her patrol rounds — we'd been allocated a spell covering the Glasgow docklands over on the Govan side of the river.

"That whisky theft was a smooth operation," said Johnny, starting a new page on our radio log sheet.

"It was indeed." I steered the car into the traffic flow in Saltmarket. The sun was shining, though there was a hint or two of cloud creeping in. "How long is it now, Johnny?"

"Since it happened? A week tomorrow." He always has things like that at his fingertips. Still, I should have remembered. We had to do a couple of hours overtime because of it.

The liquor concerned was eighty-six percent proof Broomfire Special Blend, a brand you don't see on the home market. It went by the lorry-load from a Glasgow blending warehouse to the docks, then was put aboard a cargo ship, next stop New York.

At least, that's what usually happened. This particular lorry load's destination changed when the driver, slowing for a sharp

turn near the dock gates, had his car door wrenched open by a tall, thin man with a silk stocking mask over his face . . . and, what was more important, a big old-fashioned revolver in one hand.

The lorry driver had a wife, children, and a half-share in a roll-up bet on that day's three-thirty race. So he did exactly what he was told — and who could blame him?

Well, Car One-Nine found the lorry abandoned in a back lane three hours later. The cases of whisky had vanished — and there had been no trace of them since then, even though Headquarters put a deal of pressure on the divisions and asked for help from all the county forces round about.

The thieves, whoever they were, had taken considerable trouble to cover their tracks.

Still it was past history on that Tuesday afternoon, and we had our patrol area to look after. For once the city was quiet enough and after a couple of hours with only the usual routine radio checks it looked like staying that way.

Then, when we were travelling along one of the back streets, near the docks, things began to change.

Johnny saw him first — a small, rather grubby lad of eight or nine wandering along the pavement swinging an empty bottle in one hand.

" Matt . . ." I looked where Johnny was pointing, and felt a bit of a tingle run up my spine. They'd shown us a sample bottle of Broomfire Special Blend at Headquarters, and no other whisky I've known is produced in that cube-and-globe type of bottle with cherry tinted glass.

I brought One-Five to a halt beside the youngster.

Johnny got out and walked over to him. I wound down the window and listened.

" Hello, son."

" Hello." The youngster looked at him with an equal mixture of caution and interest.

" Eh . . . where'd you get the bottle, son?" asked Johnny in a mild voice.

The youngster shrugged. " Found it, mister." Then, deciding there was no harm in telling more, he volunteered: " I'm taking it home for my dad. He makes them into table-lamps."

" It's a nice colour," agreed Johnny. " I'd like to buy it."

" Well . . ." The youngster pondered for a moment. " My dad usually gives me sixpence for them."

" I'll make it a shilling," said Johnny. He paid up, and the bottle changed hands. There was no label on it, but it was the real thing all right.

Johnny produced another shilling and held it casually in the palm of his hand. " Know where there are any more of these bottles, son?"

" Aye." The youngster took the shilling first. " There's a pile of them lying behind the pub in Empire Street. I'll go and get you some of them if you want."

We told the young bottle tycoon we'd have a wee look for ourselves.

The pub was called the Hydra's Head, and the manager was a burly little fellow named Paddy Gauld. He was an ex-boxer, tough as tanned leather — I'd heard of him as someone not given to standing any nonsense from his customers.

First of all we took a look around outside. We found about a dozen more of the bottles buried in the rubbish bins in his back-yard — every bottle with the label carefully removed.

That was enough. In we went. Paddy Gauld was behind the bar, tidying glasses and generally getting the place ready for opening time, which was only a few minutes away.

You couldn't say he was pleased to see us. And at first he tried to tell us he didn't know anything about how those bottles had found their way into his rubbish bins. But we talked on for a spell and at last he capitulated.

" Ach, all right, I bought them in," he admitted. " Maybe I was a mug, but the price was a bargain."

The price always seems a bargain — at the time. There'd be a lot fewer thieves on the go if the folk who bought their loot knew the trouble they were buying along with it.

" I suppose this means the pub's in real trouble now as far as the licence is concerned," said Paddy ruefully.

" It's not my job to decide that," I told him. " Tell me, why did you take the labels off the bottles? Surely you knew the bottles were unusual enough to be spotted on their own?"

" The labels had been taken off before I got them." His face was growing gloomier by the minute. " Even so, I knew I couldn't sell the stuff straight over the counter, so I poured it all into one of the bulk stock kegs."

"You thought you could have made a wee bit of money on the side, is that it?" asked Johnny.

Paddy nodded. "There's a difference between being a pub manager and a pub owner. I could have used some extra cash."

The next stage, getting him to tell us who'd supplied the whisky, took a little longer. But at last he came round.

"Ach, it was a fellow called Dunky Cowan. He brought the stuff in two nights back, twenty bottles of it. I'd thought of taking more from him but — that's finished now, eh?"

I nodded. A few things were probably finished for Paddy Gauld all because of those twenty bottles and the apparent chance of making a few pounds.

"Where do we find him, Paddy?"

That was easier than we'd expected. Dunky Cowan ran what's politely called a one-man salvage business. He was one of these fellows who used to give you balloons for jelly jars, except now it's goldfish in plastic bags instead of balloons — and they're looking for things like old furniture or scrap metal.

According to Paddy, Cowan had a small blue van with a home-made body and he usually looked into the Hydra's Head for a drink about six, just before he went off for the night. Paddy didn't know where he lived, except that it was out of town somewhere.

Well, we'd got so far on our own. I looked at Johnny, and knew his mind was working along the same lines.

"We'd appreciate some help," I told Paddy. "Mind you, it won't make any difference to whether you're charged or not. But if you help us, then we'll make sure the fact is remembered."

He scratched his chin sadly, then sighed: "What do I do?"

"Just act naturally when he comes in. If he asks about another delivery say, yes you want it — and that you'd like it tonight."

"That's all?"

"That's all. But Paddy, if you tip him off we've been here then we can remember that, too."

We left him. Once we'd moved the car a few streets away, Johnny called Headquarters from a public telephone box. Ay, there's some things we don't talk about on the radio because of a habit some newspapers have — a habit of just accidentally having a radio receiver tuned to the police network.

As I said, it was a quiet day and the C.I.D. were a bit short-handed what with it being their annual golf outing to Troon. So at six o'clock we were sitting in Car One-Five, parked well away from the pub, yet at a place where we could keep an eye on its doorway.

Dunky Cowan was punctual in his habits. Exactly on six o'clock, just as it was becoming dusk, a rusty-looking blue van drove up and stopped outside the Hydra's Head. A small thin man in a greasy off-white raincoat got out. He went into the pub and was back out again inside five minutes. He climbed back into his van and drove off.

I started One-Five's engine, and we followed at a suitably discreet distance. After a couple of minutes we could guess where he was heading — the Clyde Tunnel.

Sure enough, the van turned into the brightly lit tunnel, and though we had to keep our distance we were still close enough behind to spot which way it went when it emerged on the north side of the river.

Cowan drove on in that very careful, steady way we often see when someone's nervous about getting into any kind of trouble. As it grew darker, his van's red tail-lights were guide enough for us . . . and as we crossed the city boundary and out into Dunbartonshire, Johnny got busy on the radio.

There's a thing a lot of folk don't realise. A policeman outside his own area is more or less a civilian, unless he's in what's termed ' active pursuit.' In the old days it could be a problem. Now, of course, county boundaries have a habit of being flexible and there are the Regional Crime Squads. But there's still a procedure to be carried out, and it's usual to have a local officer along when it comes to making an arrest.

Well, as we got out into open country I dropped One-Five further and further back in case Cowan was the kind who keeps an eye on his driving mirror. But we seemed lucky. He headed into the Dumbarton Boulevard. We picked up a Dunbartonshire sergeant waiting at the Dumbuck Road end, and very soon we were nearing Loch Lomond.

The Dunbartonshire sergeant, once we'd told him what it was all about, settled back and was well content to let us set our own pace. But he gave a grin when a few miles further on, the van suddenly left the main road and turned off down a narrow track.

" No need to hurry lads," he told us. " That'll only take him one place, down to the lochside."

I took it gently, parked the car at the start of the track, and then we walked the rest of the way. A nice night it was for it too, with the moonlight shining on Loch Lomond and the world a quiet, peaceful place.

The van was parked near the water's edge, and a little way off, moored at the end of a narrow jetty, sat an old houseboat. There was a light shining in its cabin and we could hear voices as we approached.

The voices stopped the moment our feet touched the houseboat's deck. Next moment the cabin door opened and a tall man in a dark blue jersey and overalls strode out into the open.

" Hey . . ." he stopped as he saw our uniforms.

" Mind if we come in?" asked Johnny — though we didn't wait for an answer.

Inside the cabin we found Dunky Cowan, who looked more than a little worried. But it was his friend, the stranger, who spoke first.

" What do you want? Look, this is my boat —"

" Fine," I told him. " Then you won't mind us having a nose around."

" What for?" asked Dunky in a voice that was more of a squeak than anything else.

" Whisky," said Johnny. " Two hundred cases of it. One of your customers decided to tell us about it."

Dunky's face whitened, but the other man just grunted. " Whisky? Well, I could ask if you've got a search warrant. But go ahead. You'll find nothing here."

We didn't, though we prowled that houseboat from stem to stern. You can't hide two hundred cases of whisky in a corner, but there wasn't even a bottle-cap visible.

" Satisfied?" asked the boat-owner.

We weren't — and I had the stirrings of an idea. The empty bottle we'd collected from that wee lad down near the docks had had no label. Paddy Gauld had told us Cowan had delivered the bottles without a label. Yet keeping the whisky in those very distinctive bottles was an equal giveaway.

So maybe Dunky and his friend had taken off the labels for another reason, in case they floated off . . .

" Johnny, if we got a boat-hook and had a bit of a poke around in the water underneath this hulk . . .

That's when Dunky Cowan tried to disappear through the cabin door. But the Dunbartonshire sergeant was there, filling it in

a way a mouse would have found hard to get past.

Aye, once we'd sorted out our two customers the rest was simple enough.

They'd loaded the whisky from the first lorry onto another they'd hired, and had brought it down to Loch Lomond. Then they'd taken off the labels, just as I'd thought, and had put the bottles in the water — nice and safely stored, or so they thought.

Dunky had unloaded the equivalent of some dozen cases in the days that had passed. But — well, we got back the rest. And we found that revolver, a harmless old war souvenir even though it looked so dangerous.

That whisky in the water reminds me a bit of the song about the fellow who wished Cambeltown Loch was whisky.

But Loch Lomond 86 percent proof? Now that would be a real tourist attraction!

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Some EWMM Contributors . . .

Margery Allingham. Greatest living woman crime novelist, who published a successful adventure tale at 16. *Death of a Ghost* (and Albert Campion) made her famous. Her latest, *The Mind Readers*, very high in the selling charts.

Barbara James. Originally an actress. Took to writing and has published about seventy short stories and two books. Now back in acting again, as well. Lives deep in the heart of Devon.

Kerry King. South African, born and bred. Solicitor for ten years in Natal; gave up the law to write, last year. Gaining ground fast as a short story writer and radio playwright.

Bill Knox. Professional newspaperman and journalist. Constant traveller, works a lot for television. Born in Glasgow, 1928. Lives in Ayr. His new thriller is just out. Appears frequently on Scottish T.V.

Edgar Lustgarten. Famed for books, radio, and television feature programmes. Educated Manchester and Oxford (was President of the Union Society). Lives and works in London.

Sax Rohmer. Irish born, real name Arthur Sarsfield Ward. Died in 1959. Prolific writer who successfully turned out everything from musical comedies to horror and suspense books. Dr. Fu Manchu is even more famous than his creator.

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.

Jeffry Scott. Expert writer of science-fiction, now turning as well to crime and espionage stories. Lives in Surrey.

period piece

THE MISSING CENTURION

ANONYMOUS

First published in 1862 *this vivid story contains all the elements of Victorian melodrama — danger, evil, magic, mystery, oppression, and, from the junior priest, some very refreshing cynicism*

"HOW cursedly hot it is," muttered the Centurion Septimius to his lieutenant, grave old Lepidus, as he lay half stripped in the shade of his tent, longing for the Northern wind.

And he might well say so. The place was Syene, the time the month of August, and the almost vertical sun was pouring down his rays with a fierceness such as the Roman officer had never felt before.

Septimius and his cohort had been marched up to Syene to hold in check the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, who, servile in general, and little recking then as now who was their master, provided the taxes were not too heavy, had been stirred up by the priests to a state of most unwonted agitation, in consequence of some insult offered by the Roman soldiery to the sacred animals of the district.

The palm-trees were standing motionless, not a breath stirring their long pendent branches; the broad, swollen Nile was glittering like molten metal as he rolled majestically to the sea. In the background the steep sandy ridges and black crags were baking in the sun, and the only sound that broke the silence was the roar of the distant cataract.

"Curse these Egyptians and their gods," said Septimius. "I only wish I had the bull Apis here to-day, or that lumbering brute Basis which pretty Cleopatra used to worship at Hermonthis and I would see how *he* could stand this weather. I say, Lepidus, a steak cut out of Apis would be a blessed change for us from those eternal scraggy fowls that they feed us on. How snug the fat brute looked in his temple at Memphis. I only wish the Emperor's Centurions were put up half as luxuriously."

"Hush," answered Lepidus, his second in command, "you shouldn't ventilate those free-thinking opinions of yours so openly. Whatever you *think*, keep a check on your tongue, for the old priesthood is jealous and powerful even yet, and strange stories are told of their secret doings."

"A fig for the priesthood! What care I for Apis or Osiris either? I am a Roman citizen and a Roman soldier. I fear no man but my superior officer, and I know no god but the Emperor."

"Mark my words, Antony was a greater man than you, Septimius, and *he* bowed the knee to Apis and Osiris too; why, they say he was consecrated himself, and stood high in the priestly ranks, and yet he crouched like a beaten hound to old Petamon, the priest of Isis, and obeyed his very nod. I have heard strange things of that Petamon; men say he knew the old Egyptian secrets and could raise the very dead from their long sleep to answer him. And his grandson and successor is a mightier enchanter than his sire. It was he that stirred up these poor Egyptian slaves almost to rebellion not ten days ago, because one of the legionaries broke the head of a dirty ape that he caught stealing the stores. They say he is at Philae just now concocting some new plot; so, my good fellow, *do* keep your eyes open and your mouth shut — if you can."

Septimius laughed, half good-naturedly, half contemptuously; and turned in to take a nap, while Lepidus went round the sentries to see that none were sleeping on their posts.

It was evening, the sun had set some half-hour before; and the sky, after melting through all the hues of the rainbow had merged in one delicious violet, in which the clear moon and the planet Venus were shining with a glorious light such as they never attain in duller climes, and throwing long, quivering, silver reflections across the dark waters; the soldiery were preparing for their

night's rest, and the country people had already forgotten all their cares in sleep. The silence was broken only by the baying of dogs and the howl of a distant jackal when Septimius, shaking off his drowsiness, left his tent to saunter through the village and see how his troop were faring.

The beauty and stillness of the night tempted him to extend his ramble. The few dogs he met shrank cowering from before his tall form and the clank of the good sword at his side, and in a few moments he was alone in the desert. He had more than once followed the same track towards the now silent quarries, where the old Egyptians once hewed those blocks of granite which are a wonder to all succeeding ages. When he had marched over the ground once before at the head of his legionaries to check an incursion of one of the marauding desert tribes, the sky seemed brass, the earth iron, the sun was blazing overhead, scorching all colour and life out of the landscape; the heat, reflected from the black basalt and red syenite rocks, had beaten on his armour almost beyond endurance, while his stout soldiers could barely struggle on through the heavy sand, sighing and groaning for one drop of water where none was to be had.

How different it was now; the moon, hanging low in the heavens threw the long black shadows of the craggy rocks over the silvered sand; and the air was deliciously cool and fresh.

So he wandered on till he reached a huge boulder, on which some old Pharaoh, now forgotten, had carved the record of his marches and victories. The figures of gods and kings were half obliterated, but the Centurion stood trying to follow the mouldering lines in idle curiosity.

" Be their gods true or false," muttered he, " they were great men, these Egyptians, and their works are mighty."

As he turned round a huge crag behind him was shaped out by the uncertain moonlight into the figure of a colossus seated on a throne, such as he had seen at Thebes, on his way to Syene, and that so distinctly that he was for a moment fairly startled. Ere long the light changed and the colossus faded away again into an ordinary rock.

From behind the boulder an old man advanced to him, and bowing low, with the cringing servility to which the lower classes of the Egyptians had been reduced by long ages of tyranny, prostrated himself at the feet of the Centurion, and in broken Greek craved a hearing. Septimius was good-natured and at a loss for occupation; he welcomed the interruption, and as he was,

like all well-educated men of his time, as well or better acquainted with Greek than with his native tongue, in a few kindly words bade the old man speak on.

" My lord Centurion," said the beggar, " I have followed your steps for days in the hope of obtaining a hearing. My tongue is Greek, but my heart is true. You have heard of the Egyptian priesthood and their wiles; not long ago one of your nation, a Centurion like yourself, fell into their hands, and they hold him captive in the neighbourhood. If you would deliver him come here to-morrow night, and come alone; I will tell you *then* what must be done, but I cannot now — farewell." Then he vanished behind the rocks.

" By Castor and Pollux," muttered Septimius, "it *may* be a trap set for me; yet surely they *dare* not touch a soldier of the Emperor's — a Centurion too," he said. " Ay, poor Claudius vanished a month ago; they said it was a crocodile, but none saw it — yes, it must be Claudius; go I will, let Lepidus say what he likes; but if I tell Lepidus he will have my steps dogged, or some such nonsense. I'll keep my own counsel; I'll go, and go alone." With a brisk step he turned on his heel and headed back to his quarters.

The beggar stood behind the rock, his black eyes glittering with the light of triumph; his long white beard fell off, and the rags dropped from his shoulders as he joined his companion who was lying behind the rock. He drew himself up to his full stature — Petamon, the son of Osorkon, and grandson of Petamon, the High Priest of Isis at Philae.

" Hey, Sheshonk," he said to his subordinate, " I have baited the trap for my eagle right daintily, and the noble bird shall have his wings clipped ere long. *He* mocks the divine Apis, does he, and blasphemes the Ape of Thoth! *He* thinks to come here and lord it over us all with his cursed Roman pride."

" Well done, Petamon," said Sheshonk, the assistant-priest, whose low forehead, heavy brow, and sensual lips were in strange contrast to his companions' face, " what a pity there is nobody here to listen to you, and that such eloquence should be thrown away upon me, who know as well as you do yourself, if the truth were told, that Apis is only a bull after all, and Thoth's ape is a very dirty troublesome ape; at least the one I had charge of at Hermopolis was."

" Peace, fool," replied Petamon, " the beasts are but beasts, that *I* know as well as you: but the beast is only the type of the

divinity, whom the vulgar may not know. Enough."

Next day Septimius was somewhat thoughtful; he retired early to his tent on the pretence of weariness, and when all was still he stole out of the town. The hour was the same, but how different this night was from the last. A tornado had been blowing from the south all day, raising the sand in huge clouds, which obscured everything and nearly choked man and beast with a penetrating and impalpable dust.

At last he reached the granite boulder, and crouching in its shade, sat the beggar. He rose as the Centurion approached, and beckoned him silently to proceed. Septimius obeyed and followed in silence, plodding through the deep sand. At last the beggar turned.

" Sir Centurion," he said, " the night is hot and the way heavy; let me ease you of your sword"; and before Septimius could remonstrate or resist, his nimble hands had unstrapped the belt, and slung the sword over his own shoulder. " What men you Romans are!" he continued slightly raising his voice as they passed along a narrow track between high rocks on either side. " You fear nothing in heaven or on earth. I verily believe you would *make beef-steaks of the Divine Apis* "; and he halted full in the way and seemed to grow before the Centurion's eyes.

The Centurion recoiled, and at the same moment two from each side, four strange white figures, each with the head of a hawk, surmounted by the disc of the sun, glided forth and laid hands on him. Septimius struggled like a snared lion; he threatened them with the wrath of the Emperor, and they answered with mocking laughter. He made one furious rush at the beggar who had betrayed him, and clutched him by the robe. Petamon quietly threw the sword far away over the sand and crossed his arms, while his allies advanced to the rescue. The prisoner was torn away, but not before he had rent off a fragment of the priest's robes, which fell upon the sand. His good sword was gone far beyond his reach, and he was bound and lashed to a rude litter which was brought from behind the rock. The four mysterious phantoms silently raised the litter and bore it across the sands, while Petamon, with a vigour remarkable in one so far advanced in years, led the way.

They had advanced along the sandy tract for some distance when suddenly the eye of Septimius who could just raise his head and look forward by straining painfully against his bonds, caught the glimmer of the moonlight on the water, and before him rose a

most unearthly, beautiful scene.

In the midst of a quiet lagoon lay the Sacred Island, Philae, girt in by hills on whose rugged sides the black rocks were piled in the most magnificent confusion — a green spot in the midst of a desert of stone — and, amid the Grove of Palms upon its shore, rose the roofs of temples and the tops of huge pyramidal gateways, while the solemn moonlight poured over all. A boat, manned by four more of the strange hawk-headed beings, was anchored at the shore. Silently the priest embarked, silently Septimius was lifted on board, silently the rowers bent to their oars, and in a few minutes they were passing along under the massy wall which rises sheer out of the water on the western side.

Suddenly the boat stopped and the Priest struck the wall thrice. Silently a portion of the wall swung back and disclosed a narrow stair, up which they carried the Centurion; and by a side door entered the outer court. Before them rose a huge gateway, on each of whose towers was carved the giant semblance of a conqueror grasping with his left hand a group of captives by the hair, while he lifts the right to strike the death-blow. They hurried on through the great Hall of Pillars up a narrow stair, and, opening a small aperture, more like a window than a door, thrust in the Centurion, and left him, bound hand and foot, to his own reflections.

Next morning Lepidus was early astir, and, after going his rounds, entered the tent of Septimius. It was empty, the bed had not been slept on, and there were no signs whatever of the tenant. "Mad boy," muttered Lepidus, "off on some frolic as usual. I must hush it up, or Septimius, great through his family interest be, will get a rough welcome from the General on our return. I must say he is sick. He gives me more trouble than the whole cohort put together, and yet I love the lad for his merry face and his kindly smile."

Noonday and evening came and went, and still Septimius was absent; and next morning, Lepidus, blaming himself much for having delayed so long, gave the alarm that the Centurion had vanished or been spirited away, and instituted a regular inquiry. Little information could be elicited. One of the sentries had noticed Septimius wandering away towards the desert but he was too much accustomed to his officer's little vagaries to take much

note of the fact. Doubt and gloom hung over all, for the Centurion, rash as he was, was a brave leader and a kindly, cheerful man. Parties were detached to search the neighbourhood in every direction, and Lepidus could only sit and wait for information, chafing inwardly at every moment's delay.

Towards evening one of the sergeants craved an audience of him, and when they were alone together produced the Centurions' sword and a piece of a heavy golden fringe. He had struck into the desert, come upon a spot where there were evident marks of a struggle, and picked up the sword and torn fringe lying on the ground. Sergeant and officer looked at each other, and the same fear clouded the faces of both.

"Petamon is at Philae?" inquired Lepidus.

"He is, sir."

"Then may Jove the Preserver help the boy, for he will need all his help. I see it now: his foolish scoffs at the gods have reached the ears of the priest, who has hated us Romans bitterly for long, and he has kidnapped the lad. We may be too late to save him. Muster the men at once and let us to Philae — *quick*!"

In half an hour the cohort were tramping through the sand under the still moonlight, and an hour more brought them to the banks of the quiet river. There was no boat, and they had to halt till morning broke.

At sunrise a boat was brought from the neighbouring village and Lepidus, embarking with a portion of his troop, was rowed over to the Sacred Island. He landed at a flight of steps on the northern side, and mounting them, halted, giving the quick imperative, "In the name of the Emperor." Soon a band of priests, headed by Petamon himself, appeared at the great gateway, and the Centurion, advancing briefly demanded to speak with their High Priest.

Petamon, with the rising sun flashing on his leopard-skin cloak and the golden fringe of his girdle, with his head and beard close shaven, in his linen garments and papyrus sandals, stepped forward.

"I am Petamon, the grandson of Petamon, High Priest of Isis. Roman soldier, speak on."

"I seek," commenced Lepidus; but he stopped abruptly. His eye had caught the glitter of the golden fringe, and he saw that at

one side a piece had been torn away. He sprang forward, and grasped the priest's throat. " Petamon, I arrest you on the charge of kidnapping a Roman citizen. In the name of Caesar Domitian. Soldiers, secure him!"

Priests and soldiers stood for a moment transfixed with amazement while Lepidus released his grasp on the priest's throat, and they stood face to face till the Roman almost quailed before the fierce glare of the Egyptian's eye. The other priests began to press forward with threatening gestures; they outnumbered the Romans three times, and, though the strength and discipline of the latter would have proved victorious in the end, might have offered a stout resistance; but Petamon motioned them back. " Fear not, children," he said, speaking in the Greek tongue, so that both parties might understand him, " the gods can protect their own, and *you*, Sir Roman, that have laid hands on the servant of Isis, *tremble*!" He walked forward and surrendered himself to two of the soldiers.

" Rather him than me," muttered Sheshonk. " The gods are all very well to fool the people with, but I doubt if Isis herself will save him under the Roman rods."

Petamon raised his eyes and met those of Sheshonk. A few words in the Egyptian tongue and Sheshonk, with a deep obeisance retired into the temple and disappeared.

The soldiers were despatched to search the island, and Septimius heard them several times pass the door of his prison, but his gaolers had thrust a gag into his mouth, so he could give no alarm. He lay there sick at heart.

The search was fruitless, as Lepidus had expected; and he commanded Petamon again to be brought before him. " Sir Priest," he said, " I seek Septimius the Centurion, who is or was in your hands; unless he is restored before to-morrow's sun sinks in the west you die the death."

" It is well," said the priest, while the mock submission of his attitude was belied by his eye; " the gods can protect their own."

Towards evening Petamon requested an audience of Lepidus, and when they were again together addressed him with more civility than he had hitherto condescended to use. He explained that it was the practice that the High Priest should, at certain seasons, sleep in the sacred recesses of the temple, and have the decrees of the goddess revealed to him in visions. He craved permission to perform this sacred duty; it might be for the last time. Lepidus mused for a moment and then gave orders that the priest, chained

between two soldiers, should have leave to sleep where he would.

The night closed in; the shrine of the goddess was illuminated; and the blaze of a hundred lamps flashed on the rich colours and quaint designs on the walls of the shrine. Before the altar stood Sheshonk, burning incense, while Petamon, chained between his guards, bowed for a time in prayer. By midnight the ceremony was over; Petamon, chained to a soldier on each side, lay down before the altar; the lights, all but one, were extinguished; the great door of the sacred chamber was closed. Lepidus lay down across it with his drawn sword in his hand, and soon fell asleep.

The sun was bright when he awoke and, hastily rising, gave orders to change the guard upon the prisoner, and himself entered the chamber to see that the fetters were properly secured. The lamp was burning dimly, and there lay the two soldiers: but *where* was the prisoner? He was gone — utterly gone. The fetters were there, but Petamon had vanished. Lepidus gave one of his soldiers an angry kick; the man neither stirred nor groaned; he snatched up the lamp and threw its rays upon the soldier's face. It was white and still, and a small stream of blood, which had flowed from a wound over the heart, told too plain a tale. It was the same with the other.

Perplexed beyond measure, Lepidus hastily roused the cohort. It was some minutes before he could get them to comprehend what had happened; and even then the men followed him most unwillingly as he snatched up a torch and hurried back. To his amazement the corpses of the soldiers were gone, and in their place lay two rams newly slaughtered, and bound with palm ropes; the fetters had also vanished. Shuddering and horror-stricken, he left the chamber, followed by the soldiers; and, as he passed out of the temple, met Sheshonk in his priestly robes going in to perform the morning services.

A panic seized the soldiery, in which Lepidus more than half concurred. They were men, they said; why fight against the gods? In half an hour they had left Philae and were marching through the desert to Syene, with weary steps, under the already scorching sun.

Terrified though he was at this tragedy, Lepidus was too honest to abandon the quest. The soldiers refused to assist further in the search, and he was left almost to his own resources. After much thought he published a proclamation in Egyptian and Greek offering a thousand pieces of gold for the Centurion, if alive; five hundred for the conviction of his murderers, if dead; and

five hundred more for the head of the priest, Petamon; and threatening the last penalty of the law on all men detaining the Roman a prisoner or sheltering his murderers.

His hopes were faint, but he could do no more; and having despatched a full report of the whole case to the Roman general at Alexandria, he waited, impatiently enough, his heart sickened with alternate hopes and fears.

During the next few days he was much disturbed by the sentiments of disaffection which he heard being muttered among the soldiers. Like all ignorant men they were superstitious, the events which had occurred at Philae had produced a deep impression on their minds, and they murmured almost openly at Lepidus.

This feeling was much increased by an old beggar-man who constantly haunted the camp. He had attracted the attention of the soldiers by some ordinary tricks of magic and was constantly telling fortunes and reciting prophecies all foreboding evil to the cohort if it stayed in the neighbourhood; and, indeed, foretelling the speedy and utter downfall of the Roman power.

Lepidus ordered the beggar to be brought before him, and when he came taxed him with attempting to incite the soldiers to mutiny, and sternly reminded him that the punishment for such an attempt was death. The old man listened quietly and calmly, crossing his arms and fixing his glittering eye, which seemed strangely familiar to Lepidus on the Roman officer.

After a pause he spoke — " My lord," and again the tone struck Lepidus as familiar to his ear, " I serve the gods, and you the Emperor: let us both serve our masters truly. You would have news of Septimius the Centurion? If may be that the gods will permit you to see a vision: shall it be so?"

A curl of contempt was on the Roman's lips as he answered: " You know the proclamation. I am prepared to fulfil its terms."

The old man shook himself like an awakening lion, and again the gesture struck Lepidus as familiar.

" I seek not gold," he said; " give me your attention, and keep the gold for those that need it."

" It is well," said Lepidus; " proceed."

A small stove was burning in the tent; the old man cast upon the charcoal some drugs that raised a dense smoke, and filled the

tent with a heavy perfumed smell.

"Look!" said the old man, pointing to the smoke; and retiring behind Lepidus he crouched upon the ground.

A circle of light formed itself clearly and well defined among the smoke, and in its midst Lepidus suddenly saw the image of the bull Apis, as he had seen him once before in Memphis, with all his gorgeous scarlet and gold trappings, and the golden disk between his horns. A moment and the image suddenly grew smaller and smaller, and vanished from the eyes of the wondering Roman.

Again the circle formed, and this time he saw the Centurion Septimius sitting at his tent door, and, stranger still, he saw himself in converse with him.

But suddenly, whether it was the perfumes or the excitement that overcame him he never knew, but the circle of light, the old man, the tent spun round and round, and he sank fainting to the ground.

When he awoke from his swoon the stove was burnt out, the old man was gone, and he hardly knew whether he had been dreaming or not. He felt dull and heavy and could scarcely rise. His servant entered with a light. He glanced at his finger, on which he wore his signet-ring, with which all important despatches must be sealed, and which marked their authenticity — it was gone. He felt in his bosom for the secret orders which the general had entrusted to him rather than to the headlong Septimius — they were gone too.

Back in Philae — on the fifth day after Lepidus so hurriedly left it — Septimius was still alive. A scanty allowance of bread and water was daily furnished him and his bonds had been somewhat loosed, but he had not seen the light of day since his capture, and his heart sank within him in hopeless despondency. Release seemed impossible, rescue hopeless. He could see no way out of his calamities, but by death. He had never seen or spoken to any one since his capture; invisible were the hands that had relaxed his bonds, and invisible the attendants who supplied his daily food.

Petamon had been stirring here, there, and everywhere, rousing priests and people, reminding them of old wrongs and old memories, and urging them to join in one strong effort, and expel the Roman despots.

The news of Lepidus' proclamation had just reached the Island of Philae. It was the turn of Sheshonk to officiate at the altar of Isis, and, while the incense was burning, he stood for a few moments wrapped in deep thought.

'Petamon is crafty and wise,' so his meditations ran; 'but Rome is strong, and we can never resist her. Better swim with the flood of the river and release that Centurion — and the gold, ay, the gold! — and the wrath of the gods, what of that? I have helped the trickery here for so many years that I hardly know whether there be gods at all. Petamon believes in them; but I am not Petamon. The gold is my god.'

The evening closed, the night was half spent, and Petamon, who had been away all day had not returned, when Sheshonk stole silently up the stair with a bundle under his arm, and, touching the spring, entered the dungeon of Septimius. The Centurion enquired in a languid voice who it was.

"A friend," whispered Sheshonk. "Hush, Sir Centurion, and hearken. Lepidus, your second in command, has offered a thousand pieces of gold for your safe return; do you confirm the offer?"

"Ay, and add a thousand to it," answered the Centurion. "I have an old father in Rome, who values his son at that sum ten times told."

"Good," said the priest. "Petamon seeks your life and in a few days will take it; you cannot be worse than you are, therefore, you can lose nothing by trusting me — will you do so?"

"I will," said the Centurion.

A knife was drawn across the cords which bound him, and he stretched his limbs. Cautiously the priest struck a light with flint and steel and lighted a small lantern, after which he produced from his bundle a pair of huge hawks' heads, surmounted by the disc of the sun, with great glass eyes, and a pair of white disguises, such as the original captors of Septimius had worn. The Centurion eyed them and muttered to himself. "So much for the hawk demons," proceeded to array himself in the disguise, while Sheshonk did the same. This accomplished the priest opened the door and they cautiously descended the stair. They met a young priest, but at a whispered word from Sheshonk he bowed and passed them by. They entered a small chamber on the west side; the priest touched a mark on the floor, and a trap-door opened at their feet, showing a dark stair. Down this they made their way, the priest, stopping for a moment to draw a heavy bolt on the

under side of the trap-door to impede pursuit. After some time the Centurion heard a rushing of water above him, the passage grew damper and damper, and the priest in a whisper explained that they were passing under the bed of the river. In a little while they again ascended a high flight of steps, another trap-door opened at the touch of Sheshonk, and they emerged in a small temple on the island of Snem. The priest silently opened the door, and they stole out.

The moon had set and the night was almost dark. Cautiously picking their steps they crossed the island, and found at the other side a small skiff lying at anchor, and two swarthy Nubian rowers in attendance; a few words passed between them and Sheshonk. " We must wait," he said, " till the day breaks; they dare not pass the cataract by night. Sleep if you can, and I will watch."

Septimius was too glad of the permission; he had slept but ill in his dungeon, and, taking off the heavy mask, he buried his head in his garments and fell fast asleep.

In a few hours the morning broke, and ere the sun was risen Sheshonk and Septimius were on board the boat. The rowers pulled stoutly at their oars, and they soon neared the cataract, whose roar became louder as they advanced. Before them lay a stretch of the river, fenced in on either hand with desolate rocky hills; here, there, everywhere, in the course of the stream jutted out the heads of black rocks, round which the water foamed and raced like the stream of a mill dam. The Centurion shut his eyes and held his breath; the current caught them; they were hurried helplessly along for a moment, stern foremost, and were on the point of being dashed upon a rock, when a dexterous stroke of one of the oars righted them: a rush — a tumult of waters — dashing spray and the roar of the current for a moment, then the boat floated again in calm water and the danger was past.

In a few moments they reached the Roman encampment. The Nubians, at a word from Sheshonk, pulled away up the stream, while the two hawk-headed ones hurried through the camp, to the no small wonderment of several drowsy sentries.

Lepidus was just awakening with the weary disheartened feelings of one who dreads impending misfortune, when the flap of his tent-door was thrown back, and the sleepy officer fancied he must still be dreaming when he saw a strange hawk-headed phantom rush into the room.

It was no phantom, for it hugged him close in his arms, and a voice — the voice of Septimius — issued, hollow sounding, from

the depths of the mask:

" Dear old Lepidus. I never thought to see your face again."

There was little time for greetings and congratulations. Sheshonk was urgent on them to complete their work and the legionaries, their fears dispelled by the reappearance of the young Centurion, hastened again across the desert to Philae, burning so hotly to wipe out the insult that had been offered to the Roman name that they never felt the sun.

Several boats were lying at the shore, and while Lepidus with the main body of the men made for the stairs upon the northern side, Septimius and a few chosen followers, under the guidance of Sheshonk, crept along under the western wall in a small boat and reached the secret door. It opened obedient to the touch of the priest, and silently they mounted the stair — they met the other party in the great Hall of Columns; the island seemed deserted — no living thing was to be seen.

Sheshonk's eye twinkled.

" Five hundred golden pieces for Petamon's head!"

" Ay, and five hundred more," said Septimius.

The priest beckoned them on. They entered the sacred chamber where Petamon had kept his vigil on that memorable night, and Lepidus half shuddered as he looked round at the familiar paintings on the wall. The altar was prepared and the fire burning on it. The priest advanced and set his foot heavily on one side of the step in front. Suddenly altar and step, solid though they seemed, rolled away noiselessly to one side, disclosing a passage beneath. The Romans leapt down, Lepidus hastily lighting a torch at the altar fire as they did so. The passage led them to a small room in the thickness of the wall, and throwing in the light of his torch, he saw the arms and accoutrements of the two murdered soldiers, and the fetters that had bound Petamon lying in a corner. Here the passage apparently terminated abruptly, but the priest raised a stone in the roof with his hand, and they crept up through the narrow aperture thus opened. and upon Sheshonk touching another spring, a square aperture opened, through which they glided into a chamber, and gladly hailed the light of day as it glimmered faintly through the door.

They searched the whole temple, but in vain; secret chambers they found more than one; even the dungeon of Septimius was opened, but nothing was discovered, and even the bloodhound sagacity of Sheshonk seemed for a moment at fault.

But his eye soon brightened, and he led them through the court

under the high painted pillars, and opening a door in one of the sides of the pyramidal gateway, proceeded up a long narrow stair. Suddenly a rustle of garments was heard above them, and they caught sight of the robes of Petamon, his leopard-skin cloak and his golden fringe, as he fled before them. The two Romans dashed after him like greyhounds on a hare, but as they reached the top of the staircase Septimius stumbled and fell, and so checked the pursuit for an instant. He recovered himself, but in that instant Petamon, casting back on his pursuers a glance of baffled malignity sprang from the tower, and in another moment lay, dashed upon the pavement of the hall.

The soldiers and Sheshonk, horror-struck hastened down, and were standing beside the body — Lepidus had just recovered from the finger of the priest the signet-ring that he had lost, and was in the act of drawing the roll of secret orders from his bosom — Sheshonk had raised his head-dress and was wiping the perspiration from his brow, when from aloft a sharp dagger was hurled with unerring aim. It cleft the skull of the traitor, and he fell, with scarcely a groan, on the top of Petamon's corpse.

The Romans looked up: no one was to be seen. With a party of soldiers they searched the huge gateway towers, but without a guide such a quest was hopeless, and they never traced the hand from which the dagger came.

Their main object was accomplished. Petamon was dead, and with him expired all chances of a revolutionary outbreak. Sheshonk was dead too; but as Lepidus said, *that* saved the good gold pieces.

The same evening they returned to Syene, and next day the camp was broken up, and the cohort embanked on the river and floated down to rejoin the garrison at Memphis.

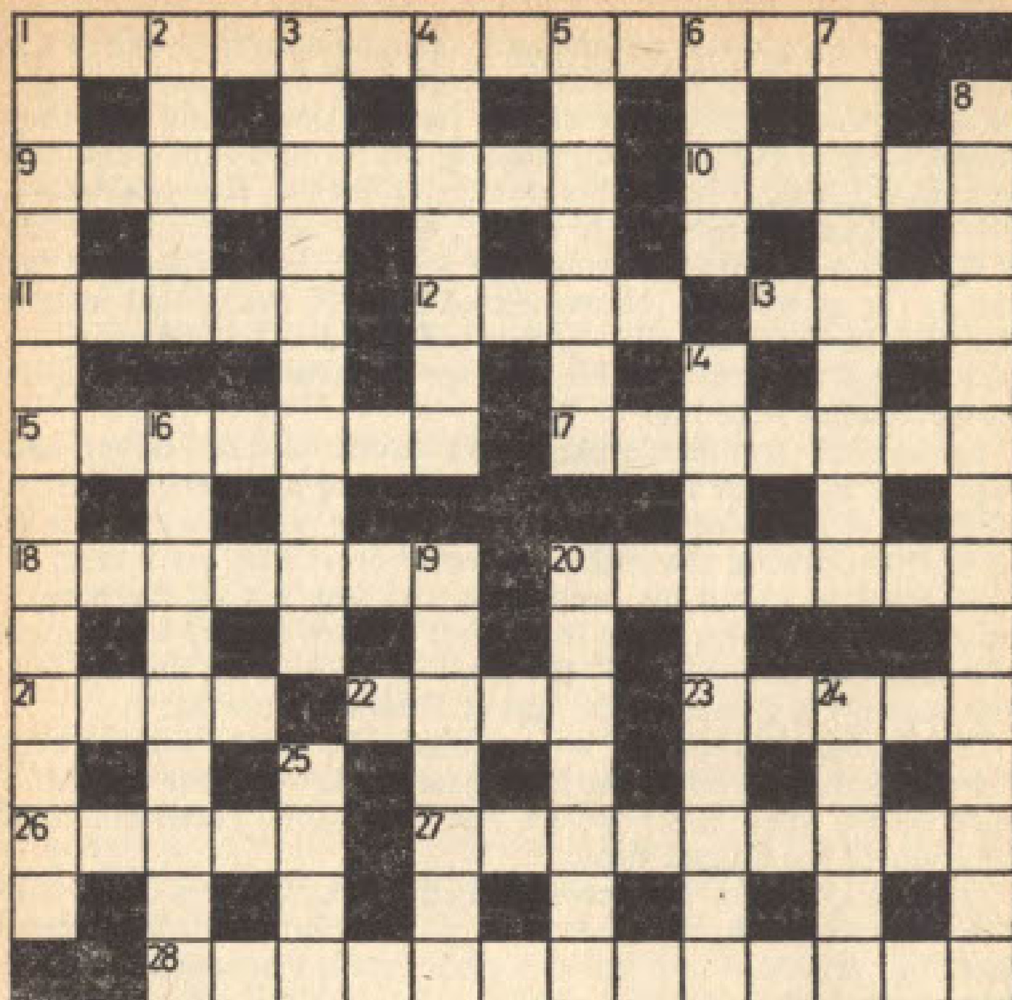
In six months Septimius and Lepidus left Egypt for good, and when they were fairly out of sight of land they seemed to breathe more freely.

" I owe you many a good turn, Lepidus, old boy," said the Centurion; " but I'll never admit, to the end of time, that Apis would not have made splendid beefsteaks."

" Whoever said he wouldn't?" retorted the other, his grim features relaxing into a smile; " only I think it would need a braver man than either you or I to eat them under the nose of old Petamon."

The wind began to freshen, and the ship headed to the deep sea, and towards home.

EWMM Crossword No. 13



ACROSS

1 To him detection is a science (13)
9 Midway look-see? (9)
10 A rope trick on stage! (5)
11 Gets one's deserts? (5)
12 Legal expression about a certain matter (2, 2)
13 Gaol break! (4)
15 Authorities often consulted at one time (7)
17 Happy lad on the beach? (7)
18 Only a minor injury (7)
20 The woman in the case . . . (7)
21 . . . of this kind? (4)
22 It is served but not by a waiter (4)
23 If bad it may have to be stopped (5)
26 Still with us (5)
27 Those that give us lifts in America! (9)
28 No longer any good at backing horses? (4, 2, 3, 4)

DOWN

1 Cliché true in fact but not necessarily in fiction (5, 6, 3)
2 Fatherless painter! (5)
3 Not having the courage of your convictions? (10)
4 Signori come from these (7)
5 Achieving progress (7)
6 One of those things men were once clapped in? (4)
7 Bet it was an EW title (3, 6)
8 The scene of a haunting story! (6, 2, 6)
14 Get yourself into someone's good books (10)
16 Taking out of circulation? (9)
19 Reap the benefit (7)
20 Like the best tip? (7)
24 Nothing on either side of a short volume for a moulding (5)
25 Change of name! (4)

(Solution will appear in our March issue.)

Once Upon a Future Time

JEFFRY SCOTT

When science fiction and the whodunit meet, the result is fascinating

SERGEANT GRODIGAN shot a longing glance at the patrol car, squatting so smugly on the roadway, thirty storeys below. The patrol car scuttled along on invisible wheels of compressed air, at speeds up to 130 miles an hour. Its driver had to make do with all too solid feet, and feet which had corns, at that.

Sometimes, quite often in fact, Grodigan thought he would like to spend his retirement in the car. It had piped music to soothe his weary, heard-it-all-before brain; and a scientifically designed contour seat.

The owner of the apartment block, a man called Fellin, sensed the policeman's discomfort. He said, with a trace of grievance: " Well, after finding that note by the body . . . it seemed the only thing to do. Call you, I mean."

Grodigan, saving energy, nodded once. Soon, he knew, the landlord would come up with the corny bit about thinking that human policemen had been abolished.

Fellin smirked at him. " It's been years since I saw one of you fellows. Vanishing race, cops. The way I hear it, computers are running you boys out of a job. Guess you're glad to get your teeth into a *real* crime."

Grodigan did not bother to comment. The only thing he wanted to get his teeth into was a steak. Not the type that grew in a laboratory tank, but an illicit chunk of beef from one of the black-market animals reared by bootleg farmers in cellars, under sun-ray lamps.

Fellin cleared his throat accusingly. " I'm trying to tell you about a *real* crime," he reminded the detective. It was evident that the phrase appealed to him.

Grodigan eyed him without enthusiasm. The man was a pest, infesting a near-slum while behaving as though he ran the latest subterranean luxury hotel. Yet his apartment block, an antique forty-storey affair built on the old system of stressed concrete, attracted few clients. Who, after all, would live in an apartment built in 1990, except from poverty?

" Crime?" Grodigan repeated. " According to the reports, Smith died of heart failure. Hell, he was one hundred and twenty years old — nobody lives forever."

The landlord bridled. " Oh, no? I'll have you know I'm close to the century — and since that heart graft, I've felt like a teenager . . . in every possible way." And Fellin gave a most unpleasant leer.

" Yeah, but you're not dead," said Grodigan, unable to disguise the regret in his voice.

Fellin nodded, eyes glinting. " Far from it. But Smith died here in his apartment, yesterday. And I found a note under the bed this morning."

Whatever their message, the sheets of paper he passed to the detective were oddities in themselves. Written by hand, not the product of a Lazy Pen — the gadget which turned speech into printed symbols.

Grodigan laid his own Lazy Pen aside while he stared at the paper. " Note? This looks like a full-scale manuscript," he observed sourly. " What sort of guy was this Smith, anyway?"

The landlord shrugged, eyebrows raising on the pale egg of his face. " Average."

" With a name like Smith, that's a real help."

The landlord accepted the challenge. " He was a retired engineer, I do know that. Had something to do with the last World's Fair, before Chicago went underground in the late nineteen nineties."

Grodigan stirred impatiently, making the fibre glass armchair vibrate. " So what makes you so sure he murdered somebody?"

Fellin's mouth worked for an instant. " It's all in the note," he spluttered.

" ' To whom it may concern,' " Grodigan read aloud. " Huh, darndest confession I've ever seen."

" I'm beginning to think Smith was the darndest tenant I've

ever had," the other man retorted darkly. "Go ahead and read the rest — it gets crazier by the line."

The detective sat in silence, eyes plodding through the sprawling thickets of bad handwriting.

I wish to clear my mind and perhaps my conscience by making this statement. By the time it reaches the authorities I will be beyond justice: a most pleasant state of affairs.

I killed Homer Biddler. At the time, my one concern was to outwit the police. Now, in the shadow of death, I feel he deserves a less enduring memorial than the one I gave him. Why should he rest secure through the centuries, while I vanish in a hygienic puff of smoke and ashes, at the expense of the city? Having reached this point, I realise the motive of my confession is not a qualm of conscience at all, but pure malice. Alive after a half century . . . astonishing!

Biddler was a wicked man, a shark with gold front teeth. Having bled me dry, he proposed to take my daughter '*in lieu of interest*.'

One night he came to my office at the World's Fair site, tossed a five dollar bill on the desk, and told me to stay away from my home until the following morning. So that he could 'collect his interest.'

I snatched a heavy ashtray from my desk, and smashed his skull with the second or third blow. The project on which I was working provided me with a perfect hiding place for the body. The police arrived far too late to search this area which I had chosen, and after prolonged enquiries, I was released. Now that it no longer matters, to me or anyone else, I can tell you that Biddler's corpse will be found by lifting—

Grodigan turned the page. And cursed. There were no more pages.

"Lift *what*?" he demanded blankly.

The landlord shrugged. "He must have keeled over and died right there at the bottom of the page. The stylo was on the bed, under his body. It leaked — ruined a perfectly good blanket. They cost money, even if you can throw them away at the end of the week. And Smith made his exit on a Monday."

Grodigan heaved to his feet. "Tough," he acknowledged drily. "Let's search this room of his."

The other man sniggered. "Sure. But I told you it was crazy — there are too many clues."

Half an hour later, Grodigan realised the landlord was speaking

no more than the truth. Smith's apartment was crammed with clues, each a little less sane than the previous one.

What sort of man, the detective asked himself, would bother to cherish a microfilm spool of the Bible and the Koran, along with a toy ingot of gold, a uranium rod, and a model nuclear missile?

Smith, the man who had murdered with success, had also preserved:

> a clockwork mouse;
> auto-erotic pills, illegal for the past thirty years;
> an atomic needle;
> a set of false eyelashes.

"To hell with it," Grodigan snarled.

"Of course, it must make sense to you, a trained investigator." Fellin was simmering with quiet enjoyment. "Smith told me he had to clear all this stuff out of something, once, to make way for something important. Does that throw any light?"

"Sure," said Grodigan bleakly. A couple of trunks still awaited attention, but he had taken enough for the day. Sealing the apartment with the department's shield, he fled to the patrol car.

Downtown, at police headquarters, Grodigan fed the lunatic data to SHERLOCK, the department's computer.

Within five seconds SHERLOCK burped and poked out a mocking tongue of pink tape.

Grodigan read it and sat down abruptly, feeling faint.

SHERLOCK said that since all United States crime records had been destroyed during the Third World War, nothing could be done about Smith's confession, whether or not it was genuine. By bothering to check the item, Grodigan had shown his unsuitability for detective work.

Conclusion: Sergeant Grodigan to be discharged forthwith, on full pension.

Grodigan ate a three-pound steak every day of his retirement. Finally, chomping contraband beef in a knock-twice-and-ask-for-Charlie joint in the cellars of police headquarters, he was attacked by acute indigestion and died shortly afterwards.

The world spun on and on. Then, one day, it stopped.

The travellers were only remotely humanoid. To them, war was a word. They lived and died for knowledge, not glory.

"This," said the first traveller, "is a wonderful moment." His green scales turned blush-pink with emotion.

" Fantastic," the second traveller agreed. " Until we happened on this debris, Planet Earth — the legendary third planet from the sun — was . . ." And he broke off in confusion.

" Exactly," the third traveller agreed. " It was a legend. A few scraps of an alien language. Nothing more."

The first traveller gazed out of the ship's armoured glass porthole. " To stumble on a fragment of a chip of a pebble of Planet Earth . . . and discover that it contains a whole treasury of material from the past of that planet. Miraculous."

The second traveller hooded his multiple eyes. " I don't quite understand what we have found. "

The first traveller was impatient. " It's quite simple, dear colleague. At some time, a great personage called The World's Fair buried a capsule made of the strongest material available to him. In it, he placed samples of artifacts and literature and so on, from his era."

The third traveller picked up a sheaf of photographs. " Here . . . it's all engraved on the side of the capsule. It bears the figures 8/5/1993. Our consultants presume that to be a date, meaningless to us."

The first traveller was bouncing with excitement. " Our engineers have contrived a way of breaking into the capsule. Come, let us see."

They scrambled away down the curving corridors of their spacecraft. Soon they were grouped around the time capsule. A humble fellow, moisture dripping from his comb and dull blue scales, stepped back.

" It is open, your worthinesses."

The travellers peered inside. They exchanged stares. It was the most disappointing moment of their lives.

" There has been a mistake," they said heavily, in unison.

Inside the capsule, the skeleton of Homer Biddler lay heaped in casual solitary repose. Its gold front teeth winked appreciation of a joke lost in centuries.

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CONVICTED criminals, sometimes of the violent side . . . are often able to reap a greater reward from a few short talks with a ghost writer than from a long life of crime.

— *The Police Review.*

Round the World with *EWMM*

(3) *SOUTH AFRICA*

The COLOUR of MURDER

KERRY KING

Another in our Crooks' Tour of stories from other lands specially written for EWMM; this time a whodunit rich in picturesque incident and background

ALTHOUGH IT WAS only seven in the morning, sweat was gathering along the small of Sergeant Cloete's back as he sat at his desk.

"Hey, Sarge, this bulletin says we've got to keep a look-out for stolen gold being sent out of the country."

Sergeant Cloete sighed. He glanced up at the young constable. "O.K. You keep a look-out for gold being sent out of the country," he said, and returned to the irritating paper.

Constable Klopper looked nonplussed. "I mean, it says so here," he repeated, lamely.

"I know," said Cloete. He frowned as he completed the form, then sat back, with his arms raised slightly. "It always says so. There's always gold being sent illegally out of this country." He paused, then, more kindly, he added: "Look, Klopper, we're four hundred miles from the goldfields. We're in the middle of the sugar belt. We deal with assaults and thefts and sometimes killings. You'll have to get used to it. Now, are you getting anywhere with that sugar stolen from the Ensani Sugar Mill?"

"No," said the constable, a little crossly. The two sat,

saying nothing. Sergeant Cloete had short, black hair with a good deal of grey around the edges. There was a permanent line on his forehead, made by his cap-band. Above the skin was white, below brown and weathered.

The telephone rang, and he stood up, short, neat and athletic, to answer it. He took the 'phone and said: " *Ja*? South African Police. Sergeant Cloete speaking." He listened, while his surprisingly soft brown eyes considered the shelves and pigeon-holes of the orderly, grey-green room. " Right. I'll come at once." He looked at the constable. " There's a body," he said, replacing the receiver. " At the Ensani Sugar Mill, funnily enough. A Bantu male."

As soon as Cloete and a native African constable arrived at the mill he went through a side entrance that led to the manager's office. He hated the thick, sickly-sweet smell of crushed cane and boiling syrup that got into his nostrils.

Rawlston, the manager, was standing outside his office talking to another man.

" Good day, Sergeant." Rawlston was tall and blackhaired, with a big, red face. They shook hands, because Rawlston always shook hands.

" Glad you could get here so quickly. The poor devil was done in right behind the storage room, and of course we've had to leave him lying there." Rawlston started ushering Cloete along the passage, while the other man followed.

" How was he killed?" asked Cloete.

" Stabbed." Rawlston put his hand on Cloete's shoulder. " Oh, I am sorry. This is Mr. Trench." He indicated the man following them. " Our new secretary."

Cloete shook hands with Trench, who was also tall, and wore glasses. But the outstanding feature about him was a head of silvery, glinting hair. Cloete had never seen anything like it.

" Mr. Trench," Rawlston said, " will be able to give you all the details. You will forgive me if I leave you, won't you?"

Cloete walked out into the haze of heat with Trench.

" Let me show you the way." Cloete had the feeling Trench wasn't any too pleased at having to go back to the scene of death, so he said: " Just point out where the body is, Mr. Trench, and then I'd be obliged if you'd send the constable who's in the van along there as well."

" Oh, right-ho." Trench's relief was obvious.

They stopped at the corner of a building that was part concrete,

part corrugated iron, and Trench pointed. " It's — he's behind there."

" Thank you." Cloete smiled at him encouragingly. " If I want you, where will you be?"

" In my office. Next to Mr. Rawlston's."

" Good. Thank you."

The body was sprawled out. The man had been wearing a blanket around his shoulders, and it was pulled over his head. Cloete lifted it, and looked at the dead African beneath. He was on his back, and at the base of his neck was a knife-wound.

" Let's find out who he is," he said to the African constable, Tukali, who had just arrived. Together they went through the pockets of the corpse and the leather pouch-belt he wore under his loose shirt. They found a little money, a copper wrist-band, loose tobacco and nothing else.

" No identity book," said Cloete. He meant the book all native Africans were obliged to carry. It contained name, address and every other particular necessary for identification. Cloete pointed to the blanket. " He wasn't a Zulu, anyway." Tukali shook his head. The Zulus never wore blankets, as did the Basutoes and some of the Xhosa.

They took the body back to the mortuary at the village hospital, where it would have to stay in cold storage until identified. For two days Cloete and two African constables asked questions at the mill compound, and at kraals in the surrounding district, with no success. Cloete was baffled by the lack of information. On the evening of the second day he met Rawlston at the mill.

" Any progress?" asked the manager.

" None," said Cloete. " I'm beginning to think it's a freak. The fellow had no identity book, and was probably on the run from the police somewhere. Perhaps he came here to get assistance from some of his old pals. They weren't too pleased to see him, so, wham!" He felt tired. " If only I could identify the body, we could close the wretched file, or hand it over to the C.I.D. in Durban for long-term investigation. Well, I'm off. I can't do much more today."

As he was walking to his van, Cloete saw a tall figure approaching. It was Barney Winder, a local planter and bachelor who played polo as well as he played women — or so it was said.

" Hey Barney." Cloete called him over, gave him a description

of the dead man, and asked him to make enquiries.

" My dear fellow, too delighted." Winder's rather hooded eyes sparkled gaily. " I'm off to a polo tournament in a couple of days, but I'll see what I can do for you." Cloete left him wondering how Barney made enough money to keep horses and an aeroplane on his smallish farm.

Back at the station, Klopper was waiting for him. " Listen, Sarge, I've got something for you. I found that stolen sugar."

" Ah! We're making progress. Well done —"

" No, listen, Sarge. I haven't finished. I found these sacks while I was investigating something else. They were in the cane near a kraal about ten miles from the mill. I asked the people there where the sugar came from. At first they didn't want to talk, then one of the women — she probably thought they might be blamed for it — told me that this sugar had been hidden by a man they didn't recognize."

Cloete looked interested. " So?"

" I got his description. It's the dead man, Sarge. They kept quiet about the sugar because they didn't want trouble."

" Thanks Klopper. At least we've got something to work on. I'll take those bags of sugar with me to the mill when I go back tomorrow." He sat down at his desk. " Make some coffee, please."

Klopper brought him the coffee and he drank a mouthful. It had not been sugared, and he yelled for some.

" There isn't any, Sarge. Except one of those bags I brought in has a big hole near the top, and the stuff's running out."

" Might as well take some from there," said Cloete. He didn't think Rawlston would mind.

He drained his sweetened coffee and scraped up what was left of the sugar in his spoon. He always ate it. Something was glinting in the little coffee-coloured mound, and he dabbed with his little finger to remove it. He'd thought it some impurity, but it was hard and metallic. Like an iron filing, except for its dull yellow colour. Gold? Then he looked again. It *was* gold.

" Klopper, Klopper!" The constable ran in, looking as though he expected a hold-up. Together they carefully placed the holed bag in a canvas post-bag. Cloete took it home, and, a few pounds at a time, dissolved the sugar into hot water. Then he sieved the water through fine muslin. At the end of three hours he had a little mound of gold filings weighing just over eight ounces.

The head of the Gold Squad in Durban did not hesitate. Nor

did he sound excited. " We're sending someone right away," he said.

" O.K." said Cloete, thankfully. He needed help now.

Cloete liked Reyders, the Gold Squad man, immediately. He was young, had a humorous mouth, and moved with a relaxation that hid considerable vigour. Cloete took him straight out to the Ensani Mill, the next morning. As they were going towards the office entrance, Trench came up to them.

" Oh, Sergeant, could I trouble you for a moment?" His eyes seemed dilated by his strong lenses.

" Yes, certainly." Cloete introduced Reyders, and then Trench said:

" What I was thinking is, that dead African — well — as a matter of fact," he hesitated again, looking extremely uncomfortable. " Well, what I wanted to say was, he could be identified by his blanket, you know."

Cloete rubbed his jaw slowly. " Ye-e-es, I know a bit about these blankets. I've heard they change like women's fashions. A trader told me that, once. But do they vary from place to place?"

" Oh, yes," said Trench. " Sometimes from one valley to another. I lived in the Transkei when I was a youngster, and I'd say that the blanket the — er, deceased, was wearing, came from around Tsobo. You might send a photograph down there—?"

" Yes, all right." Cloete smiled at Trench. " Thanks very much. Very good of you, Mr. Trench. I'll be more than pleased if you're right."

" Oh, don't mention it," said Trench, and walked off in confusion.

Cloete took Reyders into Rawlston's office, introduced them to each other, and told Rawlston what they had found. Rawlston was so surprised that he could not speak for a moment.

" Good God! Yes, yes, of course. We'll simply have to search every bag in storage. I'll get my staff to help you. Thank goodness there aren't many bags awaiting delivery. It means we'll have to dissolve the sugar in every darn one of them, and then crystallise it out afterwards."

He took them to the storage room, which was the corrugated iron part of the building. A packing machine was whirring softly

in the concrete portion as it shot sugar into bags and sewed them up. Fine sugar crystals lay everywhere.

"I'll leave you to it," said Cloete to Reyders. "I want to get some information from Mr. Rawlston."

Outside, Rawlston shut the door on the packing machine. Cloete noticed that the noise could not be heard.

"Mr. Rawlston, could you give me the addresses of every firm, outside South Africa, to which you send sugar?"

Rawlston smiled. "Yes. Of course, Sergeant. You want to know where the gold is going?"

"That's right," said Cloete. "I don't think it'll be very helpful now, however."

Rawlston gave him the list, and Cloete returned immediately to the station to phone it through to Durban and ask them to check the addresses. He also arranged to have a photograph and description of the dead man sent to the place Trench had suggested. Then he went back to the mill, with Tukali, the native constable, who had changed into a sugar cane cutter's ragged clothes.

"Get around," was all Cloete said. "See what you can find out." The big African grinned, and went.

Reyders finished towards sunset, and as Cloete drove him home they discussed the position.

"Two bags with gold in, from the stores," said the younger man. "Both addressed to a firm in Lourenço Marques. The ones Klopper found were not labelled, and only one contained gold. Have you asked for the addresses to be checked?"

"Yes. We'll have a better chance trying to trace the source, rather than the destination," said Cloete.

"Will we?" Reyders looked dubious. "How many people work in that mill?"

"Oh, hundreds. But that doesn't matter. The gold can only be put into the bags *after* they're in the storage shed — that's the only place where there's no one to watch them. Before that, the sugar is passing through dozens of hands."

Reyders nodded. "All right, then. Who can get into the storage shed?"

"Rawlston and Trench, at night. During the day, of course, while the bags are being filled and stacked, there are labourers about, but there wouldn't be time for them to do anything."

"Yes." Reyders looked as perplexed as Cloete felt. "What do you know about those two?"

Cloete shrugged. "Nothing. Rawlston's been manager for

years. With his salary he must be a wealthy man by now. You should see his orchid house. Trench is new, and I know nothing about him. Might be worth investigating. Where either would lay his hands on gold I can't imagine."

"You'd be surprised. And the dead man? Was he just stealing sugar, and by chance picked up the wrong bag, or was he in with someone else? Listen, *could* someone steal from that storage-room?" asked Reyders.

"I don't know." Cloete thought for a moment. "Why don't we go there after dinner and have a look? I've still got the key Trench gave me."

Reyders groaned. "All right. Overtime, unpaid and unappreciated. What do we join the force for?"

The new moon threw a pale light over the mill yard, softening its angularity. The mill was silent, after the day's clatter. As they stopped, an African night-watchman came up. He saluted when he saw Cloete's uniform.

"Is there a watchman here every night?"

"Yes, sir."

"How many?"

"Only one, sir."

Cloete grunted. "You've never seen anyone around the storage room at night, I suppose?"

"No, sir. If I had I would have reported it."

Cloete nodded, and they went toward the storage building. "One watchman for this huge yard is ridiculous," he said. He unlocked the door with the key Trench had given him, and they took out their torches and began checking the building.

After ten minutes Cloete said: "Yes, here we are." Reyders went over to where he was shining his torch on part of the corrugated iron wall. The bolts holding the iron to the wooden uprights that formed the framework of the building had been torn out, and the sheet of iron, so loosened, was tied on in a makeshift way with wire. The whole thing had been covered by a mound of empty sacks.

"Our unknown corpse," said Cloete. "I guess I was partly right. He was on the run. So he decided to steal a few bags of sugar, and sell them cheap. Unfortunately for him, he took one containing gold. The real gold operator found out, waited for

him, struck him as he was coming out of this hole, and then partly fixed it."

"Do you think the gold was put into the bags in here?" asked Reyders.

"Certain of it. Whoever was doing it would have to empty out a little sugar, put in the gold, then refill the bag and sew it up. He'd use the machine for that."

"Wouldn't the machine be heard?" asked Reyders.

"No, that's the funny thing. Where the packing is done, the building is made of thick concrete. It's completely soundproof."

They walked from the storage room into the packing room. As they did so, a key scraped in the lock. Instantly both torches went out, and the policemen moved to either side of the faint crack of light that showed where the door was moving, very slowly, from its frame. As it opened more, Cloete could see the faint outline of a person. The unknown gained confidence, pushed the door open, and stepped in. For an instant Cloete caught a glimpse of another form outside. Then Reyders grabbed hold of the one inside.

"Run!" The single word briefly halted Cloete. By the time he had got through the door, all he could do was listen to the footsteps, faint and completely directionless. He yelled for the night-watchman, who came up after half a minute, but he had seen nothing. Cloete went back into the building, where Reyders was holding the intruder under his automatic. Cloete flashed his light on the man's face.

"Barney Winder!" The hooded eyes looked evil in the torch-light, and not the slightest afraid. The man even grinned a little, although Cloete noticed that his lips were dry. "Well, Mr. Winder," he said, as formally as he could, "you're going to have to make up a very good story, now."

"I'm not talking," said Barney. "Neither now nor later."

"Listen, man, use your sense. We've caught you fair and square. How can you get away with it? If we search your place, we must find the stuff, mustn't we?"

"What stuff?" Winder's voice had the same inflexion all the time, giving away nothing. Cloete sighed exaggeratedly.

"All right, you'll have to spend the night in the cells. How does that appeal to you?"

"It won't make any difference," replied Winder. Cloete had a feeling that it wouldn't.

As soon as they got back to the station Cloete hauled Klopper

out of bed, and sent him with two African constables to search Winder's house and out-buildings.

The next morning both he and Reyders were at the station early. There was a message from Reyders' branch to say that the address in Lourenço Marques had been visited by the Portugese police. The offices there were completely empty, and the tenant untraceable.

" So that's that," said Reyders. " I suggest we try to trace the source, as you suggested. We'd better get down to the mill."

Before they left for the mill, Cloete interviewed Winder in the cells.

" We found nothing at your place last night, Barney, but that's neither here nor there. What about telling me what you were doing in the storage room?"

" Sorry, Cloete. Nothing doing."

Cloete ruminated, his large eyes wide and dreamy. " Where were you, the night of the murder?"

Winder didn't hesitate. " At the club."

Cloete looked at him for a moment longer. " Good, I'll check that. I can still hold you for another twelve hours, you know?"

Winder shrugged. " Go ahead. Only don't ask me to talk about last night."

Cloete left instructions for Winder's alibi to be checked, and then set off for the mill with Reyders. As they drove into the familiar yard, a figure emerged from the shadow of the building. It was dressed in tattered cane-field working clothes, and turned out to be Constable Tukali.

" I've got something for you, Sergeant."

" Good. What is it?"

" A workman who's been away ill since, saw a white man passing through the mill yard on the night of the murder."

" At what time?"

" At exactly ten past eleven. The compound closes at a quarter past, and the man was watching the time so as not to be late."

" What a break," said Cloete. The post-mortem had shown death to have taken place between ten and midnight, and Cloete, from experience, knew the havoc an African's disregard for time could play. " Who was the man? The white man?"

" The workman doesn't know. But he was tall, wore glasses, and had silver hair."

" Trench?" Reyders said it. Cloete, however, was wary.

" Maybe. It's not such a detailed description. I think we'd

better separate, and meet at lunch time. Now what I suggest . . ."

They had lunch of sandwiches and a thermos of coffee in the police van. Not until they had finished did Cloete say: " 'Right, shoot. What did you find?"

" Not much." Reyders was looking disappointed. " The order from Lourenço Marques came through normal channels. The bags were labelled after they'd been sewn and left in the storage room until sent out."

Cloete chuckled. " Simple, eh? The gold gets put in, just before despatch, and no one's the wiser. What about payment for this gold? Can't you trace that?"

" Yes. After about a year's work. No, man the only way to catch a gold operator is now."

" Where's he getting it from?" asked Cloete.

" The chances are that he's got it already. There are always small thefts going on, you know, and overall they amount to thousands of rand's worth. We never recover it all."

" You mean, whoever is operating here is a kind of receiver?"

" Yes. He sets up as a buyer of illicit gold, and once the word spreads around, they'll come from far and wide to sell to him."

Cloete pondered. " If it's here, can't we search the houses of anyone we suspect?"

Reyders was serious. " No, for goodness sake, don't do that. We don't know who the accomplices are. You might be quite wrong about the dead African, for a start. Once we institute a general search, we might frighten the gold away for ever. Let's rather try and find the person responsible."

Cloete knew that this was right. To get enough men to make a thorough search of only Winder's farm would be impossible. He turned to the other matter. " Trench has got a very flimsy alibi for the night of the murder. He's not married. His cook left the house after dinner, and from then on no one saw Trench."

Reyders whistled. " So?"

" I was hoping you'd suggest something."

Reyders grinned thinly. " Whatever we do, we've got to do it fast."

" Fast," repeated Cloete. " That's becoming the operative word, isn't it?"

" There comes Rawlston. Who's the lady?"

" His wife," said Cloete. " We may as well tell him about Winder."

" Good morning, gentlemen," Rawlston was smiling as usual.

He shook hands with both policemen. "You know my wife?" In the drab mill yard, she looked extraordinarily beautiful. "What news? Any progress?"

Cloete told him about Winder's arrest, and Rawlston seemed shocked. "Good heavens, Sergeant, this is serious. Where did the man find a key? He must have had one?"

"He did," replied Cloete, and produced it from his pocket. "I'd say it's been cut from an impression."

Rawlston took it. "Yes, I think I agree. And that, of course, makes it far worse. You realise that he could only have made the impression from my key, or Trench's?" He looked from under his bushy eyebrows at Cloete. "And I can assure you, Winder's never had mine."

They all felt uncomfortable. Cloete, also, was puzzled by something. He glanced at Mrs. Rawlston, and saw her light brown eyes fixed on him.

Rawlston said: "I think I'd best leave it to you, gentlemen. You're the experts." With polite farewells, they departed.

Reyders was sniffing the air which was occupied largely by the smell of molasses. "You know, there's something bothering me—"

"I know," said Cloete. "It's Mrs. Rawlston's perfume."

"That's right! Queer, how it stands out against the sugar smell. But why is it familiar?"

"Because you smelled it last night," said Cloete, slowly. "She was outside when we caught Winder. She was the person he told to run."

"No! This thing's getting thicker than station coffee." But Cloete was looking across the mill yard, and Reyders saw Trench coming out into the bright light.

"Hold on here," said Cloete. "I must see what he has to say about this." He walked up to Trench and said, as casually as possible: "By the way, when did you lend your key to Winder?"

Trench put a finger to his chin, considering in his vague, rather defensive sort of way. After a pause, he said: "I don't think I have ever lent any key to Mr. Winder, Sergeant." He was either very smooth or very honest.

A clerk called through the window: "'Phone, Sergeant."

"Thank you," said Cloete, and went into the office. It was Klopper.

"Sarge, the dead fellow has been identified. He does come from Tsobo, and he's been missing for about a year. No record, though.

Just a drifter, I should think."

"Thanks. And Winder?"

"His alibi for the night of the murder is cast-iron." Klopper chuckled. "Between ten and twelve he played snooker, had several drinks and eventually tried to ride a horse into the lounge. About twenty people saw all this."

"I see." One up, one down, and you stayed in the middle. Sergeant Cloete went into the yard again.

"Congratulations, Mr. Trench, you were right about that place." When Trench looked a bit vague, Cloete said: "You know, Tsobo. Where the dead man came from."

"Oh. Oh, yes, that's good." Trench seemed pleased with himself, yet definitely startled. As if he'd never expected to be right. His whole attitude had about it something that, thought Cloete, shouted for an explanation, but how he was going to get any further with this he had no idea.

Just at that moment several Africans came into the mill yard on the back of a lorry. They were all wearing blankets, and Cloete saw his chance. He pointed to a man who had jumped off the lorry. "What blanket is he wearing?" he asked.

Trench looked thoroughly ill at ease. Cloete was watching him closely. "You mean, that blue one?" he asked.

"Well, blue and — Cloete stopped. "Yes, that's right, the blue one."

"It's Basuto," said Trench. "I'm afraid I don't know much about them. Only the Xhosa, from the Transkei, are my province." He was beginning to look distinctly uncomfortable. "I think I'd better get back to the office," he said, and before Cloete could say another word, had left.

Reyders came over.

"What colour is that blanket?" asked Cloete, pointing out the one he'd been discussing with Trench.

"Blue and green," said Reyders.

"Trench thought it was all blue. That means he suffers from a certain kind of colour-blindness, doesn't it?"

"I think so," said Reyders. "Did he know where the man came from, by the blanket?"

"I'm beginning very much to doubt it," said Cloete, and called to the African wearing the green and blue blanket: "Where do you come from?"

The African laughed, and said: "The Transkei. Near Umtata."

Cloete's face had a rugged look of puzzled concentration.

" That makes Trench hopelessly wrong. Yet he was right about the dead man. And he's colour-blind. Reyders, what does all this mean? He's not only bluffing, he's making an outstanding fool of himself—" He stopped, then turned to his colleague. " Wait a minute. What was that—?" He thought for some minutes, waving the other to silence. Then: " Reyders, do something for me?"

" O.K."

" Go into the packing room, now, stand there for a couple of minutes, and walk out again."

Reyders looked comically surprised. " *Magtig*, you've been too long in the sun. All right, man."

He walked over to the building that was the packing room and storage room, and opened the door. The whirr of the packing machine could be heard, and then was cut off as the door closed. A minute later Reyders emerged, brushing crystals from himself. Cloete's jaw tightened.

" Reyders, I think I've got it!"

" What?"

" Yes, yes, I think so, but I'm not sure. We've got to give the impression that we're laying off for a while, and set a trap. To-night."

" If you say so, *kerêl*. What must I do?"

" We'll spread it around that we've found an unexpected lead, and that you have to return to Durban for a couple of days to follow it up, while I intend to do nothing more here. I think it will be best if you actually drive down, this afternoon. But to-night, at seven, you must meet me at a turn-off I'll show you as we drive back to the station. O.K.?"

Reyders threw up his hands. " What else can I say?" he replied.

There was faint moonlight, as on the previous evening, and Reyders found the turn-off quite easily. Cloete's van was parked well down in a cane-break.

" Leave your car," the sergeant said. " And not a word from now on."

They walked for some time, until Reyders realised that they were skirting the bottom of the gardens belonging to the mill houses. They reached a spot, and Cloete signalled to Reyders to sit. He did the same himself.

They must have waited four hours. Just as Reyders was about to ask Cloete whether there was any point in going on, a night-jars'

harsh cry jerked him to attention.

" That's Tukali's signal. Come on," said Cloete and jumped up. Reyders followed the running figure through the trees. They burst into a clearing and Reyders saw a small building. Cloete ran straight for the door, and crashed against it. It splintered open revealing a brightly lit room that had been blacked out. All about them stood, in silent rows, varieties of exotic orchids. The strange colours were compelling, but it was only one colour that drew Reyder's practised eye. Gold. It lay where it had been uncovered under a bed of cattleyas, and standing over it, his face slack with fear, was Rawlston.

" How did you know it was him?" asked Reyders, later.

" If I was right about the murdered African, then the suspects were Rawlston, Trench, and Winder. Winder was out of the murder when he established an alibi, and so, according to my reasoning, he was also out as far as the gold went. That was confirmed when I woke up to the fact that he'd been dallying with Mrs. Rawlston."

" So that left Rawlston and Trench?"

" Yes. And, of course, Trench seemed the certainty. It was he who identified the dead man by his blanket, yet later made such a fool of himself over the very thing in which he claimed to be expert. It seemed clear enough then that he'd killed the African, taken his identity book, and later pretended to know about the blanket."

" Not to mention being seen, in the mill yard, at the time of death?"

" Yes, quite. I'll come to that later. What bothered me was this blanket business. It was far *too* obvious. Why would a colour-blind man choose to bluff about that particular method of identification? And, even more confusing, why did he want to identify the body at all? There was no need to."

" Somebody wanted to," said Reyders.

Cloete banged his desk. " Exactly, man. That's where I was so dumb. I had said to Rawlston, not to Trench, that if I could identify the body, I'd hand the whole case over to Durban. Rawlston knew that if I did that there wouldn't be police all over the place all the time and he'd have a breathing space in which to dispose of the rest of the gold. He must have felt sick when he

realised that the identity book, which he'd taken to cause confusion, was the very thing that would have saved him."

"What did he do, then?" asked Reyders.

"He couldn't allow the book to be 'found,' as he'd destroyed it. So he got hold of Trench, and made him tell the blanket story to me. Trench of course, didn't suspect the implications. He probably believed that Rawlston knew what he was talking about, and anyway, he was new there. He had to do what Rawlston told him." Cloete smiled. "He is the type that would never dare question a person like Rawlston."

"So you knew Rawlston had seen the identity book. But what about Trench being in the mill yard, that night?"

"He wasn't," said Cloete. "It was Rawlston whom the night-watchman saw. As a matter of fact, you proved that when I asked you to go into the packing room. When you came out, you had a silver halo, just like an angel. Rawlston had been in the packing room, using the machine, and his hair, too, was covered with sugar crystals. That's why the watchman saw a man with silver hair."

Reyders looked admiring. "And the orchid house?"

Cloete grinned. "That was a sort of chance, except that once I'd settled on Rawlston, it narrowed the field considerably. When I thought about it, it had to be the orchid house. There was nowhere else."

Reyders lifted his hand in a kind of salute. "And Rawlston confessed when he heard what his wife had been up to. Apparently he needed the money for her."

"Yes, because she needed it for Winder. Some women—" Cloete shrugged. "I'm not the judge, thank goodness. Klopper, make some coffee!"

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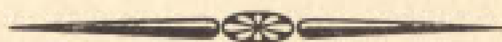

SOLUTION TO EWMM CROSSWORD (No. 12)

ACROSS. 1, Criminology. 9, Plug. 10, Red herring. 11, Pie-eyed. 12, Feather. 14, Uncovered. 16, Kills. 19, Seven. 20, Train gang. 22, Mothers. 24, Oppress. 27, Ground-bait. 28, Reef (knot). 29, Senselessly.

DOWN. 2, Rogue. 3, Mr. Reeder. 4, Nude. 5, Leered. 6, Garotting. 7, Alliance. 8, Once. 13, Perry. 15, Open house. 17, Land-seer. 18, Disputes. 21, Brides. 23, Ogre. 25, (Truly) Rural. 26, Ball.

—*Philip Meigh, ARCA.*

EYE-WITNESS

BARBARA JAMES

An unusual story about a child, gentle in its understanding, and grim in its conclusion

IT TOOK a lot of nerve to go and tell the police, but I had to do it. I hung round outside the police station for a long time before I could make myself go in. The policeman there thought I was up to something; he didn't take me seriously, at first.

" Well, son, what can I do for you?" he asked.

" That girl," I said, " Brenda Samms, the one our paper says is missing from her home, I know where she is."

" Oh, you do, do you?" He still thought I was having him on.

" Yes; she's dead." That changed the look on his face.

" What's your name, son?"

" Dennis Willman."

" How old are you?"

" Eleven."

" And where do you live?"

" Hinds Cottage—in the forest—near Croxton."

He wrote it down.

" Well, Dennis, you'd better come in here and tell us all about it."

When I'd told them they took me out to the forest in one of their big cars. They pulled up where I showed them. Two of them followed me through the trees until we came to the hollow sort of ditch place. There under the bushes and bracken they found her like I knew they would.

Some people are frightened of the forest. They said bad things happen there and most of the crowds who come there at week-ends and holidays won't go far from the roads. I was never frightened. Our house was right in the woods. It belonged to my Dad and it had belonged to his Grandad. My dad loved the forest and he knew it all, every track and footpath, every secret place. He'd show me where the wild deer went, where the badgers had their

setts, where the birds nested; he'd teach me the names of the birds until I came to recognise them—jays, woodpeckers, tree-creepers—all sorts. We never got tired of the forest, Dad and me and Skipper. Skipper was still a young dog then, and went everywhere with us.

My Mum used to tease us sometimes. "I don't know what you two see in these old woods," she'd say. "They get on my nerves; it's too lonely here for my liking. Give me a bit of life every time."

But she didn't mean it. She wasn't really lonely—she couldn't have been; it wasn't far from our house to Croxton where I went to school. She had friends there. Then if you went down our lane the other way you soon came to the main road, where buses ran to London.

It was a good place to live—everything was good until my Dad got ill and died. It was just after my tenth birthday. I couldn't believe it. I'd thought Dad would always be there. I wanted to die too. My Mum cried a lot; she hugged me and said we'd only got each other. I must take Dad's place and be the man in the house, and we must try and live the way he'd want us to. She made me feel a bit better.

I was afraid she might want to move from our house, but she didn't. She said she had good friends nearby. After a time she took a part-time job in Croxton. She'd only been doing it a little while when Lew Baker started coming round, dropping into our house most evenings, sometimes staying for supper, sometimes going out with her to the movies or the White Hart. A great show-off of a man he was, younger than Mum. I hated his thick lips and the leery look in his eyes. I hated everything about him. My Mum said, after he came the first time:

"Dennis, you were very rude to Mr. Baker. I was quite ashamed of you."

"I don't like him. Why did he come here?"

"He's a friend. You mustn't be jealous. I'm on my own now. I need a man's company and advice sometimes."

"I was to be the man here."

She laughed.

"You're very young. Lew can help me with things you don't know about yet."

" Lew!" I said his name with a spit.

" You're to be polite to him, Dennis, do you hear me?"

I wasn't going to be polite to him—not for anything, but for her sake I wasn't rude any more. I just kept out of his way as much as I could. That seemed to suit Mum. She was so taken up with him she didn't seem to want to be bothered with me any more. She was changing fast. She wore different clothes —tight things that showed a lot of her. She put dark lines all round here eyes and blue smears above them. She made her eyelashes spiky and black. Her hair was a different colour, almost yellow and all puffed up. When Lew was there she didn't seem herself any more—not my Mum, who was kind and nice and had loved me and Dad. She was always excited with Lew and laughed a lot. She couldn't keep away from him; she kept pushing against him, touching his arms, his hands, his face. He was so smug, ordering her about, letting her fuss over him. Underneath I felt he was laughing at her.

She married him and he came to live in our house—my Dad's house, less than a year after my Dad had died. I couldn't have stood it if it hadn't been for Skipper. He was an old dog now, his legs were stiff and his nose was grey. He didn't run after me in the forest any more. It was as if he had lost heart after Dad died. But he slept on my bed. He'd lick my face if I cried. And he'd look at me as if he knew just what I felt. I'm sure he did. He often snarled at Lew. Lew said once:

" That old dog stinks; he ought to be put down."

I was in terror that I would come back from school and find Skipper gone, although my Mum promised me it wouldn't happen.

" Lew only said it because he was annoyed, he didn't mean it," she said, but I wasn't so sure.

I stayed away from home as much as I could because I hated to see my Mum and Lew together the way they were. It made me mad that I should be kept out of my own home by Lew, who had no right there. They went out a lot in the evenings, leaving me and Skipper alone. We didn't mind that. You couldn't feel lonely in the house with the forest all round. I'd think of the deer and the birds and the badgers and the squirrels, and the hundreds of living things in the forest. I'd feel they were watching us with their friendly eyes. It was good to know they were there.

Sometimes when my Mum and Lew came back I could tell by their voices and the funny way they laughed that they'd had

a lot to drink. Sometimes they quarrelled. I would open my door a little way and listen. I hated hearing what they said, but I had to listen.

Once I heard Lew say: " For God's sake sell the bloody place. I've told you some sucker would pay a packet for a cottage like this near London."

" Yes, and you'd get the packet from me and ditch me." My Mum's voice was shrieky and trembly all together.

Once they'd been to a dance. Mum had gone out all gay and film-starry in a pretty dress. Later, after they came back, I heard her crying.

" How could you? How could you?" she said.

" Oh, stuff it! I've had enough," said Lew.

" That little tart. She can't have been more than sixteen. Everyone was talking. Can't you ever keep your hands off kids?"

" Hell, it means nothing. I've got to have a bit of fun. I married you, didn't I?"

" What for? That's what I'm beginning to wonder. What for?"

But no matter how much they quarrelled she made it up and she was sweet and loving to him again. She'd put up with anything from him. It made me ashamed for her.

Then she left me alone with him. She had to go away suddenly for a few days because my Gran was ill.

Lew said: " Don't worry, the kid'll be all right with me." He almost seemed glad to get rid of her.

It was summer holidays. I wasn't going to school. Lew was about the place. He didn't work regularly like my Dad did. I was out most of the time. I had dinner at a friend of Mum's every day, so I didn't see much of him.

That evening, the one when Mum was going to come home, I went into the forest and climbed the beech tree, my special one. I'd often climbed it before but this time I got up higher than I'd ever been. The last bit was hard. The tree trunk was smooth and the next branch was just out of reach. There were only two little sort of knobs as footholds. I almost slipped. My heart banged like anything as I pulled up on to the high branch. It was fine up there. I felt proud like a king. I got out my knife and started carving my initials on the trunk just to show I'd been there. In that tree-top I felt I was part of the forest; I was in another world with the birds and the squirrels. This was real and London down the main road with the high buildings and

buses and millions of people and everything wasn't real at all. I remembered my Dad telling me that the first Queen Elizabeth used to ride in the forest. I didn't think it had changed much since then. Looking down through the leaves I thought I could almost see her riding with those old knights. But I didn't see her. Instead I saw the man carrying the girl.

A detective inspector asked me about it all over again. We were having tea and doughnuts—the long shaped ones with cream and jam. The detective inspector wasn't in uniform. He was gentle looking, not tough like on TV. It was easy to talk to him.

"Now Dennis, tell me exactly what you saw from the tree," he said.

"I saw this man coming through the bushes carrying the girl."

"Did you recognise him?"

"No. He had his head down. I never saw his face."

"So it was no one you knew?"

I bit into my doughnut; the cream oozed up like froth.

"I don't know," I said. "I couldn't see well because of all the leaves below me. I was very high up."

"Could you see what sort of man he was? Was he big or small?"

"He was a great big man. I could see that."

"What was he wearing?"

"Looked like dark trousers and a blue jersey."

"What about the girl? What did you see of her?"

"She had a bright coloured skirt and a red blouse. Her head was on one side in a funny way with her hair hanging down. Her legs were dangling; they looked kind of thin and bony. She had shiny, light shoes."

"You saw all this?"

"Yes."

"Yet you couldn't see the man clearly enough to say whether he was someone you'd ever seen before or not?" The detective inspector spoke ever so quietly but I wished he wouldn't look at me the way he did. I tried not to look back at him but somehow I couldn't help it. I drank some more tea.

"I told you he didn't look up," I said. "He was looking down and round him. There was this kind of hollow place in the

ground near my tree. There are lots of those places in the woods. He went towards it. As he moved one of the girl's shoes fell off. He shoved her into the hollow until she was covered with bracken and bushes. You couldn't see her. He went back and picked up the shoe and put it with her. He looked round again, then hurried away."

"What did you do?"

"I stayed up the tree for a time. I was kind of scared to come down until the man had got right away."

"What did you do when you did come down from the tree?"

"I didn't want to look at the girl, but I made myself. That's when I really saw her clothes, I suppose. There were marks on her neck. Her eyes were wide open, so was her mouth. It was horrid. I was sure she was dead."

"Why didn't you go for the police straight away, Dennis?"

"I don't know," I said, trying not to look at him.

"Don't you? There must be some reason."

"Well, I didn't want to be the one to tell what this man had done. I thought someone would soon find the girl and find out who had been with her. I didn't want to have anything to do with it."

"I see. So you went back to your home?"

"Not straight away. My Mum was coming back that night. I went up to the bus stop on the main road to meet her. I waited a long time. She didn't come till the last bus. I came home with her."

"Why didn't you tell your mother or your stepfather what you had seen?"

"I couldn't," I said quickly.

"Why not?"

"I just couldn't."

"What made you come to us in the end?" he asked.

"Well, the days went by and I didn't hear anything about anyone finding the girl. I didn't know what to do. Then I saw the picture of this Brenda Samms in the paper, missing from her home in Edmonton, it said. I knew it was the girl, though her face looked different in the picture—younger."

"She was sixteen."

"But I was certain because it said about the clothes she was wearing and they were the same."

"So you decided after all to come to us?"

I nodded my head.

" Yes."

I didn't tell him what had decided me—my Mum saying that she was going to sell the house so that she and Lew could buy a little business of their own. I knew that would be the end of everything—of our home, the forest, of Skipper, and most of all the end of everything for my Mum. I had to do something.

The police came poking around our house, asking lots of questions. Later they took Lew with them to the police station to ask him more questions. My Mum was crying.

" Dennis, you can save him," she cried. " You've got to tell them it wasn't Lew."

" I don't know who it was," I said. " I couldn't see clearly enough because of the leaves and things. It could have been Lew."

" Oh, no," she cried, " it couldn't have been."

But they arrested Lew and charged him with the murder of Brenda Samms.

He didn't stand much chance. The police had found hairs from his blue jersey—the one my Mum had knitted—caught in Brenda Samms' long fingernails, and some caught on a bramble nearby. His fingerprints were on one of her light, shiny shoes. There'd been no rain those few days; the fingerprints showed up clearly. Plenty of people were keen to tell of Lew's goings-on with other young girls. Although I told the exact truth, every time I was questioned, about not recognising the man I'd seen, most people seemed to think I was pretty sure it really had been Lew. They thought that was why I hadn't gone straight home that night but had waited to meet my Mum. They thought that was why I hadn't told my Mum or Lew.

Lew said that he'd never seen the girl. He'd not been out of the house that evening until he strolled out to look for me. He remembered seeing something light in the bracken. He'd picked it up; it was a girl's shoe. He'd chucked it down again. Quite likely he had caught the sleeve of his woolly on a bramble, that damned shaggy wool was always catching on things. He'd called my name a few times, then went back to the house, had some supper and gone to the pub.

The man defending Lew said that the hairy blue wool the jersey was knitted of was a well-known make and there must

be lots of men wearing ones made of it.

But it didn't do any good. Lew's fingerprints were on the shoe and the shoe was found on the girl's right foot. Lew could hardly have chucked it there. They said Lew was guilty and gave him a life sentence. Afterwards we found out that he'd been to prison twice before—once for violence to a young girl. That's why the police got on to him so quickly—because they'd already got his fingerprints.

Mum said to me: " I'm sorry, Dennis, I must have been crazy. You knew all along what he was like. I did in my heart, but I wouldn't let myself believe it. I'll make it up to you for all you've been through."

She said she'd divorce Lew and we would forget all about him.

So she and Skipper and I are living together again in our house the way Dad would have wanted us to. Everything ought to be fine, but it isn't. I can't stick it much longer. It's the forest itself; it's turned against me. I'm like the holiday crowds now; I'm scared to go from the roads into the woods. I think I'll die if I don't get away from the forest. The creatures that live there, the animals and the birds, are watching me all the time, day and night, especially at night, I can't see them but I know they're there. I can feel their bright, cruel eyes on me. I used to belong with them but they hate me now; they mean to get me out of the forest.

You see, they know.

I tell myself they're only animals and birds, they can't do a thing to me. Lew deserved what he got. Everything I said was the exact truth. I didn't recognise the man carrying the girl. He was big, he did wear a blue jersey. Her shoe did drop off though I'm not sure that he noticed it. He did put the girl in the hollow like I said. It's the next bit that I pretended didn't happen, I pretended so hard that I could really believe it didn't. I pretended that I'd shut my eyes and stopped my ears and I couldn't see or hear. But now I can't stop thinking about it.

When the man had covered the girl he heard Lew calling me. He shot into the bushes. He must have been hiding, watching there, because after Lew had gone he crept out. He picked up the shoe by the point of the heel from where Lew had chucked it and put it with the girl—on her foot, I suppose. He looked

around and took something from a bush and leaned over where the girl was, and did something. I couldn't see properly. Only afterwards I guessed he must have seen the hairy wool caught from Lew's jersey and put bits of it in her fingers. Then he looked round again and hurried away—like I said.

I wonder who he is, where he is. Is he laughing because he got away with it? Will he strangle another girl? Or does he feel as bad as I do now?

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E W M M

March issue includes

Edgar Wallace and
Angel Esquire

Michael Gilbert

T. C. Jacobs and
the Field Murder Case

Barry Perowne

Sax Rohmer and
Dr. Fu Manchu

and many other top-level stories and features

Edgar Wallace

ANGEL ESQUIRE

WILLIAM SPEDDING, a lawyer, has built the massive Lombard Street Safe Deposit on behalf of his client, a man named Reale. It is a great hall containing a safe in which old Reale, who owned a gambling den in Egypt, has placed two million pounds in cash. He has willed the money to one of four people — Jimmy, who was his right-hand man in Egypt and is something of a crook; Connor and Massey, two other men who served Reale, and Kathleen Kent, daughter of a man the old gambler once swindled.

Reale is murdered by Massey, who, in his turn, is killed by a protective device in Reale's Terrington Square house. Christopher Angle — Angel Esquire — of Scotland Yard is in charge of the murder investigation. He particularly likes Jimmy, believing his crooked days are over, and is willing to help the reformed Jimmy and Kathleen Kent, who is alone and unprotected. Connor (who has a gang, 'the Borough Lot') will leave nothing untried, and no crime uncommitted to get Reale's money for himself; he has already made an unsuccessful attempt to kidnap Kathleen.

A ceremony has been arranged at the Deposit to which all the heirs are bidden. Spedding reads Reale's will which directs that his estate shall go to whichever heir can solve a doggerel verse containing a hidden word of six letters that opens the safe.

Jimmy offers his share to Kathleen, then he goes to see Spedding at his home, demanding a 'big red envelope' in which are clues to the puzzle's answer. Spedding traps and tries to kill Jimmy, but he escapes.

Kathleen, Angel, and Jimmy try fruitlessly to find the key to the puzzle verse, without success, and Jimmy now tries to discover 'the Professor', an unknown, from whose book the puzzle was originally taken.

At the headquarters of the Borough Lot a meeting of the gang is in progress. The caretaker, a half-demented man named old George, is questioned as to why he let two mystery men in to examine the building, though no harm appears to be done. During this meeting Connor is called away, and returns, looking very excited:

'Boys', he says to his colleagues, 'I've got the biggest thing for you — a million pounds, share and share alike ! '

The story continues:

HE FELT rather than heard the excitement his words caused. He stood with his back to the half-opened door.

"I'm going to introduce a new pal," he rattled on breathlessly. "I'll vouch for him."

"Who is he?" asked Bat. "Do we know him?"

"No," said Connor, "and you're not expected to know him. But he's putting up the money and that's good enough for you, Bat—a hundred pounds a man, and it will be paid tonight."

Bat Sands spat on his hands.

"Bring him in. He's good enough," and there was a murmur of approval.

Connor disappeared, and returned with a well-dressed stranger, who met the questioning glances of his audience with a pleasant smile. His eyes swept over them all, resting for a moment on Vennis, pausing doubtfully at old George, who was talking to himself in a rapid undertone.

"Gentlemen," said the stranger, "I have come to ask for your help. Mr. Connor tells me that he has already told you about Reale's millions. Briefly, I have decided to forestall other people and secure the money for myself. I offer you a half share, to be equally divided amongst you, and as proof of my intention I am paying each man who is willing to help me a hundred pounds down."

He drew from one of his pockets a thick package of notes, and from two other pockets similar bundles. He handed them to Connor, and the eyes of the Borough Lot focused upon the crinkling paper.

"This is what I shall ask you to do," said the stranger.

His instructions were brief and when he had finished the men came up to the table one by one, took their money and after a few words with Connor took their leave, with an awkward salutation to the stranger.

Bat was last to go.

"Tomorrow night—here," whispered Connor.

He was left alone with the newcomer and the old man, still in the midst of some imaginary conversation.

The stranger looked with interest at the man and old George, as if suddenly realizing that he was under scrutiny, sat blinking at the other. Then he shuffled slowly to his feet and peered closely into the stranger's face, all the time sustaining his mumbled conversation.

"Ah," he said, "a gentleman! I am pleased to meet you, sir,

pleased to meet you. *Omnia mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis*, but you have not changed."

He relapsed again into mutterings.

"I've never met him before," the stranger told Connor.

"Oh, old George always thinks he has met people."

"A gentleman," old George muttered, "every inch a gentleman and a munificent patron. He bought a copy of my book—you have read it? It is called—dear me, I have forgotten what it is called—and sent to consult me in his—ah!—anagram—"

"What?" The stranger gripped Connor by the arm. "Listen, listen!" he whispered fiercely.

Old George threw up his head again and stared blandly at the stranger.

"A perfect gentleman," he said with pathetic insolence, "invariably addressing me as 'The Professor'—a most delicate and gentlemanly thing to do."

He pointed a triumphant finger.

"I know you!" he cried shrilly, and his cracked laugh rang through the room. "Spedding, that's your name! Lawyer, too. I saw you in the patron's car."

"The book, the book!" gasped Spedding. "What was the name of your book?"

Old George's voice had dropped to its normal level when he replied with extravagant courtesy:

"That is the one thing, sir, I can never remember."

Vennis was arrested, as Angel Esquire put it, 'in the ordinary way of business.' It was a case of murder in the course of theft and the final link in the evidence came from a jealous woman in a tear-stained letter to Scotland Yard. The arrest was totally unconnected with Angel's investigations into the mystery of Reale's millions. None the less, there are certain formalities attached to the arrest of all criminals. Angel Esquire placed one or two minor matters in the hands of subordinates, and in two days one of them came to his office.

"The notes found on Vennis, sir, said the man, "were issued to a Mr. Spedding on his private account last Monday morning. Mr. Spedding is a lawyer, of the firm of Spedding, Mortimer and Larach."

"Have you seen Mr. Spedding?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Spedding remembers drawing the money and paying it to a gentleman who was sailing to America."

"A client?"

"So far as I can gather the money was paid on behalf of a client. Mr. Spedding would not give details."

"Lawyers certainly do strange things," said Angel Esquire drily. "Does Mr. Spedding offer any suggestion as to how the money came into this man's possession?"

"No, sir. He thinks he might have obtained it quite honestly. I understand that the man who received the money was a shady sort of customer."

"So I should imagine!"

When the man had gone Angel drew a triangle on the blotting-pad.

"Spedding is in with the Borough Lot," he put a cross against one angle. "Spedding knows I know," he put a cross at the apex. "I know that Spedding knows I know," he marked the remaining angle. "It's Spedding's move, and he'll move damn' quick."

The Assistant Commissioner came into the room at that moment.

"Hullo, Angel." He glanced at the figures on the pad. "What's this, a new game?"

"It's an old game," said Angel truthfully, "but played in an entirely new way."

Angel was not far wrong when he said that Spedding would move fast—and he moved faster than Angel anticipated—for various reasons. Not least of these was the arrest of Vennis. After his interview with old George, Spedding had decided on a waiting policy. The old man had been taken to the house at Clapham. Spedding had been prepared to wait patiently until some freak of mind brought back memory to the form of cryptogram he had advised. Several times a day he asked:

"What is your name?"

"Old George, only old George," was the invariable reply, with many grins and nods.

"But your real name, the name you had when you were a . . . professor."

But this would only start the old man off on a rambling remini-

scence of his 'munificent patron.'

Connor came secretly to Clapham for orders. It was the night after Vennis had been arrested.

"We've got to move at once, Mr. Connor," said the lawyer. Connor sat in the chair that had held Jimmy a few nights previously. "It's no use waiting for the old man to talk; the earlier plan was best."

"Has anything happened?" asked Connor. His one-time awe of the lawyer had merged in the familiarity of their joint conspiracy.

"There was a detective at my office today inquiring about some notes that were found on Vennis. Angel Esquire will draw his own conclusions, and we have no time to lose."

"We are ready," said Connor.

"Then let it be tomorrow night," said Spedding, and sat down to write a letter.

The night of the great project turned out miserably wet.

"So much the better," announced Connor, viewing the world from his Notting Hill fastness. "England for work and Egypt for pleasure, and if I get my share of the money, and it will be a bigger share than my friend Spedding imagines, it's little this damned country will see of Patrick Connor."

He rubbed the steam from the window and looked down into the deserted street. Two men were walking towards the house. One, well covered by a mackintosh, moved with a long stride; the other, wrapped in a new overcoat, shuffled by his side, quickening his steps to keep up with his more energetic companion.

"Spedding," said Connor, "and old George. What's he bringing him here for?"

He hurried downstairs to let them in.

"Well?" asked Spedding, throwing off his coat.

"All's ready," answered Connor. "Why have you brought the old man?"

"Oh, for company," the lawyer answered carelessly.

It was Spedding's secret hope that the old man would remember. That day old George had been exceedingly garrulous, almost lucidly so at times. Spedding still thought that the old man's revelations would obviate the necessity for employing the Borough

Lot, and, what was more important, for sharing the contents of the safe with them.

As to this part of the programme, Spedding had plans which would have astonished Connor.

But old George's loquacity had stopped short at the essential point of instructing the lawyer on the question of the cryptogram.

Unconscious of the responsibility that lay upon his foolish head, the old man sat in the upstairs room talking to himself.

" Now, what about the men?" asked the lawyer. " Where do we meet them?"

" We shall pick them up at the corner of Lombard Street. They'll follow me to the Safe Deposit. "

" Ah!"

They turned swiftly on old George, who with his chin raised and with face alert was staring at them.

" Safe Deposit, Lombard Street," he mumbled. " And a most excellent plan too—a most excellent plan."

The two men held their breath.

" And quite an ingenious idea, sir. Did you say Lombard Street—a safe?" he muttered. " A safe with a word? And how to conceal the word, that's the question. I am a man of honour, you may trust me." He made a sweeping bow to some invisible presence. " Why not conceal your word thus?"

Old George stabbed the palm of his hand with a grimy forefinger.

" Why not? Have you read my book? It is only a little book, but useful, sir, remarkably useful. The drawings and the signs are most accurate. An eminent gentleman at the British Museum assisted me in its preparation. It is called—it is called—" He passed his hand wearily over his head and slid down into his chair again, muttering foolishly.

Spedding wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

" Nearly, nearly!" he said huskily. " He *nearly* told us."

Connor looked at him with suspicion.

" What's all this about the book?" he demanded. " This is the second time old George has spoken like this. It's to do with old Reale, isn't it?"

Spedding nodded.

" Come on," said Connor, looking at his watch, " it's time we were moving. We'll leave the old chap to look after the house. Here, George."

Old George looked up.

" You'll stay here, and not leave till we return. D'ye hear?"

" I hear, Mr. Connor, sir," said old George, with his curious assumption of dignity, " and hearing, obey."

As the two men turned into the night the rain pelted down, and a gusty north-westerly wind blew into their faces.

" George," said Connor, answering a question, " oh, we've had him for years. One of the boys found him wandering about Limehouse with hardly any clothes to his back and brought him to us. That was before I knew the Borough Lot, but they used him as a blind. He was worth the money it cost to keep him in food."

Spedding told Connor to wait while he despatched a long telegram from Westbourne Grove Post Office. It was addressed to the master of the *Polecat* lying at Cardiff, and was reasonably unintelligible to the clerk.

They found a taxi at the corner of Queen's Road and drove to the Bank, where they alighted and crossed to the Royal Exchange, then doubled back to Lombard Street.

" I instructed the guard to leave at four o'clock," said Spedding, fitting the key of the heavy outer door. He awaited in the inky black darkness of the vestibule while Connor admitted six indifferently uniformed men who had followed them.

" Are we all here?" said Connor softly.

One by one he called them by name, and they answered.

" We may as well have a light," said Spedding and felt for the switch.

The gleam of the electric light showed Spedding as pure a collection of scoundrels as ever disgraced the uniform of a gallant corps.

" Now," said Spedding in level tones, " are all the necessary tools here?"

Bat's grin was the answer.

" If we can get an electric connection," he said, " we'll burn out the lock of the safe in half—"

Spedding had walked to the inner door that led to the great hall and was fumbling with the keys. Suddenly he stopped.

" Listen!" he whispered. " I heard a step in the hall."

Connor listened.

" I hear nothing," he began, when the inner door was thrown open, and a commissionaire, revolver in hand, stepped out.

" Halt!" he cried. Then, recognising Spedding dropped the muzzle of his pistol.

White with rage, Spedding stood with his ill-assorted bodyguard. In the searching light there was no mistaking their character. He saw the commissionaire eyeing them curiously.

" I understood," said Spedding slowly, " that the guard had been relieved."

" No, sir," said the man, and a cluster of uniformed men at the door of the inner hall confirmed this.

" I sent orders this afternoon," said Spedding between his teeth.

" No orders have been received, sir," and the lawyer saw the scrutinizing eye of the soldierly sentry pass over his confederates.

" Is *this* the relief?" asked the guard, not attempting to conceal the contempt in his tone.

" Yes," said the lawyer.

As the sentry saluted and disappeared into the hall, Spedding drew Connor aside.

" This is ruin," he said quickly. " The safe must be cleared tonight. To-morrow London will not hold me."

The sentry reappeared at the doorway and beckoned them in. They shuffled into the great hall, where in the half darkness the safe loomed up from its rocky pedestal, an eerie, mysterious thing. Spedding saw Bat Sands glancing uncomfortably round the building, and felt the impression of its loneliness.

A man who wore the stripes of a sergeant came up.

" Are we to withdraw, sir?" he asked.

" Yes," said Spedding shortly.

" Will you give us a written order?" asked the man.

Spedding hesitated, then took out a notebook and wrote a few words on a sheet, tore it out, and handed it to the man.

The sergeant read it carefully.

" You haven't signed it or dated it either," he said respectfully, and handed it back.

Spedding said something under his breath and rectified the omissions.

" Now you may go."

He thought the man was smiling. It might have been a trick of the shadows, for he could not see his face.

" And am I to leave you alone, sir?"

" Yes."

" Is it quite safe, sir?"

" What the devil do you mean?" cried the lawyer.

" Well," said the other man steadily, " I see you have Connor

with you, a notorious thief and blackmailer."

The lawyer was silent.

"And Bat Sands. Hullo Bat? How did they treat you in Pentonville, or was it Parkhurst? And there's the gentle Lamby, trying hard to look military in an overcoat too large for him. That's not the uniform you're used to wearing, Lamby, is it?"

From the group of men at the door came a laugh.

"Guard the outer door, one of you men," said the sergeant, and turning again, to Spedding's men, "Here we have our respected friend, Curt Goyle."

He stopped and picked up a bag that Bat had placed carefully on the floor.

"What a bag of tricks! Diamond bits and dynamite cartridges and—what's this little thing, Bat—an ark?"

Spedding had recovered and stepped forward. He was playing for the greatest stake in the world.

"You shall be punished for this insolence," he stormed.

"Not at all, sir," said the imperturbable sergeant.

Somebody at the door spoke.

"Here's another one, Sergeant," and pushed a queer old figure into the hall, a figure that blinked and peered from face to face.

He saw Spedding and ran up to him, almost fawning.

"The safe deposit—in Lombard Street," he cackled joyously. 'You see, I remembered, dear friend; and I've come to tell you about the book—my book, you know. My munificent patron who desired a puzzle word—"

The sergeant stared.

"My God!" he cried, "The Professor."

"Yes, yes," chuckled the old man, "that's what he called me. He bought a copy of my book—two sovereigns, four sovereigns he gave me. The book—what was it called?" The old man paused and clasped both hands to his head. "*A Study—A Study*," he said painfully, "*on the Origin of—the Alphabet*. Ah!"

Another of the commissionaires had come forward as the old man began speaking. The sergeant turned to him.

"Make a note of that, Jimmy," the sergeant ordered.

Spedding flinched.

"Angel!" he gasped.

"That's me," was the ungrammatical reply.

Crushed, beaten and powerless, Spedding awaited judgment. What form it would take he could not guess, that it would effectively ruin him he did not doubt. The trusted lawyer stood

self-condemned; there was no explaining away his companions; there could be no mistaking the meaning of their presence.

" Send your men away," said Angel.

A wild hope seized the lawyer. The men were not to be arrested; there was a chance for him.

The Borough Lot trooped hurriedly through the doorway, anxious to reach the open air before Angel changed his mind.

" You may go," said Angel to Connor, who still lingered.

" If the safe is to be opened, I'm in it," was the sullen reply.

" You may go," Angel repeated; " the safe will not be opened tonight."

" I—"

" Get out!" thundered the detective, and Connor went.

Angel beckoned the commissionaire who had first interrogated Spedding.

" Take charge of that bag, Carter. There are all sorts of things in it that go off." Then he turned to the lawyer.

" Mr. Spedding, there is a great deal I have to say to you, but it would be better to defer our conversation; the genuine guard will be back in a few minutes. I told them to return at ten o'clock."

" By what authority?" blustered Spedding.

" Tush!" said Angel wearily. " Surely we've got beyond that stage. I expected your order for withdrawal and I gave the sergeant of the guard another order."

" A forged one, I gather?" said Spedding, recovering his balance. " Now I see why you have allowed my men to go, I over-rated your generosity."

" The order," said Angel soberly, " was signed by His Majesty's Secretary of State for Home Affairs "—he tapped the horrified lawyer on the shoulder—" and, if it would interest you to know, I have a warrant in my pocket for the arrest of every one of you. That I do not put it into execution is a matter of policy."

Spedding scanned the calm face of the detective in bewilderment.

" What do you want of me?" he asked at length.

" Your presence at Jimmy's flat at ten o'clock tomorrow morning," replied Angel.

" I will be there," he said, and turned to go.

" And, Mr. Spedding," called Jimmy as the lawyer reached the door, " regarding the boat you have chartered from Cardiff. One of my men is at present interviewing the captain and pointing

out to him the enormity of the offence of carrying fugitives from justice to Spanish-American ports."

"Damn you!" said Spedding and slammed the door.

Jimmy removed the commissionaire's cap from his head and grinned.

"One of these fine days, Angel, you'll lose your job, using the Home Secretary's name."

"It had to be done," said Angel sadly. "It hurts me to lie, but I couldn't very well tell Spedding that the sergeant of the commissionaires had been one of my own men all along, could I?"

That night a car swung along Pall Mall and headed southward across Westminster Bridge. It ran smoothly along the Old Kent Road, through Lewisham and Chislehurst.

Near the common the car pulled up at a big house standing in black quietude, and the two occupants of the car descended and passed through the stiff gate, along the gravelled path, and came to a stop at the broad porch.

"I don't know what old Mauder will say," said Angel as he fumbled for the bell; "he's a methodical old chap, and a most respected publisher."

In the silence they could hear the sound of the bell. They waited a few minutes, and rang again. Then they heard a window opened and a sleepy voice demand:

"Who is it?"

Angel stepped back from the porch and looked up.

"Hullo Mauder, I want you. I'm Angel."

"The devil!" said a surprised voice. "Wait a bit. I'll be down."

Mr. Ernest Mauder, in dressing-gown and pyjamas opened the door and conducted them to a cosy library.

"I'm awfully sorry to disturb you at this hour," Angel commenced, and the other arrested his apology with a gesture.

"You detectives are so fond of springing surprises on us unintelligent outsiders," he said with a twinkle in his eye, "that I am almost tempted to startle you."

"It takes a lot to startle me," said Angel complacently.

"Then you've brought it on your own head," warned the publisher. "Now let me tell you why you have driven from London on this miserable night on a fairly fruitless errand.

" What!" The smile left Angel's face.

" Ah, I thought that would startle you? You've come about a book published by our people nine years ago?"

" Yes."

" The title," said the publisher impressively, " is *A Study on the Origin of the Alphabet*, and the author is a half-mad old don, who was turned out of Oxford for drunkenness."

" Mauder," said Jimmy, gazing at his host in bewilderment, " you've hit it—but—"

" Ah," I thought so. Well, I'm afraid you're out of luck. We only printed five copies; the book was a failure—the same ground was more effectively covered elsewhere. I found a dusty old copy a few years ago, and gave it to my secretary. So far as I know, that is the only copy in existence."

" Your secretary?" asked Angel eagerly. " What is her name?"

" If you had asked me that earlier in the evening I couldn't have told you," said Mauder, obviously enjoying the mystery he had created, " but since then my memory has been refreshed. The girl—and a most charming one too—was me secretary for two years."

" What is her name?" asked Angel impatiently.

" Kathleen Kent," replied the publisher.

" Kathleen Kent!" repeated Jimmy in wide-eyed astonishment. " Angel and Ministers of Grace defend us!"

" Kathleen Kent!" repeated Angel. " But how did you know why we had come?"

" Well," drawled the elder man, wrapping his dressing-gown round him more snugly, " it was a guess to some extent. You see, Angel, when a man has been already awakened out of a sound sleep to answer mysterious inquiries about an out-of-date book—"

" What," cried Jimmy, jumping up, " somebody has already been here?"

" Nobody has been here," said Mauder, " but an hour ago a man called me on the telephone—"

Jimmy looked at Angel and Angel looked at Jimmy.

" Jimmy," said Angel penitently, " write me down as a fool. Who was the man?" he demanded.

" I couldn't quite catch his name. He was very apologetic. I gathered that he was a newspaperman and wanted particulars in connection with the death of the author."

Angel smiled.

" The author's alive all right," he said grimly.

" How did the voice sound—a little pompous, with a clearing of the throat before each sentence?"

The other nodded.

" Spedding!" said Angel, rising. " We haven't any time to lose, Jimmy."

Mauder accompanied them into the hall.

" One question," said Jimmy. " Can you give us any idea of the contents of the book?"

" I can't," was the reply. " I have a dim recollection that much of it was purely conventional, that there were some rough drawings and the earlier forms of the alphabet were illustrated—the sort of thing you find in encyclopaedias or in the back pages of a teacher's Bible."

The two men took their seats in the car as it swung round and turned its headlights towards London.

" ' I found this puzzle in a book, from which some mighty truths were took,' " murmured Angel, and Jimmy nodded. He was at that moment utterly oblivious of the fortune in the great safe at Lombard Street. His mind was filled with anxiety about the girl, who, unknowingly, held the word which might tomorrow make her an heiress. Spedding had moved promptly and he would be aided no doubt by Connor and the Borough Lot. Time went all too slowly for his mood.

One incident relieved the monotony of the journey. As the car sped round a corner in a narrow road, it almost crashed into another car which was coming much too fast from the opposite direction.

They had headed for Kathleen's home. Streatham was deserted. At the quiet house in which the girl lived Angel stopped the car and alighted.

He rang the bell and it was almost immediately answered by an elderly lady, wrapped in a dressing-gown who bade him enter.

" Nobody seems to be surprised to see us tonight," thought Angel with bitter humour.

" My name is Angel, I am from Scotland Yard," he announced. The elderly lady seemed unimpressed.

" Kathleen has gone," she informed him.

Jimmy heard her with a sinking heart.

" Yes," said the old lady, " Mr. Spedding, the solicitor, called for her an hour ago and "—she grew confidential—" as I know you gentlemen are very much interested in the case, I may say that there is every hope that before tomorrow my neice will be

in possession of her fortune."

Jimmy groaned.

" Please go on," said Angel.

" It came about over a book which was given to Kathleen some years ago. When Kathleen's father died I had a great number of things stored, including an immense quantity of books."

" Where are they stored?" Angel realised the rudeness of his impatience. " Forgive me, but it is absolutely necessary that I should follow your niece at once."

" In an old house on the Tonbridge Road," she answered. " So far as I can remember, it is somewhere between Crawley and Tonbridge, but I am not sure. Kathleen knows the place well; it belonged to her father—that is why she has gone."

" Somewhere on the Tonbridge Road!" repeated Angel helplessly.

They stood a minute, then Jimmy demanded unexpectedly:

" Have you a Bible?"

The old lady allowed the astonishment she felt at the question to be apparent.

" I have several."

" A teacher's Bible, with notes?" he asked.

She thought.

" Yes, I have. Will you wait?"

She left the room.

" We should have told the girl about Spedding—we should have told her," said Angel in despair.

" It's no use crying over spilt milk," said Jimmy quietly. " The thing to do now is to frustrate Spedding and rescue the girl."

" Will he dare—?"

" He'll dare. He's been on the verge of ruin for months. I discovered he's in a hole that the dome of St. Paul's wouldn't fill. He's a trustee or something for an association that has been pressing him for money. Spedding will dare anything"—he paused, then—" but if he dares hurt that girl he's a dead man."

The old lady came in at that moment with the book, and Jimmy quickly turned over the pages.

Near the end he came upon something that brought a gleam to his eye.

He took out a notebook and wrote rapidly, comparing the text with drawings in the book.

Angel, leaning over, followed the work breathlessly.

"There—and there—and there!" he said exultantly. "What fools we were, Jimmy, what fools we were."

Jimmy turned to the lady.

"May I borrow this book?" he asked. "It will be returned. Thank you. Now, Angel," he looked at his watch and made a move for the door, "we've got two hours. We'll make the Tonbridge road by daybreak."

Only one other person they disturbed that night was a peppery old colonel of Marines who lived at Blackheath.

There, as the dawn broke, Angel explained his mission and writing with feverish haste, subscribed to the written statement by oath. Whereupon the Justice of the Peace issued a warrant for the arrest of Joseph James Spedding, Solicitor, on a charge of felony.

Kathleen very naturally regarded the lawyer as a disinterested friend; and if there had been any act needed to induce a kindly feeling for him it was this last act of his, for when he had discovered by the merest accident, a clue to the hidden word, he had rushed off to tell her about it. He had naturally advised immediate action and hinted vaguely at difficulties which would beset her if she delayed. She wanted to let Angel know, and Jimmy; but this the lawyer would not hear of and she thought it the cautiousness of the legal mind.

Then the excitement of the midnight adventure appealed to her—the swift run in the car through the wild night and the wonderful possibilities of the search at the end of the ride.

So she went, and her appetite for adventure was all but satisfied by a narrowly-averted collision with another car speeding in the opposite direction. She did not see its passengers, but she hoped they had had as great a fright as she.

As a matter of fact, neither of the two men had given a second thought to their danger ; one's mind was entirely and completely filled with her image, and the other was brooding on telephones.

She had no time to tire of the excitement of the night—the run across soaking heaths and through dead villages, where cottages showed up for a moment in the glare of the headlights, then faded into the darkness. Too soon she came to a familiar stretch of the road, and the car slowed down so that they might not pass the grass lane that led to Flairby Mill. They came to it at last. The

car bumped cautiously over deep ruts, over loose stones, and through long drenched grass till there loomed out of the night the squat outlines of Flairby Mill.

Once the mill had been famous in the district and the rumble of its big stones went on incessantly, night and day; but the wheel had long since broken, its wreck lay in the bed of the stream that had so faithfully served it; its machinery was rust and scrap-iron, and only the house that adjoined was of value. With little or no repair the homestead had remained watertight and weather-proof and here had Kathleen stored the odds and ends of her father's household.

Spedding took the key from her and opened the door.

"You must direct me, Miss Kent," he said, and Kathleen pointed the way in the light of his torch. They went up the oaken stairs, covered with dust, their footsteps resounding hollowly. At the head of the stairs was a heavy door and the lawyer opened it.

It was a big room, almost like a barn, with a timbered ceiling sloping downward. There were three shuttered windows; and another door at the farther end of the room that led to a smaller room.

Spedding placed the torch on the table and looked round the room in search of the books. They were not difficult to discover; they had been unpacked and were ranged in three disorderly rows upon roughly constructed bookshelves. He turned the torch so that the light would fall on the books. He went carefully over them, row by row, checking each copy, and half muttering the name of each tome he handled.

"*Anabasis*, Xenophon," he muttered; "Josephus, *Works and Life; Essays of Elia, Essays*. Emerson; *Essays*, De Quincey. What's this?"

He drew from between two bulky volumes a thin little book with a discoloured cover. He dusted it carefully, glanced at the title, opened it and read the title-page, then walked back to the table, sat down and started to read the book.

There was something in his attitude at that moment which caused Kathleen uneasiness and stirred within her a sense of danger. Perhaps it was that until then he had shown her marked deference, had been almost obsequious. Now that the book was found he disregarded her. He did not bring it to her or invite her attention; she felt that the lawyer's interest in her affairs had stopped just as soon as the discovery was made.

He turned the leaves carefully and her eyes wandered from the book to his face. She had never looked at him before with any critical interest. In the unfriendly light of the torch she saw his imperfections—the brutal strength of his jaw, the thinness of his lips, the heavy eyelids and the curious hairlessness of his face.

" Don't you think we had better be going?" Kathleen asked.

Spedding looked up and his stare was in keeping with his words.

" When I have finished we will go," he said brusquely and went on reading.

She gasped, for, even with her suspicions, she had not been prepared for such a complete and instant dropping of his mask of amiability. She made another attempt.

" I must insist, Mr. Spedding, that you finish your examination of that book elsewhere. I do not know whether you are aware that you are occupying the only chair in the room," she added indignantly.

" I am very well aware," said the lawyer calmly, without raising his eyes. " May I ask you to remain quiet until I have finished."

She stood in silence, her mind turning with schemes of escape.

After a while the lawyer looked up and tapped the book with his forefinger.

" Your precious secret is a secret no longer," he said with a chill laugh. " If I hadn't been a fool, I should have seen through it before." He looked at the girl meditatively.

" I have two propositions before me," he said, " and I want your help."

" You will have no help from me, Mr. Spedding," she replied coldly. " Tomorrow you will be asked to explain your extraordinary conduct."

He laughed.

" Tomorrow, by whom? By Angel or the young crook who's half in love with you?" He laughed again as he saw her colour rising. " Tomorrow I shall be away—I am not concerned with tomorrow as much as today." She remembered that they were within an hour of daybreak. " Today is a most fateful day for me—and for you." He emphasised the last words.

She preserved an icy silence.

" If I may put my case in a nutshell," he went on, with all his old-time suavity. " It is neccessary for me to secure the money that is stored in that ridiculous safe." She checked an exclamation. " When I say get the money, I mean get it for myself, every penny of it and convert it to my private use. You can have no idea,"

he went on, " how comforting it is to be able to stand up and say in so many words the unspoken thoughts of a year. I thought when old Reale's commission was entrusted to me that I should find the legatees ordinary plain fools, who would have unfolded to me day by day the result of their investigations. I did not reckon very greatly on you, for women are naturally secretive and suspicious, but I did rely upon two criminals. My experience of the criminal classes, a fairly extensive one, led me to believe that with them I should have no difficulty." He pursed his lips. " I had calculated without Jimmy," he said shortly. He saw the light in the girl's eye. " Yes," he went on, " Jimmy is no ordinary man and Angel is a glaring instance of bad nomenclature. I nearly had Jimmy once. Did he tell you how he got the red envelope? I see he did not. Well, I nearly had him. I went to look for his body next morning and found nothing. Later in the day I received a picture postcard from him, of a particularly flippant and vulgar character." He stopped as if inviting comment.

" Your confessions have little interest for me," said the girl quietly. " I just want to see the last of you."

" I'm coming to that. I was very rude to you a little while ago, but I was busily engaged and, besides I desired to give an artistic introduction to the new condition. Now, so far from being rude, I wish to be very kind. My position is this," Spedding continued. " There is an enormous sum of money, which rightly is yours. It is unfortunate that I also, who had no earthly right, should desire this money and we have narrowed down the ultimate issue to this: Shall it be Spedding or Kathleen Kent? I say Spedding and circumstances support my claim, for I have you here and, if you will pardon the suspicion of melodrama, very much in my power. If I am to take the two millions, *your* two millions, without interruption, it will depend entirely upon you."

He stopped to notice the effect of his words. The girl made no response, but he could see the terror in her eyes.

" It has come to this—I have got to silence you."

He put forward the proposition with the utmost coolness and Kathleen went cold at all the words implied.

" I can silence you by killing you," he said simply " or by marrying you. Now, of the alternatives, which do you prefer?"

She looked at him with horror then: " I'd rather die!" she said, and, as his swift hand caught at her throat, she screamed.

His face looked down into hers, no muscle of it moved, she saw his pitiless eyes.

Then, suddenly, he released her, and she fell back.

She heard his quick breathing, closed her eyes, and waited.

Then she looked up. She saw a revolver in his hand and in a numb kind of way she realised that it was not pointed at her.

"Hands up!" She heard Spedding's harsh shout. "Hands up, both of you!"

She heard an insolent laugh.

There were only two men in the world who would laugh like that in the face of death and they were both standing in the doorway—Angel and Jimmy.

The revolver in Spedding's hand did not tremble. He was as self-possessed as he had been a few minutes before.

"If either of you moves, I'll shoot the girl." said Spedding.

They hesitated in the doorway, and Jimmy spoke.

"Spedding, Spedding, you're frightening that child; put your gun down and we'll talk. Do you hear me? If you harm that girl I'll take you with my bare hands and treat you Indian fashion, tie you down and stake you out, then burn you slowly. Yes, and by the Lord, if any man interferes, even if it's Angel here, I'll swing for him. D'you hear that?"

Spedding shuddered at the ferocity in the man's bearing and lowered his gun.

"Let us talk," he said huskily.

"That's better," said Angel, "and let me talk first. I want you."

"Come and get me."

"The risk is too great," said Angel frankly, "and besides, I can afford to wait."

"Well?" said the lawyer defiantly, after a long pause. He kept the weapon in his hand pointed in the vicinity of the girl.

Angel exchanged a word in an undertone with his companion, then:

"You may go," he said and stepped aside.

Spedding motioned him farther away, then edged his way to the door. He paused for a moment as if about to speak, then suddenly raised his revolver and fired twice.

Angel felt the wind of the bullets as they passed his face, and sprang just as Jimmy's arm shot out, holding a gun.

Three shots so rapid that their reports were almost simultaneous followed the lawyer, but they were too late. The heavy door crashed to in Angel's face, and the snap of the lock told them they were prisoners.

Angel went to the window, but it was shuttered, nailed, and immovable.

He looked at Jimmy and laughed.

"Trapped!"

Angel was still examining the windows when a report outside the house arrested his attention.

"What is that?" asked the girl.

"It is either Mr. Spedding's well-timed suicide, which I fear is too much to expect," said Angel philosophically, "or else it's the same Mr. Spedding destroying the working parts of our car. I am afraid it is the latter."

He moved up and down the room, examined the smaller room at the other end, then sniffed uneasily.

"Miss Kent," he said earnestly, "do you feel well enough to tell me something?"

"Yes," she said, with a faint smile, "I'm quite all right now."

"What is under here?" asked Angel, pointing to the floor.

"An old workshop, a sort of storehouse," she replied in surprise.

"What is in it?" There was no mistaking the seriousness in Angel's voice.

"Broken furniture, paint and things. Why?"

"Jimmy," said Angel quickly, "do you smell anything?"

Jimmy sniffed.

"Yes; *move*! The windows!"

They made a quick search of the room. In a corner Jimmy unearthed a rusty cavalry sabre.

"That's the thing," said Angel, and started to prise loose the solid shutter; but the wood was unyielding, and just as they had secured a purchase the blade snapped.

"There is an old axe in the cupboard," the girl said.

With a shout of joy Angel dragged out an ancient battle-axe, and attacked the shutter. With each blow the wood flew in big splinters, but fast as he worked something else was moving faster. Angel had not mistaken the smell of petrol, and now smoke flowed into the room from underneath the door, and in spirals between the floorboards. He stopped, exhausted and Jimmy picked up the axe and after one vigorous stroke a streak of daylight showed in the shutter. The room was becoming intolerably hot and Angel took up the axe and hacked away furiously.

"Shall we escape?" asked the girl quietly.

"Yes, I think so," said Jimmy cheerfully.

"I shall not regret tonight," she told him.

" Nor I." Jimmy's voice was low. " Whatever happens, it's very good to love once in a lifetime, even if that once is on the edge of eternity."

She looked at him, trying to speak.

Angel was hard at work on the window, his back was towards them, and Jimmy bent and kissed her.

The window was suddenly down. Angel turned in perspiring triumph.

" Outside as quick as dammit!"

He had found a rope and now he slipped it round the girl's waist. " When you get down run clear of the smoke," he instructed her, and then found herself swinging in mid-air, in a cloud of rolling smoke that blinded and choked her. She felt the ground, and staying only to loose the rope she ran outward and fell exhausted on a grassy bank.

In a few minutes the two men were by her side.

They stood in silence looking at the fire, then Kathleen remembered:

" The book, the book!" she cried.

" It's inside my shirt," said the shameless Angel.

(*To be concluded*)

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JOHN de SOLA

non-fiction

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fiction

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LADY OF NO COMPASSION, Peter Malloch (*John Long*, 15*s.*)

The author's 15th book, and obviously under a pseudonym, for the style is reminiscent. This story is set in Glasgow where pretty Sandra Pell is attacked and strangled, not long after she walks out on her boy friend, then another girl, Helen Wright, is murdered, presumably because she knew something about the first crime . . . A good thriller, well observed, and though it's not too hard to spot the crux of it all, this is good reading.

RIDE A TIGER, Anthony A. Randall (*Hale*, 12*s.* 6*d.*)

International espionage again, with plenty of expertise, excellent plotting and a tight narrative. This time it is the Russians, with a master-plan for contriving a nuclear rocket base dangerous to the Western powers. The 'goodies,' as the saying is, charge into the fray and rout the 'baddies,' and do it exceedingly well. High marks for speed and occasional, most welcome irony. If the author has any faults at all it is a tendency to overdo the exclamation marks.

A SCATTER OF PAPERBACKS

DEADLINE, Patrick Macnee (*Hodder*, 3*s.* 6*d.*)

The resourceful Mr. Steed (of TV's 'The Avengers') in a first publication thriller, all in the brisk, knock-about Idiot Box style. Readable for the uncritical.

DESPERATE MEN, James D. Horan (*Mayflower*, 5*s.*)

This is the authentic, unbeatable picture of the real private eye. It tells the story of Pinkerton's National Detective Agency and, in passing, debunks much of the Wild West.

NEON HAYSTACK, The, James Michael Ullman (*Mayflower*, 3*s*. 6*d*.)

The narrator's kid brother disappears in the big city, and, with the help of a frowsy, realistic private eye, the search is on. Violent, exciting; crime plus.

VANISHING POINT, Patricia Wentworth (*Penguin*, 3*s*. 6*d*.)

Two women disappear in the quiet village of Hazel Green, close to a secret Air Ministry project. Security and the police panic, and in comes Miss Maud Silver, to sort everybody out.

WORLD OF VIOLENCE, The, Colin Wilson (*Pan* 5*s*.)

A curious, rambling book solid with scholarship and knowledge. Basically, it concerns the hero's emergence from childhood into a world of violence, crime, and brutality.

EW BOOK MART

A service for EWMM *readers without charge for buying, selling, or exchanging any books by*

EDGAR WALLACE

(*Each advertisement, other than from subscribers, should be accompanied by coupon from page* 127 *of the current* EWMM)

WANTED: Old paper-back editions of EW books buy or exchange. M. J. Cordwell, c/o Miss Blandford, 8, Cotman St., London, S.W.18.

OFFER two hard-cover fiction books for one Edgar Wallace paper-back (crime only), and three hard-cover for one Edgar Wallace ditto. R. Deacon, 19 Ruthin Road, Blackheath, London, S.E.3.

MANY hard-cover EW's wanted. Please send full lists or can send my wants list on request. George C. Hoyt, Jnr., 10110 Swinton, Granada Hills, California, U.S.A., 91343.

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WANTED: *Daughters of the Night; The Man Who Changed His Name; The Million Dollar Story; Smithy.* B. M. Byrne, 118, Central Avenue, Indooroopilly, Brisbane, Queens, Australia.

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 bought my first *EWMM* at the Exhibition (which I very much enjoyed), and read with interest the review of Lord Russell's *Deadman's Hill.* I have now read Mr. Justice's article on the case in *EWMM* [September] in the copy you kindly sent me . . . as a practising criminologist (in my native United States) I can see that the court evidence was clear and solid. But I would unhesitatingly criticise the investigating officers and suggest a lot of further enquiries could have been made, certain further searches carried out. On the evidence in court Hanratty was guilty; on surmises based on what *should* have been done, he was apparently not guilty. Perhaps the case will be reopened, as is happening with Evans, in the Christie case?

E. M. E. PFEIL.

London, W.2.

You published a letter of mine in November, when I said I had attended the Hanratty trial. I have read *Deadman's Hill*, by Lord Russell, now, and can only repeat my horror at such an awful miscarriage of justice. *Surely* the basis for the Evans' enquiry (and that is strong) is less concrete than that for a Hanratty enquiry? Can nobody do anything for him?

(Miss) E. A. DILLY.

Luton, Beds.

● *Letters continue to reach us regarding Hanratty;* EWMM *is a popular magazine, not equipped to run a crusade. But perhaps the private citizens who brought about the enquiry into Evans will have their attention directed to the many letters from* EWMM *readers recording their uneasiness about the hanging of James Hanratty.*

Correction

A story I liked in the November issue was *La Tête Noire*, by Charles Alston Collins, described in the introduction as being the brother-in-law of Charles Dickens. In actual fact he was the son-in-law of the great novelist, marrying Miss Katie Dickens in 1860. Also, he was born in 1828; it was Wilkie (his brother) who was born in 1824.

J. BEST.

Stoke, Coventry.

● EWMM *apologises, but pleads innocence. Its authority for the published statement was a reference book believed to be reliable.*

Bouquets and . . .

I got out my knife for John de Sola [December] when he impugned my beloved Kingsley Amis, but, to be honest, *The Egyptologists* was a poor book. I forgive you, Mr. de Sola, because you also praised William Haggard so warmly in the same issue.

(Miss) JEAN FRIMLEY.

Tenterden, Kent.

I have just looked through the December *EWMM*; very good indeed. It really does get better (if this is possible) each month. I would like to say that *EWMM* has put me in touch with many collectors [of Edgar Wallace books] who have helped me, and I hope in turn I have helped them.

HERBERT A. SMITH.

Diss, Norfolk.

I knew Neville Heath quite well and thought Anthony Boucher's article about him [December] very well done. I very much enjoy the *True Crime Classics* and would like to see them in a more permanent form. As a ' fan ' of such works, I can verify that both the standard and factual accuracy are extremely high.

EDWARD CUSACK.

Stirling.

EW Book Mart Coupon 19

EDGAR WALLACE EXHIBITION

Held at the National Book League, London, from 25 November to 4 December, 1965, the exhibition included photographs, and programmes, manuscripts and letters. There was a most comprehensive display of various early editions of the books, including the Tallis Press edition of *The Four Just Men*, and the very first book of all, a paper-covered edition, published in South Africa, 1898, of *The Mission that Failed*.

Dozens of foreign editions were on display, from every possible country ranging from the Americas to Turkey, one of the most unusual being *The Crimson Circle* running as a serial in a Greenland newspaper.

An exhibit of great interest was the desk Edgar Wallace designed. It has an assymmetrical cut-out front so that the dictaphone could stand on the left and on the right a wooden tray on runners which could carry the endless cups of sweet weak tea. A secret compartment held writing paper.

Among the personal items was Mr. Wallace's Press Club Medal, commemorating his chairmanship, his South African war ribbons, and the gold cigarette case with his racing colours of claret, white, and gold inscribed with the names of the race-horses he bred. There was one of his famous cigarette holders, this particular holder being telescopic so that it extended from nine inches to its full length of three feet. Visitors to the exhibition were fascinated by letters from Edgar Wallace to his daughter, Penelope — frequently written in verse and illustrated in his own individual style.

Another pair of exhibits which received a great deal of attention were a tape-recording of Mr. Wallace's voice, reading his short story, *The Man in the Ditch*, and a short film taken by his German publisher of an afternoon at Chalklands, Edgar Wallace's last home in Buckinghamshire, and showing him as the world remembers him.

Miss Penelope Wallace was at the exhibition every afternoon and greatly enjoyed meeting visitors. The attendance records were, in spite of some very bad weather, quite remarkably high. (A specially designed souvenir programme was given to visitors, and some of these are still available for any *EWMM* readers who care to apply, enclosing a 6d. stamp).

EDGAR WALLACE EXHIBITION

Photographs taken at the reception on the night before the public opening.

Below: from left to right, H. J. Chamberlain, Chairman of the Press Club; Horace Sanders, President of the Press Club; Penelope Wallace; a journalist friend, A. Powis Bale, and, in front, Michael Halcrow, grandson of Edgar Wallace.

Right: actor Finlay Currie, seated in the Edgar Wallace memorial chair, talking to Nigel Morland, Editor of *EWMM*.

Back cover: the Edgar Wallace bust, executed by Jo Davidson, flanked by foreign editions and several early books.