THE TOP SELLING BRITISH CRIME MAGAZINE

Edgar Wallace

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

NEW!

FRANK SWINNERTON
Girl in Flight

EDGAR WALLACE
Sheer Melodrama

SIR A. CONAN DOYLE
The Lost Special

Plus Seven *New* Stories

No. 27
Vol. 3

Edgar Wallace

3/-

This drawing of Edgar Wallace, by Carlo Tora (Chamberlain Studios, London), was made in 1966, the original being in the Press Club

EDGAR WALLACE

Mystery Magazine

Vol. III No. 27 October, 1966

Mystery, Crime, and Detection for the Aficionado

CONTENTS

STORIES

FEATURES

Cartoons by MACIEK

Edgar Wallace Mystery Magazine *is published on the 1st of each month by Edgar Wallace Magazines Ltd. All characters in these stories are entirely fictitious and in no way refer to any person, living or dead. 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.;* NIGEL MORLAND, *Editor.*

Briefly

'ARE YOU an aficionado?' learned counsel asked one of our contributors, who was a witness in a court case when this magazine was indirectly mentioned. There seemed to be some dubiety as to what precisely an aficionado is.

The word has been on *EWMM*'s title page since the beginning of 1965—something the Americans call an editorial masthead. We say, quite simply: Mystery, Crime and Detection for the Aficionado. The word does not appear in the English reference books or dictionaries in this editorial office, but every British visitor to Spain is aware of it.

It means amateur, and it began as a description of those who follow bull-fights. Then, in the United States, it spread as a more elegant, less ordinary-sounding word than fan or devotee. It is growing in popularity in this country, thanks to its steady appearance on *EWMM*'s masthead, for it is a word that falls neatly off, even, the sometimes clumsy Anglo-Saxon tongue, and people who like crime stories enjoy being regarded as 'aficionados.'

After all, state at a gathering that one is an 'amateur of crime stories' and most non-readers wonder exactly what you are supposed to be; describe yourself as a fan and it could be assumed that you climb to the roofs of airports and howl like a dervish *a la mode Beatle* . . .

But admit that 'I am an aficionado of crime novels' and you are looked upon with that curious mixture of awe and respect with which the British gaze at someone who has said an unknown foreign word in their midst—he must be very clever, they think, but we can't show our ignorance by asking outright what it means; it could be something important. So the utterer of this strange word is treated courteously, pressed to have another drink, and asked—obliquely, blandly, even cunningly—to explain what an aficionado is.

By the time the word is qualified some of the questioners look down their noses and state they *never* read crime novels, except Agatha Christie, Ian Fleming, Georges Simenon, which are 'not really thrillers, are they?' . . . whereupon the aficionado enlightens them about the colourful world of fictional crime, and before long new aficionados are in the making.

The Editor.

FRANK SWINNERTON

GIRL IN FLIGHT

A great modern novelist has written for EWMM *a crime story with warmth and heart*

TOM CALLOWAY and I had driven down to Brighton on a magnificent autumn evening when very strong sea breezes tingled the cheeks and brought a heady triumph to the spirit. Having dined quietly in a favourite side-street restaurant, we strolled westward along the deserted promenade in what for me was silent exultation; and at one point, having decided in spite of the wind to fill and light my pipe, I withdrew under the lee of an empty shelter, leaving the detective-inspector to walk slowly on. I now remember that I did this at his suggestion.

I should have rejoined him within a minute if Calloway had been an ordinary man; but he was not ordinary. His gift for total disappearance was called into play. I should therefore have missed him if he had not stopped me from behind with a touch upon the arm.

" Keep quite still," he murmured. " In this shadow. I'll come back."

I focused him, as it were, and kept my gaze fixed upon the broad shoulders as they were borne forward for several yards. Calloway then stood watching something invisible to me. My eyes, strained by wind and darkness and concentration, began to prick so sharply that I was forced to close them; and when I looked again I could see only the dark water and the sparkling lights overhead. I remained where I was, trying to be as immobile as I was sure Calloway must be.

Suddenly, against the black sea and crested rollers, a dim, fast-moving figure ran shoreward along a stone breakwater, leaping down, and an instant later flying across the promenade at such an angle that I caught a glimpse of the white-faced slimness of a young

woman. She was immediately hidden by a burlier object which I knew to be Calloway, whom she must have passed within a couple of yards; and, becoming a shadow, was gone.

Had I recognized that face? I must confess that my uncertainty and consequent agitation were so great that I started forward. Remembering Calloway's injunction, however, I checked the movement. Nothing could check the rapidity of my heartbeat.

He was again there in the shadow, his eyes directed to the end of the breakwater, over which waves were dashing in glorious tumult. We stood in silence, without comment upon the running figure; and I knew that his thoughts were as swift as they were secret. At last:

" We'll go back," he murmured, to my relief; and as we went he seemed to have dismissed the incident from his attention, for he spoke easily of a new ballet which he and his wife had witnessed a few nights before. The ballet, a modern product, had mocked the macabre dream fantasies of a respectable bank cashier with what Tom thought unnecessary cruelty. " Quite heartless," said he. " I didn't like it."

I thought: " You being full of heart, my boy!" But I said nothing.

In speaking, Calloway glanced aside to an illuminated glass-covered case in which two dials showed the times of high and low tide; but he did not pause. I noticed that low tide would be at two o'clock in the morning.

Only when we were back at his car did Calloway reveal what must have been his intention all along. He said:

" Look here, old chap; I wonder whether you'd mind driving back to town alone? I think I'd like to stay here overnight."

" Should I stay, too?" I asked. His reply was bland.

" By no means. I know you have an appointment first thing in the morning. I've got a bag in the car."

" Strange!" said I.

" No, no; it's always there."

" Well, then, I'll go up by train. You may need the car."

He gave me a steady glance, as if wondering how hurt I was by his abrupt decision, or how much I guessed of his real plan; but the offer was evidently welcome.

" Do so. That's very kind and very helpful."

I left him there, and walked fast towards the station—until I was out of sight, when I began thoughtfully to dawdle. As each minute passed I felt more convinced that the running figure and

blanched face, which Calloway must have seen more clearly than I, were those of Nancy Temple, who was supposed to be in Paris. And Nancy Temple was the darling of my heart.

★

Thoroughly troubled, I reached the railway station, took a ticket for London, and, still doubtful whether to go or stay, approached the platform.

"Come along, sir!" cried the man at the gate. "Hurry up!"

He pushed my arm as he clipped the ticket. He slammed the gate behind me. At his bidding, I ran; and as a porter snatched open the carriage door I jumped into the moving train. There was a crash behind me as the door was flung to; I was a little breathless; and as I recovered I had yet another shock. Before me, sitting by herself, was Nancy. Her face, drawn, even agonized, turned scarlet.

Now I do not possess the art of saying and doing the right thing. I tend to blurt or be dumb. But when Nancy, as if driven by deep and candid impulse, cried "Oh, Joe! How thankful I am to see you!" and gave me her nearer hand, which happened to be the left, I took it with joy and as I sat beside her would have kept it within my own.

Whether this act struck her as too possessive, or whether she felt her own greeting to have been dangerously unguarded, I could not tell. I have since learnt that neither was the case; but it is true that as the colour passed from her cheeks her expression grew veiled.

"Precious words!" said I. "What can I do?"

The hand was withdrawn. At last, not looking at me, but holding herself aloof, as a stranger, she answered:

"Just *be*. Be your sane and generous self."

"Too easy. And surely too impersonal."

"All the same, far more valuable than protestation."

"I'm not to protest? Am I allowed to feel—sympathy?"

"No. Nothing."

"Yet you were thankful, you said, to see me."

I saw a quick glance.

"Forget that," she replied. "It meant nothing."

"To me, it sounded good," said I. "Are you scrambling back to safety?"

She started so violently that her elbow knocked against mine.

She was as pale now as she had formerly been. I could recall that glimpse of the running figure as it passed close to Calloway; and I could not bear to alarm her further by adding that Calloway had seen all she did.

The train, by this time, was rushing at high speed towards London. We should arrive within the hour. Where was she going in or from London?

"By the way," I ventured; "what were you doing in Brighton? I thought you were in Paris."

"I'm still in Paris," was the surprising answer. "I've never left it."

"You're flying back tonight?"

"And you haven't seen me!"

"My darling, darling girl," I whispered, "I'd lie to the death for you; but it wouldn't be any good. Calloway's in Brighton."

Her breath caught. Her eyes closed. Though she tried to clench her teeth she could not entirely do so, and I heard them chatter.

"He doesn't know me. He didn't see me," she said at length.

"He knows everybody. He saw you closer than I did."

"Where? When?"

"On the breakwater."

"Oh, God!" I thought she would faint. "You were mistaken. Calloway was mistaken."

"Calloway's never mistaken. I'm bound to tell you that."

"And you're his friend. You'll go straight to him. You'll ring him up tonight." The tone was more bitter than the despairing words. I had become an enemy.

"You're unjust. I said I would lie to the death for you."

"But not to Calloway."

"You either trust me or you don't," I warned her. "The feeling goes and comes, like the wind. I'm not to protest, feel, or advise. You are to deceive me or not as you choose."

She turned away in aversion.

"Can't you understand?" I said, with deep earnestness. "I'll help you. I'll go with you to the plane. I'll deny that I've seen you. But in the end, my darling, that won't avail. You'd far better stay, see Calloway, tell him everything!"

Nancy shuddered. My words had reached her; but she was unable, through strong emotion, to accept them. On the contrary she rose to her feet, and when I caught her arm in entreaty she violently thrust me away and went to another seat in the coach

where the presence of two strangers forbade me to follow.

In the end we drove together in silence by taxi to the Airport; and at parting, as if she took leave for the last time, she came close into my arms and, crying, kissed me. I don't know what I said at that moment—no doubt it was some incoherent protestation of love, of loyalty—but she did not stay. Head downcast, she ran to the plane, which I presently saw moving down the airfield. It rose in the darkness; its shape was lost; Nancy was gone. Meanwhile I, dismissed by Calloway, and in spite of that embrace refused her confidence, strode about with a sense of complete futility.

What had happened? What had Calloway seen and guessed? I could imagine Nancy on the plane, uselessly flying from immediate danger to a suspense even harder to bear. I could imagine Calloway, like an invisible cat, watching for low tide and the discovery he hoped it would bring. Nancy was no stranger to him. He had not pursued her; therefore he knew where she had come from. Somebody had seen her departure from Paris, and somebody else had watched her board the train to London. Even I, it might be, was now under observation.

Evidently Calloway knew more of all this than I could understand. He had suggested the trip to Brighton, well aware that he would learn there something he wanted to know. He had kept his own counsel. Therefore he had assumed that where Nancy was concerned I should be untrustworthy. Used as I was to his omniscence, I felt this to be an outrage, and not for the first time did I curse my friend. He was a merciless devil. Had he hinted as much when he condemned the modern ballet as heartless?

What a night I had! I did not sleep; I groped for meanings. And in the morning I was as far as ever from the solution. I kept my City appointment, being hardly sensible of its outcome. Hurrying back to my flat I found that no message whatever had come for me; and although I remained at home all the afternoon I heard nothing from Calloway. For a little while I had the unreasoning hope that he had been beaten. As soon as I picked up a late evening paper at the Club, however, I was seized with panic. In the Stop Press column I read:

BRIGHTON MYSTERY

Police officers raiding Brighton flat of Montgomery Temple, well known author, in search illicit drugs found dead man, believed murdered. Enquiries proceeding.

The paper fell to the floor. I was in consternation.

No word from Calloway. No word from Calloway. When I sought news of him I learned nothing. " I think he's in Paris, Mr. Ferguson," was his assistant's reply. " Not sure, sir. You know what he is. Here, there, and everywhere!" In Paris, which that poor, pretty fool supposed would hide her from him! And I was in London, doing nothing whatever to protect my darling! I didn't know whereabouts in Paris she could be found. Calloway would know. I ground my teeth in a fury of despair. Why the hell hadn't she done as I wanted her to do? If she was innocent!

If she was innocent! I never doubted it. Or did I, in that despair, doubt it? The brother, Montgomery, had never been any good. One of those experimentalists who try all the vices, and a sick man. Evidently it was to save him that she had made the crazy journey. To save him from arrest; perhaps to save his life. And now her danger was really desperate; for a man had been murdered in Montgomery's flat, and she would be under still graver suspicion. Who was the man? Had she seen him? Had she, by some ghastly accident, killed him?

" Fool!" I exclaimed, many, many times in the course of the evening. It was myself I accused.

I was still in this state of insane anxiety when I heard a ring at the front door of the flat, and my man, Myers, ushered two people into the room which I was at that moment pacing. I stared, almost beside myself. Both were pale, weary, and very grave. They were Calloway and Nancy Temple.

★

" Well, Joe," Calloway said, in a serious tone. " I've persuaded Miss Temple to come back with me. Also to come here. She didn't want to do either."

I had already pulled an armchair forward for Nancy, who sank into it as if she were half-dead. In answer to my glance of enquiry, Tom said:

" Water, I think. Nothing stronger. I'll have some beer in a moment."

I hurried to pour water into a glass, which she accepted with a slight inclination of the head. Her hand was so unsteady that as she sipped from the glass some of the water spilled; and when I had poured beer for Tom and sherry for myself, I drew another chair as close as possible to hers, with the idea of giving her moral

support. I was sick with apprehension.

" Now, Joe," observed Tom, when he had drunk a little of his beer. " When you and I saw Miss Temple last night she had just thrown a large packet into the sea. That packet, according to my belief, contained heroin; and I thought it was a box recoverable at low tide. It wasn't. I was wrong."

I arched my brows. Calloway had been wrong!

" So it's lost," said I, realising the importance of this fact in evidence. " You don't charge her with anything."

Calloway stuck out his jaw.

" Miss Temple is liable to be charged with conspiracy to defeat the ends of justice," he continued.

I removed the glass from Nancy's hand, and in response to a nod from Calloway offered her a cigarette. As I lighted it for her I knew that she looked at me; but no word was spoken. Calloway went on :

" But she's a very brave girl, my boy; and I want her under your care, because you're her friend, and we're enquiring into an extremely nasty business. She mustn't run away or be without proper protection. I also didn't want her to think me a bully."

" She knows, at least, that you're a devil," I said. " I mentioned the fact to her."

" You're no fool, Joe," remarked Calloway. " And I hope she doesn't think you are." He smiled at Nancy as he spoke. Addressing her, he added: " Miss Temple, now that we're all here together, I think you might bring yourself to realise that I'm Joe's friend—and when I say ' friend ' I mean *friend*. We have hardly any secrets from each other—except that Joe slyly didn't tell me *you* were his friend, and I slyly didn't tell Joe how much I wanted to talk to you. So do you think you could tell us, no notes being taken, what happened?"

Then only did Nancy look at me in full trust. It was a look that any man might feel proud of; and I saw proud of it. Here is the story she told:

She had gone to Paris to find her brother, who was in what I should describe as the last stages of living decomposition. He was barely conscious, and in fact could live no more than a few weeks, owing to his idiotic habits. Having found him, she one day opened a letter which was obviously a warning. Not being acquainted with the dope jargon, she had difficulty in deciphering the message; but she was certain that her brother was both being blackmailed

and in danger of arrest. The name ' Calloway ' was three times underlined. It was clear that Montgomery's flat in Brighton contained a large quantity of dope which had been dumped there with more sense of security than this writer thought to be justified.

" Get it away!" he wrote. " *Pronto* !"

Jumping to the urgency of the matter, Nancy hit on the notion of flying into England, going herself to the brother's flat, disposing of the drug, and returning to Paris, as if nothing had happened to interrupt her stay there. She had no mishap. She reached the flat; she had a long hunt for the heroin, which she at length discovered in its hiding place. And she was thankfully on her way out when, almost the moment after she had switched off the light, she heard voices outside the front door, and a rustle as somebody fumbled with the lock.

Naturally she was scared. Fortunately she was able to slip into a little cloakroom behind the door. The men entered and went into the back room where she had found the dope. She heard them talking, arguing, shouting. She unlatched the door without a sound, was out on the landing and down the stairs in a flash, and ran as fast as she could to the sea, into which she cast her burden, which was in a single paper parcel. Only when she saw me on the train, and knew that Calloway was on the trail, actually in Brighton, did she lose her nerve. The rest I have told. She knew nothing at all of the murder.

" However," said Calloway; " that's all right. I had a man on the flat; but I hadn't told him to look out for a young lady. It wasn't until he saw you, Miss Temple, that I realised you were in the dope business. He recognized the two men who went in. recognized the one of them who came out. So we've got him. The two had a row, each thinking the other had pinched the stuff; and it wasn't murder at all. It was a knife duel. As for you, Miss Temple, you're still a guilty party; but I don't see what I can charge you with. So I'll leave you with Joe; and Joe must look after you as if you were—what shall I say—the Koh-i-noor Diamond?"

" More precious than that," said I.

Calloway raised his hands in a paternal blessing.

" I was once in love myself," he remarked. " And still am, to my cost—"

" And reward!" I reminded him.

Then my darling and I were alone.

THE
Bright, Hard Light

J. HOLLAND SMITH

Every crime, it has been said,
destroys more Edens
than our own

HE WAS ABOUT forty—short, fat, as smooth as lard. The corner of a pale blue silk handkerchief showed below the cuff of his cream silk suit. He was heavy with perfume. As he smiled the sun glinted on a gold-capped upper canine, and on the gun in his hand pointed unwaveringly at my throat. His pudgy finger was white on the trigger. His name was Arturo Tabona, and if I did not tell him within ten seconds where he would find Veronica, he was going to kill me.

He wanted to kill me. The whitened finger said so, and the smile, and the wide soft, brown eyes. But he played fair: he counted the seconds very slowly.

At that moment he was quite mad.

". . . a-two, a-three . . ."

It seemed a stupid thing to die for, a girl's address. Especially as before he had counted even ' a-one ' I had told him the exact truth:

" I honestly do not know."

More than that: I had no idea who Veronica was, or why Tabona should be interested. I had told him that, too. The gun was saying he did not believe me.

" . . . a-four, a-five."

You know the travel agent advertisements. They tell you to ' Come to sunny Malta for a carefree holiday, where the sun shines hotter and the sea seems bluer.'

From where I was standing, I couldn't see the sea. But it was hot, right enough, in that sun-filled yard behind the bar at Qrendi. The wall at my back was as hot as a griddle. The flies buzzed angrily round the sticky necks of a pile of dead coke bottles.

A brown dog lay panting in the snaggle-toothed shade of a young palm tree in a cracked pot. But it wasn't only the heat of July that was making the sweat trickle down my ribs.

". . . a-six, a-seven . . ."

I could have jumped him. I should have been dead before I reached him, but I could have tried. In fact, I did nothing—not even to shout for help. I had no more desire to answer questions than Tabona himself. I should have had to lie, and I am a bad liar.

It was a girl who saved me. She was not the kind of girl they write songs about, but if I'd been a composer, I'd have done my best. She wasn't even planning to save me: her only purpose was to empty a pail of dirty water over the palm tree. But the door was at Tabona's back, and the instant the latch rattled, his gun vanished. He was still smiling as he turned and spoke to her—explaining our presence, I suppose—in gutteral Maltese. She was not pleased to find us there, and she told him so, nervously, but firmly, and stood aside from the doorway to point the direction she wanted us to take.

I took it.

Before Tabona could move, I ploughed through the gap between his pointed kid shoes and her broad, bare feet, and plunged into the darkness of the bar, slamming and bolting the door. The girl cried out in surprise, but there was no one behind the high counter. The only customer at the scrubbed tables was a boy in a ragged shirt, finishing my drink, who watched me in silence; big, empty, black eyes in a pale, thin face.

Outside in the street under the battered statue of St. Matthew, a dozen other boys stood watching a teenage candidate for the local jail trying to pick the lock of my car with a safety pin, but when I roared at them, they melted away quicker than a tourist's money. Within five seconds I was burning my thighs on the sun-baked driver's seat. The engine fired as I touched the starter, and I blessed Gwanni Sant of Gwanni's Car Hire as I roared through the suffocating alleys of the village like a fly-crazed minotaur through a red-hot labyrinth.

Once clear of the houses, I drove aimlessly till I was thoroughly lost. Tabona would look for me where he expected to find me I argued. The chances were that if I could not find myself, for some time at least, he wouldn't find me either. When the old car began to protest at being worked so hard, I pulled it off the road

into the shade of a spreading carob, took my Walther from the glove compartment and with the pistol on my knee and my finger on the trigger—I wasn't going to be caught naked twice in one morning—I settled down to think.

★

The past was perfectly clear. At that time, I was Donald Thompson. A year earlier, I had been working for a news-magazine with its head offices in New York,—and seeing a lot of a girl named Arlene. She had died at the bottom of a traffic pile-up on the freeway. The verdict had been ' heroin.'

The police department had not been very sympathetic. They could do nothing without evidence. I said, ' Why aren't you out looking for it?' and they replied—in effect—' Why don't you try?' I resigned from the magazine, and became my own detective department. By the time I reached Malta, I was sitting on a big story, and still feeling bitter, I was planning to sit tight, although it was nearly time for the eggs, from New York, London, Hamburg Palermo and Izmir, to hatch. With Tabona gunning for me I should have been justified in calling for help. But in fact, nobody knew what I was doing in Malta. Even to Gwanni I was an innocent visitor. I hadn't said a word at the airport about the Walther. Nor about the *S.S. Persephone*. Nor about the Kulturan Brothers. Nor about drugs.

Yet Tabona knew. I had been in the island only seventy-two hours and already Tabona knew.

He had called me that morning at my hotel. I was sitting on the balcony of my room, smoking a cigarette and not drinking the abominable coffee room-service had delivered to me with my early call. Alone on the rocky beach below my window a blonde girl with a golden tan was practising diving into the sparkling sea. I was just telling myself that I should be content to sit watching her all morning, and to hell with vengeance when behind me in my room the telephone rang.

" Good morning, Mr. Thompson." He spoke English with a sing-song accent, unusual, but not difficult to understand. " My name is Arturo Tabona. You do not know me, but our mutual friend, Ahmed Kulturan, phoned me yesterday from Izmir to suggest we ought to meet."

My mind was full of the blonde girl. But that was no excuse for saying what I said. " Surely you mean Karim," I blurted out.

" Ahmed is dead."

It was true—but only I knew it. I had buried him myself in the hills above Izmir. For a wild instant, I wondered if he had revived and somehow unburied himself. But my reason rejected that as impossible. The Walther had made such a little hole at the front and such a big one at the back. Only I had seen them—but now Tabona's laugh told me he was seeing them, too.

" Indeed?" he said. " Then we shall have much to talk about. You will meet me, please, at half-past ten." I said nothing. He went on to give me instructions. " Drive to Qrendi—that's Q-r-e-n-d-i. Park by the statue of St. Matthew in the little square —not the main square. Anyone will tell you; go into the bar you will see on your right, and wait."

Belatedly, I tried to re-establish my ignorant innocence. " I don't know what the hell you are talking about."

Tabona sighed theatrically: he was that sort of man. " If you are not there, Mr. Thompson, or if you are foolish enough to bring a gun with you, Veronica will have an unfortunate accident."

As I have said, I did not know this Veronica from Eve. But I certainly did not want her to suffer an accident on my account—at least, not until I had talked to her and learned what she knew. Besides, I was in Malta specifically to look for links with the Kulturan set-up in Turkey. There was never any chance that I should not go to Qrendi. Less than a minute after Tabona had cut the connection, I was making out a route clear across the island to Qrendi on my ordnance survey map.

The poppies which had first made both Kulturan brothers rich and had now killed Ahmed, grew in the eastern hills of Turkey. The milky juice from the ripening seed-heads, dried and compressed into convenient brown sticky blocks, found its way by transport of all kinds from camel train to jet plane to the Kulturans' secret refinery—little more than a good-sized barn hidden in the hills south of Izmir, Turkey's second largest commercial centre, a sleazy port, all beggars and boot-blacks, billionaires and belly-dancers, on the Aegean coast. It was from the luxurious Hotel Ephes on the water-front that the Kulturans had operated in a semi-secrecy owing less to efficiency in disguise than in the planting of bribes. From the spotless windows of the international restaurant with his favourite coffee and Smyrna figs on the table before him, Ahmed could look out over the city's inevitable equestrian statue of Kemal Ataturk, and watch his precious cargo leave the quayside in Karim's ships. I had almost come to like Ahmed:

a friendly Turk with an open face and teeth white enough to send ad-men green with envy. Until within hours of the time when he had forced me to shoot him in self-defence. I don't think he had suspected me. Until then, I had been watching his organisation. Now the organisation was watching me.

There is politically a great gulf of hatred between Turks and Greeks. It did not stop the refined white heroin powder pouring out of the Izmir factory from travelling Malta-wards in Greek-registered ships, financed by the Turk, Karim Kulturan. Karim himself was travelling with a consignment on one of them—the *Persephone*—when Ahmed died. She had passed Crete and was due to dock in Sicily the day after Tabona called me. I knew that when she docked, Karim would still be aboard her but the heroin wouldn't. The ships of the line did not call at Malta.

Somehow, somewhere near Malta, the consignment would be trans-shipped on the high, unpoliced seas. I was pretty certain of all this before ever I landed at Luqa Airport: after meeting Arturo Tabona for the first time, I was convinced of it. A lot of heroin left Izmir. Some travelled only as far as Piraeus, in Greece, but most went on to Malta, and from there, somehow, to Sicily and the North. Between Malta and Sicily there are sixty miles of salt water—on a clear day in winter, you can sometimes see one island from the other. The answer to my problem lay somewhere in those sixty miles. On the day I met Tabona, I sat under the carob with my gun on my knee, and thought about every one of them.

★

I had one contact on Malta, the ex-seaman turned hire car dealer, Gwanni Sant. He had saved my life once in Alexandria at the time of the Suez Canal crisis, but that was long ago. He was married now with several children and looking sleek and satisfied. So when I'd hired the car from him, I'd told him the same story I'd told the immigration officer, ' I'm just a tourist, Gwanni. That's all.' He had grinned, and looked as though he was trying to believe it. But now I had to find Veronica before Tabona could, and only Gwanni could help me. I pushed the Walther into the waist-band of my trousers, and started the car.

Ten minutes driving along a winding road flanked on both sides by yellow drystone walls and bare, brown, stony summer fields brought me to a sleepy village,already settling towards siesta under

the burning sun. I stopped the car by the red-domed church and asked a boy with a donkey where I could find a public telephone. He did not speak enough English to tell me, but asked for his fee just the same, holding out a grubby hand and demanding "Cigarette!" I should probably have been weak enough to give him one, except that a man came out from the shadow of the church porch, shouting, "I'm his father. You give him nothing. The telephone is by the police office, in the piazza. You drive fifty yards, turn left. You got cigarette?"

I gave them a cigarette each and drove on. Surprisingly I found the telephone exactly where the man had said. Gwanni answered my call himself. When I said, "Trouble, Gwanni," I could almost hear him grin.

"Like the last time?" That was the real Gwanni: not asking details on the telephone.

"More or less," I told him, then in fairness added a warning, "But not so legal."

"O.K. Don. Where can I meet you? This place is so small, you can't be more than half-an-hour away."

I read the name of the exchange off the dial of the telephone.

"It just couldn't be better," Gwanni said. "There's a cousin of mine. Paolo Borg. Not as young as me. A shopkeeper now—like me. But not always a shopkeeper." He laughed, bubbling over with excitement. "In this, you know, he is also like me." He gave me some simple instructions. "You go there. I telephone him. You wait for me."

Gwanni's cousin Paolo was fifty-something and bald, but he'd been a good man in his time. There was a power in his grip which had not come from folding newspapers in his tiny, crowded shop, and dipping into a freezer for cold drinks and ice-cream. "Welcome, Mr. Thompson. Come in. Give me the keys—I'll get that car off the street. And you go upstairs." He raised a flap in the counter and pushed me through a doorway to the foot of a dark staircase, and shouted, "Tina! Our visitor has come!" before going off immediately to dispose of the car.

Maybe I'm unlucky as a rule. In fact, I must be if most reporters and secret agents really do have the kind of luck they write about in paperback books. The girls I meet working are usually either barefooted near-imbeciles—like the one who saved me at Qrendi—or real international bitches, with brass hearts and figures to match, measured in dollars and pounds rather than inches. But there are exceptions to every rule, as somebody used

to say. Justina Borg looked like the exception to all mine.

I can't describe her. You can't put that sort of thing into words. I can say that she was five foot five or six, weighed around a hundred and twenty pounds, had dark hair, dark eyes, a straight nose, a generous mouth, a superb neck and throat, a good figure, though light for perfection (but again—by whose standards?), well-turned limbs, and long, narrow hands and feet. But that doesn't tell you much, does it? And if it does, it still doesn't add up to Tina.

She greeted me with the very words her father had used. Her voice was full and mellow. " Welcome, Mr. Thompson. Come in. Please come in."

★

The room was high-ceilinged and large, made larger by the deep shadow into which it had been thrown by the closing of the shutters. After the untidy poverty of the shop, its elegance was a surprise. Most unworthily, I wondered what Gwanni's cousin dealt in besides newspapers. Later Tina told me her brother was a prosperous physician, whilst she herself taught school. Their mother had had money, but had married well below her own social class. In Malta, such things are still important. The family had not had to keep up a position. They were not entitled to a position. They had spent only to make themselves secure—as Tina told me—and comfortable—as I could see for myself.

Tina offered me a deep chair, a cigarette and a drink. Like Gwanni, she asked me no questions. Till her father came in with Gwanni, who had just arrived, she talked about herself.

I was content to look, listen and learn.

Gwanni looked younger than he had seemed at the garage. He greeted me with a broad grin. " Well, Don—what are we in this time? It's like old times this: Gwanni to the rescue. No, stay, Tina love. If I know our friend here, there's a girl mixed up in this. Before its over, we shall need you to save him from her. Or vice versa."

" That's a gross slander," I said, smiling at Tina. " But I shall be glad to have you stay."

She sat down again, and so did I. Gwanni span a dining chair out from the wall and sat astride it, looking at us both. Paolo went off by himself to a dark corner, from where he could keep an eye on us and an ear on the stairs and shop. Gwanni said,

" What's all this about? Come on! Give!"

I told him. " Drugs." I heard the girl draw in her breath. " Regular parcels, coming in to Malta and going out again."

" I have heard rumours," Gwanni said.

" About the parcel that's on its way now?" I asked.

" No, no. Just general gossip. Do you know any names?"

I told him about Arturo Tabona and the girl named only Veronica.

" Tabona I know," Gwanni said, and sketched the man's appearance and character in a way that convinced me he did indeed.

" What does he do?" I asked.

" Nothing if he can help it. He calls himself a businessman."

" His father was a good man," Paolo said from the corner. " He worked hard to leave Arturo enough to go to the Devil on."

" You can find him most days at the Yachtsman's Club, most nights at the Casino," Gwanni told me.

That summed up Tabona well enough: you meet that type everywhere. I guessed he was probably known to be involved in some shady business or other, Gwanni would not mention in front of Tina. From the old days I remembered that he was a delicate man in that way: I'd seen him treat a Eurasian dance hostess as though she were a duchess.

" And Veronica?" I asked.

No one said anything at first, then the cousin said, " There's a lampuki boat called *Veronica* at Ghar Lapsi."

That did not seem very useful. I was sure Tabona had been talking about a girl. Tina asked me if it was possible Tabona had made a mistake in English. " I don't think so," I told her. His English was as good as Gwanni's. And I've never known Gwanni make that sort of mistake. Is there a real girl missing from the island? Is there any way we could find out?"

Tina's smile faded into a look of pain, and I wondered what I had said to offend her. But it soon appeared that I hadn't: her smile returned, though it was rueful now. " Joey would tell me," she said with a strangled laugh. " He's a newspaperman. But he wants us to get engaged, and I don't want to talk to him."

" Please," I said.

She rose, tall, beautiful in the half-light. " Of course. If there's a girl in danger. You wait here. I'll go down and call him on the telephone."

While she was gone, Gwanni wanted to know more about the

background to what I had been doing, but I did not want to discuss it, so I told him about the results of the trade as I had seen them in New York, London and Hamburg. A rambling discussion soon got under way. It must have been half-an-hour before anyone noticed that Tina had not come back. The cousin went to the head of the stairs and called her: there was no reply. Gwanni elbowed him aside. " I'll go down. Talking to her lover-boy, she has probably fallen into a trance—"

But the cold finger of fear was laid on me. " I wasn't followed here," I said, " I'll swear I wasn't."

There was no sign of struggle in the shop or store-room behind it, but the yard door at the back of the house was open, and Tina had gone.

Gwanni ran out into the yard. I would have followed him, but Paolo gave a curious grunting cry and half collapsing. sat down heavily on an open sack of dried pasta which crunched under his weight. I called after Gwanni, but he vanished into the street, beyond the yard wall. Paolo's colour was not bad, but he was breathing with difficulty, pressing his right hand into his chest and shoulder as though trying to prevent something from escaping. What was wrong with him? Shock, obviously. Angina? Perhaps. I did not know. I spoke to him, but he did not reply. In the shop, under the counter, I found a bottle of brandy, and poured some into a plastic cup. He took it, and recognising me, thanked me. I was just saying, " Will you be all right now, if I go after Gwanni?" when the telephone rang.

I went into the shop and scooped up the receiver. " Hello."

There was a second of hissing silence, then Tabona spoke: " Mr. Thompson? Listen!"

There was another breathing silence. Then a voice that might have been Tina's cried hoarsely, " No! No!" And screamed.

★

It was a horrible scream. Even over the telephone, it gripped my diaphragm and tried to push my stomach up into my lungs so that I could not breathe until it choked and died.

Tabona spoke again. " I suggest a simple exchange, Mr. Thompson. Justina for Veronica—and you."

" I told you," I started to say. Then I stopped: how stupid can you be? What better way was there of seeing Justina again than by promising him Veronica? I sighed. " O.K. You win,

Tabona. When and where?"

He was equally incisive. "The Ghallis Tower. Sant will know it. Ten o'clock tonight."

"And how do I know you will keep your side of the bargain?"

"You don't, Mr. Thompson. But I know you will keep yours. Unless you want Justina dead."

"Threats," I sneered. "You're very fond of them, aren't you? Only this morning you were going to arrange an accident for Veronica."

"Be careful how you speak to me, Mr. Thompson. It does not please me to have to hurt the girl."

"All right," I said. I could not bear the thought of that scream being repeated—especially now, for Gwanni had just come into the shop, with Paolo leaning on his arm. Gwanni caught my eye, shook his head, and would have spoken, but I gestured him into silence. "All right," I repeated to Tabona. "The Ghallis Tower. Ten o'clock."

He rang off, leaving me to explain to Gwanni and the girl's father what had happened to her. "Tabona has her. I don't know where. He'll take me and Veronica in exchange. Tonight."

Paolo's fingers tightened on Gwanni's shoulder till Gwanni winced.

Gwanni said, "He decoyed her away with a note. He gave the Falzon girl sixpence to bring it. She didn't know what it was. She's only five."

Suddenly his voice tightened and hardened, "I'll kill him if he hurts her. I'll kill him with my own hands."

"Right," I said. "Hold on to that thought. But make room for some others."

"Such as?"

"Such as: with eight hours to go, where do we begin to look for Veronica?"

Gwanni sighed and threw out his hands. But the heavy flush of anger had started to leave his cheeks.

Paolo said heavily, "You can't endanger another girl. Even to bring my Tina back."

I felt my temper cracking now, and turned on him, "All right, then—you tell me: what the hell do we do?"

He brushed my anger aside with a weary gesture. "We do what Tina suggested. We call this friend of hers, at the newspaper." He reached for the telephone directory. Gwanni and I stood and waited. When the connection was made, he spoke in Maltese,

listened, and rang off almost at once. " He is not there. I shall try his home. Usually when he has an afternoon free, he comes here. But he quarrelled with Tina." His voice, suddenly very old, dribbled on as his stubby fingers with their money-stained tips, searched out the new number. Again, the conversation was short. When he put the receiver down, he said, " He is at St. Paul's Bay. Someone telephoned him. He told his mother, he is on to a good story. But it's a big place. You'll never find him."

" He's still our best chance," I said stubbornly. " If he was ever genuinely fond of Tina, he'll do more to help us than anyone else we might contact." I grinned across to Gwanni. " With Gwanni to help me, I'll find him all right."

" Give me ten minutes," Gwanni asked. " Five to swallow a sandwich and five to call Maria."

Whilst we were eating, Paolo stayed in the shop, making telephone calls, but he learned nothing. When I left, it was with the feeling that despite my earlier optimism, Tina's friend Joey would prove to be the biggest wild goose ever chased.

★

We took both cars, because, as Gwanni said, we did not know when we might need them. *En route*, he stopped only once, to show me the Ghallis Tower, a squat, yellowstone watch-tower, built on a spit of land, rocky and desolate, admirably suited to Tabona's purposes. Even in the bright, hard light of the afternoon, it did not look inviting.

Despite what Paolo had said about St. Paul's Bay, it was not a big town—just a cramped sea-side resort, huddled between the water-front and the steep ridge of the hills. Nor did we have to search for Joey. A news item of the kind he had been told about attracts people like jam attracts flies. Half the population—and all the children—were clustered round one spot on the water-front. An ambulance was jammed in traffic fifty yards or more from the centre of the crowd.

The ' news item ' itself was a length of canvas thrown over a long, unmoving shape at the waterside. Pink-tinged water was still trickling from under the canvas into the gutter. A gaily-painted speedboat was drawn up under the sea wall, and a flabby Englishman with a pointed nose peeled by the sun, was declaiming in a high-pitched voice, " I couldn't miss her. She threw herself down from the rocks. Only a second before, I'd waved to her, and she'd

waved back." His voice agonised, he repeated, " She'd waved back." That detail would haunt him, it was like the condemned man kissing the axe and shaking hands with the executioner.

The growing crowd murmured at every syllable, watched every twitch of his face. " I pulled her out of the water, but she was horribly defaced . . . There's a hell of a lump out of the propeller. I couldn't miss . . ."

Gwanni was tugging at my elbow. " Over here, Don, Joey's over here." There was a macabre fascination about the Englishman, and I turned away reluctantly from the scene at the waterside. Gwanni led me to the terrace of a restaurant nearby. It was crowded by those who had come to stare but stayed to eat ice-cream. Joey, a tall, slightly-built man, with a long face and limbs, stood by the railing overhanging the water, looking back towards the scene we had just left: police reinforcements had arrived and the crowd was being pushed back. The seawall hid the canvas-covered bundle, and the crowd might have been gathered for no reason except to hear the Englishman speak.

When Gwanni introduced us, Joey greeted me with a friendly grin and a handshake. Then Gwanni told him why we were there—not all the story, but enough to kill his grin. When Gwanni said, " So we are looking for a missing Veronica," he gave a visible start.

" Veronica? Veronica Cacchia?"

" We don't know her surname," I said.

He turned away, looking back to where now the sheeted bundle was being carried towards the ambulance. " There she is."

" Do the police know her name?" I asked.

He nodded. " Everyone knew Veronica," he said bleakly. He was exaggerating. But his message was clear enough: Veronica was a public figure. Suddenly inspired, I asked, " Does she go around with a playboy named Arturo Tabona?"

" She did," he said. " They had a row. She's been threatening him. I heard her myself."

" With what?" I asked.

" Nothing specific. It didn't seem to worry him—"

" Not till she disappeared," I said. " Now she's dead."

He did not reply to that. Nor could I think of anything else I wanted to say. I touched Gwanni's elbow and turned away. On the water-front, the ambulance, the police, and the Englishman were gone. The crowd was thinning. The sea was a fresh, hard, blue. It was just like any other Mediterranean afternoon.

Except for me. For me, it was the afternoon I was defeated . . . When I was sure Joey could not overhear me, I said to Gwanni, " Tabona won't think this is suicide. He'll think I've done what *he* would do—killed his girl, to spite him. He won't bring Tina back now. We've got to find him, Gwanni. We must find him." I took a deep breath and said the words I had been refusing to say ever since Arlene was buried. " I'm going to the police."

Gwanni shrugged off my hand. " Please yourself," he said contemptuously. " They will do nothing. You will waste the afternoon. But please yourself." He hurried away: I watched him go, consoling myself with the thought that he did not know what it was going to cost me to do what I believed I must. That morning I had seen murder in Tabona's face. He had to be found —and quickly. If the police failed, I could start despising them again, and myself for trusting them. But Tina was more precious than my pride.

However, it was my story I was murdering—' How I Succeeded Where Interpol Failed '—and the least I could do for it was give it a high-class funeral. I drove to police headquarters, near Valletta —Malta's capital—and demanded to see the highest-ranking officer in the building. Not unnaturally, the desk-sergeant asked " Why?" and when I told him, found me the inspector investigating the Cacchia suicide.

★

Inspector Mallia was a bored man in his middle forties, with cold, grey eyes. He interviewed me in the presence of a uniformed sergeant and a man in plain-clothes. The inspector sat at a desk with his back to the high window. I sat opposite him with the sergeant and the plain-clothes man behind me. and the light hard on my face. Almost before I hit the chair, the inspector was saying, " We are very busy this afternoon, Mr.—er—Thompson? —did you say?"

I took out my passport and put it on his desk. He thumbed through it, put it down, and the plain-clothes man came and took it. I began to talk.

At first Mallia would not believe me. After ten minutes, he was looking at me warily—as though he was wondering whether to call for a psychiatrist. My thoughts were mocking me; Gwanni had been right. To come here had been a bad idea. In desperation I said, " I'm not convincing you. Ring my hotel—get the manager

to send you my brief-case. There are all the proofs you need in there—photographs, notes, everything."

The inspector looked at me, then nodded. I told him the name of the hotel, and he took up the telephone. The conversation was in Maltese. I lit a cigarette and sat smoking till the sweat from my fingers burst the paper. When the inspector at last replaced the receiver, he said, " Your room was broken into during the siesta hour. There are no papers there now. Nor anything else."

" A year's work," I said. The bitterness was an acrid taste in my mouth. But it was the spur I needed. I asked for fifteen minutes more of his time and started my story right from the beginning, from Arlene's death in New York.

The inspector interrupted me only once, to make a telephone call, to set up a search for Arturo Tabona and ' his associates.'

" So that name isn't unknown to you?" I said.

He grinned ruefully. " Not entirely," he admitted. " To tell you the truth—when you came in first, I dared not believe what you were telling me. It all fitted too well. Tabona's a big fish. Not the biggest. Even now, we probably shall not get the big one. But Tabona will satisfy me."

He would not say any more, either then, or when I had told him all I could. Asking me to wait until the sergeant had prepared a statement for me to sign, he went out. I nervously waited for a half-hour. When he returned, it was to say, " They are beginning to panic. The Big One has gone. Suddenly. By air. To Tripoli. A last minute booking."

" Tabona wasn't with him?"

He shook his head. " He travelled alone. There is no trace of either Tabona or the girl."

The telephone shrilled. Instead of lifting the receiver immediately, he said, " You are going to be under my feet rather for the next hour. You had better get back to your hotel—sort out what's been happening there. But don't leave there without telling me. I suppose, if we don't trace the girl before, you will be willing to keep your appointment with Tabona at ten o'clock?"

" Of course. But he won't keep it, now he knows Veronica is dead."

The inspector shrugged his shoulders. The uniformed sergeant showed me out.

At the hotel the manager was as full of apologies, as though he had smashed up my room and taken my papers himself. Judging me by his own reactions—as I expected Tabona to do—he had

moved me into the best room in the house. I sat alone in almost regal splendour until it began to wear my nerves.

I went down to the bar, and ordered a Campari. A blonde on the next stool asked me for a light. I gave her one, and carried my drink out to the terrace. She left me alone, and I watched the evening gather over the distant horizon. No one disturbed me until the sea had turned pewter with evening. Then a waiter came and coughed for my attention. " Excuse me, sir. You are wanted on the telephone."

The caller was Gwanni. He talked fast, and very low, as though afraid of being overheard. " The old man is not stupid as he sometimes looks. The Veronica put to sea at four o'clock, with the usual lampuki gear on board—lines and octopus bait. But the crew included Tabona and almost certainly Tina as well."

" And how many besides?"

" Two."

" Tell me about lampuki fishing," I said, " what's the drill?"

" The lampuki hunts in shoals, living on other fish. The best place to hunt it is over deep water—fifteen miles off shore. The boat leaves today, fishes tonight and tomorrow night, and returns the day after."

" Without Tina," I said. " But with a cargo of heroin, picked up somewhere from the sea."

Gwanni must have seen what I saw: Tina struck down, bundled over the side. But all he said was, " It would be easy to land. Malta-registered fishing boats are not subject to customs examinations when they return from the fishing grounds."

It was all too easy: not only would Tabona rid himself of Tina—dead girls, like dead men, tell no tales—he would also make a profit on the night's work. And the next day, the *Persephone* would reach Syracuse with the cleanest of cargoes. A few nights later a lampuki boat would ' happen ' to meet a boat from Sicily and the heroin would be sent on its way, landing at some tiny port where no one would suspect anything. Indeed, with a thirty-six hour range, the lampuki boat itself could carry it. It need never be landed in Malta. I asked: " How are we going to stop him?"

" I still have friends. One of them will lend me a boat. The *Persephone* will not pass Filfla until eleven o'clock. Tina will be safe till then. If I understand that rat Tabona he'll wait till the ladder is in his hands before he puts a bullet into her—in case anything goes wrong. Then he'll open the *Veronica's* seacocks—and sail away to Syracuse . . ."

It was a dramatic picture he was drawing for me—but I was seeing a different one: the black face of treachery. I had never mentioned the *Persephone* to Gwanni Sant. I swallowed my sick anger and asked, " Filfla? Where the hell is that?"

" It's a rocky island, off the west coast. We can be there almost as soon as Tabona, if you will meet me at Wied Zurrieq by eight o'clock."

" I'm with you," I said, and rang off, and I meant to be, too, if I had to run every inch of the way in bare feet. I found Wied Zurrieq on the map; it was a nibble in the coastline of the west coast, where a deep valley ran down to the sea. Filfla lay a few miles off the shore to the north west. I could hardly wait to start, but before I set out, I rang the inspector, as I had promised to do. In telling him what I had learned, I called Gwanni every name I could lay my tongue to. To the inspector's credit, he confirmed them all. Then he said, " I'm afraid I have another shock for you. About an hour ago, we traced the hotel room where Veronica Cacchia spent last night. She had left a letter there, for Tabona. I'll read you a couple of paragraphs."

He read in a flat, even voice that made the dramatic sentences sound like a weather forecast. Most of what he read, I have deliberately forgotten; it wasn't written for him or for me. But one sentence I cannot forget:

> If you were dead, or in jail, or in agony with cancer, I could endure it: if they tortured me, I should not betray you: but I cannot live to dream of you with that *puttana* Justina in your arms . . ."

That was a bigger blow to me than even Gwanni's self-betrayal had been. I refused to think about it. I concentrated all my energies on driving to Wied Zurrieq.

Gwanni was waiting for me on the narrow landing. He was all smiles and grim satisfaction. " We've got them, Don," he told me as he handed me down into the waiting dinghy. And I'd got the Walther in my belt, but I did not tell him that.

The boat he had borrowed was high in the prow and stern, but lay low in the water. Overall it was less than thirty feet long. Its navigation lights were burning, and in the tiny cabin amidships a pressure lamp glowed on the flabby face of Paolo Zarb. As soon as we were on board, Paolo heaved on the string that started the diesel motor, whilst Gwanni dropped the moorings. The high rock walls of the valley began to slide past, and soon we were heading for the light marking the channel to the open sea.

I wondered how far we should be off shore before Gwanni—or would it be Paolo?—smashed me over the head, as in my innocence I had imagined Tabona smashing Tina, and dropped me into the ink-black, unruffled water.

It had been foolish to think that Gwanni could walk straight out of the kind of life he used to lead and become respectable, just like that. He lived for excitement. And with the Kulturan Organisation, he had found it, long before I reached Malta. Watching him steer the boat, I wondered exactly how he would have contacted me if I hadn't phoned him that morning. Ah, well, it did not matter now. In fact, I had reacted to Tabona's threats exactly as they had expected me to do. I had phoned Gwanni. He had called Paolo. I had walked into a carefully prepared trap.

What still hurt was the knowledge that Tina was on their side. I still did not want to believe it. I sat silent in the stern of the boat, my hand on the butt of the Walther, and waited.

★

We never saw the *Persephone*, but we found the *Veronica* four miles west of the bulk of Filfla so easily that my suspicions would have been aroused, even if nothing else had warned me. Her lights were still burning, but she was down so hard by the stern that the staring eye painted on her bow seemed to be pleading with the newly-risen moon. She looked as though she would founder any second, but Gwanni insisted on going aboard " in case Tina is there, helpless." The hypocrite: he kept up the pretence so well that I almost began to doubt my own judgment. We brought the two boats beam to beam—Paolo at the bow, I at the stern—with boathooks. Gwanni disappeared into the *Veronica's* cabin—and a moment later burst into sight again with an excited cry. " Here! Here—Don! Take this!" He was so convincing that I dropped the boathook and ran to take the plastic-wrapped package he held out to me. As my hand closed on the plastic, he seized my wrist and tried to pull me off balance, so that I should fall between the two boats. The package did fall, and sank instantly. Then I began to fall. The Walther was in my free hand, but I could not bring myself to shoot at him. With all my strength, I brought the pistol down on his wrist. An instant before he screamed, I heard the bones snap and my hand fell free. Immediately the boats began to drift apart.

He cursed me, but I had no time for him. I had only just

regained my balance before Paolo turned on me, striking at me with his boathook. Luckily for me, he slashed with the staff rather than jabbed with the metal end. A slash is always slower than a jab, as well as being less dangerous. The Walther bucked twice in my hand before the wooden staff exploded on the side of my head.

When I recovered consciousness, it must have been well after midnight. The moon was cold and hard in the distant sky. I pulled myself upright: all round the sea was empty. Paolo, a bullet in his thigh, lay groaning on the deck. He had lost a lot of blood, and the bone was probably smashed, but he would live to give evidence. And that was all that mattered. I started the motor and, steering between the north star and the moon, headed the boat back towards Malta.

The high rock of Filfla was blotting out the northern stars before I saw the lights of a police-boat ahead, and hailed it, to be somewhat ingloriously rescued. Its crew was not surprised. Inspector Mallia had asked them to watch for me.

The *Veronica* was found drifting at dawn, with Gwanni still aboard, still cursing me. By that time, Tabona and the beautiful Tina were already in police custody at Syracuse, waiting to be returned to Malta to answer charges arising from Mallia's researches and Veronica's letter. But Karim Kulturan was still free.

Is still free.

I can't touch him now: he knows me. But I think Arlene would forgive me that one failure, and be satisfied.

IT COULD HAPPEN TO ANYONE

Christopher Curtis

Another brief tale with a wryly Grand Guignol ending, and a wildly ironic plot

THERE WAS A sudden reaction about capital punishment some years after Britain, and, later, the United States abolished it.

The division between the abolitionists and the non-abolitionists remained deep and wide. It became a matter of international concern.

The resurgent nations of Africa, sometimes idealistic at the expense of logic, grew appalled at the endless slaughter within their own borders. And the slaughter without.

It did seem that there would never be an answer to whether or not murderers should hang. But the African nations, with a surge of practicality, decided that the time had come.

Something like a bloc formed within the United Nations. The Assembly was disrupted by a driving intensity on the part of a powerful majority of small nations. They bulldozed a ruling, which later became law, by driving it rough-shod into acceptance. They had, it is admitted, the advice of Cuenepton, Q.C., the greatest living authority on matters of international law.

The Revisions of 1969 in the glasshouse of Manhattan did a lot to put teeth into anything the United Nations chose to make law. This smoothed the way for the Afro-Asian-South American Law of Punishment, a chain-reaction law before anyone had realised what had happened. It amounted to this:

Simplified, it was a law which laid down that whosoever hanged a man should himself be put to death, and who put to death a man should automatically be hanged or executed . . .

On the face of it there was no excuse for anything so silly. But when you get a flock of high minded politicians together, pig-

headed as only they can be when reforming everyone else, you will get chaos.

And Great Britain, as it was still called, where laws are sacred and haste to better the world has always been legend, tried very hard to stop the Law becoming law. And failed on the day Ubanda-Ochero hanged a murderer. Ubanda-Ochero, a sort of composite bite made of disputed border territories on the edges of the Congo, Angola, and Zambia, had all the unreal, uplifted ideas proper to a nation four years old. It also possessed a few million dollars of U.S. aid, and a fanatic ruler.

It took six days to wipe out Ubanda-Ochero. Its fanatic ruler went gladly to his death at the hands of a hangman hired from a neighbouring state.

The neighbouring state, of course, lasted precisely six weeks . . .

★

The Law was the Law was the Law. High-mindedness, like plague or pop-music, can knock mankind sideways before it has time to think.

It took 18 weeks to decimate the African continent. The executioner hired from Russia was shot the moment he got back to Moscow, after turning off the last African.

Russia was without people within four months, having quite a population. From there it was only a short time before living Europe consisted of Great Britain where, with that singular devotion to the exact letter of the law that has always distinguished the islanders, the mutual wiping-out was done very speedily. The last person died at the hands of John F'Chwang, a professional killer from Hongkong, who destroyed the final guilty Englishman on the Southampton dockside, before taking a Chinese vessel for China, home, and death for all.

The United States, through its president—Yoker Hokum Crimmles—spoke mournfully but encouragingly to the rapidly ending world, and told it that, fearful though this chain-reaction law might be, it was still International Law—' Oh, sa-ay can you see . . . ?'

It was very well done. Even those who did not care for a president from Kentucky had to admit that President Crimmles was a good, idealistic, 100% American.

But since Americans were not keen on killing anyone any more, foreign executioners had to be hired, and they, when they got home

naturally had to be destroyed.

The last man outside the United States, a New Zealander named Hotchkiss, fled to New York in an American ship for company, forgetting *he* had to be hanged. The chain-reaction sped across the United States, to South America, and back again with such transatlantic efficiency that only one man was left in a year, one lone man in all the world.

It proved to any Heavenly Hosts interested in the matter that the rule of law was above all things and that it lifted *h. Sapiens* from the level of the beasts.

But what happens to me, Yoker Hokum Crimmles, I just can't say. I shot my assistant yesterday, as the Law demands, but quite apart from the fact I am a Roman Catholic and have no *intention of committing a mortal sin by killing myself, I'm stuck right here in the White House on my own, awaiting execution, but how the hell . . .?*

Some EWMM Contributors . . .

Christopher Curtis. Journalist of considerable experience, and a wide traveller. Knows a lot about what goes on ' behind the news headlines.'

Steve April. Writes for leading U.S. magazines. Is over 50; married; lives in New York City. Hobbies are fishing and being friendly with poodles.

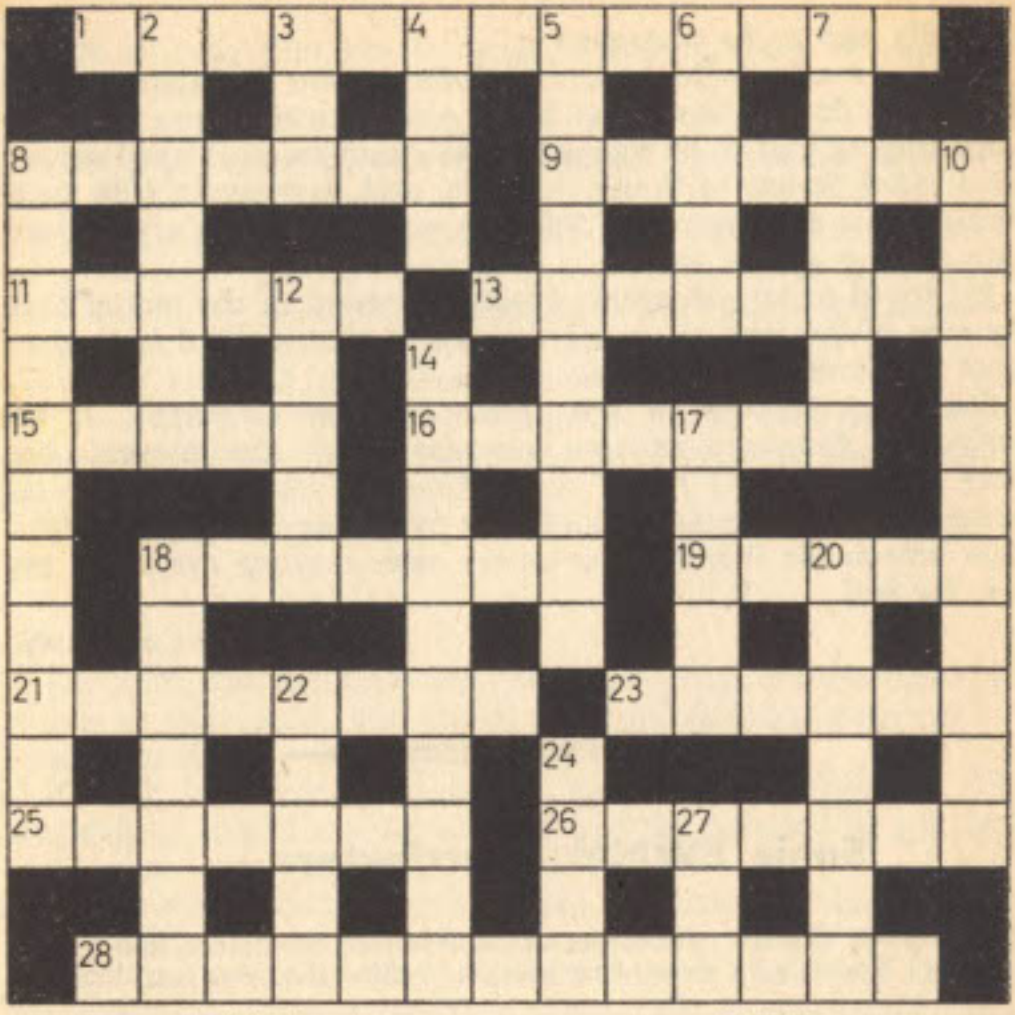
Joel Casavantes. 33-year-old Californian. A serious writer on Jacobean drama. Reviews fiction for radio-stations in Los Angeles and is also a psychiatric research assistant.

Morris Cooper. Lives in San Francisco. Professional writer for all his adult life. Lived briefly in London; travels.

Christine Hickman. Born in Oxford 21 years ago. Lives in London. Started out with a stint at St. Martin's Art School; dropped art to become a writer.

Frank Swinnerton is London born. Wrote his world-famous best seller *Nocturne* in 1917. Author of many notable books. Keen gardener, who lives in Sussex.

EWMM Crossword No. 21.



ACROSS

1 Not one of the Whitefriars in an EW title (3, 5, 5)
8 Titled criminal! (7)
9 Got at on the course or in the box! (7)
11 That naughty age? (6)
13 Preparing to give a donation? (8)
15 Assessed for trade, perhaps (5)
16 Had been willing at one time apparently (7)
18 Rodents never found inside (7)
19 The malefactors' profession (5)
21 Move into another's manor? (8)
23 Like a certain acid (6)
25 Springs, perhaps, even out of prison! (7)
26 The purposes of loitering? (7)
28 Fingerprint artist? (13)

(Solution will appear in our November issue.)

DOWN

2 The kind the police would throw round a demon barber? (7)
3 An airline shortly (3)
4 Sums up? (4)
5 Bird reminding one of Izaak Walton (10)
6 Many people swear by it (5)
7 Lubricant conveyor (7)
8 Those for whom crime did pay?
10 Permits needed by tails? (3, 8) (4, 7)
12 Style of the royal house? (5)
14 Those where people were pushed down to their death? (10)
17 African capital (5)
18 Speak rhetorically (7)
20 Those followed, presumably, by outings? (7)
22 That certain something about the over-sanctimonious? (5)
24 Not the sort of bird to fly (4)
27 Top number in Downing Street (3)

THROW TIME A FALSE COIN

JOEL CASAVANTES

It was a high price indeed for such fatherless masterpieces of the Renaissance

LIKE ALL NORMAL people, Philip Bowman did not believe in time-machines. So he groaned when he saw the old man walking towards him as he supervised the hanging of a painting in the newest gallery of the museum where he was employed as Assistant Art Curator. He had only himself to blame. A few weeks ago he had noticed the old man standing transfixed in front of a Leonardo da Vinci sketch of a catapult. Since Bowman's speciality was the Italian Renaissance, with a strong personal interest in Leonardo, he had been unable to resist showing off his erudition. It turned out that the old man was an inventor, which explained his fascination in the Leonardo sketch, and he had taken Bowman's quite selfish gesture as an overture of friendship. Bowman was cornered regularly, and found, to his chagrin, that the old man preferred talking to listening, usually about a time-machine which he claimed to have perfected. Bowman had at first listened politely, then with ill-concealed impatience, and finally, in a burst of exasperation, had told the old man that the idea of time-travel was nonsense.

The old man had looked pained. "You mean you don't believe me?"

"Have you actually taken trips in time?"

"Yes, short ones. It's hard on a man my age to time-travel. The further back you go the harder it is on you, so I've just hopped back a couple of days at a time to make sure the machine works."

Bowman had smiled sceptically. "I'll believe it when I see

something you've brought back from the past." He had started to walk away, but the old man gripped his arm.

"All right then. I'll bring something back. Anything you name."

"Bring back a drawing of Leonardo's."

"Place and date?"

"Florence, fourteen seventy-five."

That had been a week ago and Bowman hadn't seen him since.

The old man waited until the picture was hung, then shuffled forward. He looked haggard and pale as if he had just risen from a sickbed. He handed a large envelope to Bowman with a reproachful look.

"I've been sick. Couldn't get out of bed. It was a very rough trip." He paused, then added accusingly, "Too much for a man of my age."

Bowman made no effort to open the envelope.

"What's this?" he asked brusquely.

The old man was racked by a spasm of coughing and was unable to reply for a moment.

"Take a look at it," he said finally.

Bowman smiled scornfully as he opened the envelope. If this old eccentric had the nerve to pretend he had a genuine Leonardo . . .

But it was. There was no mistaking the delicate line and subtle shading, the precise draughtsmanship. Also, it was by a left-handed artist. It was a drapery study of a kneeling Madonna done in silver paint on a red prepared surface heightened with white. Judging from the relief it was a rare pre-1480 drawing. Perhaps a cartoon sketch for the Uffizi *Annunciation*. Bowman knew the entire Leonardo canon at sight. Outside of the Codice Atlantico and the Windsor collection there were only a few drawings extant in scattered collections. They rarely appeared on the market and, when they did, brought extraordinary prices. Bowman recalled that in March, 1963, the drawing 'Head of an Old Man,' only 4¼ by 3¼ inches, fetched $44,259 at Christie's. And two months later, at Sotheby's, an even smaller drawing, 'Madonna and Child with a Cat,' reached $53,625. This drawing, though similar to other drapery studies, was unquestionably new. For one thing it showed the Madonna in right profile, unusual in itself. Another pleasing thing about the drawing was the neat inscription at the lower right-hand corner: Leonardo. This occurred infrequently enough to enhance the value of any drawing

on which it appeared.

The old man was looking at him triumphantly.

" Where did you get this?" asked Bowman, shaken.

" Drew it myself," cackled the old man maliciously. " That's what you thought, wasn't it? The old crackpot and his time-machine."

" Look, I'm sorry I doubted you. It's the real thing all right. But did you really get it from—"

" From Leonardo. Cost me a good wrist-watch. He wouldn't take any of my money. But the watch got him. Smart fellow. He took it all apart and drew pictures of the insides."

" Good Lord, man. Do you realize you were face to face with the most gifted human being the race has produced? What did he look like? What did he say?"

" I knew he was smart. All inventors are. You should see him draw. Fast. Hand never stops. Picture just grows on the paper. Left handed, too." The old man scratched his head. " Come to think of it, he was sort of different."

" What do you mean, different? "

" Well, those people are all short. Husky, some of them, but not very tall. But Leonardo, he's tall. Taller than any of them. Good looking man. Slim, but broad shouldered. Strong, too. He works for this fellow with a funny name."

" Verrocchio."

" That's it. Well, we're in this Verrocchio's shop and two fellows are trying to get a piece of marble up on a platform. They can't do it, so one of them yells for Leonardo. He doesn't say a word, just walks over and looks at it, then grabs it and swings it up. Strong, but he knew where to grab it, too. He's got blond hair and blue eyes that look right through you. I don't know the language, but he understood what I wanted right away. He's not much of a talker, mostly looks and listens. but when he does say something people pay attention. It's the eyes that make him different, too. Like he's taking you apart when he looks at you."

Bowman licked his lips nervously, his mouth suddenly very dry. An improbable idea had just occurred to him.

" Could we make another trip in your machine? Back to see Leonardo?"

The old man shook his head. " Only room for one man. Batteries take up most of the room. Besides. I don't know if the machine could stand another trip. Got so hot coming back I thought the whole thing was going to burn up. Should rewire

it and get new batteries."

"How long would that take?"

"If I was feeling well, probably a couple of weeks. It's a big job. But I'm too sick to do anything right now."

"Couldn't you just patch it up for one more trip and send me alone?"

"Too dangerous." The old man kept shaking his head. "Likely to burn up the machine and leave you stranded. Besides, you've got your proof. You can keep the drawing."

Bowman stepped close to the old man, his eyes glittering. "Listen to me. No matter what the risk, it's worth it. One trip and we'll be millionaires!"

"Now who's the crackpot? You think the streets are paved with gold?" The old man laughed shrilly.

"You old fool. Any painting of Leonardo's would bring millions. Just last week an American businessman offered six million dollars for a Leonardo in a private collection in Leichtenstein. The deal fell through because the owner wanted seven million. I'll go back and offer to buy any painting Leonardo has even nearly completed. If I get ten paintings that's fifty or sixty million dollars. We'll just put them on the market one at a time to keep the prices high."

The old man whistled softly and nodded. "With that kind of money I could build a new machine. I'll do it. Come over to my place tonight and I'll show you how it works."

★

For the rest of the day Bowman was frantically busy. Without saying a word to anyone at the museum he hurried off to his apartment. There he gathered up the paintings he had painstakingly collected over the years on his meagre salary. A de Kooning, a Klee, two Gottliebs, two Rivers, a Klandinsky, and a small Pollock. He had acquired them at a time when the Abstract Expressionists were still struggling for recognition. He could never touch them at today's prices. He took them to the art gallery where he had bought most of them, and after a few minutes of bargaining walked out with a cheque for $110,000. Mortlock, the art dealer, would make a considerable profit out of the deal, but there was no alternative. He needed the cash now. He deposited the cheque then went to a large jewellery store where he knew the manager. He bought $110,000 worth of assorted

brilliants in one-half, one, and a few two carat sizes. It made an impressive heap of over one hundred stones, and Leonardo would be further dazzled by the splendid fire of the brilliant-cut; a cut unknown in the 15th century. From there he proceeded to a theatrical costuming shop where he was outfitted in a 15th century English costume.

The old man lived in a small house in a shabby neighbourhood. Bowman rang the door bell and pounded on the door for some time before he heard a feeble voice saying, " Come in." The old man lay on a couch in the bedroom, looking even sicker than before. He was sweating heavily and complained of pains in his groin and armpits. He waved his hand towards the strange looking machine which dominated the room. It consisted of interlocking bars of varying lengths and thicknesses rooted in a series of enormous black batteries. In the centre of this maze was a small wooden seat surrounded by thick rubber bars on two of which was mounted a small instrument panel with a large red lever and a few dials.

" It's all set to go. All you have to do is unplug the line feeding the batteries from the house current. Then sit on that seat and pull the big lever. Don't touch anything but the rubber bars or you'll fry to a crisp. The machine is set to return automatically in twelve hours. Otherwise the batteries will be too weak to make the trip back. So be sure you're back in time." He made an attempt to rise, but sank back with a moan.

" I'd better call a doctor."

The old man did not reply, but tossed restlessly on his bed.

Bowman put his hand on the old man's forehead and found him burning with fever.

The doctor arrived in minutes and made a rapid examination, his face growing grimmer as he proceeded. He cursed savagely to himself, stood up and glowered at Bowman.

" Where has this man been?"

" Just got back from Italy," answered Bowman, feeling it prudent to avoid details.

" Italy! If you'd said Asia it would be more helpful. Well, never mind. How did he travel?"

" Travel?" hedged Bowman.

" Yes, travel. Did he fly or go by ship?"

" I think he flew. Yes, I'm sure of it."

" Which airline, which flight?" snapped the doctor.

" I don't know, why?"

" Because we've got to warn all the people he's been in contact with. Your friend has the plague, bubonic variety. You and I are now in quarantine. Where's the phone? I must call the Department of Public Health."

He left the room to make the call and Bowman moved quickly to unplug the power line and seat himself carefully in the machine. He placed the bag containing his costume on his legs, glanced at his watch which indicated half-past nine, gripped one of the rubber bars firmly, and pulled the lever. A blinding flash, a roaring in his ears, and then darkness.

★

He opened his eyes in bright sunlight. He was near the summit of a low hill overlooking a town. He pushed the machine into the shelter of a nearby clump of trees, changed his clothes, put the small bag of gems in his doublet and began walking hurriedly down the hill.

As he entered the town and made his way through the crowded streets he drew interested stares, but not undue attention. Florence was a sophisticated city and not unfamiliar with strangers. His Italian was good, and, since the Italian language had changed relatively little since the 13th century, he had little difficulty in finding his way to Verrocchio's.

He paused at the open doorway. The large high-ceilinged room was filled with works of art in varying stages of completion. There were men painting, others sculpting and some were drawing at lecterns.

One of the models, a handsome, well-built youth who had been sitting for a portrait, got up, stretched, and moved towards him. " Enough, Lorenzo. If I sit much longer I'll turn to stone. Let me see what this gentleman wants . . ." He moved towards Bowman with easy grace.

Bowman bowed and flashed his most ingratiating smile. " Whom do I have the honour of addressing?"

" My name is Jacopo Saltarelli. You are a stranger to Florence, are you not?"

So this was Saltarelli; to be remembered forever as a casual and scandalous incident in Leonardo's life. The almost feminine beauty of face, the enormous eyes, the glossy, curly hair, the finely cut lips and delicately modelled nose were balanced by the aggressive virility, and masculine yet elegant grace and assurance of the

well-muscled body.

Bowman felt dim and unhealthy in the presence of so much vitality. He looked around the workshop uncertainly. "I'm looking for Leonardo da Vinci."

"You want Leonardo, eh? Everyone wants Leonardo." The smile stayed on Saltarelli's face, but his eyes were suddenly guarded. "But try to find him. He may be out throwing his money away buying caged birds to set free. Or at the stables drawing horses, or just looking at them. Sometimes he sees a face in the crowd that fascinates him and he spends the rest of the day following it. His strangeness knows no bounds; he has stood the day through in one spot, entranced by an idea. I tell you these things, stranger, only to prepare you for a most unusual man. When you have found him, what then? You talk to him, but he hears other words; you stand before him and he looks at you but what does he see? The subject for another drawing perhaps, who knows? Who knows anything about Leonardo? No one knows him. Not even those—" He stopped. His voice, which had begun rich and mocking, thinned as if tinged with the pallor of regret.

A short stocky man whose every gesture exuded vigour moved briskly toward them. Bowman felt as if he were seeing an old friend; he had looked upon that round face with its penetrating intelligent eyes and purposive lips in the portrait by Lorenzo di Credi a thousand times. Andrea del Verrocchio, sculptor, painter, and goldsmith, through whose workshop were to pass some of the most glittering names of the Italian Renaissance—di Credi, Perugino, Signorelli, and, of course, Leonardo.

"Get back to your place, Jacopo. Lorenzo is getting impatient." Verrocchio's tone was paternally firm. Saltarelli withdrew with a slight bow, and Verrocchio turned to the visitor. Bowman felt himself being sized up; the shrewd, intelligent eyes flicked over his clothes as much as to say how much of my time are you worth.

"I am Andrea del Verrocchio and this is my workshop. Whatever you need in the way of art can be found here. Statuary in gold, silver, bronze, copper, marble or terra cotta; paintings; cameo; intaglio; drawings . . . how may I help you?"

It will be easier if he is on my side thought Bowman as he addressed the artist deferentially.

"Master Verrocchio, the fame of your workshop has travelled far. All who have been fortunate enough to look upon your *Putto*

with Dolphin in the Palazzo Vecchio know you have no equal as a sculptor."

He paused to see the effect of his words and was rewarded by a pleased smile on Verrocchio's face.

" You are too kind, Messer. But, you are a stranger. You are from the North, perhaps?"

" Very far to the north. England. I have come to buy some paintings from one of your students, Leonardo da Vinci."

Verrocchio's smile broadened. " Leonardo, eh? You have chosen well, stranger; he has genius of the highest order. But he never finishes anything he begins. You would do better by having Lorenzo di Credi do your paintings. Not as gifted as Leonardo but he delivers the work on time."

Bowman shook his head. " No, I want Leonardo. I will pay him well."

" Very well. He is in the garden. Do what you can with him. But you would do well to remember that Leonardo cares less than most men for money. Some of his paintings he will not sell for any amount, for, unequalled as they are, he is dissatisfied with them in that not even his hand has captured the vision in his mind's eye." Verrocchio led Bowman through the workshop to the garden, pointed to a tall figure standing at a drawing board, and withdrew.

On a bench in front of Leonardo sat two men: one a handsome youth in the first flush of manhood; the other an incredibly ugly ancient whose face seemed ravaged by both age and disease. Both were looking up at Leonardo, entranced by the fantastically humorous story that flowed from his lips. Leonardo's right hand described graceful motions in the air as if emphasising points in his story, while his left hand drew, with amazing rapidity, the contrapuntal study in beauty and hideousness before him.

Leonardo put down his pen, reached into his pocket and, with a smile and a jest, handed some coins to the men who left the garden still laughing. The artist stood looking after them, lost in thought. Bowman moved closer and cleared his throat.

Once having overcome his initial awe, Bowman found Leonardo quite approachable. In this he was helped by his extensive knowledge of Leonardo's tastes and interests, a knowledge greater than that of Leonardo himself by virtue of Bowman's vantage point in time. Skilfully he fed Leonardo conversation gambits which the artist caught up eagerly; the talk ranged from horses to the virtues of chiaroscuro. Leonardo spoke easily and forcefully. with a

pungency of phrase and lucidity of thought that reflected the dazzling brilliance of his mind. He moved from subject to subject rapidly, pouring out on each a flood of ideas which seemed to cascade effortlessly from him. But, Bowman thought sadly, impressive as this many-sided discourse was, it suggested Leonardo's tragic flaw: his lack of single-mindedness. Like Browning's Duchess, Leonardo liked whatever he looked on, and his looks went everywhere; he was equally enthusiastic about every subject. In the end this susceptibility to ideas, this propensity for experimentation, would doom most of his projects to incompletion or rapid decay.

In spite of this preliminary softening-up, Leonardo proved surprisingly recalcitrant when Bowman finally asked to buy whatever paintings were available. They had wandered, in the course of their conversation, into Leonardo's room above the workshop, where six paintings, in various stages of completion, stood on easels. A full-length study of a nude youth, obviously Saltarelli; two profile portraits of stern-looking noblemen; a magnificent rearing horse; and two studies of the Madonna and Child. Torn between greed and aesthetic pleasure, Bowman could not pull his eyes away from the paintings. As yet untouched by time, the rich colours and subtle tints, the delicacy and preciseness of detail, enabled Bowman to understand the glowing tributes of Leonardo's contemporaries. The artist, while pleased with Bowman's unrestrained praise, was obviously dissatisfied with what his hand had captured of his inner vision. In the end he won Leonardo over by convincing him that the chances of his fame surviving would be enhanced if his works were widely dispersed. That left the question of payment. Not wanting to haggle, Bowman decided on a grand gesture; he upended the leather pouch over the table, spilling the gems into a glittering pile.

"*Diamanti*?" asked Leonardo.

Bowman nodded. Leonardo picked up one of the larger stones and held it up to the light. Then without saying a word, he went to a desk in the corner of the room, took a sapphire ring from a drawer, and returned to the window. Holding the ring in his right hand, he drew the point of the diamond firmly across the flat surface of the sapphire. The scratch was clearly discernible.

Leonardo smiled, swept the brilliants into the pouch and put it in his pocket.

Bowman watched the whole performance with fascinated amusement. Whatever Leonardo's flaws, gullibility in commercial

matters was not one of them. He glanced at his watch. Time to go. He rolled the canvases neatly, tied them and took his leave.

He reached the machine, changed his clothes, took his seat and pulled the lever. Again the flash of light, the whistling roar and then darkness.

★

He opened his eyes, painfully conscious of intense heat. He was back in the room where he had started his journey, but the bed upon which the old man had been lying was empty. The batteries and metal bars of the machine which enclosed him were heated to a glowing red. Even as he watched, the wooden panels of the wall exploded into flame. He caught up the precious roll of paintings and scrambled to safety. As he bolted into the bright morning sunshine he heard the rest of the house ignite with a sharp crack. His car was still parked at the kerb where he had left it the night before. He took one last look at the house as he drove away.

He drove straight to the art gallery where he had sold his paintings the day before. The Leonardos were too big an item for an ordinary art dealer to handle; he would have to deal with Sotheby's or Park-Benet eventually. But he could not resist the chance to flaunt his acquisitions at Mortlock, the owner of the gallery, and rattle that imperturbable character's aplomb. Besides, Mortlock had made a considerable fortune buying cheap and selling dear in a rapidly rising art market. He could, if he wished, buy one of the Leonardos, and it amused Bowman to think of reversing roles with the haughty art dealer.

He strode through the opulently furnished salon, filled with well-heeled customers and deferential assistants, to Mortlock's office at the rear of the gallery. He knocked brusquely and walked in. Mortlock, seated behind an enormous desk, looked up from some prints he was examining, raised his eyebrows, but motioned Bowman into a chair.

" I take it it's important," he said quietly, fixing Bowman with a cold eye.

Bowman laughed scornfully. " Important! This is the biggest thing that's ever come your way, Mortlock!"

" Come now, Bowman. That's a bit extravagant."

" Extravagant, hell! I couldn't be too extravagant about what I've got here." He rapped the top of Mortlock's desk for em-

phasis.

" Well, well. Let's see what has put you in such a state."

One by one, Mortlock spread out each canvas and studied it carefully. Bowman watched him closely. He had to hand it to Mortlock. Not a flicker of emotion crossed that impassive mask of a face. The art dealer leaned back in his chair.

" Interesting, Bowman. Am I right in placing them as Italian High Renaissance?"

Bowman shuffled his feet impatiently. " You know perfectly well what they are. Let's not play games."

Mortlock's eyebrows went up again. " Florentine, I would say. Strongly influenced by the School of Verrocchio," he said calmly. " How much are you asking?"

" I'll start talking with you at six million dollars for any one painting," said Bowman triumphantly.

The dealer looked at him steadily, then spoke in a take-it-or-leave-it tone. " The paintings are in unusually good condition for that period. However, there is the question of establishing provenance. I'll give you fifty thousand for the lot."

Bowman's face flushed and he reached out angrily for the paintings. " What kind of fool do you take me for! You must be joking."

" I never joke about business matters," replied Mortlock evenly. " It's a good price because you're an old customer, but if you're not satisfied you may try elsewhere."

Bowman looked at him incredulously. " These are Leonardos. I'm giving you first choice."

" Leonardo who?"

Bowman put down the paintings, leaned across the desk and said slowly:

" Leonardo da Vinci."

Mortlock looked doubtful for a moment, then shook his head.

" You have the advantage of me there. I don't know the name. But then you're more of a scholar in this area."

Bowman picked up the paintings angrily, and jerked open the door. " What a cheap bluff. I thought better of you." He slammed the door savagely, Outside, in the salon, he paused beside the desk of one of the sales assistants.

" Do you have a copy of Berenson's *Italian Painters of the Renaissance* ?"

" Yes, sir. Here you are, sir."

But the book made no mention of Leonardo. Filled with a

growing disquiet, he got in his car and drove to the main branch of the Public Library. He hurried to the Reference Section of the library and took down a volume of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica.* Nothing under Leonardo. He tried da Vinci. Still nothing. He was sweating heavily now, though the air in the huge high-domed room was cool. His pace accelerated as he looked through the *Americana, Colliers, The Century Cyclopaedia of Names, Webster's Biographical Dictionary.* Nothing.

He dropped the last volume on the table with a thud, oblivious to the curious and irritated looks directed at him from all over the room, and leaned against a table for support. He felt dizzy, his body trembled uncontrollably, and he realized with a start that the strange panting noise he heard was the sound of his own breathing.

Someone was standing in front of him. He looked up to see the Reference Librarian bending towards him, a wary look of concern on his face.

" Are you not feeling well, sir? Is anything the matter?"

He gave the librarian a look such as a drowning man would bestow on a nearby life preserver. Surely this precise, pedestrian figure wrapped in the solid respectability of his profession was the concrete reality which could pull him back from the abyss of uncertainty into which he was falling. " Have you ever heard of a painter called Leonardo da Vinci?" he asked hopefully.

" No, I'm afraid not. But that's not my field. Why don't you try the Art Department?" The librarian indicated a door at the far end of the room. " Through that door and to your left."

The librarian in the Art Department was a large cheerful girl with a crisp knowledgeable way of giving information. She frowned when she heard his question.

" That's annoying. It sounds vaguely familiar but I can't pin it down. Can you tell me his dates or the names of his contemporaries?"

" Fourteen fifty-two to fifteen nineteen. Italian High Renaissance. Florence. He was a pupil of Andrea del Verrocchio."

She smiled. " Oh, Verrocchio. We have dozens of books about him. Are you sure this Leonardo da Vinci was a pupil of his?"

" His most famous pupil, and he went on to become far more famous," Bowman said belligerently.

She shook her head politely. " You must be thinking of Lorenzo di Credi. *He* was Verrocchio's most famous pupil, and

did surpass his master."

" I suppose you've never heard of the *Mona Lisa* or *The Last Supper*?" he said sarcastically.

" Everyone's heard of *The Last Supper*. It's Lorenzo di Credi's most famous painting. But I don't know the other. What was it called?"

He looked at her wearily. " Don't take offence, miss. This is important and I must be sure; are you an expert in this field?"

" I have a degree in Art History. I certainly would have heard of this person if he were at all well known," she replied indignantly.

" All right, all right. I must have the wrong name. Thanks for the help." He turned and moved towards the door.

Her voice softened. " Why don't I bring you some books on Verrocchio? Perhaps you can find some mention of your man."

She brought him an armload of books and he started flipping through them, checking first the index and table of contents. There was no mention of Leonardo, but as he read here and there in the history of a period he knew so well, he noticed unmistakable changes. Verrocchio, Luca Signorelli and Lorenzo de Credi dominated the scene until the advent of Michelangelo, who seemed in these histories to tower over the entire Italian Renaissance. Yet he was sure he remembered Leonardo dwarfing all his contemporaries until the younger Michelangelo challenged his supremacy. Leonardo and Michelangelo. Those two names came first to mind when one thought of the Italian Renaissance.

He picked up a massive volume written by a German scholar and recently translated into English. Under the entry, Verrocchio pupils of, he found a long list of citations. Using the list as a guide, he worked his way through the book and eventually came upon the following:

> In an age so prodigiously endowed with genius, it is, perhaps, needless to bewail the loss of an unproven talent. Yet in the case of Leonardo da Vinci, no less an authority than Verrocchio speaks, in a letter, of unusual promise and versatility, of a youth ' gifted above any man I know.' Unfortunately, this paragon, a pupil of Verrocchio's and licensed by the Guild to accept commissions in fourteen seventy-two, met an untimely death. Another letter of Verrocchio's mentions that this Leonardo was murdered for a bag of gems he had received as payment for a few paintings purchased by an Englishman.

Edgar Wallace

SHEER MELODRAMA

The trouble about gunning for Mr. Reeder is the way he always seems to turn up behind the gun

IT WAS MR. REEDER who planned the raid on Tommy Fenalow's snide shop and worked out all the details except the composition of the raiding force. Tommy had a depot at Golders Green whither trusted agents came, purchasing £1 Treasury notes for £7 10s. per hundred, or £70 a thousand. Only experts could tell the difference between Tommy's currency and that authorised by and printed for H.M. Treasury. They were the right shades, of brown and green, the numbers were of issued series, the paper was exact. They were printed in Germany at £3 a thousand, and Tommy made thousands percent profit.

Mr. Reeder discovered all about Tommy's depot in his spare time, and reported the matter to his chief, the Director of Public Prosecutions. From Whitehall to Scotland Yard is two minutes' walk and in just that time the information got across.

"Take Inspector Greyash with you and superintend the raid," were his instructions.

He left the inspector to make all the arrangements, and amongst those who learnt of the projected coup was a certain detective officer who made more money from questionable associations than he did from the Government. This officer 'blew' the raid to Tommy and when Mr. Reeder and his bold men arrived at Golders Green, there was Tommy and three friends playing a quiet game of auction bridge, and the only Treasury notes discoverable were veritable old masters.

"It is a pity," sighed J.G. when they reached the street; "a great pity. Of course I hadn't the least idea that Detective-

Constable Wilshore was in our party. He is—er—not quite loyal."

"Wilshore?" asked the officer, aghast. "Do you mean he blew the raid to Tommy?"

Mr. Reeder scratched his nose and said gently that he thought so

"He has quite a big income from various sources—by the way, he banks with the Midland and Derbyshire, and his account is in his wife's maiden name. I tell you this in case—er—it may be useful."

It was useful enough to secure the summary ejection of the unfaithful Wilshore from the force, but it was not sufficiently useful to catch Tommy, whose parting words were: "You're clever, Reeder; but you've got to be *lucky* to catch me!"

Tommy was in the habit of repeating this scrap of conversation to such as were interested. It was an encounter of which he was justifiably proud, for few dealers in slush and snide have ever come up against Mr. J. G. Reeder and got away with it.

"It's worth a thousand pounds to me—ten thousand! I'd pay that money to make J.G. look sick, anyway, the old dog! I guess the Yard will think twice before it tries to shop me again, and that's the real kick in the raid. J.G.'s name is Jonah at headquarters, and if I can do anything to help, it will be mud!"

To a certain Ras Lal, an honoured (and paying) guest, Mr. Fenalow told this story, with curious results.

A good wine tastes best in its own country, and a man may drink sherry by the cask in Jerez de la Frontera and take no ill, whereas if he attempted so much as a bottle in Fleet Street, he would suffer cruelly. So also does the cigarette of Egypt preserve its finest bouquet for such as smoke it in the lounge of a Cairo hotel.

Crime is yet another quantity which does not bear transplanting. The American safeblower may flourish in France, just so long as he acquires by diligent study, and confines himself to, the Continental method. It is possible for the European thief to gain a fair livelihood in oriental countries, but there is no more tragic sight in the world than the Eastern mind endeavouring to adapt itself to the complexities of European roguery.

Ras Lal enjoyed a reputation in Indian police circles as the cleverest native criminal India had ever produced. Beyond a short term in Poona Jail, Ras Lal had never seen the interior of a prison, and such was his fame in native circles that, during this short period of incarceration, prayers for his deliverance were offered

at certain temples and it was agreed that he would never have been convicted at all but for some pretty hard swearing on the part of a certain *sahib*—and, anyway, all *sahibs* hang together.

Ras Lal was a general practitioner of crime, with a leaning towards a specialisation in jewel thefts. A man of excellent and even gentlemanly appearance, with black and shiny hair parted at the side and curling up over one brow in an inky wave, he spoke English, Hindu, and Tamil very well indeed, had a sketchy knowledge of the law and a very full acquaintance with the science of precious stones.

During Mr. Ras Lal's brief rest in Poona, the *sahib*, whose evidence had been so damning and whose unromantic name was Smith, married a not very good-looking girl with a lot of money. Smith *sahib* knew that beauty was only skin deep and she had a kind heart, which is notoriously preferable to the garniture of coronets. It was honestly a love match. Her father owned jute mills in Calcutta, and on festive occasions such as the State Governor's reception, she carried several lakhs of rupees on her person; but even rich people are loved for themselves alone.

Ras Lal owed his imprisonment to an unsuccessful attempt he had made upon two strings of pearls, the property of the lady in question, and when he learnt on his return to freedom, that Smith *sahib* had married the resplendent girl and had gone to England, he very naturally attributed the hatred and bitterness of Smith *sahib* to purely personal causes, and swore vengeance.

Now in India the business of every man is the business of his servants. The preliminary inquiries, over which an English or American jewel thief would spend a small fortune, can be made at the cost of a few annas. When Ras Lal came to England he found that he had overlooked this very important fact.

Smith *sahib* and *mem-sahib* were out of town; they were, in fact, on the high seas en route for New York when Ras Lal was arrested on the conventional charge of 'being a suspected person.' Ras had shadowed the Smiths' butler, and, having induced him to drink had offered him immense sums to reveal the place, receptacle, drawer, safe, box or casket wherein Mrs. Smith's jewels were kept. His excuse for asking, namely that he had had a wager with his brother that the jewels were kept under the *mem-sahib's* bed, showed a lamentable lack of inventive power. The butler, an honest man, though a drinker of beer, informed the police. Ras Lal and his friend and assistant Ram were arrested, brought before a magistrate and would have been discharged but for the fact

that Mr. J. G. Reeder saw the record of the case and was able to supply from his own files very important particulars of the dark man's past. Therefore Mr. Ras Lal was sent down for six months and, which was more maddening, the story of his ignominious failure was, he guessed, broadcast throughout India.

This was the thought which distracted him in his lonely cell at Wormwood Scrubs. What would India think of him?—he would be the scorn of the bazaars, 'the mocking point of third-rate mediocrities,' to use his own expression. And automatically he switched his hate from Smith *sahib* to one Mr. J. G. Reeder. And his hate was very real, more real because of the insignificance and unimportance of this Reeder *sahib*, whom he likened to an ancient sheep, a pariah dog and other things less translatable. And in the six months of his durance he planned desperate and earnest acts of reprisal.

Released from prison, he decided that the moment was not ripe for a return to India. He wished to make a close study of Mr. J. G. Reeder and his habits and, being a man with plenty of money, he could afford the time and, as it happened, could mix business with pleasure.

Tommy Fenalow found means of getting in touch with the gentleman from the Orient whilst he was in Wormwood Scrubs, and the luxurious car that met Ras Lal at the gates of the Scrubs when he came out of jail was both hired and occupied by Tommy, a keen business man, who had been offered by his German printer a new line of one hundred-rupee notes that might easily develop into a most profitable sideline.

"You come along and lodge at my expense, boy," said the sympathetic Tommy, who was very short, very stout, and had eyes that bulged like a pug-dog's. "You've been badly treated by old Reeder, and I'm going to tell you a way of getting back on him, with no risk and a ninety percent profit. Listen, a friend of mine—"

It was never Tommy who had snide for sale: invariably the hawker of forged notes was a mysterious friend.

So Ras was lodged in a service flat which formed part of a block owned by Mr. Fenalow, who was a very rich man indeed. Some weeks after this, Tommy crossed St. James's Street, to intercept his old enemy.

"Good morning, Mr. Reeder."

Mr. J. G. Reeder stopped and turned back.

"Good morning, Mr. Fenalow," he said, with his benevolent

solicitude. "I am glad to see that you are out again, and I do trust that you will now find a more—er—legitimate outlet for your undoubted talents."

Tommy went angrily red.

"I haven't been in stir and you know it, Reeder! It wasn't for want of trying on your part. But you've got to be something more than clever to catch me—you've got to be lucky! Not that there's anything to catch me over—I've never done a crook thing in my life, as you well know."

He was so annoyed that the lighter exchanges of humour he had planned slipped from his memory.

He had an appointment with Ras Lal, and the interview was entirely satisfactory. Ras Lal made his way that night to an uncomfortably situated rendezvous and there met his new friend.

"This is the last place in the world old man Reeder would dream of searching," said Tommy enthusiastically, "and if he did, he would find nothing. Before he could get into the building the stuff would be put out of sight."

"It is a habitation of extreme convenience," said Ras Lal.

"It's yours, boy," replied Tommy magnificently. "I only keep this place to get-in and put-out. The stuff's not here for an hour and the rest of the time the store's empty. As I say, old man Reeder has gotta be something more than clever—he's gotta be lucky!"

At parting he handed his client a key, and with that necessary instrument tendered a few words of advice and warning.

"Never come here till late. The police patrol passes the end of the road at ten, one o'clock, and four. When are you leaving for India?"

"On the twenty-third," said Ras, "by which time I shall have uttered a few reprisals on that dog Reeder."

"I shouldn't like to be in his shoes," said Tommy, who could afford to be sycophantic, for he had in his pocket two hundred pounds' worth of real money which Ras had paid in advance for a vaster quantity of money which was not so real.

It was a few days after this that Ras Lal went to the Orpheum Theatre, and it was no coincidence that he went there on the same night that Mr. Reeder escorted a pretty lady to the same place of amusement.

When Mr. J. G. Reeder went to the theatre (and his going at all was contingent upon his receiving a complimentary ticket) he invariably chose a drama, where to the excitement of the actors' speeches was added some amazing action such as wrecked trains

or terrific horse-races in which the favourite won by a nose. Such things may seem wildly improbable to blasé dramatic critics—especially favourites winning—but Mr. Reeder saw actuality in all such presentations.

Once he was inveigled into sitting through a roaring farce, and was the only man in the house who did not laugh. He was, indeed, such a depressing influence that the leading lady sent a passionate request to the manager that ' the miserable-looking old man in the middle of the front row ' should have his money returned and be requested to leave the theatre. Which, as Mr. Reeder had come in on a free ticket, placed the manager in a very awkward predicament.

Invariably he went unaccompanied, for he had no friend, and fifty-two years had come and gone without bringing to his life romance or the melting tenderness begot of dreams. Now Mr. Reeder had become acquainted with a girl who was like no other girl with whom he had been brought into contact. Although he had saved her life, this fact did not occur to him as frequently as the recollection that he had imperilled that life before he had saved it. And he had a haunting sense of guilt for quite another reason.

He was thinking of her one day—he spent his life thinking about people, though the majority of these were less respectable than Margaret Belman. He supposed that she would marry the very good-looking young man who met her bus at the corner of the Embankment every morning and returned with her to the Lewisham High Road every night. It would be a very nice wedding, with hired cars, and the vicar performing the ceremony, and a wedding breakfast provided by the local caterer, following which bride and bridegroom would be photographed on the lawn surrounded by their jovial but unprepossessing relatives. And after this, one specially hired car would take them to Eastbourne for an expensive honeymoon. And after that all the humdrum and scrapings of life, rising through villadom to a small car of their own and afternoon tea parties.

Mr. Reeder sighed deeply. How much more satisfactory was the stage drama, where all the trouble begins in the first act and is satisfactorily settled in the last. He fingered absently the two slips of green paper that had come to him that morning. Row A, seats 17 and 18. They had been sent by a manager who was under some obligation to him. The theatre was the Orpheum and the play was *Fire of Vengeance*. It looked like being a pleasant evening.

He took an envelope from the rack, addressed it to the box office, and had begun to write the accompanying letter returning the surplus voucher, when an idea occurred to him. He owed Margaret Belman something, and the debt was on his conscience for he had described her as his wife. This preposterous claim had been made to appease a mad-woman, it is true, but it had been made. She was now holding a good position—as secretary at one of the political headquarters, for which post she had to thank Mr. J. G. Reeder, if she only knew it.

He took up the phone and called her number and, after the normal delay, heard her voice.

"Er—Miss Belman," Mr. Reeder coughed, "I have—er—two tickets for a theatre tonight. I wonder if you would care to go?"

Her astonishment was almost audible.

"That's very kind of you, Mr. Reeder. I should love to come with you."

Mr. J. G. Reeder turned pale.

"What I mean is, I have *two* tickets—I thought perhaps that your—er—your—er—that somebody else would like to go—what I mean was—"

He heard a gentle laugh at the other end of the phone.

"What you mean is that you don't wish to take me." she said, and for a man of his experience he blundered badly.

"I should esteem it an honour to take you," he said, in terror that he should offend her, "but the truth is, I thought—"

"I'll meet you at the theatre—which is it? Orpheum—how lovely! At seven o'clock."

Mr. Reeder put down the instrument feeling limp and moist. It is the truth that he had never taken a lady to any kind of social function in his life, and as there grew upon him the tremendous character of this adventure he was overwhelmed and breathless. A murderer waking from dreams of revelry to find himself in the condemned cell suffered no more poignant emotions than Mr. Reeder, torn from the smooth, if treacherous, currents of life and drawing nearer and nearer to the horrid vortex of unusualness.

"Bless me," said Mr. Reeder, employing a strictly private expression which was reserved for his own crises.

He employed in his private office a young woman who combined a meticulous exactness in the filing of documents with a complete absence of those attractions which turn men into gods, and in other days set the armies of Perseus moving towards the walls of

Troy. She was invariably addressed by Mr. Reeder as 'Miss.' He believed her name to be 'Oliver.' She was in truth a married lady with two children, but her nuptials had been celebrated without his knowledge.

To the top floor of a building in Regent Street Mr. Reeder repaired for instruction and guidance.

"It is not—er—a practice of mine to—er—accompany ladies to the theatre, and I am rather at a loss to know what is expected of me, the more so since the young lady is—er—a stranger to me."

His frosty-visaged assistant sneered secretly. At Mr. Reeder's time of life, when such natural affections as were not atrophied should in decency be fossilised!

He jotted down her suggestions.

"Chocolates indeed? Where can one procure—? Oh, yes, I remember seeing the attendants sell them. Thank you so much, Miss—er—"

And as he went out, closing the door carefully behind him, she sneered openly.

"They all go wrong at seventy," she said insultingly.

Margaret hardly knew what to expect when she came into the flamboyant foyer of the Orpheum. What was the evening equivalent to the aged bowler and the tightly-buttoned black jacket, of ancient design, which he favoured in the hours of business? She would have passed the somewhat elegantly dressed gentleman in the well-cut dinner jacket only he claimed her attention.

"Mr. Reeder!" she gasped.

It was indeed Mr. Reeder: with not so much as a shirt-stud wrong; for Mr. Reeder, like many other men, dressed according to his inclination in business hours, but accepted blindly the instructions of his tailor in the matter of fancy raiment. Mr. J. G. Reeder was never conscious of his clothing, good or bad—he was, however, very conscious of his strange responsibility.

He took her coat (he had previously purchased programmes and a large box of chocolates, which he carried by its satin ribbon). There was a quarter of an hour to wait before the curtain went up, and Margaret felt it incumbent upon her to offer an explanation.

"You spoke about somebody else; do you mean Roy—the man who sometimes meets me at Westminster?"

Mr. Reeder *had* meant that young man.

"He and I were good friends," she said, "no more than that—we aren't very good friends any more."

She did not say why. She might have explained in a sentence

if she had said that Roy's mother held an exalted opinion of her only son's qualities, physical and mental, and that Roy thoroughly endorsed his mother's judgment but she did not.

"Ah!" said Mr. Reeder unhappily.

Soon after this the orchestra drowned further conversation, for they were sitting in the first row near to the noisiest of the brass and not far removed from the shrillest of the woodwind. In odd moments, through the exciting first act, she stole a glance at her companion. She expected to find this man mildly amused or slightly bored by the absurd contrast between the realities which he knew and the theatricalities which were presented on the stage. But whenever she looked, he was absorbed in the action of the play; she could almost feel him tremble when the hero was near death; and when he was rescued on the fall of the curtain, she heard, with something like stupefaction, Mr. Reeder's quivering sigh of relief.

"But surely, Mr. Reeder, this bores you?" she protested, when the lights in the auditorium went up.

"This—you mean the play—bore me? Good gracious, no! I think it is very fine, remarkably fine."

"But it isn't life, surely? The story is so wildly improbable, and the incidents—oh, yes, I'm enjoying it all; please don't look so worried! Only I thought that you, who knew so much about criminology—is that the word?—would be rather amused."

Mr. Reeder was looking very anxiously at her.

"I'm afraid it is not the kind of play—"

"Oh, but it is—I love it. But doesn't it strike you as being far-fetched? For instance, that man being chained to a plank and the mother agreeing to her son's death?"

Mr. Reeder rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"The Bermondsey gang chained Harry Salter to a plank, turned it over and let him down, just opposite Billingsgate Market. I was at the execution of Tod Rowe, and he admitted it on the scaffold. And it was 'Lee' Pearson's mother who poisoned him at Teddington to get his insurance money so that she could marry again. I was at the trial and she took her sentence laughing—now what else was there in that act? Oh, yes, I remember: the villain tried to get the young lady to marry him by threatening to send her father to prison. That has been done hundreds of times—only in a worse way. There is really nothing very extravagant about a melodrama except the prices of the seats, and I usually get my tickets free!"

She listened, at first dumbfounded and then with a gurgle of amusement.

" How queer—and yet—well, frankly, I have only met melodrama once in life, and even now I cannot believe it. What happens in the next act?"

Mr. Reeder consulted his programme.

" I rather believe that the young woman in the white dress is captured and removed to the harem of an Eastern potentate," he said precisely, and this time the girl laughed aloud.

" Have you a parallel for that?" she asked triumphantly, and Mr. Reeder was compelled to admit that he knew no exact parallel, but—

" It is rather a remarkable coincidence," he said, " a very remarkable coincidence!"

She looked at her programme, wondering if she had overlooked anything so very remarkable.

" There is at this moment, watching me from the front row of the dress circle—I beg you not to turn your head—one who, if he is not a potentate, is undoubtedly Eastern; there are, in fact, two dark-complexioned gentlemen, but only one may be described as important."

" But why are they watching you?" she asked in surprise.

" Possibly," said Mr. Reeder solemnly, " because I look so remarkable in a dinner jacket."

One of the dark-complexioned gentlemen turned to his companion at this moment.

" It's the woman he travels with every day; she lives in the same street, and is doubtless more to him than anybody in the world, Ram. See how she laughs in his face and how the old so-and-so looks at her. When men come to his great age they grow silly about women. This thing can be done tonight. I would sooner die than go back to Bombay without accomplishing my design upon this such-and-such and so-forth."

Ram, his chauffeur, confederate and fellow jailbird, who was cast in a less heroic mould and had, moreover, no personal vendetta, suggested in haste that the matter should be thought over.

" I have cogitated every hypothesis to their logical conclusion," said Ras Lal in English.

" But Master," said his companion urgently, " would it not be wise to leave this country and make a fortune with the new money which the fat little man can sell to us?"

" Vengeance is mine," said Ras Lal in English.

He sat through the next act which, as Mr. Reeder had truly said, depicted the luring of an innocent girl into the hateful clutches of an easterner and, watching the development of the plot, his own scheme underwent revision. He did not wait to see what happened in the third and fourth acts—there were certain preparations to be made.

" I still think that, whilst the story is awfully exciting it's awfully impossible," said Margaret as they moved slowly through the crowded vestibule. " In real life,—in civilised countries, I mean—masked men do not suddenly appear from nowhere with guns and say ' Hands up!'—not really, do they, Mr. Reeder?" she coaxed.

Mr. Reeder murmured a reluctant agreement.

" But I have enjoyed it tremendously!" she said with enthusiasm and looking down into the pink face Mr. Reeder felt a curious sensation which was not entirely pleasure and not wholly pain.

" I am very glad," he said.

Both the dress circle and the stalls disgorged into the foyer, and he was looking round for a face he had seen when he arrived. But neither Ras Lal nor his companion in misfortune was visible. Rain was falling dismally, and it was some time before he found a cab.

" Luxury upon luxury," smiled Margaret, when he took his place by her side.

Mr. Reeder took a paper packet of cigarettes from his pocket, dubiously offered her one and when she refused selected a limp cylinder, and lit it.

" No plays are quite like life, my dear young lady," he said, as he carefully pushed the match through the space between the top of the window and the frame. " Melodramas appeal most to me because of their idealism."

She turned and stared at him.

" Idealism?" she repeated incredulously.

He nodded.

" In melodrama even the villains are heroic and the inevitable and unvarying moral is ' Truth crushed to earth will rise again '—isn't that idealism? And unpleasant things are never shown in an attractive light—you come away uplifted."

" If you are young enough," she smiled.

" One should always be young enough to rejoice in the triumph of virtue," said Mr. Reeder soberly.

They crossed Westminster Bridge and bore left to the New Kent Road. Through the rain-blurred windows J.G. picked up the

familiar landmarks and offered a running commentary upon them in the manner of a guide. Margaret had not realised before that history was made in south London.

"There used to be a gibbet here—this ugly-looking goods station was the London terminus of the first railways—Queen Alexandra drove from there when she came to be married—the thoroughfare on the right after we pass the Canal bridge is curiously named Bird-in-Bush Road—"

A big car had drawn level with the taxi and the man at the wheel was shouting something to the taxi-driver. Even the suspicious Mr. Reeder suspected no more than an exchange of offensiveness, till the cab suddenly turned into the road he had been speaking about. The car had fallen behind, but now drew abreast.

"Probably the main road is up," said J.G., and at that moment the cab slowed and stopped.

He was reaching out for the handle when the door was pulled open violently, and in the uncertain light, Mr. Reeder saw a broad shouldered man standing in the road.

"Alight quickly!"

In the man's hand was a long, black Colt, and his face was covered from chin to forehead by a mask.

"Quickly—and keep your hands erect!"

Mr. Reeder stepped out into the rain and reached to close the door.

"The female also—come, miss!"

"Here—what's the game—you told me the New Cross Road was blocked." It was the taxi-driver talking.

"Here is a fiver—keep your mouth shut."

The masked man thrust a note at the driver.

"I don't want your money—"

"You require my bullet in your bosom perchance, my good fellow?" asked Ras Lal sardonically.

Margaret had followed her escort into the road by this time. The car had stopped just behind the cab. With the muzzle of the pistol stuck into his back, Mr. Reeder walked to the open door and entered. The girl followed, and the masked man jumped after them and closed the door. Instantly the interior was flooded with light.

"This is a considerable surprise to a clever and intelligent police detective?"

Their captor sat on the opposite seat, his gun on his knees. Through the holes of the black mask a pair of brown eyes gleamed

malevolently. But Mr. Reeder's interest was in the girl. The shock had struck the colour from her face, but he observed with thankfulness that her chief emotion was not fear. She was numb with amazement and was stricken speechless.

The car had circled and was moving swiftly back the way they had come. He felt the rise of the Canal bridge, and then the vehicle turned abruptly to the right and began the descent of a steep hill. They were running towards Rotherhithe—he had an extraordinary knowledge of London's topography.

The journey was a short one. He felt the wheels bump over an uneven roadway for a hundred yards, the body rocking uncomfortably, and then with a jar of brakes the car stopped suddenly.

They were on a narrow muddy lane. On one side rose the arches of a railway aqueduct, on the other an open space bounded by a high fence. Evidently the driver had pulled up short of their destination, for they had to squelch and slide through the thick mud for another fifty yards before they came to a narrow gateway in the fence. Through this, they struck a cinder path leading to a square building, which Mr. Reeder guessed was a small factory of some kind. Their conductor flashed a torch on the door; and in weather-worn letters the detective read:

The Storn-Filton Leather Company.

" Now!" said the man, as he turned a switch. " Now, my false-swearing and corrupt police official, I have a slight bill to settle with you."

They were in a dusty lobby, enclosed on three sides by plaster-board walls.

" Account is the word you want, Ras Lal," murmured Mr. Reeder.

For a moment the man was taken aback, and then, snatching the mask from his face:

" I am Ras Lal! And you shall repent it! For you and for your young missus this is indeed a cruel night of anxiety!"

Mr. Reeder did not smile at the quaint English. The gun in the man's hand spoke all languages without error, and could be as fatal in the hands of an unconscious humourist as if it were handled by the most savage of purists. And he was worried about the girl: she had not spoken a word since their capture. The colour had come back to her cheeks and that was a good sign. There was, too a light in her eyes which Reeder could not associate with fear.

Ras Lal, taking down a long cord that hung on a nail in the wooden partition, hesitated.

" It is not necessary," he said, with an elaborate shrug of shoulder; " the room is sufficiently reconnoitred—you will be innocuous there."

Flinging open a door, he motioned them to pass through and mount the bare stairs which faced them. At the top was a landing and a large steel door set in the solid brickwork.

Pulling back the iron bolt, he pushed at the door, and it opened with a squeak. It was a large room, and had evidently been used for the storage of something inflammable, for the walls and floor were of rough-faced concrete and above a dusty desk an inscription was painted, ' Danger. Don't smoke in this store.' There were no windows except one some eighteen inches square, the top of which was near the ceiling. In one corner of the room was a heap of grimy paper files, and on the desk a dozen small wooden boxes, one of which had been opened, for the nail-bristling lid was canted up at an angle.

" Make yourself content for half an hour or probably forty minutes," said Ras Lal, standing in the doorway with his ostentatious revolver. " At that time I shall come for your female; tomorrow she will be on a ship with me, bound for—ah, who knows where?"

" Shut the door as you go out," said Mr. J. G. Reeder; " there is an unpleasant draught."

Tommy Fenalow came on foot at two o'clock in the morning and as he passed down the muddy lane his torch suddenly revealed car marks. Tommy stopped like a man shot. His knees trembled beneath him and his heart entered his throat at the narrowest end. For a while he was undecided whether it would be better to run or walk away. He had no intention of going forward. And then he heard a voice. It was Ras Lal's assistant, and he nearly fainted with joy. Stumbling forward, he came up to the shivering man.

" Did that fool boss of yours bring the car along here?" he asked in a whisper.

" Yas—Mr. Ras Lal," said Ram with whom the English language was not a strong point.

" Then he's a fool!" growled Tommy. " Lord! he put my heart in my mouth!"

Whilst Ram was getting together sufficient English to explain what had happened, Tommy passed on. He found his client sitting in the lobby, a black cheroot between his teeth, a smile of satisfaction on his dark face.

" Welcome!" he said, as Tommy closed the door. " We have

trapped the dog."

"Never mind about the dog," said the other impatiently. "Did you find the rupees?"

Ras Lal shook his head.

"But I left them in the store—ten thousand notes. I thought you'd have got them and skipped before this," said Fenalow anxiously.

"I have something more important in the store come and see my friend."

He preceded the bewildered Tommy up the stairs, turned on the landing light and threw open the door.

"Behold—" he said, and said no more.

"Why, it is Mr. Fenalow!" said Mr. J.G.

One hand held a packet of almost life-like rupee notes; as for the other hand—

"You oughter known he carried a gun, you dam' black baboon," hissed Tommy. "An' to put him in a room where the stuff was, *and* a telephone!"

He was being driven to the local police station, and for the moment was attached to his companion by links of steel.

"It was a mere jest or a piece of practical joking, as I shall explain to the judge in the morning," said Ras airily.

Tommy Fenalow's reply was unprintable.

★

Three o'clock boomed out from St. John's Church as Mr. Reeder accompanied an excited girl to the front door of her boarding-house.

"I can't tell you how I—I've enjoyed tonight," she said.

Mr. Reeder glanced uneasily at the dark face of the house.

"I hope—er—your friends will not think it remarkable that you should return at such an hour—"

Despite her assurance, he went slowly home with an uneasy feeling that her name had in some way been compromised. And in melodrama, when a heroine's name is compromised, somebody has to marry her.

That was the disturbing thought that kept Mr. Reeder awake all night.

American Gothic (i) **MORRIS COOPER**

Nine Isn't Eleven

A chill look at rural crime
plus the mistakes some
people make,
and . . .

JEB PARKER shifted the quid of chewing tobacco with his tongue and shook his head. " Sorry, Sam, but all I got in stock right now is double-0 buckshot." A thread of molasses-brown tobacco clung to his lower lip, moving like a tendril each time he spoke.

The wooden, damp-warped blades of a ceiling fan circled lazily, sweetening the warm air with the hungry odours of cheese and sour pickles and dried apples. Sam Larkin glanced aimlessly about the country store, jingled some loose change in a pocket of his overalls and stood there, debating. Finally, he said, " I'll take a box anyway, Jeb."

" If you could wait till tomorrow, I'll have some number eight in. Maybe eight and a half too."

" I want to show my new twelve-gauge shotgun to Floyd Sommers." Sam flicked his thumb at a fly drowsing on the counter. " Reckon they'll be good enough to blast some crows. I want Floyd to see how those trigger safety-catches work."

Jeb put a box of double-0 shotgun cartridges on the counter. " When you and Lucy plannin' on having the wedding?"

" Pretty soon now, pretty soon." Sam tucked the box of cartridges into a pocket and grinned at the store-keeper. " That's one reason I'm anxious to show Floyd my new gun. Maybe it'll get him to set his mind on a date. Best way I know to put him in a good mood."

" Sure is." Jeb closed the cash drawer and handed Sam his change. " Floyd sure goes all out for shootin' irons. Surprisin' in a feller who's so danged careless when it comes to handlin' a gun."

" I'll see nothing happens." Sam headed for the screen doors.

Jeb called after him. " I'll save you a couple boxes of eights and you can pick 'em up next time you come in."

" Thanks." Sam went down the two wooden steps and walked to his jeep. He looked at the double-barrelled shotgun on the rear seat and suppressed a grin as he started the car.

The road to Floyd Sommers' farm was dry and dusty at this time of year and Sam drove slowly, marshalling his thoughts. He didn't especially relish the idea of killing the old geezer, but he couldn't see any other way out.

He remembered that night a month ago as if it had been yesterday. He was sitting in his bedroom when the old man came in. Floyd had a jug of hard cider under his arm and he was chuckling happily.

" Won't be long now before you'll be my son-in-law, instead of just Sommers' hired hand. And right in line to be boss of the finest little farm in the valley, one of these days."

" You know that's not why I asked Lucy to marry me," Sam protested. " Don't make no difference to me if she never gets a dime. I love her."

" Sure, I know," the old man grinned. " Was just joshin' you along a bit." He put two glasses on the table and uncorked the cider. " Ain't no sense in letting this grow any older."

★

The cider was potent and before the evening was over Sam had dug a photograph album from his trunk. Floyd Sommers roared when he saw the universal pose of a naked child on a bearskin rug. " I never got took like that," he said. " No, sir, I had more sense."

Floyd turned another page and suddenly grew strangely silent.

Sam focused his bleary eyes and tried to wrench the album from the old man's grasp. Sommers stood up. " I hope you got a good story to go with this picture," he said quietly.

Sam didn't have to look at the photograph to know what the old man meant. It was Flo, tucked out in all her wedding finery, with him standing beside her. And scribbled across the bottom, the inscription: ' To Sam my husband, with all my love.'

A harmless picture, ordinarily, like a million others. Only it wasn't just the thing a guy should show his prospective father-in-law without warning.

" Guess I forgot to mention it," Sam mumbled. He tried to shake the cider from his head. " Some people wouldn't understand. You ain't going to hold it against me because I was married, are you?"

" Where is she now?" Floyd asked. The gaiety of a moment before had vanished and his words fell with an almost impersonal monotone.

" She didn't stay with me long. One day she just up and left me, and I started drifting. Didn't think I'd ever want to settle down again till I went to work for you and met Lucy." Sam felt the thickness of his tongue as he spoke jerkily, trying to clear the cider haze from his brain.

" Where is she now?" Floyd repeated the question.

" Dead. Been dead for two years." There was a ringing in his ears and Sam couldn't hear the sound of his own words.

Floyd was a blurred statue and when he finally spoke, the words seemed to be coming from some far-off distance: " It was just the shock, finding out like that. Reckon there's nothing wrong in it "—he stared at Sam—" if things are like you say they was."

Floyd walked from the room and Sam sat in his chair all night, waiting. But the old man did not return. Sam kept on waiting as the days passed, waiting for Floyd to become the friendly man he had been.

Then a week ago he asked Sam abruptly, " Where is your wife buried?"

" I don't know," Sam answered. " A private detective traced her for me. He told me she was dead and I never asked him where."

" I'd like to know," Floyd said.

" Alright. I'll write to him and find out."

★

Right then Sam decided that old man Sommers had lived long enough. Because there was no private detective. Sam wasn't even sure if Flo was still in Cleveland where he'd deserted her.

He thought of the possibility of getting some phony information for Floyd. But if the old man checked up later, after the wedding well, Sam didn't relish the idea of going to jail on a charge of bigamy. And if he didn't get the information for Floyd, there would be no Lucy and no farm and no security for the rest of his life.

It wasn't tough to figure out a simple murder method. Everyone in the valley knew how careless Floyd was with guns. There'd be some fuss and stew over it for a time, but in the end they'd have to call it an accident . . .

A grove of elms and a bend in the road hid an acre of seed corn from the two-storey farm house. Sam held the double-barrelled shotgun loosely as he walked towards the post-strung barbed-wire fence.

Floyd Sommers looked up at the sound of footsteps; when he saw who it was he straightened slowly and came over to his side of the wire fence.

Sam said casually, " Figured I'd try the gun on some crows."

The old man glanced at the weapon disinterestedly. He asked the question which had become a daily routine with him. " Heard from that detective yet?"

" No," Sam answered, raising the gun to his shoulder. His fore-finger flicked a guard-safety, then squeezed slowly. Almost at the same instant the shot echoed across the field, his finger moved to the other trigger and repeated the actions. The two explosions chased each other thinly through the heavy air and a flock of crows wheeled angrily, cawing shrill scoldings.

" You sure you wrote him?" Floyd asked impatiently. Sam lowered the gun and stared towards the grove of elms, waiting to see if Lucy might decide to come down when she heard the shots.

" Well?" the old man demanded.

" You act mighty suspicious," Sam said. He reloaded the shotgun. " Why wouldn't I write?"

Floyd leaned against a fence-post. " I ain't told Lucy yet, but I know there's something wrong, Sam. I think I'll drive over to see Sheriff Turlock tomorrow. Shouldn't be too hard for him to check on your story."

Sam lifted the shotgun. The first load furrowed the old man's cheek. Sam cursed his impatience in not taking more careful aim, and squeezed the second trigger.

Floyd Sommers stood there for an instant; then he fell across the fence like an emptied sack.

Sam reloaded the gun, fired a single shot into the air, and let the shotgun fall between the strands of wire. Then he turned his back on the dead man who no longer felt any pain as the barbs ate into his flesh.

Sam sat across the desk from Sheriff Turlock, his face showing

no trace of the elation which filled his heart.

" Sorry to ask you here today," Sheriff Turlock said. " I'll see you get back in time for the funeral, but I got a couple of things I need yet to keep my reports straight."

" I understand. Just so I get back in time. Lucy's been hit mighty hard and I don't like for her to be alone too long."

Sheriff Turlock said, " Now, just for the record, how about going over the main facts again."

" Well," Sam shifted in the chair, " I took a few pot shots at some crows and then Floyd wanted to try the gun. You know how he was. I guess it was my fault in a way, but I didn't think he'd start climbing over the fence with a cocked gun in his hands."

" Seems mighty queer."

Sam shrugged his shoulders. " He might have had some reason, but we'll never know. Anyway, the gun got tangled in the barbed wire—or maybe he dropped it. I ain't rightly sure. Then she went off, and . . . well, you saw what it did to him."

" One shot?"

Sam looked at the sheriff. " That's a funny thing to ask me. You saw for yourself the other cartridge was still in the shotgun, unfired. Besides, there's a twin-safety which makes it impossible for both barrels to be fired at the same time."

" I know," the sheriff agreed. " We checked to make certain both barrels couldn't possibly be discharged at the same time."

" Can't blame you for that," Sam said.

" Part of my job. Like checking Floyd's hands to see if he'd fired a gun."

Sam felt a tightness in his throat. " I told you he didn't."

" So you did. And naturally, when you loan a man a gun like that, you're going to load both barrels."

" Everybody would do that to see how the safetys work."

" Just checking." Sheriff Turlock made a pyramid with his fingers. " Heard from your wife recently?"

Sam started to rise from the chair, changed his mind. " You get around," he said slowly.

" You shouldn't save so many pictures. Just in case you're interested she's in Chicago now."

" So, I've got a wife," Sam said.

" And you were going to marry Lucy." The contempt in the sheriff's voice made Sam wince.

" So it's off now," he shrugged his shoulders. " Anyway, I've committed no crime." Sam cursed himself silently, cursed

the pack-rat habit which made him save things. He said, " I thought she was dead."

" But you were planning on marrying Lucy without making certain."

" Like I said, I ain't committed no crime."

" No," the sheriff said softly. " Not unless you call murder a crime."

" Murder!" Sam clenched the arms of his chair. " Just because I got a wife, you got no reason . . ."

" She gave me your motive,' the sheriff said. " You told me it was murder."

" Me?"

" You said there was only one shot fired when the gun fell—or maybe got tangled in the barbed-wire fence."

" You saw that for yourself," Sam shouted. " You know it was impossible for both barrels to go off."

Sheriff Turlock nodded his head. " Right. And Floyd Sommers was in no condition to put another cartridge in the gun after getting a double load in the face."

Sam said, " You're doing a lot of talking."

" The coroner took eleven pellets from what was left of Floyd."

" So what?"

" I don't know why you had to shoot twice. Maybe you didn't get him right the first time. I don't know. But you'll tell us all about it later."

" Will I? You're just fishing for some way to get even with me on account of Lucy. But if you think I killed the old man, you're nuts."

" Am I? Then how does this sound? You had to replace a cartridge for two reasons. First, because everyone knows both barrels would have been loaded when you loaned it to Floyd, so he could see how the safetys worked. And second, because that double-safety feature would keep the other load from accidental discharge."

" A lot of yakking with no proof," Sam said.

Sheriff Turlock said quietly, " I told you the coroner took eleven pellets from Floyd's face."

" Still don't mean nothing to me," Sam laughed harshly. " You got nothing says the old man was shot twice. Nothing that means anything to me."

" It probably will when they put a noose around your neck," the sheriff said grimly. " You were using double-0 buckshot.

Guess you ust never got around to finding out there are only *nine* pellets in a double-0 shell. Which means Floyd had to be shot twice."

Sam put a cigarette in his mouth with fingers that were trembling. Sheriff Turlock scraped a wooden match against the side of his desk, and held the light for Sam. " Y'know," he said, " there wasn't really any need for murder."

Sam stared at him through a haze of cigarette smoke.

The sheriff blew out the match. " I shouldn't have given you the impression your wife was living in Chicago. She's in a cemetery. Died a little over a year ago."

(*American Gothic*, part two, overpage)

American Gothic (ii) **STEVE APRIL**

The Road Out

. . . another angle of rural crime filled with the hard impact of rough living and savage opportunism

HOW I GOT hooked picking potatoes with these dumb migratory apes, me who can type and has held down white collar jobs, was because of my lousy luck. And Harry . . . which is the same thing.

Harry's about 30, a few years younger than me, the muscular stud type I'm always a sucker for. We met in a Virginia bar where he was a contractor for these migratory workers. Harry drove a Caddy and was flashing dough, so when he suggested I tag along with him, follow the crops up to Long Island, it seemed a smart deal. I've good legs and standing behind a counter all day in this greasy stool joint was giving my pins a hint of varicose veins. Oh, I don't have 'em yet, but I knew that would happen and when a gal is hitting 40, good legs are a heck of an asset. Well, from the jump it wasn't what I had expected. I mean, these dumb migratory workers live outside the towns in temporary shacks, most times without plumbing and being Harry was the bossman, we had to live with 'em. If that wasn't bad enough, when we worked our way up to this potato spread near Southampton, Long Island, a really swank section, Harry got stupid-drunk and busted his Caddy around some stone marker, claiming the British warships had shelled the damn' spot in 1776.

The next thing I know Harry and I are hustling in the spud fields, like the rest of the slobs. You can make a dozen bucks a day but it's a back-breaker, working on your hands and knees—you can imagine what *that* was doing to my figure! I knew I had to put a little dough aside and take off, maybe try New York City. But Harry was tight with bucks, including mine, he's hell-bent on

getting another car. And it wasn't only the hard work, in these shacks there can be five or six men and maybe a girl or two, all bunking together and I had a feeling Harry might even make me hustle for him.

Around Southampton they have these large and small estates, all solid father-to-son-money-stuff, mixed with smaller houses and gentlemen-farmers raising spuds and corn. As it happened, near the farm we were working was this little weather-beaten cottage, with a garage in the back, all very neat and facing a side-road heading into the Montauk Highway. The little land back of the cottage ended in a small swamp bordering the potato fields. One afternoon we heard this dog howling while we were working. We, and the fellow owning the land, rushed to the swamp where a mutt was in some goo up to his chest.

The farm owner said, " Stop howling, old boy, we'll get you out. You're in no real danger."

" Ain't this quicksand, boss? " one of the migrant jerks asked.

" Yes, but it's fairly shallow, due to the rock formation around here. Small objects will sink but a man would only go in up to his hips."

After he pulled the mutt out, the guy tossed in a thick branch and it sunk out of sight. You see how it was, all the little things that added up to murder. The house, the quicksand, me trying to escape and then the wallet.

Even though I was completely pooped at night, the cabins reeked so of unwashed people, I often took a walk after supper, to get away from it all. That's when I found the wallet. There was $3 in it along with cards showing a Mrs. Mabel Smith belonged to the Village Improvement Society, the Island Art Guild and all that jazz. Her address was the little cottage I told you about. Naturally the angle was to play it honest. I mean, what's three bucks?

★

I walked on to the cottage and this old biddy opened the door. I explained about finding the wallet and she asked me in, while making a speech about honesty. The living-room had a real wood burning fireplace, with an axe and a poker, and the rest of the room was spick and span and furnished with this antique kind of junk: all adding up to the feeling of money in the family for generations. The old biddy gave me some iced tea, said she lived alone and when

I was ready to go, she went into the bedroom and came back with a $10 bill.

I got the picture: old Mrs. Smith didn't trust banks, probably had a mattress worth a fortune. A dainty little woman living alone—an easy mark. Naturally, I thought of robbing her, but since I was probably the only stranger she'd spoken to in years and we poor migratory workers would be the first suspected—anyway, I mean, from the start I realized such a robbery would have to end by silencing the biddy. I've been down a couple of wrong roads in my time, but never the murder road.

But that Saturday night was bad. Saturdays are always rough with all the apes getting tanked up. This Saturday started by a guy beating up his wife and I could see Harry slapping me around some day. Then he somehow found the $10, which I'd hidden in my one good bra, and used the money to buy some wine, lost the rest in a crap game. Harry passed out on the juice and I spent the night in my bunk with a kitchen knife at my side, fighting off drunken apes.

I was plenty hysterical but Sunday morning was bright and sunny, and I took a long walk, my head working calmly. I knew two things: I had to get away and my only out was to take Mrs. Smith's hoard, even if it meant murder. To my surprise I started thinking about this calmly, working out the angles. One thing: her corpse couldn't be found until I had time to skip this crummy set-up, find work in New York City or maybe Los Angeles, under one of my phony names, the distance depending on how full Mabel's mattress was. It also meant being very careful, leaving no prints.

★

I've read lots of murder stories, knew plenty of gimmicks. I started by having an argument with Harry, shouting loudly, before the other clowns in the shack, that I was going to pull out. Next, I merely waited, until a night when it rained hard.

The rain started Tuesday afternoon. The radio said it would last all night and the next morning. That meant the fields would be too muddy to work in the morning and since we were on a piece basis—no pay. Most of the stiffs pooled their dimes to buy a gallon of cheap wine, including Harry. By midnight they were all snoring in the hot shack, every window shut. Putting on my work gloves, it was a cinch to leave without being seen.

In the driving rain I crossed the fields to Mrs. Smith's cottage. In her garage I stripped, except for the gloves, walked buck-naked to the rear of her dark house, went in through an open window. The cool rain made me feel alive and clean, which I guess is a crazy thing to say when you're about to murder. But that's how I felt, very sure of myself.

Inside the dark house I went directly to her room, held a pillow over the old lady's sleeping face. She hardly struggled. That was the easy part. I removed her night-gown; she didn't weigh as much as a sack of spuds. Taking the axe from the fireplace and carrying the old bag over my shoulder, I walked out into the dark and rainy night, made for the quick-sand hole, of course.

Even though I once worked in a butcher's shop, the next part was rough. But I managed it, with the axe, and the quick-sand. The rain washed away my footsteps. And it washed me clean . . .

I made one mistake: her body disappeared okay but the head wouldn't sink. I guess the damn' quick-sand pit was full. While I didn't know what to do, I didn't panic.

I walked back through the rain to the cottage. In the kitchen I pulled the shades down and kept the refrigerator door open, working by its faint light. I wrapped the head in some silver foil and put it in the refrigerator.

I dried the axe, cleaned up the tracks my bare feet had made in the kitchen, then dried myself with a towel and checked the time. It was 2.10 a.m. I had plenty of time. As long as it rained the apes wouldn't get up until noon and I'd be back long before daybreak, my loot safely buried under a tree I'd already selected. And before then, I'd try the quick-sand again, or, if that didn't work, I'd try digging a deep hole.

★

Pulling down the shades in the bedroom, I turned on a small table lamp and started hunting for money. There was $23 in a pocket-book and I left it there, for the time being. I went through her dresser, the old shoe-boxes in the closet, examined the mattress and pillows. Nothing.

I moved into the living room. It was in her desk drawer: $355 in cash, plus bank books and stock certificates proving the old babe had been loaded—she was worth $64,000. I read through some letters from her lawyers in New York; she also owned this cottage and land outright and some other property on the island.

I took my time, trying to figure a way I might bite into this big money. Her signature was on a couple of old letters and didn't seem hard to copy, but I decided it was far too risky.

But I kept thinking and studying the deal and as a rainy, grey dawn broke, I decided to play it safe, settle for the $355. That would take me far away to, maybe, Atlantic City, even give me time to buy a few clothes and look around for a decent job. I didn't bother with the $23 in her purse: when they did realise Mrs. Smith was missing, if they didn't know about the cash in her desk, the money in her purse might make it seem like there *wasn't* any robbery.

Glancing about the living room and the bedroom, I considered making up the bed, but let it go. I had the money tucked inside one of my gloves as I pulled up the shades and shut the windows. In the kitchen I made a fast check of the cupboard, in case she'd stashed dough there. All I found was a bottle of cooking sherry and a whisky bottle, both half full. Maybe the old gal had been a quiet lush. Although I wanted a drink badly, I left the sauce alone.

As I was ready to go out to the garage and dress, then return for the package in the refrigerator, I heard a car stop and a man's steps coming around to the back of the house. It was 5.15 a.m. I peeked out the window and damn' near fainted—it was a middle-aged State trooper in his wet, grey uniform!

★

He knocked on the kitchen door as I raced for the bedroom, yanked off my gloves and money-roll, and tossed them in her closet. I put on one of her old flannel robes. It didn't come to my knees. Mussing up my hair, I walked bare-footed towards the kitchen door, yawning as he knocked again, praying my hysteria didn't show.

Using part of my robe to turn the knob, I opened the door. The trooper blinked at me, eyes taking in the parts of me the robe didn't cover. Yawning again, I asked, " Yes, Officer?".

He tipped his hat. " Excuse me, but where's Mabel . . . Mrs. Smith?"

" She went to New York City last night, on business," I said, trying to sound sleepy.

" Oh." It was a flat suspicious sound, not a word.

" Yes. I'm Miss Flynn. I work for her lawyer, Bill Preston," I said softly remembering the name from her papers. " He has an

offer for her Riverdale property and I brought some papers down for her to sign, but she decided to go into the city herself, talk to Mr. Preston. I'm to wait until she returns tonight. Sort of watch her house, I guess. My goodness it's still dark out—what time is it?"

"Near five-thirty. I remember Mrs. Smith telling me once about that land. It will make a good marina."

"I don't know the details. I imagine she'll return tonight, unless she calls me to the contrary. Anything I can do for you, Officer?"

"Well, no, Miss—?"

"Flynn." When I got away from here I'd have to change and dye my hair, not that he was studying my face: he was looking at my hand holding the scrimpy robe over my bosom.

The cop grinned, suspicion vanishing from his heavy face. "I generally drop in to see the old lady every day. Kind of isolated here."

"You drop in so early?"

"Mrs. Smith is always up by now, has had her breakfast. I go on patrol at five a.m. and this is my first stop."

"Well, I'll tell her you were by." At five a.m. tomorrow I'd be hundreds of miles long gone.

"Yeah." He started to walk away, then turned and pushed by me in his wet uniform, rubbing up against me. "She won't mind. Mrs. Smith always keeps a brew in the box for me."

"Sure, help yourself. I guess it's all right. But I'd like to get back to bed."

Opening the refrigerator, he reached for a can. He didn't pick it up, instead he turned and stared at me with hard eyes, fingers resting on his holster. "There's some blood spots inside the refrigerator," he said, motioning with his head towards the bottom of the box.

"So what?"

"They're coming from that package—what's inside the foil?"

"Officer, at five-thirty a.m., I'm hardly up to discussing house cleaning. I remember Mrs. Smith saying she had beef ready to cook, and some of the blood must have dripped down. Look, please take your beer and let me try for some more sleep."

"No. I'd best look in the foil. Something odd here. Mabel . . . Mrs. Smith is a strict vegetarian, never had meat in her house before . . ."

THE CARTOONIST AND THE CRIME WRITERS

JOHN DICKSON CARR ('CARTER DICKSON')

EWMM TRUE CRIME CLASSIC

THE MISER OF LYONS

NIGEL MORLAND

The squalor and the savagery of the Crepin case was both a scandal and a cautionary tale

VICTORIAN LITERATURE, both grave and gay, often contained misers, some of them so incredible that they seemed creatures of nightmare, rather than imagined creations.

The foul old man living in filth, starving himself to increase his wealth; the Scrooge-like figure exploiting others for his own gain; the greedy hoarder hating to part with so much as a halfpenny—all these have always aroused mirth or disgust. And they are generally regarded as fictitious beings.

But there was a miser whose story become widely known in the reign of George III, a sordid old man to whom writers in the past century and a half are indebted as the living version of the miser of the story books.

He was Jean Crépin, who was born in 1768 of parents with small means. But in Lyons—then a place of quiet lanes and rural peace—the Crépins were a respected family.

Jean's early days were those of any child of the lower middle class in the France ruled by Louis XVI and the colourful, unfortunate Marie Antoinette. The boy went to school for a short time, and grew up into a gaunt, cadaverous, almost repellant-looking young man, who, for some reason never explained, changed his name to Crépin-Crépin.

In the feverish twilight of the *ancien régime* he managed to make a small living, selling stockings to housewives as a door to door salesman. He had reached his majority when the Bastille was

destroyed and rural Lyons was drawn into the Revolution. One of its earliest victims was Crépin senior and his wife; they were ruined and vanished from sight.

Crépin-Crépin somehow held on until the Proclamation of the Republic and the first grim warnings of the Reign of Terror. Astutely, with boldness and daring, he began speculating in assignats. These were notes issued by the first Republic on the security of confiscated estates, the notes being for large values and intended as a temporary measure. By 1792 they were issued in vast quantities for various values, good coin having vanished. Clever, unscrupulous men were able to make large sums by speculating in these assignats, and this Crépin-Crépin did. He was greedy and reckless, for this paper money was ruthlessly protected, deportation or even the guillotine being penalties for gambling in it.

Already moderately wealthy, he tried other ways of gaining easy riches, the changing values of money being one of the dangerous markets into which he ventured, with enormous success.

His wealth grew rapidly and, with it, a passionate desire to acquire money, and more money. Nothing in his life mattered except this; the world did not affect him, nor did passing events, except as means of enrichment. Then, in semi-retirement, and for long years Crépin-Crépin lived in Lyons, becoming a recluse with no social life worth recording. His growing bank balance brought him into the millionaire class, something unusual in those days.

Not until 1848 did Crépin-Crépin return to the world's notice. At that time, when Louis Philippe had abdicated and Louis Napoleon was waiting in the wings, Crépin-Crépin, in peaceful Lyons, had become the living example of the legendary miser. A joke to the poor, a horror to the fastidious, and the envy of the wealthy, he was not using his big revenues but making his capital grow by investing the dividends to earn more money—he was not spending more than coppers on his daily existence.

★

He had one servant, an utterly devoted creature named Annette Gojon, who, since approximately 1808, tended slavishly to him for no wages, for nothing save her meagre keep. Why she did it has never been explained, yet, strange as it would have seemed to the people of Lyons, there must have been some factor of charm

about her master to justify such faithful service.

Crépin-Crépin had a miserable little hovel of a home, 94 Rue St.-Georges. Somewhere in it Annette Gojon had an almost bare room; he slept in a cubicle containing only a truckle bed without linen, its coverings tattered and unwashed for years.

There is a story, reasonably well founded, giving a picture of Crépin-Crépin. It draws the man as a typical miser, like something from an ancient book.

At a time when his servant Annette Gojon, was away at a hospital, Crépin-Crépin catered for himself by purchasing a bag of stale bread. This was to last until Gojon returned.

To save the expense of making fires for his cooking, he made a thick bread soup on Monday. He ate very sparingly, regretting every necessary mouthful. On Tuesday the mess had become mouldy and uneatable; therefore, he did not touch it. On Wednesday the soup was putrid, but Crépin was hungry.

It seemed wastefully extravagant to consume any of the foul bread soup, yet he had to eat. The still unquenched human side of his appetite wanted food but rebelled at the thought of what was available. He poured out a small glass of rum and told himself, in these sort of words: ' If you eat your food, you shall have a glass of rum.' With his eyes on the rum he forced himself to swallow what was on his plate. That done, he carefully poured the rum back into the bottle, saying: ' You have eaten your soup, Crépin-Crépin; you do not need any rum.'

Crépin's life was that of an absolute recluse. He saw no one and nobody came near him, for he neither offered hospitality nor did he want visitors in case they expected the wine of hospitality.

Even his wealth brought no acquaintances. It was widely known that he was the most cunning of misers, that his sordid house held nothing of any intrinsic value. Yet, in spite of his life, his self-starvation, his personal habits, which were part of the filth in which he dwelt, Crépin-Crépin was a healthy, hearty and extraordinary vital old gentleman. His looks were repellant. He was lank, his dirty, pock-marked skin stretched tight on his skull and his clothes were held together by faith as much as repairs. Those who knew him casually (and they were not particularly fastidious times) reported it was necessary to keep well to windward . . .

A long immunity from rascals was reaching its end. He had come under the notice of a man named Pierre-Benoit Favré, a beadle of St.-George parish, a splendid figure of a man whose religious outlook and dutiful attention to his church duties were

notable. Beneath this outward garment of virtue, Favré was a horribly depraved rascal. He had all the tricks and astuteness of the modern confidence man. In some way quite beyond anyone in Lyons, he had used great ingenuity and charm in persuading two women, who were little more than friends, to leave him legacies. These ladies, a Miss Faverge and a Widow Berthon, saw to it that certain monies were willed to Favré. About the only person who found this out and had reason to remark on it was Procureur Général Louis Gaulot, who dealt with the case in detail years later (1860) and from whom I have borrowed extensively.

In 1838 Favré, close on sixty years old, married Marie-Claire Gobet. She was eighteen and living in his house as, ostensibly, a sort of domestic help though, in actuality, his mistress for some time past. This unpleasant situation had been known to Favré's first wife, Dorotheé, who had died, neglected by him, in hospital in 1835, when Claire was fifteen and, even then, well acquainted with Favré's bed.

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Favré's own depravities, of which we have no details, recoiled on his own head. Having seduced Marie-Claire Gobet as a child and taught her an obscene way of life, it was natural she inclined automatically to misbehaviour. She was without spiritual stamina to sustain her and had grown up with no guidance in the decencies of life. Almost as soon as she became the second Mrs. Favré, her misconduct was generally remarked (by everybody of course, except her husband who was completely ignorant of it). His own rascalities, which were common gossip, were hastily forgiven when it was learned that he had left church to return home unexpectedly, and there found a young man under his wife's bed, and Marie-Claire arrayed in a manner unbecoming to her station.

The only effect this had it would seem, was to harden the woman's inclination to evil. Instead of being content with the wild youth of Lyons, she began to look round to see what was available for a woman of talent, no scruples and considerable good looks. Crépin-Crépin she knew by repute and from her husband's remarks, and through an occasional meeting at which she had to be polite and gracious to the old man. His house at 94 Rue St.-Georges was in the heart of the parish which employed Favré.

Marie-Claire learned of the illness that attacked Annette Gojon (this was in 1847), the time when Crépin was supposed to be eating his fearful bread soup. Her facile mind concentrated on the old man's enormous wealth and his seclusion. It took some courage even for one without morals, to pay a visit to the miser's house.

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Charming, gracious, and prettily dutiful, she visited Crépin-Crépin in her capacity as wife of the parish beadle. She sympathised over the servant's illness; in the most friendly fashion she tidied a few things in the dirt-encrusted house, and said she must pop in now and again to look after a lonely man; he leapt on the suggestion because it cost nothing. Marie-Claire paid frequent visits and very cleverly cemented her position by bringing gifts of food. It meant that Crépin could economise on his famous bread soup. The uncharitable thought he continued with the bread soup, rushing round to the market with Marie-Claire's gifts as soon as she had gone, selling them for a few sous they were worth.

Favré, it is clear, learned something of what was going on. That he failed to interfere at the time can be put down to his hopes of filching part or all of whatever Marie-Claire might get out of her little game.

Her nature was such that within a few weeks she was Crépin-Crépin's mistress. The old gentleman was nearly 80 at the time and was helpless in the woman's hands. Marie-Claire was pretty, unscrupulous, and too sure of the good things to come to let the miser get away from her. She made herself indispensable in more than one way. When Annette Gojon returned to the house, she was relegated to the position of scullery maid and treated badly by the new power in the house.

In early 1848 Marie-Claire's game became obvious. By tricks and stratagems by cunning, and play on Crépin's ancient lusts, she gradually manoeuvred him into making a will which left her a sum of 400,000 francs—this was in the days when the franc was worth about tenpence. How it was done nobody seemed to know. The miser was careful enough to conserve things in his ordinary life; money, he regarded as sacred. He would not part with a penny unless he was forced to do so. The answer may be that he was hopelessly besotted with Marie-Claire, or, with the stupid spite of bitter old age, sought to infuriate his just heirs.

Marie-Claire became an accepted part of the household. With the will in her pocket, I do not know why she should instruct and encourage her ancient protector into most unnatural practices and immoralities of a wholly shocking concept. Some have said it was the sheer wickedness in the woman's mind; others inclined to the belief that she encouraged the miser in fleshy abuses in hopes of speeding his death. In the summer of 1851 Annette Gojon suddenly became ill and departed to hospital for the second time. This time she died there.

Crépin-Crépin was deprived of his lifetime devotee—Gojon had worked faithfully for him without wages, attended to him and, it was said, yielded to him. It was a selfless devotion; with that gone he was Marie-Claire's private property.

But not quite. Public indignation began to seethe. Her depravities, after Gojon's death, became so wanton that they were the talk of Lyons. The old man, of course, was no more than butter in her hands but it was as if his excesses made her worse and completely shameless. All through the summer the garden of 94 Rue St.-Georges was used for the saturnalia of Marie-Claire and her miser. What a French chronicler calls a ' scene of the most disgusting and indescribable sexual depravity ' was regularly to be observed in that garden, and observers there were, including children of neighbouring houses.

This was too much for parents in the locality. A deputation of outraged fathers waited on the chief of police, demanding action and punishment. He could not do a great deal; private property was being used, the property of the man who was misbehaving. He issued a warning (being tactful towards a wealthy man) asking Crépin-Crépin for discretion; he did not even proceed against Marie-Claire.

The trouble was, Favré was her husband and everything was taking place with his full consent. He no longer worried about the views of the parishioners of St.-Georges. His wife was heiress to a fortune in which, doubtless, he would share. He actively encouraged that disorderly household, at least during the night hours, by escorting his wife several days a week to Crépin's home at nine o'clock at night. There he led her to a small room containing one bed and the miser, and left her. She stayed the whole night returning to her marital bed at dawn, followed by the hoots and howls of the outraged neighbours.

The position was becoming awkward for the thick-skinned Marie-Claire. It was necessary to exercise some sort of care,

unless she wished to find herself in prison.

Boldly, and with the complete consent of her husband Marie-Clairé Favré urged Crépin-Crépin to come and live free at her own home. There the influence of her husband would protect her from the anger of the neighbourhood, and the old man would be completely at her command. Once the Favré door was locked, the world could not pry. No matter what it might say or suspect, it was Favré's house; she was his wife, and Crépin-Crépin was their guest.

There is no information as to life within the house. Whether Crépin minded his translation to a new home and new surroundings is unknown, but it is certain the scandal of the Rue St.-Georges died away until neighbours no longer found interest in the deserted home of the miser.

Marie-Claire was quietly biding her time. Crépin-Crépin was old; as her husband said, and somebody must have heard it, for the words have been recorded: ' Old man Crépin is only fit to be dead.'

At the time this remark did not register on the woman's mind. She was heiress to a fortune; she was prepared to wait for it. No doubt, Favré had been promised a handsome *pourboire*—at all events he made no known objection to being cuckolded within his own home, nor did he mind Crépin's filthy habits and filth of person.

But, as the months passed, Favré's statement remained unfulfilled. The miser appeared to have all the elements of immortality within him; Marie-Claire began to look ahead. So adept had she become at managing her aged lover that she was able to get him to change his intention and will her a million francs as it would seem that this wife of a poorly-paid beadle must have readjusted her sense of values—400,000 francs was insufficient for her purposes.

It is true that there is nothing like the acquisition of large sums of money to inspire the owner to go after all the other money in sight. Marie-Claire, with little pretence, worked on Crépin-Crépin boldly and violently. Her hold on the poor, probably dazed dotard was such that, before long, he had changed his will again. This time he disinherited his natural heirs to make Marie-Claire the sole legatee to a great fortune indeed. With that most precious of documents properly signed and sealed she set out to get the money in the quickest possible way.

She took the thought of murder in her stride (perhaps it had

been in her mind from the beginning), and began giving Crépin-Crépin secret draughts. These were infusions of poppy—opium.

At first the victim was given mild doses, and he took them willingly. Crépin-Crépin never refused anything that cost him nothing; he would even eat long after his appetite was satisfied rather than lose gratis food.

The doses had to be graded carefully. Marie-Claire did not want to take any chances and, to make sure nothing went wrong she called in help in the form of a man named Chorel, a relative by marriage. If he had any scruples at all, and there is no record that he had, he was light-heartedly promised 100,000 francs out of the coming loot. His aid was urgently needed since Favré was either too old or indifferent to take very much notice of what was going on. And Crépin-Crépin, with thoroughly unexpected toughness, was defying opium and a recent history of depravity that would have debilitated a much younger man.

Chorel gave his aid and between them he, and Marie-Claire began to load the miser with opium. Even then his physique sustained him for many weeks. At last, the limit was reached; Crépin-Crépin went tottering to bed one night, alone, and this time he did not wake. Marie-Claire was one of the richest women in town.

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Lyons, or that part of it adjacent to Rue St.-Georges, began to talk. The tide of scandal was extraordinary; even more extraordinary was the complete indifference of the police. Crépin-Crépin was buried; Marie-Claire inherited and the months went on without anything worse than unbridled gossip.

The old man's millions were tainted, or propinquity was too much for her—either way, Marie-Claire, once the cash was in her hands, became avaricious. Her meanness outshone the dead man's and one of the first things she did was to banish Favré to a tawdry little villa in Bron with barely enough money to live on. Chorel, waiting patiently for his 100,000 francs, got nothing except threats of arrest if he came near her.

Amazingly enough, the conspirators took their dismissal meekly. Perhaps they were afraid of the open anger of the people against Marie-Claire, or perhaps they feared being accused of Crépin-Crépin's murder—it seemed everybody knew about it except the police.

Four years went by like this, with Marie-Claire becoming acquisitive in a manner her aged lover would have contemplated with envy.

Chorel—who has never been more than a shadow—brooded over his 100,000 francs. It grew a more desirable sum with the passing of time until he could bear it no longer. He went to the police and denounced Marie-Claire and all she had done. His venom was so great that it never occurred to him that he was involved . . .

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The Rhône Assizes saw the last act. Public interest boiled over as the horrors of Crépin-Crépin's ugly life were unfolded, as the disgraceful conduct of Marie-Claire was bared to the world. Unwilling and sullen partners with her in the indictment were Favré and Chorel.

She fought the court viciously; her denouncements were colourful rather than accurate; she poured savage scorn on her fellow conspirators—in all, it was a wildly tempestuous Gallic trial.

Chorel got twelve years' hard labour. Favré received five years, probably because his participation had been indifferent rather than evilly inspired, and Marie-Claire was given the same sentence as Chorel; worse, the money she had worked so cunningly to acquire was legally removed from her and restored to the rightful heirs. The law did not believe that an old man of four-score years was completely sensible when he indulged in sexual orgies with a young woman whom he made his sole heir, then conveniently succumbed to massive doses of opium.

THE

LOST SPECIAL

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

Continuing our series of outstanding (but less well known) crime stories by famous 20th century authors, this was one of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's (1859-1930) personal favourites. It also contains a fascinating, oblique fragment of unsigned ratiocination by Sherlock Holmes

THE CONFESSION of Herbert de Lernac, now lying under sentence of death at Marseilles, has thrown a light upon one of the most inexplicable crimes of the century—an incident which is, I believe, absolutely unprecedented in the criminal annals of any country. Although there is a reluctance to discuss the matter in official circles, and little information has been given to the Press, there are still indications that the statement of this arch-criminal is corroborated by the facts, and that we have at last found a solution for a most astounding business. As the matter is eight years old, and as its importance was somewhat obscured by a political crisis which was engaging the public attention at the time, it may be as well to state the facts as far as we have been able to ascertain them. They are collated from the Liverpool papers of that date, from the proceedings at the inquest upon John Slater, the engine-driver and from the records of the London and West Coast Railway Company, which have been courteously put at my disposal. Briefly they are as follows:

On the 3rd of June, 1890, a gentleman, who gave his name as Monsieur Louis Caratal, desired an interview with Mr. James

Bland, the superintendent of the London and West Coast Central Station in Liverpool. He was a small man, middle-aged and dark, with a stoop which was so marked that it suggested some deformity of the spine. He was accompanied by a friend, a man of imposing physique, whose deferential manner and constant attention showed that his position was one of dependence. This friend or companion, whose name did not transpire was certainly a foreigner and probably, from his swarthy complexion, either a Spaniard or a South American. One peculiarity, was observed in him. He carried in his left hand a small black, leather despatch-box, and it was noticed by a sharp-eyed clerk in the central office that this box was fastened to his wrist by a strap. No importance was attached to the fact at the time, but subsequent events endowed it with some significance. Monsieur Caratal was shown up to Mr. Bland's office, while his companion remained outside.

Monsieur Caratal's business was quickly dispatched. He had arrived that afternoon from Central America. Affairs of the utmost importance demanded that he should be in Paris without the loss of an unnecessary hour. He had missed the London express. A special must be provided. Money was of no importance. Time was everything. If the company would speed him on his way, they might make their own terms.

Mr. Bland struck the electric bell, summoned Mr. Potter Hood, the traffic manager, and had the matter arranged in five minutes. The train would start in three-quarters of an hour. It would take that time to ensure that the line should be clear. The powerful engine called Rochdale (No. 247 on the company's register), was attached to two carriages, with a guard's van behind. The first carriage was solely for the purpose of decreasing the inconvenience arising from the oscillation. The second was divided as usual, into four compartments, a first-class, a first-class smoking, a second-class, and a second-class smoking. The first compartment, which was nearest to the engine, was the one allotted to the travellers. The other three were empty. The guard of the special train was James McPherson, who had been some years in the service of the company. The stoker, William Smith, was a new hand.

Monsieur Caratal, upon leaving the superintendent's office, rejoined his companion, and both of them manifested extreme impatience to be off. Having paid the money asked, which amounted to fifty pounds five shillings, at the usual special rate

of five shillings a mile, they demanded to be shown the carriage, and at once took their seats in it, although they were assured that the better part of an hour must elapse before the line could be cleared. In the meantime a singular coincidence had occurred in the office which Monsieur Caratal had just quitted.

A request for a special is not a very uncommon circumstance in a rich commercial centre, but that two should be required upon the same afternoon was most unusual. It so happened, however, that Mr. Bland had hardly dismissed the first traveller before a second entered with a similar request. This was Horace Moore, a gentlemanly man of military appearance, who alleged that the sudden serious illness of his wife in London made it absolutely imperative that he should not lose an instant in starting upon the journey. His distress and anxiety were so evident that Mr. Bland did all that was possible to meet his wishes. A second special was out of the question, as the ordinary local service was already somewhat deranged by the first. There was the alternative, however, that Mr. Moore should share the expense of Monsieur Caratal's train, and should travel in the other empty first-class compartment, if Monsieur Caratal objected to having him in the one which he occupied. It was difficult to see any objection to such an arrangement and yet Monsieur Caratal upon the suggestion being made to him by Mr. Potter Hood, absolutely refused to consider it for an instant. The train was his, he said, and he would insist upon the exclusive use of it. All argument failed to overcome his ungracious objections, and finally the plan had to be abandoned. Mr. Horace Moore left the station in great distress, after learning that his only course was to take the ordinary slow train which leaves Liverpool at six o'clock. At four thirty-one exactly by the station clock the special train, containing the crippled Monsieur Caratal and his gigantic companion, steamed out of the Liverpool station. The line was at that time clear, and there should have been no stoppage before Manchester.

The trains of the London and West Coast Railway run over the lines of another company as far as this town, which should have been reached by the special rather before six o'clock.At a quarter after six considerable surprise and some consternation were caused amongst the officials at Liverpool by the receipt of a telegram from Manchester to say that it had not yet arrived. An enquiry directed to St. Helens, which is a third of the way between the two cities, elicited the following reply:

To James Bland, Superintendent, Central L. & W.C.,

Liverpool.—Special passed here at 4.52, well up to time.—Dowser, St. Helens.

This telegram was received at six forty. At six fifty a second message was received from Manchester:

No sign of special as advised by you.

And then ten minutes later a third, more bewildering:

Presume some mistakes as to proposed running of special. Local train from St. Helens timed to follow it has just arrived and has seen nothing of it. Kindly wire advices.—Manchester.

The matter was assuming a most amazing aspect, although in some respects the last telegram was a relief to the authorities at Liverpool. If an accident had occurred to the special, it seemed hardly possible that the local train could have passed down the same line without observing it. And, yet, what was the alternative? Where could the train be? Had it possibly been sidetracked for some reason in order to allow the slower train to go past? Such an explanation was possible if some small repair had to be effected. A telegram was dispatched to each of the stations between St. Helens and Manchester, and the superintendent and traffic manager waited in the utmost suspense at the instrument for the series of replies which would enable them to say for certain what had become of the missing train. The answers came back in the order of questions, which was the order of the stations beginning at the St. Helens end:

Special passed here five o'clock.—Collins Green.

Special passed here six past five.—Earlestown.

Special passed here five ten.—Newton.

Special passed here five twenty.—Kenyon Junction.

No special train has passed here.—Barton Moss.

The two officials stared at each other in amazement.

"This is unique in my thirty years of experience," said Mr. Bland.

"Absolutely unprecedented and inexplicable, sir. The special has gone wrong between Kenyon Junction and Barton Moss."

"And yet there is no siding, so far as my memory serves me, between the two stations. The special must have run off the metals."

"But how could the four-fifty parliamentary pass over the same line without observing it?"

"There's no alternative, Mr. Hood. It *must* be so. Possibly the local train may have observed something which may throw some light upon the matter. We will wire to Manchester for more

information, and to Kenyon Junction with instructions that the line be examined instantly as far as Barton Moss."

The answer from Manchester came within a few minutes.

No news of missing special. Driver and guard of slow train positive no accident between Kenyon Junction and Barton Moss. Line quite clear, and no sign of anything unusual.—Manchester.

"That driver and guard will have to go," said Mr. Bland grimly. "There has been a wreck and they have missed it. The special has obviously run off the metals without disturbing the line—how it could have done so passes my comprehension—but so it must be, and we shall have a wire from Kenyon or Barton Moss presently to say that they have found her at the bottom of an embankment."

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But Mr. Bland's prophecy was not destined to be fulfilled. Half an hour passed and then there arrived the following message from the station-master of Kenyon Junction.

There are no traces of the missing special. It is quite certain that she passed here, and that she did not arrive at Barton Moss. We have detached engine from goods train, and I have myself ridden down the line, but all is clear, and there is no sign of any accident.

Mr. Bland tore his hair in his perplexity.

"This is rank lunacy, Hood!" he cried. "Does a train vanish into thin air in England in broad daylight? The thing is preposterous. An engine, a tender, two carriages, a van, five human beings—and all lost on a straight line of railway! Unless we get something positive within the next hour I'll take Inspector Collins, and go down myself."

And then at last something positive did occur. It took the shape of another telegram from Kenyon Junction.

Regret to report that the dead body of John Slater, driver of the special train, has just been found among the gorse bushes at a point two and a quarter miles from the Junction. Had fallen from his engine, pitched down the embankment and rolled among bushes. Injuries to his head, from the fall, appear to be cause of death. Ground has now been carefully examined and there is no trace of the missing train.

The country was, as has already been stated, in the throes of a political crisis, and the attention of the public was further dis-

tracted by the important and sensational developments in Paris, where a huge scandal threatened to destroy the Government and to wreck the reputations of many of the leading men in France. The papers were full of these events, and the singular disappearance of the special train attracted less attention than would have been the case in more peaceful times. The grotesque nature of the event helped to detract from its importance, for the papers were disinclined to believe the facts as reported to them. More than one of the London journals treated the matter as an ingenious hoax, until the coroner's inquest upon the unfortunate driver (an inquest which elicited nothing of importance) convinced them of the tragedy of the incident.

Mr. Bland accompanied by Inspector Collins, the senior detective officer in the service of the company, went down to Kenyon Junction the same evening, and their research lasted throughout the following day, but was attended with purely negative results. Not only was no trace found of the missing train, but no conjecture could be put forward which could possibly explain the facts. At the same time, Inspector Collins's official report (which lies before me as I write) served to show that the possibilities were more numerous than might have been expected.

" In the stretch of railway between these two points," said he, " the country is dotted with ironworks and collieries. Of these, some are being worked and some have been abandoned. There are no fewer than twelve which have small gauge lines which run trolley-cars down to the main line. These can, of course be disregarded. Besides, these, however, there are seven which have, or have had, proper lines running down and connecting with points to the main line, so as to convey their produce from the mouth of the mine to the great centres of distribution. In every case these lines are only a few miles in length. Out of the seven, four belong to collieries which are worked out, or at least to shafts which are no longer used. These are the Redgauntlet, Hero, Slough of Despond, and Heartsease mines, the latter having ten years ago been one of the principal mines in Lancashire. These four side lines may be eliminated from our enquiry, for, to prevent possible accidents, the rails nearest to the main line have been taken up, and there is no longer any connection. There remain three other side lines leading—

(*a*) To the Carnstock Iron Works;
(*b*) To the Big Ben Colliery;
(*c*) To the Perseverance Colliery.

" Of these the Big Ben line is not more than a quarter of a mile long, and ends at a dead wall of coal waiting removal from the mouth of the mine. Nothing had been seen or heard there of any special. The Carnstock Iron Works line was blocked all day upon the third of June by sixteen truckloads of hematite. It is a single line, and nothing could have passed. As to the Perseverance line, it is a large double line, which does a considerable traffic, for the output of the mine is very large. On the third of June this traffic proceeded as usual; hundreds of men including a gang of platelayers were working along the two miles and a quarter which constitute the total length of the line, and it is inconceivable that an unexpected train could have come down there without attracting universal attention. It may be remarked in conclusion that this branch line is nearer to St. Helens than the point at which the engine driver was discovered, so that we have every reason to believe that the train was past that point before misfortune overtook her.

" As to John Slater, there is no clue to be gathered from his appearance or injuries. We can only say that, so far as we can see, he met his end by falling off his engine, though why he fell, or what became of the engine after his fall, is a question upon which I do not feel qualified to offer an opinion." In conclusion, the inspector offered his resignation to the Board, being much nettled by an accusation of incompetence in the London papers.

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A month elapsed during which both the police and the company prosecuted their enquiries without the slightest success. A reward was offered and a pardon promised in case of crime, but they were both unclaimed. Every day the public opened their papers with the conviction that so grotesque a mystery would at last be solved but week after week passed by, and a solution remained as far off as ever. In broad daylight, upon a June afternoon in the most thickly inhabited portion of England, a train with its occupants had disappeared as completely as if some master of subtle chemistry had volatilized it into gas. Indeed, among the various conjectures which were put forward in the public press, there were some which seriously asserted that supernatural, or, at least, preternatural, agencies had been at work, and that the deformed Monsieur Caratal was probably a person who was better known under a less polite name. Others fixed upon his swarthy companion

as being the author of the mischief, but what it was exactly which he had done could never be clearly formulated in words.

Amongst the many suggestions put forward by various newspapers or private individuals, there were one or two which were feasible enough to attract the attention of the public. One which appeared in *The Times*, over the signature of an amateur reasoner of some celebrity at that date, attempted to deal with the matter in a critical and semi-scientific manner. An extract must suffice, although the curious can see the whole letter in the issue of the third of July:

> It is one of the elementary principles of practical reasoning, that when the impossible has been eliminated the residuum, *however improbable*, must contain the truth. It is certain that the train left Kenyon Junction. It is certain that it did not reach Barton Moss. It is in the highest degree unlikely, but still possible, that it may have taken one of the seven available side lines. It is obviously impossible for a train to run where there are no rails, and, therefore, we may reduce our improbables to the three open lines, namely the Carnstock Iron Works, the Big Ben, and the Perseverance. Is there a secret society of colliers, an English *Camorra*, which is capable of destroying both train and passengers? It is improbable, but it is not impossible. I confess that I am unable to suggest any other solution. I should certainly advise the company to direct all their energies towards the observation of those three lines, and of the work-men at the end of them. A careful supervision of the pawnbrokers' shops of the district might possibly bring some suggestive facts to light.

The suggestion coming from a recognized authority upon such matters created considerable interest, and a fierce opposition from those who considered such a statement to be a preposterous libel upon an honest and deserving set of men. The only answer to this criticism was a challenge to the objectors to lay any more feasible explanations before the public. In reply to this two others were forthcoming (*Times*, July 7th and 9th). The first suggested that the train might have run off the metals and be lying submerged in the Lancashire and Staffordshire Canal, which runs parallel to the railway for some hundreds of yards. This suggestion was thrown out of court by the published depth of the canal, which was entirely insufficient to conceal so large an object. The second correspondent wrote calling attention to the bag which appeared to be the sole luggage which the travellers had brought with them, and

suggesting that some novel explosive of immense and pulverizing power might have been concealed in it. The obvious absurdity, however, of supposing that the whole train might be blown to dust while the metals remained uninjured reduced any such explanation to a farce. The investigation had drifted into this hopeless position when a new and most unexpected incident occurred.

This was nothing less than the receipt by Mrs. McPherson of a letter from her husband, James McPherson, who had been the guard of the missing train. The letter, which was dated July 5th, 1890, was posted from New York and came to hand upon July 14th. Some doubts were expressed as to its genuine character, but Mrs. McPherson was positive as to the writing, and the fact that it contained a remittance of a hundred dollars in five-dollar notes was enough in itself to discount the idea of a hoax. No address was given in the letter, which ran in this way:

My dear Wife,

I have been thinking a great deal, and I find it very hard to give you up. The same with Lizzie. I try to fight against it, but it will always come back to me. I send you some money which will change into twenty English pounds. This should be enough to bring both Lizzie and you across the Atlantic, and you will find the Hamburg boats which stop at Southampton very good boats, and cheaper than Liverpool. If you could come here and stop at the Johnston House I would try and send you word how to meet, but things are very difficult with me at present, and I am not very happy, finding it hard to give you both up. So no more at present, from your loving husband,

James McPherson.

For a time it was confidently anticipated that this letter would lead to the clearing up of the whole matter, the more so as it was ascertained, that a passenger who bore a close resemblance to the missing guard had travelled from Southampton under the name of Summers in the Hamburg and New York liner *Vistula*, which started upon the 7th of June. Mrs. McPherson and her sister Lizzie Dolton went across to New York as directed and stayed for three weeks at the Johnston House, without hearing anything from the missing man. It is probable that some injudicious comments in the Press may have warned him that the police were using them as a bait. However this may be, it is certain that he neither wrote nor came, and the women were eventually compelled to return to Liverpool.

And so the matter stood and has continued to stand up to the present year of 1898. Incredible as it may seem, nothing has transpired during these eight years which has shed the least light upon the extraordinary disappearance of the special train which contained Monsieur Caratal and his companion. Careful enquiries into the antecedents of the two travellers have only established the fact that Monsieur Caratal was well known as a financier and political agent in Central America, and that during his voyage to Europe he had betrayed extraordinary anxiety to reach Paris. His companion, whose name was entered upon the passenger lists as Eduardo Gomez, was a man whose record was a violent one, and whose reputation was that of a bravo and a bully. There was evidence to show, however, that he was honestly devoted to the interests of Monsieur Caratal and that the latter, being a man of puny physique, employed the other as a guard and protector. It may be added that no information came from Paris as to what the objects of Monsieur Caratal's hurried journey may have been. This comprises all the facts of the case up to the publication in the Marseilles papers of the recent confession of Herbert de Lernac, now under sentence of death for the murder of a merchant named Bonvalot. This statement may be literally translated as follows:

'It is not out of mere pride or boasting that I give this information, for, if that were my object, I could tell a dozen actions of mine which are quite as splendid; but I do it in order that certain gentlemen in Paris may understand that I, who am able here to tell about the fate of Monsieur Caratal, can also tell in whose interest and at whose request the deed was done, unless the reprieve which I am awaiting comes to me very quickly. Take warning, messieurs before it is too late! You know Herbert de Lernac and you are aware that his deeds are as ready as his words. Hasten then, or you are lost!

'At present I shall mention no names—if you only heard the names, what would you not think!—but I shall merely tell you how cleverly I did it. I was true to my employers then, and no doubt they will be true to me now. I hope so, and until I am convinced that they have betrayed me, these names, which would convulse Europe, shall not be divulged. But on that day . . . well, I say no more!

'In a word, then, there was a famous trial in Paris, in the year 1890, in connection with a monstrous scandal in politics and finance. How monstrous that scandal was can never be known

save by such confidential agents as myself. The honour and careers of many of the chief men in France were at stake. You have seen a group of ninepins standing, all so rigid, and prim, and unbending. Then there comes the ball from far away and pop, pop, pop—there are your ninepins on the floor. Well, imagine some of the greatest men in France as these ninepins and then this Monsieur Caratal was the ball which could been seen coming from far away. If he arrived, then it was pop, pop, pop for all of them. It was determined that he should not arrive.

'I do not accuse them all of being conscious of what was to happen. There were, as I have said, great financial as well as political interest at stake, and a syndicate was formed to manage the business. Some subscribed to the syndicate who hardly understood what were its objects. But others understood very well, and they can rely upon it that I have not forgotten their names. They had ample warning that Monsieur Caratal was coming long before he left South America, and they knew that the evidence which he held would certainly mean ruin to all of them. The syndicate had the command of an unlimited amount of money—absolutely unlimited, you understand. They looked round for an agent who was capable of wielding this gigantic power. The man chosen must be inventive, resolute, adaptive—a man in a million. They chose Herbert de Lernac, and I admit that they were right.

'My duties were to choose my subordinates, to use freely the power which money gives and to make certain that Monsieur Caratal should never arrive in Paris. With characteristic energy I set about my commission within an hour of receiving my instructions, and the steps which I took were the very best for the purpose which could possibly be devised.

'A man whom I could trust was dispatched instantly to South America to travel home with Monsieur Caratal. Had he arrived in time the ship would never have reached Liverpool; but alas! it had already started before my agent could reach it. I fitted out a small armed brig to intercept it, but again I was unfortunate. Like all great organizers I was, however, prepared for failure, and had a series of alternatives prepared, one or the other of which must succeed. You must not underrate the difficulties of my undertaking, or imagine that a mere commonplace assassination would meet the case. We must destroy not only Monsieur Caratal, but Monsieur Caratal's documents, and Monsieur Caratal's companions also, if we had reason to believe that he had communi-

cated his secrets to them. And you must remember that they were on the alert, and keenly suspicious of any such attempt. It was a task which was in every way worthy of me, for I am always most masterful where another would be appalled.

'I was all ready for Monsieur Caratal's reception in Liverpool, and I was the more eager because I had reason to believe that he had made arrangements by which he would have a considerable guard from the moment that he arrived in London. Anything which was to be done must be done between the moment of his setting foot upon the Liverpool quay and that of his arrival at the London and West Coast terminus in London. We prepared six plans, each more elaborate than the last; which plan would be used would depend upon his own movements. Do what he would, we were ready for him. If he had stayed in Liverpool, we were ready. If he took an ordinary train, an express, or a special, all was ready. Everything had been foreseen and provided for.

'You may imagine that I could not do all this myself. What could I know of the English railway lines? But money can procure willing agents all the world over, and I soon had one of the acutest brains in England to assist me. I will mention no names, but it would be unjust to claim all the credit for myself. My English ally was worthy of such an alliance. He knew the London and West Coast line thoroughly, and he had the command of a band of workers, who were trustworthy and intelligent. The idea was his, and my own judgment was only required in the details. We bought over several officials, amongst whom the most important was James McPherson, whom we had ascertained to be the guard most likely to be employed upon a special train. Smith, the stoker was also in our employ. John Slater, the engine-driver, had been approached, but had been found to be obstinate and dangerous, so we desisted. We had no certainty that Monsieur Caratal would take a special, but we thought it very probable, for it was of the utmost importance to him that he should reach Paris without delay. It was for this contingency, therefore, that we made special preparations—preparations which were complete down to the last detail long before his steamer had sighted the shores of England. You will be amused to learn that there was one of my agents in the pilot-boat which brought that steamer to its moorings.

'The moment that Caratal arrived in Liverpool we knew that he suspected danger and was on his guard. He had brought with him as an escort a dangerous fellow, named Gomez, a man who carried weapons and was prepared to use them. This fellow

carried Caratal's confidential papers for him, and was ready to protect either them or his master. The probability was that Caratal had taken him into his counsels, and that to remove Caratal without removing Gomez, would be a mere waste of energy. It was necessary that they should be involved in a common fate, and our plans to that end were much facilitated by their request for a special train. On that special train you will understand that two out of the three servants of the company were really in our employ, at a price which would make them independent for a lifetime. I do not go so far as to say that the English are more honest than any other nation, but I have found them more expensive to buy.

'I have already spoken of my English agent—who is a man with a considerable future before him, unless some complaint of the throat carries him off before his time. He had charge of all arrangements at Liverpool, whilst I was stationed at the inn at Kenyon where I awaited a cipher signal to act. When the special was arranged for, my agent instantly telegraphed to me and warned me how soon I should have everything ready. He himself under the name of Horace Moore applied immediately for a special also, in the hope that he would be sent down with Monsieur Caratal, which might under certain circumstances have been helpful to us. If, for example, our great *coup* had failed, it would then have become the duty of my agent to have shot them both and destroyed their papers. Caratal was on his guard, however, and refused to admit any other traveller. My agent then left the station, returned by another entrance, entered the guard's van on the side farthest from the platform, and travelled down with McPherson the guard.

'In the meantime you will be interested to know what my movements were. Everything had been prepared for days before, and only the finishing touches were needed. The side line which we had chosen had once joined the main line, but it had been disconnected. We had only to replace a few rails to connect it once more. These rails had been laid down as far as could be done without danger of attracting attention and now it was merely a case of completing a juncture with the line, and arranging the points as they had been before. The sleepers had never been removed, and the rails, fish-plates and rivets were all ready, for we had taken them from a siding on the abandoned portion of the line. With my small but competent band of workers, we had everything ready long before the special arrived. When it did

arrive it ran off upon the small side line so easily that the jolting of the points appears to have been entirely unnoticed by the two travellers.

'Our plan had been that Smith, the stoker, should chloroform John Slater, the driver, so that he should vanish with the others. In this respect, and in this respect only, our plans miscarried—I except the criminal folly of McPherson in writing home to his wife. Our stoker did his business so clumsily that Slater in his struggles fell off the engine, and though fortune was with us so far that he broke his neck in the fall, still he remained as a blot upon that which would otherwise have been one of those complete masterpieces which are only to be contemplated in silent admiration. The criminal expert will find John Slater the one flaw in all our admirable combinations. A man who has had as many triumphs as I can afford to be frank, and I therefore lay my finger upon John Slater, and I proclaim him to be a flaw.

'But now I have got our special train upon the small line two kilometres, or rather more than one mile, in length, which leads, or rather, used to lead, to the abandoned Heartsease mine, once one of the largest coal mines in England. You will ask how it is that no one saw the train upon this unused line. I answer that along its entire length it runs through a deep cutting and that, unless someone had been on the edge of that cutting, he could not have seen it. There *was* someone on the edge of that cutting. I was there. And now I will tell you what I saw.

'My assistant had remained at the points in order that he might superintend the switching off of the train. He had four armed men with him, so that if the train ran off the line—we thought it probable, because the points were very rusty—we might still have resources to fall back upon. Having once seen it safely on the side line, he handed over the responsibility to me. I was waiting at a point which overlooks the mouth of the mine, and I was also armed, as were my two companions. Come what might, you see, I was always ready.

'The moment that the train was fairly on the side line, Smith, the stoker, slowed-down the engine, and then, having turned it on to the fullest speed again, he and McPherson, with my English lieutenant, sprang off before it was too late. It may be that it was this slowing-down which first attracted the attention of the travellers, but the train was running at full speed again before their heads appeared at the open window. It makes me smile to think how bewildered they must have been. Picture to yourself

your own feelings, if, on looking out of your luxurious carriage, you suddenly perceived that the lines upon which you ran were rusted and corroded, red and yellow with disuse and decay! What a catch must have come in their breath as in a second it flashed upon them that it was not Manchester but Death which was waiting for them at the end of that sinister line. But the train was running with frantic speed, rolling and rocking over the rotten line, while the wheels made a frightful screaming sound upon the rusted surface. I was close to them, and could see their faces. Caratal was praying, I think—there was something like a rosary dangling out of his hand. The other roared like a bull who smells the blood of the slaughter-house. He saw us standing on the bank and he beckoned to us like a madman. Then he tore at his wrist and threw his despatch-box out of the window in our direction. Of course, his meaning was obvious. Here was the evidence, and they would promise to be silent, if their lives were spared. It would have been very agreeable if we could have done so, but business is business. Besides, the train was now as much beyond our control as theirs.

'He ceased howling when the train rattled round the curve and they saw the black mouth of the mine yawning before them. We had removed the board which had covered it, and we had cleared the square entrance. The rails had formerly run very close to the shaft for the convenience of loading the coal, and we had only to add two or three lengths of rail in order to lead to the very brink of the shaft. In fact, as the lengths would not quite fit, our line projected about three feet over the edge. We saw the two heads at the window: Caratal below, Gomez above; but they had both been struck silent by what they saw. And yet they could not withdraw their heads. The sight seemed to have paralysed them.

'I had wondered how the train running at a great speed would take the pit into which I had guided it, and I was much interested in watching it. One of my colleagues thought that it would actually jump it, and indeed it was not very far from doing so. Fortunately, however, it fell short and the buffers of the engine struck the other lip of the shaft with a tremendous crash. The funnel flew off into the air. The tender, carriages, and van were all smashed up into one jumble, which, with the remains of the engine choked for a minute or so the mouth of the pit. Then something gave way in the middle, and the whole mass of green iron, smoking coals, brass fittings, wheels, wood-work, and cushions, all crumbled together and crashed down into the mine. We heard the

rattle, rattle, rattle, as the debris struck against the walls, and then, quite a long time afterwards, there came a deep roar as the remains of the train struck the bottom. The boiler may have burst, for a sharp crash came after the roar, and then a dense cloud of steam and smoke swirled up out of the black depths falling in a spray as thick as rain all round us. Then the vapour shredded off into thin wisps, which floated away in the summer sunshine, and all was quiet again in the Heartsease mine.

'And now, having carried out our plans so successfully, it only remained to leave no trace behind us. Our little band of workers at the other end had already ripped up the rails and disconnected the side line, replacing everything as it had been before. We were equally busy at the mine. The funnel and other fragments were thrown in, the shaft was planked over as it used to be, and the lines which led to it were torn up and taken away. Then, without flurry, but without delay, we all made our way out of the country, most of us to Paris, my English colleague to Manchester, and McPherson to Southampton, whence he emigrated to America. Let the English papers of that date tell how thoroughly we had done our work, and how completely we had thrown the cleverest of their detectives off our track.

'You will remember that Gomez threw his bag of papers out of the window, and I need not say that I secured that bag and brought them to my employers. It may interest my employers now, however, to learn that out of that bag I took one or two little papers as a souvenir of the occasion. I have no wish to publish these papers: but, still, it is every man for himself in this world, and what else can I do if my friends will not come to my aid when I want them? Messieurs, you may believe that Herbert de Lernac is quite as formidable when he is against you as when he is with you, and that he is not a man to go to the guillotine until he has seen that every one of you is *en route* for New Caledonia. For your own sake, if not for mine, make haste, Monsieur de —, and General —, and Baron — (you can fill up the blanks for yourselves as you read this). I promise you that in the next edition there will be no blanks to fill.

'P.S.—As I look over my statement there is only one omission which I can see. It concerns the unfortunate man McPherson, who was foolish enough to write to his wife and to make an appointment with her in New York. It can be imagined that when interests like ours were at stake we could not leave them to the chance of whether a man in that class of life would or would not

give away his secrets to a woman. Having once broken his oath by writing to his wife, we could not trust him any more. We took steps therefore to ensure that he should not see his wife. I have sometimes thought that it would be a kindness to write to her and to asssure her that there is no impediment to her marrying again.'

SO DARK THE ROSE

CHRISTINE HICKMAN

An EWMM *first story with an uneasy chill about it and a Poe-sian air of futility and waste*

THE HOUSE across the road there—no, not the one with the turquoise door, the one next to it, with the monkey tree in the front garden; yes, that one. It used to belong to Cranton and his sister Jenny. Odd couple, left alone after their parents were killed in a train crash. Basically, they were nice kids, but there was something odd about them, or maybe it was just Cranton, the brother. He had a nervous breakdown when he was 15. Went berserk in the rose-garden of the park. Destroyed the lot with a knife, he did. People round here said he was unstable. Never had any friends—always played with his sister. Boys didn't like playing with him; they said he was violent, and yet you'd never think so to look at him, or even to speak to him. He became very quiet when the parents died; never used to talk to anybody, then everything changed—he became a different man. Anyway, it all came to a head one summer. It was about the middle of June. The weather was dry, humid, stifling, and the sky had been overcast for days. Everyone was waiting for a thunderstorm to end it all—but it never seemed to come. It was so still that you could hear every sound. There was no breeze, nothing; only the sounds of birds first thing in the morning, and that was all. The rest were human sounds, man-made cacophonies—banal—that made our poor old two-storey Victorian houses shake and tremble.

At that time, Cranton and his sister had guests staying with them. He had his girl-friend—he met her at a dance-hall during

his 'changed man' phase, and his sister was putting up an old school friend who happened to find herself out of work and was unable to keep up payments on her flat.

Cranton was tall and very thin. He had black hair, but his skin was so pale and pock-marked that he often looked ill. Jenny had his looks, but they made her beautiful. The effect on Cranton was rather effeminate—that pointed nose and chin, and the sunken eyes and cheeks. You were either attracted to him at once or slightly repelled. Their house was in a state of decay then. They said that there was no money forthcoming for them to do anything about it, and it was a pity, because in their parents' time, it had been one of the best houses in the road. Now the gardens were overgrown and the paint was flaking and peeling off windows and doors, but things got even stranger at a later date.

At first everybody was very sorry for them; two kids in their late teens suddenly finding themselves without parents, but as the months went by and turned into years, the neighbours began to realise that the kids were neither grieving nor helpless nor young any longer. They were in their early twenties by this time, and reaction to them was mixed, and not altogether favourable. You know the sort of thing—

"It isn't every kid that gets left a house, is it?"

"I bet they'll get up to no good; you wait and see!"

"Wild parties every night, that's what it'll be. Taking advantage."

It was ridiculous. No sooner had the neighbours finished petting them and advising and sympathising, than the pair became the main topic of gossip over fences and gardens and gates, and ugly rumours started to circulate about Cranton and his girl-friend living together, and Jenny's lack of boy-friends, and these turned into even uglier rumours about incest and midnight parties. The neighbours complained of the flaking paintwork and the state of the gardens and the absence of curtains at the upstairs windows. They complained of music played too loudly at night, and of laughter and breaking glass . . .

"They have no right to be there. It's a pity the parents had to leave the house to them."

"Council ought to evict them. Make them move away!"

"They have no bloody right to be there . . ."

But, of course, they had every right to be there. The house belonged to them; it was paid for, and, anyway, the next door neighbours still spoke to them.

This particular week, because of the weather and God knows how many other excuses they had been sitting around, idle. Cranton only worked very occasionally on driving jobs for the money, and Jenny did temporary work when she felt like it. The colourless skies and the lack of air made them tired and restless. They had been getting on each other's nerves all the week: Cranton had quarrelled with his girl, and Jenny and her friend lapsed into long silences whenever the mood took them. The tight, almost electric atmosphere finally shattered on the Sunday.

Cranton had been unable to sleep the night before, because of the intense heat. He had made Sandy, his girl, sleep in a separate bed because of the heat—there were two single beds in his room—and when the sky was at last light, he got up and pulled on a pair of old jeans, keeping on his pyjama jacket, and wandered around the house. He made himself tea in the tiny, cramped kitchen, and stood gulping it at the window, staring out over the garden. When he had finished, he unbolted the back door and went out into the weed-tangled, overgrown garden. He adored this garden —spent every spare moment there. At the far end, near a high fence, was a child's swing, now rusty from old age. Here, he used to sit and sway gently backwards and forwards, whenever he wanted to be alone for it was hidden from the kitchen window by a sprawling, gnarled and knotted apple tree.

He sat on the swing, deep in thought, and listened to the early-morning birds. Before the rest of the road awoke, theirs was the only sound to be heard. Cranton sighed, listened for a few moments to the steady creak-creak of the swing and then drew a pack of cigarettes from his pyjama pocket and lit one. The washed out stripes of the jacket and the frayed cuffs clung shrunkenly to his frail body and he looked at himself in disgust and averted his attention to a tangle of wild sunflowers where bees and wasps were busy collecting pollen. He liked flowers. They reminded him of the large house they had sent him to a long time ago. There were flowers and trees and insects in the grounds, and whenever he wanted to hide from doctors and nurses, he escaped to the gardens and stayed there with his friends until he was discovered.

Now he turned his head and stared up at a tall poplar tree in a neighbouring garden. He loved to hear the wind moaning and rushing through the branches of this tree on stormy nights, and noted with dismay that not a single flimsy branch or leaf was moving in the still air. He took out a grubby handkerchief and blew

his nose loudly because he was having difficulty in breathing properly.

As he resumed creaking back and forth on the swing, an upstairs window shot open and Sandy pushed a large, tangled mop of sand-coloured hair out into the garden.

" Cranton, is that you down there, love?"

He grimaced before answering: " Yes. Why?"

" Just wondered. I'll come down and join you," and she closed the window. Cranton was angry. She was always disturbing his peace. She would not let him alone for a second—especially on Sunday mornings. Why couldn't she leave him alone?

Sandy wandered among the green and yellow foliage in a scarlet housecoat, wobbling in pink, high-heeled slippers. Her flamboyant eye make-up from the night before still clung stubbornly to her eye-lids, so that she looked like an unkempt doll.

" Here you are. I thought you were hiding from me." She kissed him and he flinched at the odour of stale perfume and nicotine.

" Would you like breakfast now, or do you want to wait?" she said, flicking black-fly from her bare legs.

" I don't care. Cook it if you like. What's the time?"

" About nine-thirty."

" Cook it then."

" Shall I, or shall I wait?"

" No, might as well cook it now."

" Yes. Shall I bring you some tea?"

" No, I've had some, thanks."

" Want another cup?"

" No, I'll wait for breakfast."

" Alright, then. I'll call you when it's ready." She kissed him again, and left him alone. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and resumed his watch on the pollen-collecting from his sunflowers, but he soon tired of this and got off the swing to walk slowly round the garden, inspecting everything—the weeds, the odd flowers, the rhubarb, the peonies, the hollyhocks, the wild roses. The garden was not large, but everywhere there were clusters of red and yellow roses. He broke off a yellow rose and carried it indoors He sat down at the long table in the living room and placed it in front of him carefully, as if it were some irreplaceable jewel.

Sandy was cooking eggs and bacon in the adjoining kitchen, and kept rushing in and out laying knives and forks and plates on the

table. The rose was in her way; she picked it up and put it elsewhere, but Cranton snatched it out of her hand: " Leave that alone!"

" I'm only trying to lay the table. You don't have to be so bloody uppity. You want to eat, don't you?"

" Just leave my rose where it is, that's all," he muttered, and placed it in front of him again. He stared at it for a few moments, then got up and went out into the hall to take the *Sunday Picture News* from the letter-box. He glanced at the front page and cast it aside. Bloody load of tripe, he thought, and wondered why he had never bothered to cancel it after his parents' death. Both he and his sister loathed the paper, and week after week it was left unopened on a chair somewhere.

Sandy came back into the room. " Just waiting for the bacon. I know you like it crisp . . . " then she saw the paper lying on the old, green armchair and pounced on it. Just about her level, he thought to himself. Just about her stupid level. " The bacon's burning," he said.

" Is it?"

" Can't you smell it burning?"

" Oh, yes," and she rushed out. She returned with a plate of bacon and eggs and placed it in front of him.

" Thanks," he said, then: " better get Jenny up, hadn't you?"

" She'll get up when she's ready. She never eats breakfast, anyway."

" She does."

" Well, they can cook it themselves when they come down."

Cranton shrugged and dug his knife and fork into the greasy mess on the plate. " Pour me out another cup of tea," he said, with his mouth full, and she obeyed. " What are you eating?" he asked, without looking up.

" A bacon sandwich."

She peppered the sandwich vigorously and wished that Cranton wasn't always in such a bad mood, but what can I do, she thought. After all, he is keeping a roof over my head for nothing, isn't he? Wouldn't do to upset him too much.

The living room was not large—like the other rooms in the house, but it was cluttered, which made it appear smaller. Bookshelves were crammed with books and magazines, and everywhere there were bottles, shoes, tennis balls, clothes, ties, belts, cosmetics, newspapers. It was an incredible collection of rubbish which reflected the habits of everybody in the house. Cranton loved it.

It was his favourite room. In his parents' time it had been scrubbed and polished and brushed; it had smelt of polish and cleanliness and had been unbearable. He liked it as it was now.

When he had finished eating, he thrust the plate aside and took a book of Genet's from one of the shelves and sat reading it. Sandy was used to being ignored, and buried herself in the Sunday scandal.

This was how Jenny and Pinkie found them when they came downstairs. Jenny was dressed in a pair of dirty white jeans and a dark blue towelling sweatshirt that was too big for her. Pinkie was wearing faded jeans and a pink shirt, and her uncombed, shoulder-length auburn hair fell about her face.

"Morning," Jenny said, as she collected two cups. There was no reply.

"Okay, don't bloody well answer me!"

"Hi, Jenny," Sandy grinned over the top of her paper, "Wasn't it hot last night? I couldn't sleep."

"Terrible," Jenny said, pouring out tea, "I couldn't sleep either," and she and Pinkie exchanged amused glances. They cooked some toast, and carried it out into the garden. There was a small concrete terrace just beneath the kitchen window where they could sit without insects descending upon them, and when they were settled Jenny said: "They annoy the pants off me, especially first thing in the morning."

There were sounds of activity now from neighbouring houses. Radios blaring out pop and church services, raised voices, frying breakfasts. "Listen to them," Jenny said, "everybody fights and argues on Sundays. People are so stupid. They always moan about having to go to work and how short the week-ends are, and then when they get their leisure time, they don't know what to do with it, so they spend the whole time bickering. Before they know it, its Monday morning again, and there they are moaning like hell about the short week-ends."

Pinkie nodded and drew long puffs on a king-size cigarette. They lapsed into one of their silences. Then a voice called out:

"Jenny, dear! You haven't got some flour I could borrow, have you? I'm right out and I'm in the middle of making a pie."

Jenny turned her eyes heavenwards and looked up to Mrs. Handy, hair in giant blue rollers, leaning out of an upstairs window next door.

"Just a minute, Mrs. Handy. I'll have a look. How much do you want?"

" Oh, only a cup full."

" Is that enough?"

" Yes, plenty, dear."

Jenny disappeared indoors and Mrs. Handy came down into her garden, climbed a small step ladder and leaned on the fence: " Morning," she said to Pinkie, " Going to be a storm I should think."

" Yes, it seems that way. We need one," and she stared down at her brown freckled arms.

" Oh, yes. Drop of rain will do the gardens good."

Jenny came back, carrying a cracked cup full of flour and delivered it into Mrs. Handy's fat hand.

" Thank you, dear. Saved my life, you have . . ." she paused, uncertain how to begin her next sentence. " Oh, by the way, dear. I don't know if you could just mention it to your brother, but my hubby's been complaining about the weeds again. You see all the seeds from yours blow over into our garden and take root, and we can't keep them down. And all those greenfly on your roses . . ."

" I'll have a chat with him, Mrs. H.," Jenny said. Anything to shut the old cow up for five minutes—" must dash now, got to get dinner ready. 'Bye!" And she was gone. Pinkie grinned amiably at Mrs. Handy's puzzled expression and followed Jenny indoors.

The morning passed slowly. Sandy switched on the radio and nobody bothered to switch it off, so that it played records endlessly to deaf ears. Jenny did some ironing and Cranton moaned about her using unnecessary electricity. She ignored him. Sandy manicured her nails and then painted them with a vivid pink varnish and, unable to stop, painted her toe-nails to match. Pinkie was fascinated by the indolent activity around her, and beamed at all three of them as if she were watching animals behind bars. Finally she stood up and yawned and said she was going out for the Sunday booze and some decent papers. She took a battered old bike from the shed in the garden and wobbled away on it while they shouted sarcastic remarks after her.

She was gone for about 15 minutes, during which time Jenny considered their larder to see what was in store for lunch. There was hardly any fresh food except for some potatoes and salad—all the rest was cans. Cranton had a love of canned food—he preferred it to any other kind, and actually enjoyed it; he would not eat meat except steak which meant that meals in the house

were frugal and plain; they never had people to dinner. Indeed they had very few friends and relatives, and pleased themselves when and how they ate.

As Jenny came from the larder, Pinkie burst in through the front door, bike first, stumbling under the weight of three big bottles of red wine, and Sunday papers.

" Christ, what have you got there?"

" What does it look like?" She stumbled down the hall and dropped the lot into an armchair. " There you are. Sunday booze."

" Where d'you get the money from?" Cranton mumbled.

" Found it on a tree."

Jenny giggled: " Ask a silly question!" Sandy's eyes widened at the sight of so much alcohol. " We ought to have something special for lunch," she said, and added: " to compliment the wine."

" Spaghetti?" Cranton said.

" No, darling, not spaghetti."

" Please yourself," Cranton said, and went out into the safety of his garden leaving the back door open for some air. But there was none. Sandy was still in the nylon housecoat, and now realised that she couldn't breathe. She unbuttoned it, exposing black bra and briefs and not caring very much who saw. They laughed and made jokes and Sandy's face got redder and more blotchy until she was forced to hide it under a fresh mask of make-up. Jenny and Pinkie exchanged cynical glances and started to prepare a salad lunch with boiled potatoes. Sandy did not finish applying her mask until the lunch was being served. Cranton came in from the garden and said, " Oh, good. Salad," and sat down in front of his rose.

After the second bottle of wine, they were growing merry. Cranton opened the third bottle at everyone's request, and filled their glasses. A faint rumbling of thunder rippled through the quiet afternoon, and Jenny giggled because she loved thunderstorms.

One glass of wine later, Cranton stood up and announced that he felt tired and " peculiar," and that he was going to lie down for a while to sleep it off. Sandy tried to follow him, but he pushed her away and said that he wanted to be alone. She smiled awkwardly to hide her humiliation, and Jenny and Pinkie smiled back. Between them they finished the wine and then began singing and banging on the table. Jenny began cracking jokes and laugh-

ing hysterically before she had even finished them. In her enthusiasm she banged the table so hard that a plate shot off on to the floor and shattered. Sandy was not with them; she was fingering the wilting rose. " He should have put it in water," she said sadly, and then began picking off the petals one by one. She did not notice that Jenny and Pinkie were holding hands, she was too intent on the destruction of the rose that Cranton loved more than her. When the destruction was complete and the petals lay scattered over the table and plate, she got up and went out. They heard her foot steps on the stairs.

" Wait for the fireworks," Jenny said, " He'll kick her out. Cranton doesn't like sex."

" Why do you say that?"

" He just doesn't. Never has done. We always used to play together when we were kids. I think he's looking for someone like me."

" You sound very proud of the fact."

" Do I? I'm not really. I just know all about Cranton, that's all."

" Well, why does he let Sandy live here?"

" I don't know. Hasn't got the heart to throw her out, I suppose."

They went out on to the terrace again, knocking into things and giggling. They sat down in two tatty deck-chairs.

" Now if only the sun would come out, we could get tanned," but the distant rumblings drew nearer and, towards the east, the sky was becoming thicker and darker, the air so still, that it was as if the end of the world was near.

They were just dozing off to sleep, when Sandy's screams ripped through the afternoon, several times. They looked at each other. " What the hell's that?"

" God knows. They're probably just fooling around, but if she carries on like that we'll have the bloody neighbours banging on the door."

" Maybe you ought to investigate, just to make sure."

" Oh, they're just messing around, forget it," but the screams pierced the stillness again. Terrified screams. Jenny stood up. " I'll go."

" Shall I come too?"

" No, wait here. I expect everything's alright, but I'll call you if it isn't." She went indoors, past the dirty lunch plates strewn over the table, into the dark hall and up the uncarpeted staircase.

" Cranton, is everything alright?" She peered through the banisters at the door of Cranton's room, which was ajar. " Cranton, are you there?"

He came out on to the landing, dressed only in the jeans and barefoot. " What's wrong. What are you shouting for?"

" I heard screams. What's happened?"

" Nothing's happened. Stop making a fuss over nothing. Just a little harmless fun, that's all," but Jenny wasn't convinced.

" She sounded in pain."

" It's your imagination. You've had too much to drink." They stood in silence, glaring at each other, until Cranton said: " Okay. Come in and see for yourself." He held the door open for her and she went inside. The room was a shambles. The beds looked as if they hadn't been made for weeks, the alarm-clock was standing in a saucepan near the bed and clothes were strewn everywhere—but on Cranton's bed, Sandy was lying naked and very still.

" What's wrong with Sandy?" she turned to him anxiously, but he was grinning.

" There's nothing wrong with her. She's asleep."

" Why?"

" Because I put her to sleep."

" How? How did you put her to sleep. What's the matter with you?"

The smile disappeared. " I knocked her out. I bashed her. I clonked her one. I smashed the stupid alarm-clock over her head. Ugly whore!"

" Cranton, you might have killed her . . ."

" I only tapped her, tapped her I tell you. She'll wake up in a minute. Will you stop fussing?"

Jenny looked at the pillow for blood. It was there, but she couldn't see it. There was blood on the alarm-clock too, but but she did not think of looking there in her panic. " We must bring her round," she moved towards the bed, but Cranton held her back.

" She won't leave me alone, Jenny. She lays on top of me, and I just want to hurt her. She smothers me . . . I just got a bit mad, that's all. I just wanted to be alone for a few minutes. I promise you she'll be alright."

" Are you sure?"

" I promise you." His smile returned and he reached out and touched one of her breasts. She recoiled immediately. " Still the same old Jenny. Don't like men's hands, do you, Jenny, don't

like men. You never used to mind in the rose garden in the park, did you, Jenny—you never minded then. You used to want me to. Remember Jenny, remember how we used to . . ." and both his hands reached out for her. She spat at him, then ran away, down the stairs to Pinkie. " What's happened, tell me. What's happened?"

" Nothing. He just knocked her out. I know we ought to do something but we can't because he's having one of his turns."

" Turns?"

" It's nothing serious. Best just to leave him alone. There's nothing I can do for her. I can't stand him near me . . ." Then the rain started to fall. Enormous heavy drops of it, gathering force until it became torrential. A flash of lightning zipped across the sky and flickered blue light through the room.

" You must come away from here," Pinkie said.

" Yes, I know."

" You don't owe him anything."

" I know."

" After the storm you'll come?"

" Yes, I'll come."

They went into another room and locked the door against the house and the storm and the rest of the world, while the thunder shook the thin walls and ceilings.

Cranton came slowly downstairs and listened outside the door, then he went through into the living room and out into the garden, through the storm, to pick a red rose. When he came back, his body and hair were glistening with rain-water, but he was unaware of this and just stood staring at the petals of the yellow rose lying scattered on the table. He sat down heavily, his eyes filling with tears. " Yes, that's why I killed you," he said to the silent walls, " for killing my rose, I killed you." Then he smiled and put his face close to the wet rose he had just picked. He smelt its perfume, and rubbed the petals gently over his face and kissed them, and then, his smile becoming fixed and ecstatic, he drew the thorny stem across his bare chest, scratching the skin until he bled. He mopped the blood with the dead yellow petals, then resumed the slow laceration of himself, smiling all the time as he rubbed the rose harder and harder over his body, tearing the skin . . .

The only witnesses were the old furniture and the faded wallpaper. The only sound, apart from the monotonous hammering of the rain, was the loud ticking of the clock.

period piece

THE HEIR

ANONYMOUS

Written about the beginning of the 19th century, this ingenuous tale of unknown authorship tells in a light-hearted fashion how a conditional will was cunningly outwitted

MR. HEIMAL, an old rich man, and an odd-fellow, felt that his hour was come, and therefore wrote to Adolphus, a very poor nephew, whom he always before neglected, to ask him to visit him, promising to make him heir to all his possessions. Adolphus lost no time, but travelled night and day, and reaching the little village, the residence of his uncle, early on the fifth morning, went to the Violet, the only inn in the place, in order to dress himself better, and to make enquiries about his uncle. The landlord answered, shrugging his shoulders:

" According to all appearances, Mr. Heimal was near his end. Since Wednesday he was sensible only for a few hours each day, and is likely, says Mr. Schneidab, the village barber and physician, to depart this evening. Since the peace, instead of the better times we hoped for, a pestilence rages here, which even destroys the child in the mother's womb. My cousin, the smith, who was so strong that he might have been used like a beam to force open the church door, is gone to God yesterday evening; and Schneidab, who is not easily frightened, begins to lose courage."

Adolphus asked more particulars of his uncle. " You will find with your uncle a faithful old housekeeper, and Albertina, an orphan, who lost her left eye by a ball entering the window in a

skirmish, but who continues to set both young and old in a flame with the right, as if it were a burning-glass, and this without wishing it, for *Tinchen* is a perfect example."

With a heart beating so that it might be heard, Adolphus entered his uncle's house, and met Albertina. Her noble form, and her remaining eye, caused the loss of the other to be overlooked. The gentle goodness of her spirit played about her face. and seemed independent of its form, though in truth it was, with the exception of the eye, beautiful. " Mr. Adolphus," repeated Albertina, as he named himself, " I will announce you immediately; you are expected impatiently, and will be heartily welcome."

" Thank Heaven," said the deserving heir to himself. To her he said some flattering words as she disappeared, and then prayed that his uncle's heart might be favourably disposed towards him. Albertina opened the door and bade him enter.

★

Old Heimal was perfectly sensible: he thanked Adolphus in a friendly way; praised his appearance; assured him he had enquired after him, and heard nothing of him but what was good, and therefore had made him his heir. Adolphus stammered forth his earnest thanks.

" Not too soon, not too soon," said the other; " it is with conditions: hear them first. I am to be buried in the churchyard here, and you will receive the interest of eighty thousand thalers if you promise the magistrate to repeat piously the Lord's Prayer once a day over my grave till the end of your life. If you fail once, the informer is to receive a fourth part of the inheritance, and the remainder is to go to the hospital, the guardian of which will keep a good look out that you perform your vow. Nothing but a serious disease, testified by two surgeons, is to excuse you from this duty. The testament lies ready, with the magistrate; take time, therefore, to think, for every condition is, early or late, a clog on the enjoyment of that good with which it is combined. ' Why did my uncle curse me,' you will say, ' with this condition? Why did he poison to me the wine he was no longer able to drink himself?' I answer justice demands that my property should be expended for the benefit of the town in which I gained it—in which I went to school and grew up to manhood. On the boundary of the dominion of death you shall be at least reminded once a day to raise your thoughts to the Giver of all good; and I wish to save the soul of

my heir from the rock of worldly perdition. Go, my son; I am weak."

Albertina had remained in the room by the command of the old man, and now accompanied Adolphus to the door. In the confusion of his feeling he seized her hand and asked what she advised. She blushed and answered:

"I cannot believe that you will be guided in so important a matter by the advice of an ignorant girl."

"Oh, yes!" answered he; "your situation here makes you a friend, and the good sense of your answer belies your pretended ignorance. The powers of fate announce their decrees with pleasure by the mouth of innocent maidens."

She replied, "Turn to our Father in heaven; prayer brings power and knowledge and we then select, as if by inspiration, that which is best."

★

Adolphus left her with a grateful squeeze of the hand. He was disposed to follow her advice, but his wishes were earthly.

"Eighty thousand thalers," said he, "or rather the interest of this sum, is in truth a key to earth's heaven: but what is the price? The condition separates me for ever from all which can sweeten life or render it lovely. Suppose I might with swift horses reach the capital for a moment to strengthen my mind in the circle of beauty and intelligence, it can only be for a moment, and like a solitary moonbeam through the darkness of a wintry night; and I lose all if any accident happens to me on the road. Is there a bitterer cup than this eternal monotony—this seeing always the same faces, part expressing vulgarity, part signifying a mixture of rudeness and knowledge even more intolerable than vulgarity? Can anything be worse than to live with people who spy out every morning what I mean to nourish my body with at mid-day, and who treat every deviation from their own customs worse than the Inquisition treats heretics? Yet even here I may find friends, hearts allied to mine, though different in age, situation and habits. But how soon is conversation exhausted! How does the daily return of the same materials diminish the charms of society! Whatever happens to the town falls on me as part of it. The inheritance makes me like one of its towers; and when I will fall sick, Mr. Schneidab, the village barber, will hasten, as accoucheur sent by the fates, to deliver me into another world."

In this manner, till late in the evening, did Adolphus weigh his situation; and as he was going to bed, Albertina came to announce the sudden death of his uncle. This news made him pass a sleepless night, and at times to be almost out of his senses. He imagined that the amiable Albertina glided into his chamber and begged earnestly of him to be pleased with the little town, that she delighted him very much, that she made his staying there the condition of obtaining her favour, and that she offered him her mouth to seal the contract with a kiss. He then imagined himself, with her assistance, counting heaps of ducats, and he was full of gratitude for the golden shower and for the lovely bride. He embraced her with one arm and lifted a sack of thalers in the other.

A cry of fire awoke him—the warm living image was fled, and the landlady burst into the room to save her wardrobe, which was safely stowed in the best chamber used for guests. The cry of fire ran through the house, for not one who could breathe but joined in the alarm.

Adolphus sprang out of bed, descended to the street, and saw the house of his departed uncle in flames. He reached it just as Albertina came out with a box of valuables, which she gave him as his property, and then hastened back to secure her own, and came not again. Adolphus felt how much he was indebted to her, and pressing through the burning house, found her in a courtyard clinging to a tree, which protected her for a moment from the flames.

" I am lost," said she; " save yourself."

He, however, sprang to her, the flames, as it were, following him, and making his retreat impossible. The hot air already made it difficult to breathe, when he discovered that, by climbing the tree, he might escape over the wall. With the arm of love strengthened by fear, he dragged the maiden up and along one of the overhanging branches, and then dropped her safely on the opposite side of the wall and jumped after her. Here they stood in a neighbouring garden and first thanked God for their escape. Albertina then extinguished the sparks on his waistcoat; he kissed her as he had done in his dreams and then led her to a place of safety.

★

When the fire was extinguished, which did not take place till the house was consumed, Adolphus returned to bed and slept nearly as

sound as his uncle, whose corporeal part had been reduced by fire to a heap of ashes. Albertina had found it, and had secretly conveyed it away. In the morning his body was sought, for the will made it necessary to have it buried; but all in vain; not a bone was to be discovered. Albertina, however, sent in secret a casket to Adolphus, and wrote with it:

'If the accompanying casket serves, as I hope to free my noble assistant from the heavy conditions which our departed friend imposed upon his heir, this latter will then only pray with more fervour over the ashes of his benefactor, which now lie in his hands.'

Adolphus blessed in his heart her ingenuity, then went to the magistrate, who was full of thought and knew not whom he could bury in Heimal's place—for a grave they must have, to fulfil the conditions of his will. Adolphus, however, said:

"You undoubtedly know beforehand what I mean to say to your worship. You know that a nonentity cannot be buried, and that I cannot be bound to pray over a grave where my uncle is not entombed; and, at the same time, his testament, making me his heir, remains perfectly valid. A process would evidently last longer than your life, and probably not be finished before the day of judgment. Far be it from me, however, to wish to injure this esteemed pleasant town, the cradle of my good fortune. I therefore resign in favour of its hospital a third part of the property left by my uncle. For this, however, you will give me permission to send to your good wife some of the newest fashions from the city, where I mean to take up my residence."

Seldom has a treaty been sooner ratified than this was; and the heir got away with difficulty from the gratitude of the magistrate, to seek out Albertina. She struggled against the embraces with which, in his joy, he overwhelmed her: they might be the mode in the city—here they were quite unheard of; but Adolphus spoke with a seducing tongue, and on a subject not usually ungrateful to a maiden's ear. She pretended, indeed, not to believe him, as if she regarded it as impossible, with the failure of her eye, to please a man who was so entirely without fault, and she concealed her wishes with maidenlike excuses. The gay people of the little town, however, were soon afterwards invited to Adolphus's marriage-feast. He placed, without the knowledge of the bride, the casket with the ashes of the now blessed uncle under the marriage-bed, and was thus enabled to offer the promised prayers daily with the greatest conveniency.

NEW BOOKS

JOHN de SOLA

non-fiction

ACID TEST, The; Carolyn Anspacher (*Peter Dawnay*, 25*s.*)

This is the highly unpleasant story of a Hungarian doctor named Kaplany, who, five weeks after his marriage, murdered his wife in a revolting fashion.

The crime occurred in California in 1962, and it is examined from beginning to end by a journalist who covered the case for a San Francisco newspaper. Her work is careful, and the factual record most exacting if, at times, it lapses into journalese.

A book which fascinates as much as it repels, but is most readable. The only criticism is that the publisher has not anglicised the American spelling, which is a pity.

FBI'S MOST FAMOUS CASES, The; Andrew Tully (*Arthur Barker*, 30*s.*)

A solid book, much above the usual starry-eyed treatments of the FBI. Most of the cases will be familiar to true crime addicts but they are worth reading again, and keeping. The author is careful with his facts, and avoids too much melodrama. The coverage is wide, from such classics, among others, as the Dillinger case—which never seems to lose its bloody satisfaction—to the Sinatra kidnapping and the Liuzzo case. One curious fact emerges: there is, in this book, a pattern of crime which seems to be forming in this country in many respects. It might even repay study as, among other things, a possible signpost.

fiction

BLACKFINGERS, John Cassells (*John Long*, 15*s.*)

A criminal organisation sets out to loot London, and does it with surprising efficiency, with the help of a most plausible author. Superintendent Flagg saves us all. Wild, but readable.

DASHIELL HAMMETT STORY OMNIBUS, The; ed. Lillian Hellman (*Cassell*, 30*s*.)

No less than 355 very enjoyable pages, containing 10 stories, (including one unfinished novel), and my favourite, *Corkscrew*. Miss Hellman's brief life of Hammett is most readable, and the book both an ideal possession and an ideal Christmas present.

DRESDEN GREEN, The; Nicolas Freeling (*Gollancz*, 18*s*.)

A peace-loving East German diplomat is drawn into a maze of events which enable him to come into possession of a valuable diamond. There is excitement and thrills, which, unhappily, tend to degenerate into sermonising about politicians and bombing—not its author's best book; crime novels are *not* suitable vehicles for personal opinions.

ELIMINATOR, The; Andrew York (*Hutchinson*, 21*s*.)

Another one set in that weird world founded for James Bond, and filled with expensive living, expensive women, and cheap death. But this time the story is literate and readable. Its is hero

Jonas Wilde, a believable character. The opposition and the plot are not unexpected, but the speed of it all is fantastic. Very good indeed.

ENEMIES OF THE BRIDE, Osmington Mills (*Bles*, 16*s*.)
Well written, this crime story deals with the arrival of Ursula Weston—Aunt Ursula—where she is unwanted, though people don't say so. Then she is thrown over a cliff, the only witness a distant fisherman, and the story begins to move. Excellent.

FLASHPOINT, Anthony A. Randall (*Robert Hale*, 15*s*.)
A financial crisis threatens the world when the Soviet Government (no less!) is swindled by a clever syndicate which 'sells' sterling at low rates. Then the Kremlin twists things to its own advantage, but Roger Patten, of D.16, reverses the game. Fast-moving; slickly told; most enjoyable.

GLASS CAGE, The; Colin Wilson (*Arthur Barker*, 21*s*.)
Fine writing this, and a crackling story. A butcher is loose in London, who chops up his victims into lumps, and leaves behind lines from William Blake. Damon Reade, an amateur of Blake, is called in to help, and solves the problems presented by inductive reasoning and shrewd instinct. Definitely a must.

HIMSELF AGAIN, R. E. Pickering (*Gollancz*, 18*s*.)
A most promising first novel, set in Vienna and Budapest where a question of NATO arms being hi-jacked becomes tied up in the mystery of a vanished wife, and leads into a wild chase. Exciting and at times very thrilling indeed.

JOHN CREASEY'S MYSTERY BEDSIDE BOOK,
ed. Herbert Harris (*Hodder* 18*s*.)
Easily the best of the series so far, containing 18 stories chosen with a shrewd eye. John Boland's *Suddenly, Each Summer* and Josephine Bell's *The Commuters* rank high in reading qualities, and so does the editor's very deft *A Long Rest for Rosie*. Michael Gilbert's remarkable Mr. Calder appears in *Cross-Over*, an impressive story. The level of the other stories is equally high in a book that will certainly be bought by many people both for themselves and to give at Christmas.

LET'S CHOOSE EXECUTORS, Sara Woods (*Collins*, 16*s*.)

Introduces Antony Maitland again when he is called in to try and save an accused prisoner, on trial for her crime. It looks a hopeless cause, and it is not improved by some radical outside interference. But Maitland believes his client is innocent and, with real adroitness, solves the mystery. Very good.

LOOKING GI ASS MURDER, The; Anthony Gilbert (*Collins*, 16*s*.)

And this one introduces Arthur Crook again (I never liked him but he *is* expert). A nurse, not over bright, is deceived by the man she loves, then gets suspected of committing a murder. Following this there is another murder in which she—having changed identity—is involved. It sounds complicated but is in fact a rattling good story.

MURDER TAKES OVER, Alfred Tack (*John Long*, 15*s*.)

Another of the author's murder-in-big-business stories, this being set against the pharmaceutical industry, which since it is

written about from knowledge, quite surprised me. A scion of a family business tries to step into his late father's shoes, and lands smack in some artful wickedness. A vivid tale.

NELL ALONE, Jennie Melville (*Michael Joseph*, 21*s*.)
A book with ice-water in its veins, so to speak. There is a dead body found not far from the Institute, where the heroine works, and from that stems a curious, off-beat mystery that should frighten the nervous out of their wits. Sinister and compelling.

NO RETURN TICKET, Martin Russell (*Collins*, 16*s*.)
This very ingenious and highly original novel opens with Bill Megson ' coming to ' in a Brighton train, in possession of a briefcase containing thousands of pounds. But his memory for recent events is a blank. He is involved in a nightmare series of happenings which make this book a good one. The police are very well drawn.

SEEDS OF VIOLENCE, Miriam Sharman (*Gollancz*, 21*s*.)
Curiously like a chess game in its formalised movements, but there the similarity ends. It concerns a most unpleasant British colonel chasing after some papers which certainly compromise him. The chase goes from England to Germany and back again, and is brisk and unexpected. An eminently readable book.

SNOW ON HIGH GROUND, Raymond Sawkins (*Heinemann*, 21*s*.)
Also a first novel, very professionally written. It opens with a woman consulting ex-Superintendent John Snow on the question of her husband's suicide, which she thinks is murder. Snow takes up the investigation, which leads him across Europe, into some tight corners, and up against a real old-fashioned capitalistic-monopolist. First-rate.

STRANGE AFFAIR, The; Bernard Toms (*Constable*, 25*s*.)
The author was for 10 years a policeman, and now writes a novel that is bound to start a controversy, for it deals with a young policeman who is cleverly blackmailed. Some of those who work with him are none too honest, while the family of crooks (who motivate the plot) seem both real and reminiscent. A very able book, and definitely one that must be read and will be talked about.

THURSDAY AT DAWN, Werner J. Lüddecke (*W. H. Allen*, 18*s*.)

Translated from the German, this psychological thriller is a nick-of-time tale. Walter Klett is convicted of the murder of his aunt in Strasbourg and is headed for the guillotine one Thursday at dawn. Juliette Leblanc his girl-friend, enters the picture and very cleverly saves him. Good and readable.

TREACHEROUS ROAD, Simon Harvester (*Jarrolds*, 18*s*.)

Cairo and the Yemen area, where the Egyptian troops sit, are the backgrounds to this new Dorian Silk adventure. He is sent into the Yemen on a mission and far from being simple, it turns out to be one of those complicated, absorbing Simon Harvester tangles. A must.

WIDE OPEN DOOR, The; T. E. B. Clarke (*Michael Joseph*, 25*s*.)

There is plenty of racing in this immensely gay and exciting crime story. Geoff Judge looks for a way to easy money, then tumbles feet first into a robbery that leaves the reader breathless

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and lands Judge, finally, in his own private Shangri-La. Get this one; it's by the author of *The Lavender Hill Mob*, and not, in a distant way, unlike it.

WIDOW HOOK, The; Robert Standish (*Peter Davies*, 21*s.*)
Opens with the discovery of the murdered body of a writer named Hack just off a road in Spain. The discovery is made by Mike Darling and his girl-friend, who manage to keep from being involved, but are overcome by a desire to know more, which is the start of their troubles . . . written with great skill and as gripping as impact cement.

A SCATTER OF PAPERBACKS

DAIN CURSE, The; Dashiell Hammett (*Penguin*, 3*s.* 6*d.*)
The heroine certainly seems to be one who has committed a most unpleasant murder, but as in all Hammett novels things are never as they seem. Mature and biting.

DEEP FREEZE, Jean Bruce (*Corgi*, 3*s.* 6*d.*)
Agent OSS 117 (very much prior to Bond, by the way) has a tough one in this threat to the whole world by upsetting the balance of nature for Russia's benefit. Outstanding.

JACK THE RIPPER, Robin Odell (*Mayflower*, 5*s.*)
I gave this book praise in its hard-cover form, which is now repeated. A sound factual, excellently worked out study, well worth reading.

MISSING OR DEAD, John Creasey (*Corgi*, 3*s.* 6*d.*)
Written as by 'Gordon Ashe,' this is the resourceful Mr. Creasey dealing with the problem of five dead, beautiful young women in a rattling good mystery tale.

MONEY FROM HOLME, Michael Innes (*Penguin*, 3*s.* 6*d.*)
Holme the painter, is dead in a foreign revolution. Then he turns up at his exhibition in the flesh . . . and the glorious punishment at the end of this fascinating book is a joy.

MOUSE, The; Georges Simenon (*Penguin*, 3*s.* 6*d.*)
An old tramp gets his hands on a mass of money belonging to a dead man. The puzzle is, how to explain it away as his own. From then on the excitement begins.

FAMOUS CRIME WRITERS AT WORK

With summer behind us, and the winter's work looming up the leading crime novelists are buckling to it again. But not everyone has reported in to *EWMM* with their current news yet.

Agatha Christie is just getting down to a new book, but that is all the news of it for the moment.

Over in Wiltshire, where John Creasey is hard at work, the schedule is a busy one. The 50th *Toff* book is completing revision as is a new West story and one under the pseudonym of Michael Halliday. As to actual writing, John Creasey is now deeply engaged on a Gideon adventure.

An intending newcomer to the ranks of crime writers is Pamela Frankau. She had an idea for a thriller back in 1940 but not until last year did she work out a satisfactory plot. The book will be called *Colonel Blessington*, and Miss Frankau makes one point (which *EWMM* constantly emphasises about crime fiction!): 'I'm finding it much more fun than writing a novel, but it is much more difficult as well.'

THE CREAM OF CRIME

The 1966 edition of the *John Creasey Mystery Bedside Book* (which incorporates the anthology of the Crime Writers' Association) has just been published, picking only the best short stories. Editor, Herbert Harris (who has sold something like 3,000 of his own stories) is a connoisseur who knows how to choose the crime stories readers enjoy.

In this anthology the score-card of selected short stories is solid proof that the *Edgar Wallace Mystery Magazine* is the best of its kind, when it comes to quality and the publication of the cream of crime:

Edgar Wallace Mystery Magazine	5
Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine	2
Argosy	1
Creasey Mystery Magazine	1
Weekend	1
Australian Journal	1

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

Though this correspondence was closed in our last issue, it has been decided that certain letters lately received should be published, which explain themselves, from Lord Russell of Liverpool (author of The Hanratty Case, *in* EWMM, *July*, 1966), *from Mr. Jean Justice (author of* Murder on Deadman's Hill *in* EWMM, *September*, 1965) *and from Mr. Frank Justice.*

I am writing to correct the impression that may have been caused by the report published in most of the national newspapers of a statement made by Mr. Oliver Nugent in his opening speech for the prosecution at the trial of Peter Louis Alphon [25 August, 1966] upon five charges of making threatening and nuisance calls of which he was convicted.

It was stated that two brothers, Mr. Jean Justice and Mr. Frank Justice, helped me in the preparation of my book on the A6 murder, *Deadman's Hill, Was Hanratty Guilty?*

Mr. Frank Justice I had never met or even spoken to until six months after I had delivered the manuscript of the book to my publishers. The only information obtained from Mr. Jean Justice, which I included in the book, was part of an article which Miss Valerie Storie wrote in a weekly magazine, *To-Day*, entitled *The End of An Affair*. It appears on pages 156-7 and I made due acknowledgements to Mr. Justice in the book.

May I say that I have read with great interest a number of letters from your readers expressing concern at the conviction of James Hanratty and asking for an enquiry into the case.

RUSSELL OF LIVERPOOL.

London, S.W.

It was stated by Mr. Oliver Nugent on behalf of the Director of Public Prosecutions in Marylebone Court, London, that I had

helped Lord Russell in writing his book on Hanratty.

Lord Russell asked me to lend him copies of *To-Day* magazine which contained an article by Valerie Storie. This I did, and he acknowledged this in his book.

Mr. Sebag Montefiore, counsel for Peter Alphon, asked me if I had been employed by Lord Russell in assisting him in writing his book. I replied, 'Nothing of the sort.' Mr. Montefiore then put it to me that I had written a book called, *Murder* vs. *Murder*. I agreed with him on that. He went on during his cross-examination to ask me a leading question about his client Peter Alphon, to which I replied in the affirmative.

JEAN JUSTICE.

London, W.

I first met Lord Russell in September, 1965, six months after he sent the manuscript of his book, *Deadman's Hill*, to his publisher. This was when my brother Jean gave a dinner party for my mother, who lives in Brussels and was paying a visit to London.

I have had nothing whatsoever to do with Lord Russell's book; the recent reports in the press based on the Crown's opening speech are in that respect without foundation.

FRANK JUSTICE.

London, W.

'Murder Book'

I live in Greenwich High Road, and read Charles Franklin's story of the Kid Brook Tragedy [May] with great interest. It gave me an idea. I have been using the true cases published in *EWMM* and with my camera have travelled round as many as possible of the murder 'sites' in your series, and now have quite a collection of unusual photographs in my 'murder book.' It makes a most interesting, informative hobby. I paste the *EWMM* articles on opposing pages. It has aroused great interest.

DESMOND KENNEDY.

*London, S.E.*10.

● *Every man to his own taste, of course; it sounds a depressing chronicle, but, of course, a city's social history is often contained in its tragedies.*

'Have a Go'

We are told officially to 'have a go' when it comes to dealing with crooks, and I read in your stable companion, *Crime & Detection*, an editorial agreeing with this but advising caution since crooks are desperate men . . .

Fair enough, but *EWMM* readers are crime story fans; they are adept at spotting red-herrings and at finding the guilty man, unless the author happens to be extra expert at his job.

Why, not, then, ask *EWMM* readers to keep their eyes really *skinned* and watch for any sort of illegal action and then telling the police? *EWMM* readers are probably ten times as bright as ordinary citizens and their noses should be very sharp when it comes to sniffing out evil! And I bet what's left of the Mail Robbers won't last a week if *EWMM* amateur sleuths really get cracking.

FRANCIS KLEER.

Worksop, Notts.

● *Sounds an excellent idea. If* EWMM *readers feel like finding crooks, then by all means have a go. But be sure they are crooks, not innocent citizens* !

Crime in View

I am not so sure I am with you in publishing your new feature which tells us what is coming on TV. After all it is a very different medium to crime books and TV is both elementary and generally childish in the way it deals with good mystery stories. And doesn't the feature incline to promoting interest in a rival medium to books?

On my side I would say the way TV deals with Gideon is appalling and the Maigret series made me writhe. Some of the other characters translated from books to the idiot box have to be seen to be disbelieved.

D. E. O'H. MORNA.

Manchester, 16.

● *A point of debate. TV fans claim that the box helps the sale of books. As to this it has been said that 'people buy books after watching TV to enjoy something intelligent for a change' . . . over to* EWMM *readers.*

Bouquets

Journey for Lady G was a real gem, I thought, as was *The Rendezvous*. And I enjoyed *The Reluctant Detective* [April] thoroughly. It was so different from the usual crime story.

DOUGAL MACDONALD.

Wellington, N.Z.

. . . *The Conspirators* [August] in particular was quite outstanding. I have always admired Michael Gilbert. This story is the *best* he has ever done in his shorter writings.

M. M. TICHING.

Westbury, Wilts.

SOLUTION TO EWMM CROSSWORD (No. 20)

ACROSS. 1, Ninepins. 5, Object. 10, Bones of the River. 11, Leprosy. 12, Re-issue. 13, Investor. 15, Ghost. 18, Field. 20, Manacles. 23, Eclipse. 25, Crumple. 26, Confidence trick. 27, Springs. 28, Land-seer.

DOWN. 1, Nobble. 2, Ninepence. 3, Pistole-e. 4, Nifty. 6, Burning. 7, Elves. 8, Torments. 9, Short run. 14, Tempered. 16, Over-price. 17, Of-fences. 19, Dipping. 21, Courted. 22, Weaker. 24, Liner. 25, Cocoa.

FAMOUS EDGAR WALLACE FILMS

THE CRIMSON CIRCLE

Gaumont-British (1936)

Director: Reginald Denham

(*see outside back cover*)

Derek Yale (Hugh Wakefield); Inspector Parr (Alfred Drayton); Jack Beardmore (Niall McGinnis); Sylvia Hammond (June Duprez); Sergeant Webster (Paul Blake); Felix Marl (Noah Beery); James Beardmore (Basil Gill); Brabazon (Gordon McLeod); Millie Macroy (Renee Gadd); Lawrence Fuller (Ralph Truman); Commissioner (Robert Rendell).

Photograph shows Niall McGinnis and June Duprez.

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