BRITISH CRIME MAGAZINE

Edgar Wallace

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

PLUS SIX NEW STORIES

and

(unpublished)

EDGAR WALLACE

The Light in E Flat

BERKELY MATHER

The Troubled Lady

June, 1967
No. 35 Vol. 4

Edgar Wallace

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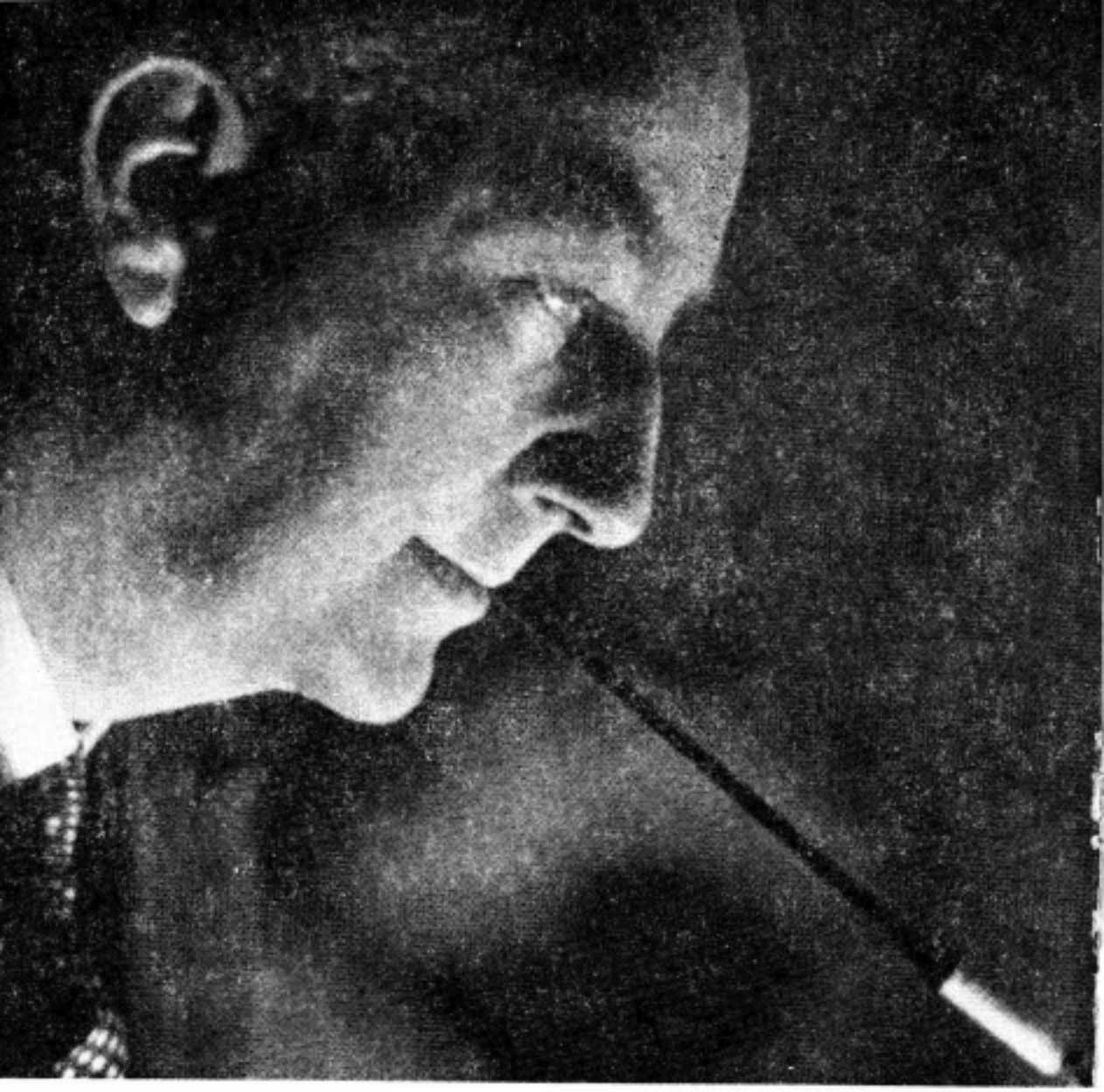

Edgar Wallace.

EDGAR WALLACE

Mystery Magazine

Vol. IV No. 35 **June, 1967**

Mystery, Crime, and Detection for the Aficionado

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JUNE IS A notable month for romance, for weddings, for those who take gardening seriously, or for rhyming with moon.

It also has another virtue, that of being as far as possible from winter's activities, for how can the eye contemplate hot drinks, parties, the impending shadow of Christmas (and New Year's bills) when, theoretically anyway, the sun is blazing down, resigned car conga-lines head coastwards, and tennis, swimming, and all the rest of the rejuvenating sports are calling. But, too, June is also a time for less stimulating things which if they don't improve the soul, then they do the mind a powerful lot of good.

Briefly

For, above all, June is the month which starts off the brief season of catching up on one's reading, despite the contrary belief that reading is a winter occupation. But is it? Winter, with its social demands, its movies, theatres, its thrall of the Big Glass Eye, and the rest of the furious and highly expensive round.

Summer is indeed for reading, for lying flat on some suitably upholstered surface, *avec* sun-glasses, -oil, -unguents, -barriers, -emollients and the rest of the arsenal which ensure tan without pain, *and* a book.

Only a sloth lies in the sun and goes to sleep, since, in hideous revenge, the sun often burns steadily into that overlooked, un-anointed little strip of hide . . .

Far better a book, a good book, all those good whodunits you saved up to read one day 'when I have time' . . . and here is the month and the day. You can even give yourself a weak laugh and tell yourself how you will make your heated blood run cold with a nerve-shaking cliff-hanger.

But, to our serious muttons: nothing is so satisfying, so mentally profitable as a crime novel to ease tensions, wipe away cares, finance-botherations, and all the grim realities of life . . . a who-dunit, the sun, complete recumbency and, most importantly, the lovely, distant noise of other people being vigorous, mowing lawns, running madly about, or just simply wearing themselves out, while you . . .

The Editor.

Edgar Wallace.

The Light in E Flat

Exclusive to EWMM *and never before published, this unusual EW story belongs to the days of* The Adventures of Heine *and* Tam o' the Scouts

SOME MEN have an aversion to cats, others shrink back with horror from a third floor window and fight desperately to overcome the temptation to throw themselves into the street below. For others, the mirror holds a devil who leers a man on to self-destruction, but for Hans Richter that cruel and garish light which he interpreted as E Flat held all that there was of threat and fear.

If you say that the obsession of Little Hans savoured of madness, tell me something of yourself. Squeak a knife edge along a plate or knife-edge against knife-edge and watch people shudder. They also are mad of the same madness. Some men and women grow frantic at the rustle of silk, others may not pass their palms over certain surfaces such as velvet without shivering. Exactly why, nobody knows. There are undreamt of horrors in commonplace objects for some of us—Hans Richter had the advantage of hating and fearing that which was not commonplace.

He played second violin at the Hippoleum. He had little spare time with a daily matinee and a twelve o'clock rehearsal every Monday, but he utilised that spare time with great profit, being a most earnest student of colour values and, moreover, a worshipper of heroes.

You had no doubt as to what manner of heroes qualified for his adoration. Nature had built him short and clumsy, with a pink round face and blue eyes. She had builded him as a cheap builder runs up a cottage out of the material left over from a more pretentious job. 'Well buttressed, but poorly thatched,' he described himself, and indeed, the great Dame had been mean in the matter of head-covering, for his hair, sandy and fine, was in a quantity less than was necessary. His moustache was a mere wisp, but in the shape to which he trained it you read his mind, his faith and his pride.

He was a gentle soul with strange and unusual views on lights, and a certain pride in his intimate knowledge of London. It was his boast that there was not a street in the Metropolitan area which he had not visited, not an historic monument upon which he could not enlarge at length. And once, on a more than ordinarily poisonous night of fog, he had led Sam Burns by the arm from Holborn Town Hall to Paddington Station, and never bungled a single crossing, never so much as mistook the entrance of a blind alley though the fog was so thick that Sam could neither see his guide, nor the sidewalk under his feet.

Oh, no, he was no spy; he hated the Prussians as so many Bavarians did before the war—he was from Nurnberg. He was German all through but neither favoured beaurocracy nor militarism.

They live together, this curious pair, in a tiny house off Church Street, Paddington—in a neighbourhood of strange smells and of Sunday morning markets. Sam Burns was 'Mr. Burns' in law, and entitled to the respectful salute of policemen, for he was a naval gunner on the reserve of officers, and held the King's warrant.

They had one quality in common, this strange pair—that they were simple men, and because of this No. 43 Bebchurch Street was a haven of peace.

For Sam directed such casual help as he could secure in his best quarter-deck manner, had a gift for spying out untidy corners and hurried scrubbings, a vigilance which earned for him the hatred and slander of the charladies of Paddington, and resulted in a constant melancholy procession of new servants.

★

They sat together by an open window on a Sunday evening in June, 1914, taking the air. Sam's lean red face was one great

scowl, for he was reading an exciting murder case—facial contortion was part of the process of his reading.

"Murder's a curious thing," he said at last, setting the paper down on his knee. "I've killed men in my time, but always in what I might term the heat of battle. I wonder how it feels?"

Hans turned his mild face to the other and stared through his gold-rimmed glasses.

"*Herr Gott*!" he said, "that you should talk about such subjects, Sam—who could think of murder on such a night? It is a night for thought—exalted thought!"

He stopped suddenly, pursing his lips and looked thoughtfully out of the open window, and upward to the patch of western sky which showed above the mean housetops.

"G minor," he said abstractedly, and Sam grinned.

"You're mad on lights, Hans!" he chuckled, "G minor! What the dickens is G minor?"

Without turning his head or relinquishing his gaze the musician whistled a soft sweet note sustained, and full of sorrow.

Sam frowned.

"I'm beginning to see," he admitted, "yes—that's the kind of light it is. You're a crank on lights, Hans—"

The other swung round in his chair and reached for his violin and bow that laid on the table near him. He drew the bow across the muted strings and a gloomy stream of thick sound filled the little room.

"Purple," he said, and played another long note—a joyous blatant note of arrogant triumph. "Scarlet," he smiled, and put the instrument back. "Lights are horrible or beautiful—terrifying or adorable—listen!"

He seized the instrument again and sent the bow rasping across the strings.

"For God's sake don't make that infernal noise!" growled Sam, shifting uneasily, for the note, shrill and menacing, carried terror in its volume.

Hans had the instrument on his knees. His lids were narrowed, his plump jaw out-thrust.

"That is white light—the devil's light—cruel and searching. It stares and shrieks at me. There is a beckoning devil in that light. You see it on the stage—I have seen it a hundred times. It strips young girls of their modesty, it reveals the lie, it mocks the ageing. You can see them staring at it—blinded and yet staring, their white teeth glittering, their red lips smiling like children smile

when they are in pain—it is the light of war, and cruelty and suffering—phew!"

He put the violin down and mopped his damp forehead with a big green handkerchief.

Sam rose from his window chair slowly.

"Hans, you're a fool," he said, "and I'm going to put a B major match to the A flat lamp."

Hans laughed and rose, too.

"And I'm going to a ten o'clock rehearsal—the show opens tomorrow—*Gott*! It is a quarter to ten already!"

It was not a happy rehearsal for the little German. There was a new American producer at the Hippoleum, a burly man in a grey sweater, who was quick to wrath, and had a wealth of unpleasant language.

In the third scene the lights went wrong. Four specially erected electric projectors had been fixed in the gallery, and on a certain chord, at the end of a song number, they had to concentrate on the principal who was singing. And they just didn't. One wandered off to the second entrance. One wavered undecidedly too far up stage, and the other two did not appear at all.

"Say, what's the matter with you!" exploded the producer. "Are you crazy up there? Is this a joke?"

He said other sarcastic things and said them through a megaphone which somehow made them worse.

A hollow and apologetic voice answered from the deserted gallery.

"Put all your lines down—now put 'em on the proscenium arch—now put 'em all together up stage—now put 'em on the bald-headed fiddler in the orchestra—"

There was a gentle titter of laughter from the weary chorus—but it was short-lived.

The bald-headed fiddler was standing up facing the light, his face distorted with rage, his wild eyes glaring like a trapped animal, as his clawing hands clung out at the light.

A torrent of words German and English poured from his twisted mouth.

"Take it off! Take it off! Take it off!" he screamed.

There was an instant and a painful pause. The lights dimmed and an outraged producer strode down the central aisle of the theatre and confronted the second violin.

"For the lord's sake!" he said, mildly enough, "have you gone mad, mister?"

The little man, one trembling hand curved about the orchestra rail, shook his head. He was very white, and the American, a judge of men, and kindly enough out of business hours, dropped his big hand on the other's shoulder.

"You go right along home and have a sleep, son," he said gently, "don't you worry—go right along home."

"It's the light, sir," faltered Hans, and blinked fearfully up at the gallery. "I do not like the light—"

"Sure!" soothed the other, "now you go right away and have a rest—there's nothin' comin' to you, son—on the square. I get just crazy like that myself."

Hans did not lose his job—he played second fiddle on the opening night of that brilliant success, *There you are, Bunny*! and would have gone on playing through the inevitable run, but for certain great happenings in Europe. A prince of an Imperial house was killed, and when the message came to six chancelleries, six separate and distinct ministers demanded of their war offices, 'How soon can you mobilize?'

Hans did not know this, but later he was to have misgivings.

"I must go home," he said doggedly, "I am too old to be of any use—but who knows?"

He looked wistfully at the red-faced Mr. Burns who sprawled across the table gloating over a newspaper chart which showed the relative proportions of the world's fleets.

Sam looked up.

"They'll want me," he said with quiet satisfaction, "my old captain will hoist his flag—he's vice-admiral now—and he promised me that if ever there was a kick-up he'd take me. Who made the Penelope the best gunnery ship in the Home Fleet? Me, Hans!"

He thumped his thick chest and his eyes were puckered with proud laughter.

"I'm not too old for sea-going, but if I am, there are lots of jobs for a man who ain't too old to spot a damned—"

He stopped in confusion. The eyes of Hans were wet and the dominant expression in those eyes was envy.

"*Gott*!" he said with a sigh, "I am no good. I hate war; it is terrible to think about—it is like the white light, a devil! But I must go back. Perhaps I may take the place of one . . . if he wants me . . ."

He left the next day—an exhilarating day for Mr. Burns, for he had received a notification that 'my lords of the Admiralty' had

accepted his offer of service.

Hans with his brown ulster and his aged violin came, his cheap gripsack and two brown paper parcels, paid his share of the expenses which were current and went off in a taxi.

"Good-bye Sam,"

"Good-bye Hans—good luck!"

The little man's grief was undisguised.

"I shall think of you—as a soft golden light, Sam," he choked.

"That's right," replied his less imaginative friend, "Yellow for me, Hans."

Poor old Hans! So thought Mr. Gunner Burns with a sigh; anyway, they weren't likely to meet. The little musician would scarcely be found amongst the ships' companies which the marksmanship of gunner Burns foredoomed to destruction.

So passed Hans and as for Sam, after a spell at Whale Island teaching young and impetuous naval marksmen how to shoot, he came back to Somewhere-in-England to more important duties.

★

There was a noise like the roll of a trap drum—an even 'Br-r-r-r' of sound.

Gunner Burns standing in the darkness, dropped his head sideways and listened.

It was faint at first, but grew louder with every second that passed, and the noise came from the air.

Sam peered over the parapet in a swift, keen scrutiny of the sector south of the position. Somewhere beyond the inky belt of darkness which blotted out the nearest features of the landscape was London—London the vast and wealthy, a gigantic flat hive buzzing and droning, unconscious of the danger.

As he watched, he pressed the bell-push which was fixed to the wall near his hand and almost instantly a second figure joined him.

The rattle drum noise was now loud and angry, and the men craned their necks and searched the skies through their night-glasses.

"There she is, sir!" said Sam in a low voice, "the biggest they've got."

The officer at his side had his glasses on the lean shape that blotted no more than two or three stars at a time.

"What's her range?" he asked with regret in his voice of one who anticipated an answer which would dash his hopes.

"Three or four thousand yards—shall I light her up?"

The other's hands had closed on the telephone receiver in the little recess beneath the parapet.

"'Lo—that you, Shepherd's Bush? Zep coming over. I'm going to light her up—no, only one as far as I can see. She'll start circling in a minute, looking for the small arms factory as usual. Right!"

He turned to the man at his side with a grunted order. Something hissed and spluttered. Little bubbles of light outlined a big barrel shape somewhere to the rear of where he stood and there leapt into the air a solid white beam of dazzling light which moved restlessly from side to side till it settled on something which looked for all the world like a silver cigar.

"She's just beyond range—but give her one for herself, Burns," said the young officer. "She's turning!"

The deafening crash of a gun woke the still night— drifts of smoke passed between the observer and his objective. As it cleared a tiny point of vivid light flicked and faded beneath the big silver cigar.

"Five hundred yards short," was the bitter comment.

"She'll take some hitting! Keep the light on her—Shepherd's Bush will pick her up in a minute . . ."

Whoom!

The shock and pulsation of the explosion came to them. The trees rustled as though they had been stirred by a gust of wind, and the concrete parapet under the officer's hand trembled and shook again.

The old gunner at his side drew a sharp breath.

"Addlestone—that is!" he said, "fancy Addlestone! Good God, it doesn't seem real, does it? Why, when I was a kid I went to school at Addlestone."

Another report followed, fainter than the rest, and then over toward Addlestone came a red glow in the sky, a glow which gathered in brightness until it was almost golden.

"Them thermite bombs are pretty useful," said the gunner with a reluctant admiration, "hot! you can't get near a fire that's been started by one of them. I've seen men and women roasted to death by 'em, and they never knew what killed 'em. There's Shepherd's Bush, sir!"

From the south two white beams had shot into the air and focused instantly on the fast-moving cigar. She turned to the westward and the lights followed—she moved in one majestic

sweep to the east, but the lights did not leave her. They were the two eyes of the dark world staring their wrath at the night-bird.

"She wants that cloud dam' badly," said the young naval officer. "Put your light over the cloud, yes, it's big enough."

He took up the telephone.

"'Lo, Shepherd's Bush. She's going for the cloud on the left. She's about level—no, I can't keep her lit up for much longer—she's getting beyond my range."

The sky shape was now blurred and indistinct, for it had reached the misty edges of the cloud—in ten seconds it had disappeared. But now flashed into the air not two, but a dozen searching eyes. They grew from the dark void beyond the hill-crest to the south, slender white spokes of light that criss-crossed incessantly. The cloud glowed yellow where the beam came to a dead end, and once it sparkled at a dozen points, for all the world, as Gunner Burns said, as if some one were striking a match along its under surface, and had done no more than raise a shower of sparks.

"Shrapnel," said the old authority approvingly. "That'll rattle her a bit—nothing like a nearby shell-burst to make you take your eyes from the compass—there she is!"

Out she came from the same cloud-wall into which she had dived—into the gleam and glare of the searchlights. Left and right, beneath, and at the side of her, the light-splashes came and went. They were as soft and as sudden as the glow the fire-flies make.

The great machine turned again, her nose rose slowly into the air and her tail went down. The watchers could see the cloud of oily smoke at her stern as her speed increased.

"She's got to climb for it, and climb quick," said the gunner.

A quick fan of light leapt up from the ground over by Golders Green.

Whoom!

"A keepsake," said the lieutenant grimly.

The telephone bell tinkled and an urgent voice demanded immediate attention.

"She's going back to you, Carter—keep your light on her—she's twelve thousand seven hundred feet up and rising. Shoot her off, or she'll give you hell."

"Aye, aye, sir!" The officer swung round: "Light her up."

Again the searchlight stabbed the dark, and again the cigar floated in a halo of soft radiance.

Then from the north came a new sound. It was not the 'br-r-r-r'

they had heard before, but a purring note—a far off motor-cycle could reproduce this gentle din.

High above, the merest midgets in the vast space of starlit sky three specks of earth-dust moved slowly across the field of the watchers' vision, and as they moved, in the limitless dome of the heavens a red ball of light lived and died.

The young officer sought the telephone.

"Three aeroplanes up—they've signalled 'shut down searchlights'," he called breathlessly.

Two seconds passed, and then as though one hand controlled the lightshafts that swept the skies, they vanished.

They waited in the dark. The never ceasing roar of the zeppelin engines neither increased or grew fainter. She was cruising laterally for some reason, the Golders Green telephone explained.

"We've hit her, sir—first or second compartment. Think one of her fore tractor screws is out of action. Yes, she got near us, but she's drifting your way."

"Her fourth visit," said Sam.

"And every time she's gone straight to the place she wanted to reach," added the young officer with an impatient and wondering little 'ch'k' of his tongue. "That fellow must know London like a book—he must know it blind to pick out his target with all the lights shaded and faked."

Sam nodded and thought of a certain Hans Richter.

Poor old Hans! Fancy making Hans the focus of ten 3,000 candle-power searchlights!

Sam grinned in the darkness.

Three . . . four . . . five minutes passed, then from the sky shot a thin beam of light that seemed from the view point of the gun position to be aimed horizontally from the airship.

"Got her blinders on," commented Sam. "Aeroplanes are up to her level—there they are! Right ahead of her! They can do nothing with the light in their faces. She'll climb if she ain't climbing already."

Another minute passed.

Then a speck of red fire appeared in the black heavens, another red followed and then a green.

Sam lifted the telephone receiver to his lips.

"Aeroplanes coming down—she's blinded 'em," he said rapidly. "Stand by to light her up—keep 'em off the aeroplanes. Now!"

From every point of the horizon the beams sprang until the sky was a thick jungle of converging light stalks.

They beat fiercely, remorselessly on the big cigar as she zig-zagged her way to safety, and the north-west.

A thousand feet above the guns the landing lights of an aeroplane burnt bluely, and the great bird swooped to earth.

They ran out to him as the guns of Golders Green began a frantic bombardment of the disappearing zeppelin.

It was Burns who helped the pilot to alight, and the boy who jumped to the ground was shaking from head to foot.

"Did you see it—did you see it?" he croaked, "It was awful . . .!"

They got him to the shelter of the position and to the little room behind.

The airman was pinched and blue of face, but it was not his cold ride which had set him trembling.

He drank the cup of hot coffee they gave him, and his teeth were chattering against the edge of the mug.

"Awful!" he said at last. "Did you see it?"

"The zepp?"

He shook his head impatiently.

"No—after we gave the signal for the lights, and they all came up—we were under the angle, and I looked up, and suddenly a man—" he shivered and closed his eyes, "a man leapt straight out of the fore cabin, leapt and turned over and over—!"

In the morning they made a search and found in the big Mill Pond by Addlestone one who had, in his lifetime, been Hans Richter—the man who knew London and hated lights. Especially lights that could be translated into E Flat.

THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE

BILL KNOX

An EWMM *favourite, private eye*
Cam Gordon returns to seek
a man who left a trail
of trouble

FROM GLASGOW to Central France is a lot of telephone wire. The fact that Cam Gordon's end of the line was at the most only a couple of hundred yards distant from the railway goods yard at the town of Vitry-Le-Francois didn't help to improve the connection.

"That's the position," he confirmed in a voice little removed from a bellow. "The man was definitely in town until a few days ago. But he went under the name of Leclere, and spun a tale that he was a Belgian engineer who'd made a packet in the Congo, and then got out when things became too hot."

Crackling back over the distance, Mr. Deathstone's voice was a pallid echo of its usual dry efficiency.

"His story wasn't questioned?"

Outside, a diesel shunting engine gave a characteristic hoot, followed by a clatter of trucks. Cam let the noise die down.

"No. He kept pretty much to himself. He spoke good French, and any imperfections were explained away by his cover story."

"Umph." Mr. Deathstone digested the news. "What happened when he left?"

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing," said Cam in disgust. "He simply paid his hotel bill and said he'd decided to move on. How about Mrs. Boynton?"

"She's left home as scheduled. She'll be watched until she reaches you, which should be some time tomorrow. And she may have company. Two hours after Mrs. Boynton set off by car, her

daughter in London received a telephone call. The girl told friends her mother was ill, and that she'd have to leave for Scotland immediately. That's all—but keep in touch."

Back in Glasgow, the phone was replaced. Cam hung up his receiver, and turned.

"Well, m'sieu?" The watchful eyes of Inspector Malote met and held his gaze. For two days now they'd been working together, ever since Cam had been practically pitchforked on to a plane on the Renfrew-Manchester-Paris flight. The French detective was a thirsty but energetic worker.

Two days—since the morning when Mr. Deathstone, the sombre Glasgow solicitor with a direct line to a quiet, almost unknown department in Whitehall, had given Cam his briefing.

Gordon Investigations, Cam's outward means of support, had been busy enough already, handling a tricky little problem involving a distillery where far too much whisky was evaporating into thin air.

But the call from Whitehall had demanded priority—absolute priority. The story was involved, its possible permutations endless.

Three months previously, said Mr. Deathstone, Mack Boynton's car had crashed on the lonely moor road between Barrhill and Glenluce, in Wigstownhire. Then it went up in flames. By the time police got the body out, identification had been an unpleasant task for Mack Boynton's widow, aided only by such items as his signet ring and wrist-watch.

Boynton was an explosives expert from North Ayrshire, living with his wife, in a rented bungalow near Glenluce. His reason for being on the moor road that night was closely linked with the nearby War Department experimental range—and the Rhinner Rocket.

The army already had one type of guided anti-tank missile. It was small, and controlled on to target by signals sent over the slim wire which swung out behind it as it headed for its objective.

But the Rhinner had no wires. It could be lock-beamed on to a dustbin at a mile's range. And it had a new explosive—yet non-atomic—head which made its predecessor seem like an overgrown squib.

The head had been Boynton's baby. But he'd been drinking heavily in a pub the night he crashed.

His widow had received all-round sympathy at the cremation service which followed. His daughter, up from ballet school in

London, was a small, sad figure in black.

Weeks passed—and then a former colleague of Boynton's, driving through Vitry on his way to a Swiss vacation, had been positive he'd spotted the 'dead' explosives expert.

It took a day or two for the report to reach Whitehall. A quiet check was made on Mrs. Boynton, still living in the Glenluce bungalow. Then came the surprise news that she was on the brink of going off on a 'rest trip' abroad. She'd been incautious enough to ask the A.A. for a motor route which would take her across France—to Vitry-Le-Francois.

"Thinking, my friend?" asked Inspector Malote.

Cam gave an apologetic grin. "The same old problems. If the man spotted here was Boynton, who was it who died in the car?"

The Frenchman gave a shrug. "In time, we may find out. There have been cases before. But now, come—that telephone shouting is bad for the throat. A cognac will help."

It was Cam's turn to shrug. "Why not? We've got till tomorrow."

Vitry-Le-Francois has railways, a broad main street with a fountain and cafés where accordions play all night, and more railways. It is also a road junction. Foreign tourists seldom if ever use it as a base—which made Mrs. Boynton's visit all the more unusual.

All next morning Cam waited in his hotel room for the expected contact. Inspector Malote spent the time more convivially, moving from café to café in a search for what he chose to describe as 'background'.

At exactly noon, there was a knock on the room door. Cam answered it.

"Well, aren't you going to invite me in?" Beth Taylor stood there, dressed in slacks and a zip jacket, a crash helmet swinging from one hand, her copper-red hair pinned tight and close.

"Old Deathstone didn't tell me—"

"That I'd got the job of tailing Mrs. B.," completed Beth as she came in. "Well, he did. 'You've got a motor-scooter, Miss Taylor,' says he. 'A nice little trip—' " She collapsed in an armchair. "So I've been scooting along after that car of hers ever since it left the boat at Calais. Thank heaven she doesn't drive particularly quickly."

Cam grinned down at the girl. Mr. Deathstone's private secretary, slim and good-looking, had a faint oil-smudge across

one cheek.

"And Mrs. Boynton!" he queried.

"Booked in at the Trianon Hotel, just along the road. We had a nice chat last night, in a hotel at Peronne."

"You *what*!"

"Relax. I'm just a girl on a motor scooter, bound for a late holiday in Switzerland. We meet in the hotel, we find we'll both be on the same road in the morning. Men—you never think of the direct approach. This way, she knew I'd be following her, but she didn't worry."

"And her daughter?"

Beth blinked. "Mrs. B. told me about her. Her name's May, and she's seventeen. She's at ballet school in London."

"No she isn't. Old Deathstone says she disappeared from there yesterday—after she told friends of a phone call which said her mother was ill in Scotland."

"Oh." Beth sat silent for a moment. "That's a complication."

"One too many," agreed Cam.

Half-an-hour later, Mrs. Boynton emerged from the Hotel Trianon. Dark-haired, a mature but attractive woman of around forty, she drew more than one glance of interest from the café-side clientele as she got back into her little car, starting off, heading south.

As it did, Inspector Malote came from the hotel and swung into the passenger seat of Cam's hired Renault.

"A woman of charm," murmured the Frenchman. "She had a telephone call a few minutes ago. The man spoke in English. They are meeting at the Café Leon at Brienne."

Cam started the Renault. Brienne was just over 40 kilometres away—about 25 miles.

He hadn't driven far before he began to realise that his wasn't the only car which seemed to be sticking close to the little saloon ahead. He'd been keeping a three-car gap between him and his quarry. The car immediately ahead of him, a powerful black Citroen, seemed equally reluctant to travel faster. There were two men in the Citroen.

"We know where she's heading," he mused. "Tell you what, Malote—I'll draw ahead, you take a good look at these characters, and then we'll go right on past Mrs. Boynton and wait for her at the café."

The Frenchman nodded. Cam slammed his foot on the accelerator, thumbed the horn button, and went rocketing down the

middle of the broad, straight road.

Once past the procession, Malote relaxed and lit a cigarette. "Their faces mean nothing. Age, about thirty perhaps. The car has French registration plates—I will check them. Why would they follow her?"

Cam shook his head. "All I know is that we've got an explosives expert who's alive and is supposed to be dead—that he was working on the Rhinner Rocket job which is still on the NATO secret list—That his wife's here and his daughter's disappeared. I'll play it as it comes."

The sun was shining as they entered Brienne, parked the Renault, and strolled along to occupy a table at the Café Leon. Minutes later, Mrs. Boynton's car purred to a stop outside. As she got out, the black Citroen went past at little more than a crawl.

Mrs. Boynton took a table near the door, ordered coffee, and waited. Malote and Cam sipped their cognac. There were sufficient other tables occupied to make their presence inconspicuous.

They hadn't long to wait. Three minutes later, a tall thin figure strode into the café and sat down beside the woman.

"Boynton?" queried Malote softly.

Cam noded. "From his photograph, yes."

The Boyntons were soon deep in earnest conversation, Mack Boynton's hand resting lightly on his wife's arm. Finally, after about twenty minutes, he rose, kissed her, and headed for the café exit.

Inspector Malote drained his cognac, then followed. Boynton went out—and Cam cursed under his breath as a jovial party of Frenchmen pushed their way in a moment later, delaying Malote's departure for valuable seconds.

It was another ten minutes before Mrs. Boynton got up to leave. Cam followed, watched from the doorway while she got back into her car, and then headed for his Renault.

Inspector Malote was already seated in the Renault, a look of disgust on his face.

"Lost him?"

The Frenchman nodded. "By the time I got out—" he shrugged.

They trailed Mrs. Boynton back to her hotel at Vitry. Soon after she arrived, the hotel receptionist passed the word that Mrs. Boynton had made a sudden change of plan. She wanted her bill, and would be leaving within an hour.

"The coast appears clear, so she's off to join her husband," said

Beth Taylor. Changed and refreshed, she had joined the two men in their car, parked once more outside the hotel Trianon. Her presence seemed to have a near-magnetic effect on Inspector Malote.

"But there's ourselves—and maybe the characters in the Citroen," said Cam softly.

Malote's check on the black car hadn't taken them far. It had been hired in Paris two days before, by two Englishmen who gave their names as Smith and Brown—with passports to match.

"You, I could be wrong, but—" Beth bit her lip. "There was a car like that behind for me a long spell on the road from Calais."

"There are thousands of black Citroens in France," Cam told her. "It might have—" He left it unfinished. Mrs. Boynton came out of the hotel, a porter by her side carrying her suitcase.

The luggage went into the back of the car, the porter saluted, and Mrs. Boynton drove off, heading once more on the road south to Brienne.

Cam kept his car at a distance. This time, there was no sign of the black Citroen. And Mrs. Boynton was obviously in a hurry. The little car ahead slowed as they reached the outskirts of Brienne, then stopped outside an apartment building. Mrs. Boynton got out, left her suitcases, and, as the Renault passed, she went into the building.

Cam steered the Renault round the next corner, and stopped. "Think there's a back way in, Malote?" he asked. "It's time we had a talk with Mr. 'Leclere.' "

The Frenchman nodded. "Yes. Perhaps that lane—it leads behind the building.

Two minutes later, they were in the rear hallway, and heading for the stairway.

"Where now?" asked Beth.

The answer came from the top floor above—as Mrs. Boynton screamed. Cam in the lead, they dashed up the stairs. At the top the door on the right was open. Just inside, Mrs. Boynton swayed in near collapse.

Mack Boynton was dead. Head grotesquely to one side, he dangled on the end of a rope suspended over a wooden attic beam. "Look after her, Beth—"

Cam and Malote cut the rope and lowered Boynton's body while Beth guided the shocked woman to a chair.

Mrs. Boynton moaned. "Is he—?"

"Yes." Cam pursed his lips. Now, for the second time, Boyn-

ton was officially dead. Which made one body too many.

"But why—why did he do it?"

"Suicide, madame?" Inspector Malote came over, the cut rope in his hands. "Your husband was murdered."

The woman gave a fresh sob of grief. And the telephone in the corner began to ring.

Cam glanced at his two companions, gave a swift shake of his head, then bent close beside the shaken, grief-stricken woman.

"Mrs. Boynton. We're here to help. Do you know where your daughter is?"

She nodded. "In London."

The phone rang on, a monotonous, demanding rhythm.

Cam spoke quickly now. "She's not, Mrs. Boynton. That's why you've got to answer that phone—and whatever you do, don't say there's anyone with you. Answer it, for your daughter's sake."

The woman rose. Beth Taylor put an arm round her shoulders.

"Hullo." Mrs. Boynton's voice was a whisper.

"Mrs. Boynton?" The man's tones crackled loud over the wire.

"Yes—who—"

"Never mind that. I saw you drive up—alone. Is anyone with you now?"

She glanced at Beth, and, as the girl glanced a warning, whispered, "No—"

"Let's keep it that way. Now listen. You love your daughter." It was a statement, not a question. "She's safe, for now. But unless you want another accident in the family, you'll do exactly what I tell you."

Mrs. Boynton gave a gasp of sudden, fresh fear. "Where is she? Where's May?"

"Safe—but restricted," said the caller. "Boynton told us about the brief-case. We want it—understand?"

"Yes." Then, she showed a flash of desperate spirit. "Why did you kill him? Why, if he'd told you?"

There was a faint laugh. "Mrs. Boynton, your husband died in a car crash two months ago. A man called Leclere commits suicide in a French town—who cares? Get out of that building, Mrs. Boynton. Let someone else find him. Start driving back home, tonight. When you're there, get the brief-case, and wait for us to contact you. And, Mrs. Boynton—think on your daughter. A cripple can't dance."

There was a click, and the line went dead.

"Easy, now." Gently, Beth led the older woman back to the chair.

Inspector Malote was already at the telephone, attempting to trace the call through the Brienne exchange.

"Cam—" Beth turned towards the grim-faced young investigator. "What did Malote mean when he said it wasn't suicide? How was he sure—before?"

"The rope, Beth. Pull a rope over a beam, and the fibres point in the opposite direction to the pull. But that rope—" he nodded to the length lying below the roof beam, close beside the dead man. "That rope's fibres lie the wrong way for suicide. Boynton was pulled up off the floor. He was probably strangled first, and the rope used to disguise the marks."

The phone tinkled as Inspector Malote replaced the receiver.

"Any luck?"

The Frenchman shook his head. "No. A local call. Impossible to trace. And now?"

Cam shrugged. "That depends on Mrs. Boynton."

The woman stirred. "Who are you?" she asked.

"My name's Gordon. Inspector Malote's from the Paris *Sûreté*."

"And Miss Taylor—I remember her."

Cam nodded. "Her job was to trail you from the boat at Calais. And that phone call was no bluff, Mrs. Boynton. Your daughter got a call to say you were at home, ill. She left her friends and disappeared—at first, we thought she was with you. Did she know her father was alive?"

"No."

"Want to tell us about it, Mrs. Boynton?" he asked gently. "You've got one weapon on your side. Whoever killed your husband doesn't know we're here—or that we're even aware he didn't die in that crash."

The woman hesitated. "But my daughter—"

The French detective joined in. "Madame, the only true way to your daughter's safety is by helping us."

"All right. Mack—my husband—was working on the Rhinner anti-tank missile. You'll know that. Then a man called Carvell approached him. If Mack handed over the details of the explosive, he'd be paid five thousand pounds. If he didn't, they'd break him."

"How?"

"Mack dodged military service in the last war. A friend stood

in for him at his call-up medical—a friend who'd already been declared unfit. Mack regretted it later, but it was too late then. If that had come out, he was ruined."

"The night he was supposed to be killed was the night he was due to give Carvell the information."

Cam nodded. "But he killed Carvell, then faked the crash. Did he take the five thousand?"

"Yes. Carvell was only one of a group—Mack knew that. But if Mack was officially dead, the story was useless to them—and the money would give us a new start. Mr. Gordon, Mack wouldn't betray his trust—but he dreaded the disgrace. That's why he killed the man. He came back to the house that night, and told me what he'd done. May was to believe him dead, we decided—until the time was ripe."

"Why did you come to France?" Beth asked.

"To settle our plans. I was going to 're-marry' him—as the Belgian, Leclere. Then he was going to Australia, with May."

"But someone's been watching you, Mrs. Boynton, watching you closely," Cam pointed out. "Who knew you were coming to France? And what's in this brief-case?"

"I told no one." Mrs. Boynton was emphatic. "The money, most of it anyway, is in the brief-case. So is a box with Mack's notes on the Rhinner warhead. But, even if he'd wanted to, he couldn't have told them where it's hidden. It's back in Scotland—and only I know exactly where."

"Where, Mrs. Boynton?"

She shook her head. "No. I won't tell you. If I need to, I'll use it to buy May's life."

"All right." Cam didn't argue. "Mrs. Boynton, do as they said. Start off for home right away, get the case, and wait till they contact you. I promise we won't do anything to endanger your daughter. But, if you need help, Beth Taylor will never be far from you." He pondered a moment. "One last thing, Mrs. Boynton. Who stood in for your husband at that medical?"

Mrs. Boynton couldn't help. "Mack never told me—it was a friend, that's all I know."

Cam waited until the woman had left, and the sound of her car had faded.

"Inspector—"

Malote raised an eyebrow.

"We need that brief case—but first we've got to find the girl. There's a long chance. The night plane from Paris leaves at eight.

Can I make it?"

The Frenchman glanced at his wrist-watch. "Five forty-five now. It is just possible. And the chance?"

Cam told him.

From Brienne to Paris is 220 kilometres—about 135 miles. The big French police car whisked up by Malote snarled along, seldom dropping below 90 miles an hour as it raced over the long, tree-lined straights of the N.4 road.

Put a Frenchman in a fast car and tell him to hurry—he jumps for joy. Tell him to go faster than hurry, and you'd better have strong nerves for what lies ahead.

Cam made the big BEA jet with scant minutes to spare. The turbo-jet touched down at London Airport an hour later, he had time to kill before the next London-Glasgow flight, and the plane on that run whined in to land at its destination at 12.35 a.m.

Two people were waiting to meet him, Andy MacKinnon, his bulky ex-cop assistant, at the wheel of Cam's dark green Mercedes, and Mr. Deathstone.

The elderly lawyer, muffled in a heavy overcoat against the night chill, greeted him first. "So far, so good, Cameron." He handed him an envelope. "That'll bring you up to date—now, off you go."

Cam nodded, and slid into the Mercedes. Andy MacKinnon, cigarette dangling from one corner of his mouth, started the car. Seconds later, they were on their way—MacKinnon already knew their final destination, Stranraer, 84 miles away.

Flicking on the roof-light, Cam settled down to read Mr. Deathstone's note. In France and Britain, Inspector Malote and several others had been busy.

Mrs. Boynton was last reported driving through the night towards the Channel ports—with the black Citroen and its two occupants trailing her. That was to be expected, but it would be at least another 24 hours before she reached home—and for the moment Malote was covering up the death of Mack Boynton as the presumed suicide of a friendless Belgian.

The next item meant half of his long-shot hunch had come off.

There had been more than one telephone call from the Vitry-Brienne area that night to Britain, according to International Trunks. But another, highspeed check, showed that one of the numbers called—in London—had almost immediately afterwards made another long-distance call to Stranraer.

The address of the Stranraer number was Auberon Cottage,

two miles west of the town. Alongside, in Mr. Deathstone's cramped handwriting, was the note, 'Rented to a Peter Barlat. Your other query still under enquiry.'

But the last paragraph of the information was the most important.

'Nothing known of Boynton having personal notes on Rhinner anti-tank explosive. But have established that small quantity equivalent to one charge disappeared some days before Boynton's supposed death in crash. Investigating why this was not previously made generally known.'

It was past three a.m. when the Mercedes whispered into Stranraer, heading west through the silent streets.

Ten minutes later, Andy MacKinnon put the gear lever into neutral, let the car coast on to the grassy bank at the roadside, and killed both engine and lights. Overhead, the night was dark and cloudy.

He stretched, and gave a growl of relief. "If old Deathstone's right, chum, the cottage should be a little way down the road. Do we walk it?"

Cam shook his head. "I do—you wait here, Andy. If anything goes wrong, I want you on the outside to bring up reinforcements."

MacKinnon shrugged. "Okay. I'll give you an hour. But here—it's a present from the old boy." He handed over a 9 mm Browning automatic, its six-shot clip already loaded.

Cam pocketed the gun, opened the passenger door, and went off into the darkness, leaving the road and taking to the moorland alongside.

Auberon cottage lay just over a ridge, a small box of whitewashed stone, standing all alone, a light still burning behind one window despite the lateness of the hour.

A hundred yards distant, he stopped and listened. The only sound was the faint wind-rustle of leaves in some nearby trees. Crouching now, moving from hedge to a stone dyke, then on into the shadowed cover of an outbuilding, he moved closer.

Finally, he crept the last few yards across to the wall of the cottage, on the dark side, away from the lighted window. Then, slowly, pressed against the wall, he inched round.

The window was curtained, but there was a wide gap in the fabric. He looked in to what was obviously the kitchen—a big black cooking-range dominated one wall. Over by the table, a sleepy-looking man dozed in an armchair, a half-empty bottle of beer by his side. Cam changed position, and gave a low hiss of

satisfaction as he saw the rest of the room. The girl was asleep, lying fully dressed on a camp bed, her face to the wall, a rope leading from one ankle to the bed-leg.

His hand slid down towards his pocket, and the Browning.

At which precise moment a hard, circular shape jammed against his spine.

"Don't try anything, fellow," said a soft voice. "Up with the hands—nice and slow."

Hands above his head, the gun muzzle hard against the small of his back, Cam found himself being hustled round the side of the cottage to the front door. The man behind growled for him to halt, then kicked the wood.

The door was flung open. Framed in the dim light from the room beyond, the other guard—the man he'd seen through the window—stood in the tiny hallway within, a heavy Luger pistol ready in his right hand.

"Who's this, Joey?" he demanded.

A fresh prod urged Cam over the threshold.

"Found him sneaking around outside, peering in the window," said Cam's captor. "Let's look him over, Dinzo."

They shoved him through to the kitchen. On the camp bed, the girl sat up, blonde and sleepy-eyed, the rope tied round her ankle and the bedleg holding her fast.

"May? May Boynton?" Cam turned towards her.

The girl nodded. "Yes—" then she stopped, wide-eyed, as Joey, the taller of her two jailers, gave Cam a hard, back-handed smash across the face.

"We'll ask the questions," he snapped. "Dinzo, search him."

Dinzo, medium height but built on bull-like lines, gave a grunt of agreement. He found the gun, tossed it on the table, then fished out Cam's wallet and began pawing through its contents.

"Name's Gordon—a private eye," he snorted. "How'd you find your way here, Gordon?"

Cam stayed silent, and took another tooth-rattling slap across the face. Joey raised his gun threateningly. "Next time, I'll use the barrel," he warned. Over by the camp bed, the blonde girl gave a gasp of helpless rage.

"All right." Cam capitulated. "But can I lower my arms? It's getting tiresome."

Dinzo nodded. "Go ahead, mister—you may have a long rest ahead. Who sent you?"

"The girl's mother," lied Cam. "She phoned my firm from

France, said her daughter had disappeared and," he gave a grimace, "She thought May might be in bad company. Seems she was right."

"Funny man." Joey slapped him again. "How'd you find us?"

Cam shrugged. "That's what I get paid for."

Dinzo growled. But Joey had another problem on his mind. "Sure he was alone?"

His companion nodded. "Far as I could see. How'd you come here, Gordon? Car?"

"Yes." Cam glanced at the girl again. "What's going on, anyway? You can't hold that kid—"

Joey cut him short. "You'll talk yourself to death, Gordon. Dinzo—check there's nobody else waiting at the car."

Dinzo shuffled out.

As the outer door closed, Joey sat down, the gun muzzle tracing a casual arc between Cam and the girl. "Let's just wait and see, eh?"

The minutes ticked past—then the outer door rattled open again, then closed. Joey tensed, then relaxed as Dinzo entered the room, alone.

"Found the car. Nobody around." Dinzo poured some beer into a glass. "What do we do with him?"

Joey scowled. "Keep him, like the girl, until the boss comes. After that—" his leer held little promise.

From the corner of his eye, Cam watched the hall doorway open a fraction. It could be just a draught . . .

"Tie him up, Dinzo," said Joey. As the man bent to pick up a coil of nylon rope, he added, "Good and ti—"

He didn't have a chance. Andy MacKinnon suddenly appeared in the doorway. His favourite weapon, the lead-loaded baton which he'd acquired once he left the force, flashed across the room, thrown with every ounce of Andy's thirteen stone behind it. The baton took Joey on the right temple, and he slumped.

Cam dived for Dinzo—who was still turning, the rope in his hands. His head hit the thug dead centre in the stomach.

"Hi!" MacKinnon grinned. "I got out o' the car to stretch my legs—then I saw this fella comin', an' just followed him back."

"Watch 'em." Cam crossed the room, took a penknife from his pocket, and sawed through the rope tethering the girl.

"Thanks." For the first time, she smiled. "Is—is my mother all right?"

"Fine," he assured her. Then he turned back to their prisoners,

Joey would be out for some time to come, but Dinzo was relatively intact.

Cam jerked the man to his feet. "Who're you working for?"

Dinzo mumbled a rude word, then paled as MacKinnon gave the baton a significant heft. "Okay—Tino Carvell hired us, mister. We were to keep the dame here until Carvell's boss was ready."

"Who's his boss?"

The man shook his head. "Dunno his name. He was here tonight—took a phone call from down south. But he wore a silk-stocking mask. Look, Gordon, we're jus' doing a job."

"And Tino Carvell? Did he have a brother who was killed?"

Dinzo shrugged. "No idea, mister. Carvell's a Pole or somethin'—he picked us up in Glasgow, offered big money." He was obviously telling the truth.

Cam turned to the girl. "May, did you recognise the man who came?"

She shook her head. "All I know is a man 'phoned me in London and said Mum was very ill. He said he was a Doctor Carvell. When I got off the train at Glenluce, they were waiting with a car. Then—well, they brought me here. That other man was here a few hours ago—but he had that mask on."

"Uh-huh." He put his next question gently. "May, how about your father?"

The girl was surprised. "He's dead—didn't you know?"

"How's your mother been since it happened?"

The girl sighed. "Upset—naturally. I stayed with her for two or three weeks after it happened. She—she went to his grave almost every other day."

"May, your mother's on her way home from France. She's quite safe. But until she gets here, our best plan is to stay here, with these two—who'll be taken care of. There's plenty of spare rope. If their boss should phone to check, Dinzo'll co-operate. Especially if I tell him that in all probability none of you were ever going to leave here alive. This is no small-time piece of crookery you're involved in, Dinzo. And that's no bluff."

Cam left the man to digest the information. "May, your mother didn't tell anyone of her trip to France—not even you. But—she'd need money, wouldn't she? She'd need French francs, or traveller's cheques. Where does she have a bank account?"

The girl frowned. "My father had an account in Stranraer—with the Central Scotland Bank. He knew the manager, or some-

thing. I think they'd known each other for a spell before dad was married."

"That's all I needed to know," said Cam softly. "Andy—get on with tying these two up, will you? I'm going to use the phone, and this time, for a change, it's old Deathhouse who's going to be dragged out of bed."

★

For most of the next day, Cam, Andy MacKinnon and the girl remained in the cottage with their two captives. The phone rang twice during that time—and was answered on each occasion by a reluctantly co-operative Dinzo. The first call was for Cam, from Mr. Deathstone. It was a long call, for there were arrangements to be made—and it concluded with the news that Mrs. Boynton had crossed the Channel by the first morning boat and was now driving north through England, followed by the same two men, now in a Ford Consul.

The second call came at five that evening—a stranger's voice this time, who introduced himself simply as "Carvell's friend," and asked Dinzo if all was well.

"Fine," agreed Dinzo, one anxious eye on the threatening gun barrel.

"The woman's reached Preston, and still coming north. We may need the girl before midnight. I'll phone instructions."

At seven, Mr. Deathstone arrived with a car-load of police, who took over Joey, Dinzo, and the telephone.

The Glasgow solicitor was in a benevolent mood. "You were right, of course, Cameron," he declared. "Mrs. Boynton's travellers' cheques were issued by the Central Scotland Bank at Stranraer. The manager, Andrew Munroy, lived in North Ayrshire for a time during the last war. He and Mack Boynton were about the same age—and Munroy was medically grade four, unfit for National Service.

"Now . . ." he gave a faint tut. "The girl's safe, which is a relief. If only we knew where that brief-case was hidden, I'd be happy."

Cam gave a slow grin. "Andy and I have an idea about that. But let's leave it until Mrs. B. collects and delivers the goods to Munroy. Then you can nab him red-handed."

Mr. Deathstone didn't approve. But Cam couldn't be budged.

"We keep the girl hidden until it's over," he declared. "If

Mrs. Boynton believes her daughter's safety is at stake, she's bound to react the way we want. It's maybe cruel—but we'll be sure of her reactions."

At eleven p.m., Mrs. Boynton reached her home in Glenluce. Tired-eyed, fatigued to near breaking-point from the strain of her journey, she stopped the little car, got out, and went up the pathway to her door. Wearily, she let herself in, paying scant attention to the Ford car which passed slowly along the road as she fumbled for her keys.

At eleven-thirty, her telephone rang.

"Mrs. Boynton?"

She had heard the voice before—in France, just after she had found her husband's body.

"Yes. What do I do now?"

"So far, you've behaved," said her caller. "We were following you, of course."

"I saw the car," she agreed.

"We want no tricks, Mrs. Boynton," came the warning. "Perhaps I should mention that it was my brother who was killed by your husband—then burned in your husband's car. Be careful, Mrs. Boynton, if you want your daughter."

"How long will it take to get the case?"

"Half an hour—no more."

"Good. Get it, and then drive out on the moor road. Just over a mile beyond New Luce there's a large white stone by the roadside near where a track runs off. Put the brief-case behind the stone at exactly half an hour after midnight. Then drive on. Understand?"

"Yes—but what about May?"

"Once we have the case, and know you've carried out your part, she'll be free."

The line went dead. Mrs. Boynton put down the receiver, lit a cigarette with trembling hands, and prepared to go out.

In a GPO van half a mile down the road, Cam Gordon removed his headphones. Mr. Deathstone did likewise, and a Post Office engineer took over, to maintain the wire-tap connection.

"Well?" demanded the lawyer.

Cam gave him a cheerful wink. "I'll go and tell Andy to have the girl back home when her mother returns."

Deathstone nodded. "Then we'll arrange the reception committee." He examined his long, bony fingers with gloomy intensity. "Though I still feel if you think you know where that

case is, we'd better be moving in now."

One hour later, Mr. Deathstone gave a murmur of discomfort. He was crouched down on the moorland, having come nearly half a mile across country. Beside him, Cam and a police walkie-talkie operator waited.

The lights of a car appeared on the dark ribbon of road below. Mrs. Boynton was arriving with almost stop-watch accuracy.

Cam raised his night glasses, adjusted the focus and watched. The car slowed, stopped beside the white stone, and the woman got out. She carried something in one hand—the brief-case. She went over to the stone, returned empty-handed, then drove off.

Five minutes ticked past. Then they heard the sound of another car engine starting—from the moorland track across the road. Sidelights gleamed on. The car stopped by the stone, a man got out, obviously found the case, checked its contents by torchlight, and got back into the car again. The car turned onto the road.

"Now—alert road blocks," hissed Mr. Deathstone.

Cam said nothing. The police radio man flicked his set switch to send—and almost simultaneously the car below exploded. The fierce blast, white-cored, scattered a hail of torn, shrapnel-like metal for three hundred yards around. The Rhinner rocket explosive, designed to pulverise a 60 ton tank, had crushed the car like a steam-hammer smashing an egg-shell.

"That's that," said Cam drily.

"But—" for once, Mr. Deathstone was shaken. "What happened?"

"Well, we knew there was a sample of the Rhinner explosive missing," reminded Cam. "The odds are it was in Boynton's brief-case. Looks like it just went up bang! Anyway, it saves the War Department the embarrassment of a spy trial—there were three men in that car, Munroy, Carvell, and the other character, whoever he was. You're left with two minor thugs on a straightforward abduction charge."

Deathstone agreed. "I suppose so. And we've a lead to Munroy's London contact—a certain diplomat may be asked to leave. But that explosion . . ." he was openly suspicious.

Cam shrugged. He saw no need to mention that earlier that evening he and Andy had gone out to the graveyard where the fake 'Mack Boynton' had been buried. If Mrs. B. had gone there so often, yet had known her husband still lived, she had a reason. They'd found it—the brief-case, hidden an inch or two under the soil of the grave.

And Andy had been there—with the woman's daughter—when Mrs. B. arrived to collect the case. Explanations had been swift.

Andy MacKinnon had had some strange friends when he wore a uniform. And he still kept some toys in the boot of Cam's car. A forty-minute delayed-fuse detonator, half the size of a pencil, its acid slowly eating through a metal shield, had done the rest.

Really, mused Cam, he'd only meant to save Old Deathstone some worries.

SOLUTION TO EWMM CROSSWORD (No. 28)

ACROSS. 1, Patrols. 5, Burglar. 9, Lured. 10, Follows up. 11, Coolant. 12, Enamour. 13, Yet. 15, Shindy. 17, Stools. 19, Elate. 20, Cheats. 22, Weasel. 25, Eel. 27, Pinched. 29, Arrests. 30, Incurably. 31, Noise. 32, Essence. 33, Resents.

DOWN. 1, Polices. 2, Terrorise. 3, Old hand. 4, Safety. 5, Bullet. 6, Riot Act. 7, Lasso. 8, Reports. 14, Evade. 16, Yes. 17, Sew. 18, Obsession. 20, Captive. 21, Teheran. 23, Errands. 24, Listens. 25, Edible. 26, Lawyer. 28, Nick-S.

YOU THOUGHT OF IT, FIRST

JOHN HYNAM

A grim little tale about the dangers of trespassing

THE TEA tastes good, the cigarette is held between very steady fingers. And why shouldn't they be steady? Success has a way of calming the nerves, and mine *are* calm. Once, when things were slack, I used to fiddle about with the stethoscope in the top pocket of my white coat, or tumble the black triangular-section piece of wood on my desk which reads, on all three sides 'Dr. Susan Ross'. I don't do that, any more.

Over there the nurses are gossiping—tea and biscuits helping out their break, too. Good team; I'm responsible for them. There's not much woman-to-woman nastiness in our kind of work. Most of them count themselves lucky to be working with me. I feel lucky today. I look at Jim's photograph on my desk, and I think that he's lucky too, if he did but know it. He will know it, in time, when he comes out of the influence of Philippa Treharris—and the de-influencing begins as of now, or in a very few minutes' time.

Jim's a dish; he was when I married him, ten years ago, when he was twenty nine and an established doctor, and I was in my last year at medical school. There's a little grey in his thick hair now, but Jim, at any age, will always look handsome and distinguished. How they all wondered when they heard that he had proposed to me! I'm certainly no beauty; call it *belle-laide* if you're feeling generous, but nothing more. I'm the skinny, enduring type who'll be fit enough to do a good day's work at eighty.

I come from a hardworking family of Geordies. My father always said, 'When tha's got a thing that's really thine, nivver let it go, nivver," and I know he was right. I've always been like that; I've worked hard for what I wanted, and when I've got it, I've kept it. Nobody steals from Susan Tapley, old Arthur Tapley's daughter.

And certainly not Philippa Treharris. *That* bitch?

Jim first met her as a patient, when I was working with him in general practice, before I took on this job. Working as I did, and being ready to be a starry-eyed door-mat for the most wonderful man in the world, I was a bit slow in twigging what was going on. But I did twig, and I realised the horrible danger he was in; she had only to shout, and Jim, *my* Jim, would be finished. When Jim was away for three days at a medical conference, and I discovered that she had been in the same town and in the same hotel, I came to a decision that something had to be done.

★

I remember taking out her card and studying it, when Jim was there in the office. I said her name, and watched him twitch a little, before steadying himself.

"Philippa Treharris," I murmured. It was then that he twitched.

He turned and said, casually, "What about her?"

"Interesting case," I said.

He seemed relieved. "Oh, yes."

"Unusual."

"Yes."

He turned on his smooth professional charm, and I wanted to scream '*Not with me damn you, Jim*! *I'm your wife*!' But I didn't, of course.

He said, "Not dangerous, really."

Dangerous, I thought, this woman is the biggest danger I'm ever likely to meet. How can he be so clever, so devoted to his job, and yet be such a fool? I stared at the record card until every single detail of it was engraved on my memory. Then I put it back and slammed the drawer.

"Anything the matter?" I remember Jim asking.

I said there wasn't. I just made up my mind that here was a thief I'd deal with, myself, before she ruined everything.

It was Jim who suggested that I should take on this present job. I didn't much care for it, at first, but soon I got to like it. There's a sort of two-way gratitude about it that you don't always get in general practice, or in hospital work. And for a time at least, I was fairly cheerful; although I didn't get home to Jim every night, I knew that Philippa Treharris had been away in Italy, working for her firm.

Just a few minutes ago, on our teams' visit to Jim's and my home town, I discovered that she was back, when she walked in here. It hit me hard, that she had returned, that she'd pick up with Jim again, and, with me still travelling . . .

★

I look at my watch. Ten minutes have gone by. Soon be time for me to stroll over. Yes, stroll. Nobody could tell, looking at me now, that I'm boiling with rage, inside. I'm not angry that he's been to bed with her, probably more than once; with Jim being the sort of person he is, I'm satisfied to have a ninety nine percent share of him, as long as there's no real threat to his position. But Philippa Treharris thought she was going to *take* him! Take Jim Ross? Who the hell does she think she is? Treharris is a spoiled little tramp who doesn't know the meaning of work. She's never ground through exams, she's never been on duty for *twenty four* hours at a stretch, never mind forty eight—and I'd like to have seen her baby blonde face after she'd served in the blood and sweat of summer week-end in a casualty department.

She never will, of course.

The limit of her generosity, the very limit, is the giving of a pint of blood to the transfusion service. She came in just before our tea break, and I said I'd see to her, so that my staff could get their tea straight away.

I've seen to her.

She said, with a silly grin, "This won't *hurt*, will it, Susan?"

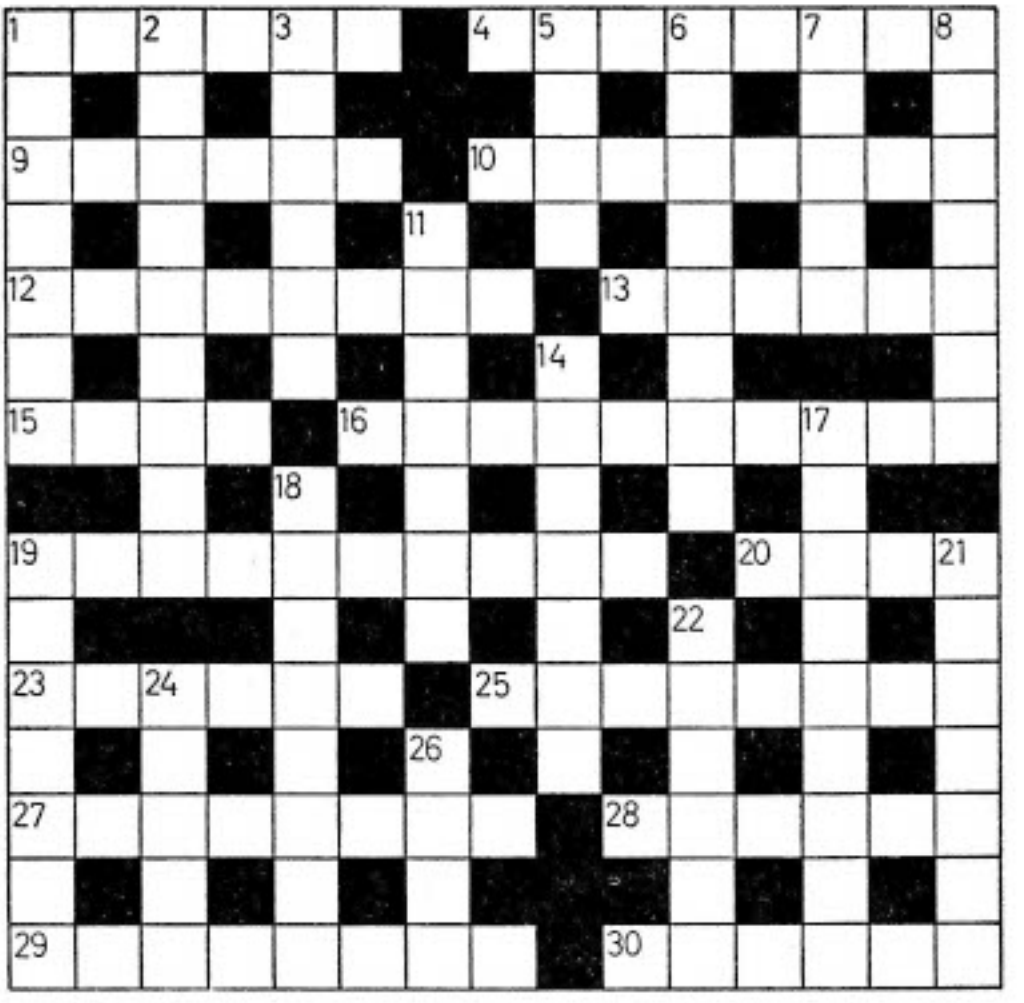
I said, "You won't feel a thing."

★

It wasn't premeditated. She just walked in to our unit, and I saw two things; one was her hated face, and the other was her medical record card.

The bubble I put into her bloodstream should have done its work, by now, so I'll stroll over, calmly, and then, just as calmly, I'll begin to deal with the death of a donor who should have declared her disability. The unit won't get some of her blood—but I shall.

EWMM Crossword No. 29



ACROSS

1 Such a man appears on TV (6)
4 The feet of the men on the beat? (8)
9 Satisfactorily concluded, like those mail-bags? (4, 2)
10 Con man, maybe (8)
12 Was sorry for some misdeed (8)
13 Takes positive steps—after a tip-off? (4, 2)
15 Just the one to take drugs (4)
16 They try to solve the clues (10)
19 Not, for example, how to handle 'jelly' (10)
20 Break under pressure? (4)
23 Jim, the well-known forger? (6)
25 Bully, but not with a cosh! (8)
27 Policemen wear them out, of course (8)
28 Grab some kid? (6)
29 Choosing—to go for trial? (8)
30 One loses them unconsciously (6)

DOWN

1 Wanted—not criminally (7)
2 Daily Wail? (9)
3 Horsy? (6)
5 They are upheld by force (4)
6 Quality of one who always gets his man? (8)
7 Does nothing—criminal or not (5)
8 Gets out of gaol? (7)
11 It gives the convict his freedom (7)
14 Coppers in the kitchen? (7)
17 Long-standing gang wars? (9)
18 Leave—entirely empty? (5, 3)
19 True a PC may arrest (7)
21 Colloquially police districts (7)
22 An effect of conscience (6)
24 It might betray a burglar (5)
26 Indicates chaps in 'O' Division, apparently (4)

(Solution will appear in our July issue)

THE SAMARITAN

John Boland

When a man has been used to yelling 'Fag!' *he usually gets prompt results*

HE WAS pathetically pleased to see me and there was none of the air of assured superiority about him that I'd known at school. Indeed, quite the reverse. He was still six inches taller than me and perhaps three stone heavier, despite the prison diet, but now he gave the impression of being physically *smaller* than me.

"Fair old mess you've got yourself into, Hamilton," I said.

"Never mind about that. You've come to get me out, haven't you." There was an unaccustomed eagerness in his voice—an eagerness that had, to my ear, a note of whining. Funny, he never even thought of why I should be the one to be there—thousands of miles from home, in a small, stinking South American Republic that was tottering on the verge of revolution. Me, Brian Henn, the correct little, polite little so-and-so, who never strayed far from well-trodden paths.

"I heard you call 'Fag!'."

But it didn't amuse him. Come to that, it didn't amuse me: I'd answered that base roar on hundreds of occasions; so many in fact that I'd developed a sort of Pavlovian reaction: my legs began the motions of running even before my brain was conscious of having given them an order to do so.

"Have a cigarette."

He fondled the thing almost as though it was a precious work of art but after the first luxurious lungful of smoke, he turned back to the main problem. "You're going to get me out?"

"That depends."

"Depends on what?"

"Whether you were guilty."

He didn't lie. Not because he was a truthful sort of man, but because it simply never occurred to him that anything he—the great Frank Hamilton—could do, would be wrong. "She was a bitch."

"And you got up to your tricks, I suppose." He glared at me but my mere presence was building up his morale again with incredible speed.

"Well, you know how it is . . . It was this bloody awful country, really. I had a drop to drink, and that was it."

Typical.

"Lucky you only murdered a woman," I said. "I mean, if it had been something serious, like insulting the Dictator—they'd have you shot on the spot or given you life in *El Bretta*". The *El Bretta* prison, up-country in the jungle, was a thousand times worse than this pigsty and reserved for political prisoners. He was in San Puerva gaol and lucky to be there.

"The swines confiscated my estate."

"What did you expect 'em to do? Give you a pension for whipping that girl to death?" I raised a hand to quell his indignation. "All right, man, don't bother. You'll see me again next week. Give me time to work something out." It was incredible, but he was almost himself again, despite the filthy rags he wore and the two weeks' ragged growth on his cheeks.

"Good old Chicken! Always comes running, eh!"

The armed jailer opened the cell door and signalled me out with a jerk of his head. "I walk these days, Hamilton," was my parting shot.

The hotel in the town was filthy and dilapidated, but in contrast with the prison the accommodation it offered was super five star rating. The bugs running up and down the once white-painted walls of my room were smaller and much less numerous than those infesting the stinking cell inhabited by my former school fellow, Hamilton, and the sanitary arrangements worked, after a fashion.

I spent the siesta hour thinking over the next move. Clearly there was no hurry: the first thing to do was to find out if any other person, school mate or business acquaintance, was going to show up in answer to the letters of appeal that Hamilton had somehow managed to get sent out. If I was right, there wouldn't be anyone else—at least, not among his male associates. At school he'd been hated by most and feared by all and it was the same after university.

The same among men, that is. But with women Hamilton was a great success. What is it, I wonder, that makes a woman chase after a man she *knows* to be dangerous? A man who is almost certain to ditch her when he's taken from her what he wanted at that particular time? I'd always told myself that one day he'd go too far—that he'd let his peculiar tastes get a bit too strong, with disastrous results.

Well, I'd been right.

He'd been more or less forced to get out of England. Even in these days of tolerance, Hamilton's behaviour was a bit too much and he'd gone—or been sent—out of the country, to take up rubber planting in South America. The estate was probably a front; there'd been a previous incident concerning the smuggling of arms and it seemed likely to me that he had not altogether given up the trade—certainly there was a lucrative market in the area where he had settled.

★

I woke up and realised I must have been asleep for some time: the room was in darkness except for the reflected sunlight from the square which filtered through the slats of the shutters. Oh well, it didn't matter. There was plenty of time to make plans. Hamilton was serving four years.

Four years.

Not long, is it, to get as punishment for the frenzied destruction of another human being. But four years in San Puerva prison would be longer than fourteen in a Western World jail. Correction—in an English jail.

If he'd committed some political offence it would have been forty years at the very least. But the local Dictator's sense of values differed from the normally accepted.

The week I spent in the hotel was the most disgusting time I ever recall. The food was horrible, the staff dirty and lazy, and even after using up two packets of bug powder, the room was still infested with crawling, biting horrors of loathsomeness. Fifty times a day I told myself I was a fool—an absolute idiot—not to get away from the awful surroundings by the first available means. But each time I reminded myself that to run away now would make me despise myself for the rest of my days.

I've never been what you could call a man of action, you understand. Even the manufacturing business my father left me is run

by the rest of the board, although I'm nominally chairman and managing director. We make articles of tinware: not the most exciting merchant adventuring, although it does bring in good money. I'd like to have been an artist, maybe, but somehow I'd never got round to finding out if I had any talent.

Perhaps I was afraid of discovering the truth.

Anyway, there it was. Me. Forty. Less than average height and build, with the fair hair thinning in front like a receding tide, and with only one mark of distinction in my life. . . . the fact that I'd been jilted.

Yes, I know. It does sound comic, and in a way I suppose it was. But I've never been able to laugh about it. I mean, I wasn't actually left standing alone at the altar. Not quite that, although she left me the day the wedding was to have taken place. So, with that as my sole achievement, if I can put it that way, do you wonder that when I received Hamilton's plea, I decided to do something about it?

I was forty. Middle-aged. Oh, yes, early middle-age, I grant you. But no longer a young man and with a suddenly frightening bleakness in the years ahead. I could have married, of course. Plenty of women would have taken my income very happily. But there are some things a man just cannot tolerate beyond a certain point.

And so here I was, in an environment that made me shudder every time I allowed myself to think of it. And on a mission that could turn out to be dangerous. I realised I was part crazy, otherwise I'd have been at home in Warwickshire, or enjoying a visit to London to take in some theatres.

To some extent I was seeing myself as a sort of hero—a hero named 'Chicken'! Excruciating. But despite that, I knew that if I backed out now the years ahead would be blank indeed. Here was a chance to do something, to give myself that bit of added stature that would change life's aspect. Am I giving you the impression that I was going to act the part of the traditional hero, storming the prison and by sheer guts and daring, break open Hamilton's cell and liberate him?

If so, let me correct that impression at once. When the time came for the actual break, I'd be miles away, out of the country and out of personal involvement. I mean, a middle-aged dog can't expect to perform new tricks with speed and agility. He has to settle for that of which he is capable.

The escape would be brought about by simple means: bribery.

It would be a mere matter of scattering a few thousand pesos to get Hamilton out of the prison. The really tricky part would be to keep him alive after the escape. For whoever took part in the arrangements would only have to shoot the escaping man in the back to receive commendation from the authorities—and stick to the bribe money with complete safety.

Therefore arrangements had to be made with delicacy. No good getting Hamilton out of his cell if his death resulted. That would be the ultimate failure, so far as I was concerned. Ah, well, the factor had constantly to be borne in mind. There were other things too—getting out by air, while quicker, would be impossible without bribing every one of the soldiers and customs men who seemed to be spending most of their lives waiting, smoking and spitting, but with all their indolence, still managing to see everything that went on at the joke of an airport.

★

San Puerva itself lay thirty miles up river from the ocean. Most of the vessels that used the port were engaged in coastal traffic, but there was a regular sailing of mail ships with passenger accommodation. Via water was the route to take. The nearest land border was three hundred miles to the north, with the road almost impassable at this time of year, when the rains came.

The rain also brought mosquitoes; my face was a blood-spotted mess by the time I called to see Hamilton again. Even though I had a police pass permitting me to see the wretched prisoner, it needed a sweetener to the guard commander to get inside the place. This time the humidity was dreadful, making every lump on my poor face an agony of irritation at which I raked with my fingernails from time to time although I tried to avoid doing so.

I must have looked a sight and I understood why Hamilton stared at me long and hard when I finally entered the stinking hole he inhabited. But I wasted no time. The stench of the place made me want to vomit.

"What happened to your clothes?"

He laughed bitterly. "Can't you guess?"

They'd been sold or bartered, of course. Which meant that I'd even have to supply him with items of apparel. Even in San Puerva an Englishman dressed the way he was now would have aroused suspicion. If only because the Government deported

poor whites as a matter of policy.

"What's the plan, Chicken?"

"I wish you wouldn't call me by that stupid nickname!" I snarled. But my reaction only delighted him. Situated as he was; totally dependent upon my good will, he couldn't resist the goading taunts he'd used all those years ago to make my existence at school a living hell. Oddly enough, he'd never beaten me, never thrashed me the way other boys were belted by the seniors they fagged for. At least, he hadn't done so physically; with me he indulged his sadism mentally—sneering, taunting, teasing, until I was less than half a human being.

"It upsets you, Chicken?"

I looked him straight in the face. "Use that name once more, Hamilton, and I'll walk right out of this cell and you'll never see me again. Nor anyone else, other than your jailers."

I thought for a moment that his head was going to explode. First from amazement that I should speak to him in that fashion, then to blazing anger that I could do so . . . this only took two or three seconds. The effort to restrain his words made his grey cheeks go red, then a horrible dough colour, with his eyes appearing to protrude out of their sockets so that I really thought for a moment that his brain had fragmented under internal pressure.

Then the moment of insane rage passed and he was gasping with the effort to appear normal—or as near normal as he could in those conditions. "I—yes . . . I'm sorry."

What the effort cost him, I'll never know. But the effect on me was marvellous. Never in my life had I known such a moment of triumph. No, that's not quite honest, for I'd had no other moments of triumph to match against this one: my solitary victory. I was well aware that this—this savouring of his humiliation—was the main reason I'd come to San Puerva.

I gloried in it.

When some of the heady delight had abated I also became aware of the fact that my behaviour to him was no better than his to me in the distant past. So what. I'm human, aren't I? Prick me, do I not bleed? . . . You know.

All right, then. It was despicable. But wonderful.

Back in my hotel bedroom, with the ceiling fan working well for once and giving an illusion of a breeze, I thought of every little detail of the scene time and time again. I even went so far as to think briefly of staying permanently in San Puerva, or at least for two or three years, playing with Hamilton's hopes every time I

visited him . . . keeping him dangling on a hook of suspense.

But that, I knew, was fantasy. He might kow-tow for the next few visits, then give up. He'd revert and leave *me* as the hooked one. Besides, I realised only too damned strongly that I'd never be able to keep up the attitude. I mean, it's not my nature. I'd crack before he did, I was certain.

All of which meant: back to planning.

★

By my next visit to the prison the jailers hailed me as an old friend—not least of all on account of the skins of tequila that I gave them along with the bundles of cigarillos they all favoured; long, thin black smokes that smelled like burning boot laces when they were lit.

"Hello, Henn," Hamilton said as I entered the cell. He was doing his best to appear civil, but I could sense the seething hatred beneath the pale skin of his skull.

I'd gone there with the intention of baiting him to some extent; but I couldn't. I looked up at him as he stood deferentially, wondering what he would do to me if he managed to lay hands on me when he got out.

"I've been lucky, Hamilton," I said softly, looking over my shoulder to make sure the guard wasn't listening. You couldn't tell how much English most of them understood; one or two of them were quite fluent, but most of the private soldiers amongst them didn't seem to speak anything other than a sort of Indian patois, whose real language was the universal one of bribery.

"Well come on," Chi—" He stopped himself just in time. "Come on, Henn," he amended. "Let's hear the drill."

"Just before that, my dear fellow," I answered. "Let me put things straight. What I've done isn't for the sake of *alma mater*, or because I love you. You know that." I waited, but he didn't comment and I went on: "I've spent a great deal of time and money—"

"I'll pay you back," he said eagerly.

Too eagerly.

I knew in just what sense he had used the words. "You're damned right you're going to pay, Hamilton," I said viciously. "Pay, then pay and pay again." I must have looked half-demented, I suppose, but he still kept silence. "You owe me plenty, for all you made me suffer . . .!"

He nodded. "I know. I'm sorry."

The bloody liar. I could see it in his eyes; the cruelty that lived in him, straining impatiently to get at me, to tear and rend me for the things I was daring to say to him. But he didn't dare let control slip. If it did, he was finished, for three years and five months at least, for he'd got that long left to serve: there was no parole system for him.

"You haven't asked me how much I'm going to charge you," I said. "So I'll tell you. I have here in my pocket an I.O.U. I wrote out last night, for you to sign." I took the slip of paper out and handed it to him. He read it, his eyes widening in shock.

"*Ten thousand pounds*!"

"That's right, Hamilton. Ten thousand quid. . . here, take my pen and sign it."

"It—it's blackmail."

"No. Compensation." I made a gesture of putting the pen back in my pocket. "Of course, if you don't want to?"

He could have killed me then and I've often wondered what stopped him. I mean, it wouldn't have meant more than another four years for him. Somehow he contained the violence within him. He was swaying, groping out for support as though he was on the verge of fainting.

"We have to pay for our pleasures sooner or later, my dear fellow," I assured him. "And after all, this little piece of business is going to set me back well over a thousand, so it won't be all profit for me."

He knew I had him and so he sighed. He must have realised the I.O.U. meant nothing unless I got him back to England. "That's a good chap," I said, as I took the paper back from him and stowed it carefully in my wallet. "Now. Here's what you have to do . . ."

The plan was elaborate—too elaborate, he objected. But I managed to convince him in the end that what I'd worked out was the best scheme to adopt.

The first part of it was to arrange his release from incarceration by one or more of the soldiers on guard duty. Actually, two of them were in it; a corporal and his captain. The *capitano* had access to all the necessary keys; the corporal did the actual work. The officer waited in a hired, chauffeur-driven car, for the corporal and Hamilton to join him.

Then the three men were driven the five kilometres to the city and the officer left at the *Café El Torres* while the corporal went on with Hamilton to the spot where part of the money and the prisoner were to be exchanged. Then, with Hamilton taken in

another car, the original vehicle went back to San Puerva, carrying the N.C.O. to join his captain who had by this time been paid the rest of the sum arranged after a telephone call from Hamilton had cleared the payment.

Complicated?

Yes. But smooth and simple in actual operation. The *capitano* was the vital link, and he'd been obtainable only after assuring himself of a splendid alibi at the café. So, all in all, it worked.

Of course I don't know how the second of the three stages went, because I never heard. But it must have been all right and I can picture Hamilton's delight when he reached the rancho where he was to hide for at least three weeks. You see, I figured that the country's ports, frontier posts and what have you would be in a constant state of alert for about a week following the escape and that after that the native temperament would dull the edge of activity into the bluntness of complete inaction.

During that time Hamilton would be able to indulge his taste for food and a comfortable bed, although his other pleasures would not be possible: there was no woman within miles of the deserted rancho; not even an ageing Indian grandmother. Whatever fears he must have suffered over the possibility of recapture must have faded by the time his guide came to escort him to the s.s. *Maria Roman*, whose captain had happily agreed to offer passage to an English naturalist wanting to leave San Puerva without publicity.

The ship had actually weighed anchor when the soldatos arrived to arrest Hamilton and cart him back into custody. So near . . .! It must have sent him crazy.

★

I'd have gone out there again, to see what happened, but I had a polite word of warning from official sources in this country. The San Puerva officials were interested in interviewing a fellow-countryman of Hamilton's, they told me, in the office off Whitehall to which I was requested to kindly present myself.

"Doesn't do for our nationals to get mixed up in South American politics," the smooth-faced gentleman behind the desk informed me.

"Politics?"

"Oh I know he was up for murder or manslaughter, but you mean to say you don't know the truth of the matter?"

"I'm sorry," I said. "But I don't know what the devil you're on about. Hamilton and I were at school together—"

"We know that," Pumblechook replied. "That's why you went out there. Look. Did you have a hand . . .?"

"I got him out of that stinking prison," I said hotly, but he waved me to silence.

"And you got him into *El Bretta*, which is a thousand times worse."

"There wasn't anything in the newspaper reports."

"My dear Henn, in this country it's hardly news. But in this office—" He shrugged. "It could be dynamite."

"So what am I supposed to do?"

The smoothness seemed to fade somehow, leaving only a mask of granite in its place. "Do? You will do precisely nothing, sir. If it hadn't been for you—Damn it! You realise that the moment he got free he started up his old tricks again, printing seditious pamphlets—the lot!"

"Sedition?"

"Treason, arson, call it what you will. But this time they've got him for subversive activities and he'll never leave that hell-hole alive." He didn't say so, but he was blaming me again, with additional bitterness. But the interview was over and I stumbled out into the bright sunshine, blinking my eyes to free them of tears.

I went into St. James Park and sat down on a bench for a long time, thinking over what I'd just learned: conscious of the presence of the I.O.U. in my wallet as though it was made of red hot iron.

Back home in Warwickshire I spent a long time composing a letter to Hamilton, then tore the thing up. It was more than possible he'd never be allowed to see it, even if it reached the prison. What would he be thinking of me, I wondered? Would he be blaming me for his terrible predicament? Of course he would. He never blamed himself for anything.

Although it was just possible he imagined himself a victim of sheer mischance. Being discovered in a cabin where illegal pamphlets had been found. No, Hamilton would either not believe in the pamphlets' existence, or take it that they had been planted.

I often pray that he thinks the latter, for that's the truth of it. For of course *I* had the damned things printed and placed in the cabin where he was to be seized after the ship's captain had notified the authorities of the 'suspicious' stranger on board.

I explain the details to Molly, every time I visit her grave in the corner of the cemetery they set apart for suicides. Today I went there and tore up the I.O.U.

"I shall never collect, my darling," I told her. "But he hasn't escaped paying for what he did to us both. Not as long as he lives, he won't escape paying."

The torn bits of paper looked like snowflakes on the grave . . . like the snowflakes that had fallen that March day when she'd told me about what she and Hamilton had been to each other before he'd dropped her without a word.

She confessed on the day our wedding was to have taken place and my rage against the man turned to searing hatred for her until driven, she took the irrevocable step. When I came to my senses it was too late, the sleeping pills had worked their permanent effect.

Some EWMM Contributors . . .

John Boland was born in Birmingham, lives in east Sussex. An active worker for writers and journalists. Wrote the famous *League of Gentlemen*. Now engaged on a new novel.

Akpan Eyen Efik was called to the Bar in 1924, took a Cambridge degree in law and history (his grandfather was Chief Justice of the, then, Gold Coast). Edited various Nigerian newspapers. Lives near Lagos.

John Hynam has been writing for five years, has sold many stories and three television plays. Lives in Peterborough with his wife and 15-year-old daughter. Likes beer and Chinese food.

Bill Knox was born in Glasgow, 1928. Professional journalist, newspaperman and novelist. Appears on, and does frequent work for, Scottish TV. Has recently moved from Ayr to live in Glasgow.

Berkely Mather. Became famous with his television plays, and film writing. Lives and works in a house hidden near a quiet village half way between Battle and Burwash in Sussex.

Penelope Wallace, younger daughter of Edgar Wallace. Born London, lives Oxford. Married; has two children, and three Burmese cats (plus four small additions in May). Heads Tallis Press, and other enterprises.

TELL DAVID . . .

PENELOPE WALLACE

Unfamiliar turnings can be confusing, and lead to curious places

I HAD BEEN married nearly three years when I first met the Blessingtons.

On the previous evening Tony and I had had a blistering row; these days we always seemed to be having rows. He was everything in the world to me and I loved him wildly, jealously and possessively. Yesterday he'd stayed late at the office and the dinner I'd so carefully cooked was dry and tasteless by the time we sat down to eat it. I was upset and he was irritable and he told me that if I 'slaved over a hot stove' I was a fool; we had an 'au pair'—I could have a full-time cook if I liked—and I had only myself to blame. I tried to explain that I wanted to do everything for him myself—that the 'au pair' Yvonne had enough to do looking after young David . . .

So on this day I thought I'd take his advice. I left David with Yvonne and I drove over to Oxford and went to the cinema. The film was supposed to be a comedy but I suppose I wasn't in the mood for laughing. I nearly left at one stage, thinking that if I drove fast I'd be at home when Tony arrived; and then I thought that this was weakness and sat there wondering whether he was home yet, whether he was missing me, wishing he hadn't said those bitter things yesterday.

At last the programme ended and I made myself leave slowly—eight o'clock—I'd be home by nine, but perhaps Tony had been delayed at the office; I'd better have a meal first. I knew Oxford fairly well because Tony had been up at Oxford when I'd first met him—and I suppose, subconsciously, that was why I'd chosen to come here to the cinema, when there were many nearer to home.

I started to walk to a Chinese Restaurant where Tony and I had often dined after the cinema. As I walked along the wide, tree-lined

St. Giles, I remembered how often we had gone this way and how happy we had been and I suddenly realised what a fool I was being. I thought of phoning and then decided to collect the car and drive straight home, and tell Tony that he was right and I was wrong—and hope that he'd forgive me.

I collected the car and drove out towards Henley. I hate driving in the dark and outside Oxford it began to get misty; and then the mist cleared but I realized I wasn't on the right road—in fact it was more of a lane than a road. It began to rain; the drizzle turned into a downpour and I couldn't even see a house where I could ask my way.

I drove along slowly and then, suddenly, there it was—a house standing on its own on a slight rise. I couldn't see lights from the windows but there was a drive which swept under a big covered porch, lit by two concealed flood lights; so there might be someone at home and I wouldn't get wet finding out. I drove in and as the front door came into the lights from my car, two more floodlights came on and I saw a light from inside over the front door.

I got out of the car and looked for a bell—I was still looking when a voice from nowhere said, "Can I help you?" I replied that I had lost my way.

"Come in," said the voice and the front door opened.

For a moment I was scared—it seemed like something from a horror film—but then I saw the brightly lit comfortable hall and I felt reassured. I stepped in and, from an archway on my left, a girl came forward. She looked about eighteen and she had a warm and friendly smile:

"David's searching for his map gadget," she said. "Won't you come in and have some coffee while he finds it?"

I followed her through the archway and sat down. The room was simply furnished with low chunky leather chairs and sofas. The light seemed to come from the walls and I noticed that there were no curtains—it puzzled me.

"One way glass," explained the girl, as she poured coffee from the low table. I helped myself to cream and sugar.

"Isn't it dangerous?" I asked. "Letting people in just because they say they're lost—I mean, I might have had a gang of armed men with me."

She smiled and pointed at the big television screen which hung on one wall.:

"It's closed circuit TV," she explained. "The camera in the front porch is light and sound sensitive so we can see who is

outside before we open the door."

It really was a fantastic house, all these up-to-the-minute inventions and yet the shape of the room and the archways gave it almost a Roman appearance—a perfect blend of old and new styles. I was looking at a further arch in the wall facing the window, when a young man came through. For a moment he was silhouetted against the brighter light in the room beyond and I nearly dropped my cup of coffee because, for a moment, I thought it was Tony. Then he came further into the room and the illusion vanished. Tony was dark and neat and this boy was fair and untidy. It didn't surprise me to hear him say:

"Pat, I can't find the map gadget—I've looked everywhere."

He didn't look like Tony and yet his face did remind me of someone. I thought it was time I told them my name and where I wanted to get too; the room was so peaceful and they were so relaxed, I could have sat there for hours . . .

David unfolded a rather battered old map of the district and explained how to get back on the main Henley Road. I'm not too bright with maps and finally I wrote it down. 'First left; first left; first right; first right.' I put the note in my coat pocket, finished my coffee and started to leave.

"You don't live very far away," said Pat. "Please will you come and see us again?"

I said I would love to, imagining it to be the usual social politeness.

"What about tea?" she asked. "Today's Thursday; can you come on Monday?"

I told her I would love to. They opened the door and waved to me as I drove down the drive and turned left.

I found the way quite easily but I couldn't get Pat and David out of my mind. I couldn't imagine why they'd asked me back. I was about five years older than Pat and, for women, that's a lot —particularly when one is only eighteen or so. I didn't feel that she was just being polite; perhaps they'd recently moved into the district and didn't know anyone; or maybe it was just politeness or kindness. I could always phone them—but I couldn't because, at that time, I didn't know their surname and I'd no idea of their address.

When I got home it was nearly eleven. I told Tony what a fool I'd been the evening before and that I'd been a fool again to go to the cinema—but, for some reason, I didn't tell him about Pat and David.

The following Monday I set off on the road to Oxford—I'd noticed where I should turn off; first left, first left, first right, first right . . . and there I was again.

The house looked beautiful in the afternoon sunshine. I drove under the porch and this time Pat opened the door herself.

I followed her in and she explained that David would be back soon—he was fixing a friend's television. "He's terribly good with anything electrical," she told me.

And that, I thought, probably explains the gadgetry.

"I didn't realize he'd be at home," I told her. "I mean, I thought he'd be at work."

She looked surprised for a moment and then she replied: "Not on Mondays. They have a three day week."

Before I could comment, she asked me if I'd like to come upstairs and take off my coat.

I followed her up the shallow winding staircase. Again there were no doors; we went through an archway into the bedroom—again the low simple furniture and a big divan with a dark cover, and the same wall lighting.

"The bathroom's through there," said Pat. She waved at what I imagine was the only door in the house and I went in from curiosity as much as anything else.

Like the rest of the house, it was beautiful but functional and everything was greeny blue so that you felt you were in some deep sea cave.

I washed my hands and looked around for a towel: There wasn't one but, on the wall, a small rounded recess. I put my hands in and immediately warm scented air flowed around them. It was a sophisticated and more efficient version of the hand-driers I'd seen in some cloakrooms. In the corner was a rounded screen. I stood by it out of curiosity and, from this also, came the same warm air. Evidently for drying after the bath. It certainly cut down the laundry bills.

"It's a fascinating house," I told Pat as I followed her downstairs.

"I'm glad you like it."

And again I had this feeling that she wasn't being polite—she really was glad.

We sat down in the living room and I was just about to ask her whether David had fixed all the gadgets in the house, when he came in—grinning broadly and acompanied by an extraordinarily

beautiful girl.

"Hullo Anita. Has David fixed it?"

"Perfectly," said the girl. "He is brilliant."

Pat asked her if she'd stay for tea but she murmured something about Mother getting anxious, gave us all a beaming smile and went out through a glass door to the garden. We heard the sound of her car starting up.

"Nice girl," said David, sitting down.

"No comment," said Pat but she smiled at him as she went off to make the tea.

I knew how I'd have felt if Tony had been fixing television for a girl as pretty as that. I also knew that I was wrong and that Pat's attitude was right.

David was speaking:

"Ann . . "

I must have looked surprised . . .

"You don't mind being called Ann?"

I assured him that I didn't mind.

"Pat's a wonderful girl—you know, even these days, you get wives who are jealous; you don't always get the relationship we have."

I hadn't known that jealousy was supposed to be dying out and I was startled at his remarks—both of them seemed to speak from the heart without filtering their emotions through conventional channels.

"Some people have jealous natures," I told him and at that moment Pat came in with the tea.

David asked me whether I had any children. "Pat and I plan to have a baby next year," he went on.

I told him that I had one son, David like himself.

"What's he like?"

"Well, he's fair, like me and he'll be two next week."

"Two," David repeated it like an incantation. "I remember my second birthday—at least I don't suppose I actually remember it, probably I was told afterwards what happened—this." He held out his left thumb and I could see a faint scar running just below the knuckle. "Apparently I picked up the cake knife and cut my finger instead of the cake—my mother got quite hysterical. It was soon after that . . ."

Pat put her hand on his arm:

"Please David, don't."

David looked at her and took her hand from his arm. His

voice was curiously solemn:

" Ann and I were talking about jealousy," he told her, " and I've got to tell her—I've got to tell her that a person can lose everything they love, everything they value—just because they get jealous."

He turned to me.

"My mother adored my father, wildly, jealously and possessively and soon after my second birthday, she killed him—she thought he was in love with someone else. She killed them both—and before her trial she killed herself."

"How awful—and how awful for you. What happened to you?"

"There was a distant relation on my father's side. She looked after me and I took her name, Blessington." He gave me a crooked smile. "You see, Ann, why I hate jealousy."

I certainly did and I began to feel terribly depressed. It was horrible to know that this woman had felt as I had felt and had taken such a terrible and irrevocable step.

I was really quite happy to leave.

As I was going, David said a strange thing:

"I have my mother's photograph—she was very beautiful."

Pat took me upstairs to collect my coat.

"Don't let David depress you," she said. "Please come again, and why not bring your David—we'd love to see him."

★

But I never did take David there.

I spent the next ten days remembering what David Blessington had told me and trying *not* to nag and *not* to ask Tony why he was late and where he'd been; but it was terribly difficult because I just can't be detached: Anyway Tony was getting home earlier and he'd promised that, on the Friday which was David's birthday, he'd really be back soon after lunch so that we could all have a birthday tea together.

I'd iced the cake myself and put on the two candles and placed it on the dining room table. It was Yvonne's day off and I set the tea. Three o'clock came with no sign of Tony; at four o'clock I rang his office and they said he'd not returned since lunch and wasn't expected back that afternoon.

Young David started to shout for his tea so I took him into the dining room—we'd just have to have our birthday tea without

Tony.

I was just going to put David in his high chair when the phone rang. I ran into the hall. It must be Tony—it was.

"Ann—look I'm terribly sorry I got held up."

"I rang the office . . ."

"No, it wasn't that—I had lunch with Jane. You remember her—she's a second cousin."

I didn't remember. "When will you be here?" I asked him—and suddenly there was a terrible scream from the dining room.

"Come soon," I told Tony. "I've got to go, it's David," I put back the phone, and turned to the dining room. There was David standing in the doorway, clasping his thumb and blood streaming out. Oh God, I thought, the cake knife. I picked him up and carried him to the kitchen and held his thumb under the cold tap and saw how deep the cut was. I put a wet cloth on it, and carried him back to the telephone. I knew the doctor's number. He was at home. I told him what had happened and he promised to come straight over.

It seemed an eternity and I wished I hadn't hung up on Tony—if only he were here. David had stopped screaming but he was still sobbing and saying, "It hurts, Mummy."

At last the doctor arrived. He looked at David's thumb and dressed it telling him he was a good brave boy. Then I heard Tony's key in the lock and I told him what had happened and the doctor assured us that it would soon heal and there would only be a slight scar.

"A scar just below the knuckle on the left thumb . . ." I said.

I could see the doctor looking at me anxiously. I felt as if my mind was one of those one-armed bandits, and one wheel had just clicked into place. Through the spinning of the others I could faintly hear the doctor talking to Tony and Tony replying, "Actually I've invited my cousin Jane down for the night—she's dying to see David." Then he looked at me: "I hope you don't mind, Ann, I was trying to tell you on the phone."

I tried to concentrate and I asked him what cousin.

"Jane," he repeated "Jane Blessington . . ."

The wheels clicked into place and yet they were still turning in my brain, and all I could bear was the noise. I shut my eyes because there was so much I didn't want to see—

I can remember someone carrying me upstairs, and drawn curtains, and telling them about the scar and how little it showed. Then I was being told to 'drink this' . . . later I remember

opening my eyes and seeing a woman—she had a kind face.

"I'm Jane Blessington."

It was difficult to speak but I finally said it:

"Look after him—and give him that . . ." I pointed at the photograph of myself which stood on the dressing-table.

Jane tried to reassure me. She told me that Tony was fine and that I'd be better in a few days.

"Not Tony," I tried to explain. "David—tell him . . ."

But what could she tell him. I shut my eyes again. I think I slept and when I awoke, I tried to think. My mind seemed now like a frightened horse, always refusing that last jump.

I was vaguely conscious of Jane Blessington coming to say Good-bye, of the doctor giving me stuff to drink, of murmurs of 'delayed shock', of Tony, of Yvonne bringing me milk drinks... but I knew that I'd got to take that final jump and face up to what lay on the other side, however frightening it was, I'd got to face it; so I went over in my mind everything that had happened from the moment I'd lost my way from Oxford. I tried to remember everything that had been said—and particularly everything that David had said. I remembered again his last remark: 'I have my mother's photograph—she was very beautiful,' and it gave me the courage I needed to admit that, somehow in some strange way, I had lost myself not only in direction but also in time.

David Blessington was my David—his scar was the one caused by my David cutting his finger on his second birthday. The house, the gadgets, they were all of the future. I had not known—but David had. He'd known that my name had been his and he'd had my photograph. So when he talked of jealousy, he'd been warning me. When he'd told me that I'd killed Tony...No. That couldn't be the answer. I'd never kill my beloved Tony; it must have been just a dream, a kind of warning . . .

★

The next time Tony came up, I asked him to get my blue coat from the wardrobe.

"Is there a note in the pocket?" I asked.

He put his hand in and drew out a paper.

"What does it say?"

"First left, first left . . . it looks like directions."

"It is. Please give it to me."

He looked puzzled but he put it in my hand. I read it myself—

so it wasn't a dream; there were those simple directions which told the way from the Blessingtons' house to ours—and equally from our house to theirs.

"Please Tony, sit down, I've got to tell you something."

He sat on my bed and I told him everything.

I could see that he didn't believe a word...

"Ann, dear, you've been ill . . ."

"Then what about the note?"

"You could have written that at any time. Look, you said they had a telephone."

"Yes, I noticed it."

"Then we'll look in the telephone directory."

"They won't be in it."

Tony picked up the bedside extension and dialled Directory Enquiries. They had no Blessingtons in the district.

"You see?" he said.

"No," I told him, "I don't see. Don't you understand it was—oh I suppose nineteen-eighty-eight or nine, their number wouldn't be in this year's directory. Tony, you're not in love with anyone else are you?"

"No, I am not."

I could see that the question annoyed him.

"It may be a warning," I tried to explain "Maybe I can stop it happening. I do love you so much, Tony."

"I love you, too. Now you must get some sleep." He kissed me gently.

"Tony," I called after him. "That gun, please put it somewhere else. Don't keep it in the drawer—please, Tony."

He called out 'goodnight' and I turned off the light and tried to sleep. It looked as though I'd got to fight it alone out—I'd got to fight . . .

The next day I felt stronger—it was going to be all right. It was a warning and I was never going to be jealous again. I trusted Tony absolutely—I wasn't going to be possessive, either . . .

That evening the doctor said I could get out of bed and sit by the window. I sat by the window and watched the sun set, and I felt at peace.

The next day I was up for longer.

"Tomorrow you can come downstairs," the doctor promised.

I sat by the window and wished that Tony would come up. Then I tried walking about the room and I thought I would give him a surprise.

I went quietly down the stairs and into the living room. It was empty. I tried the dining room; he wasn't there but I could see light from under the kitchen door. He must be in there, cooking something special to surprise me.

I opened the door....

Tony was in the kitchen—and so was Yvonne—and he was kissing her. Kissing her with a passionate intensity. My Tony, my Tony—he wasn't mine any more. And I was standing right beside the desk where Tony kept his gun.

As I opened the drawer, half of me was praying that he'd done what I asked him and that he'd moved the gun—but he hadn't, and as I felt it cold in my hand, I was glad.

So little had he cared, I thought, as I raised the gun and fired—twice.

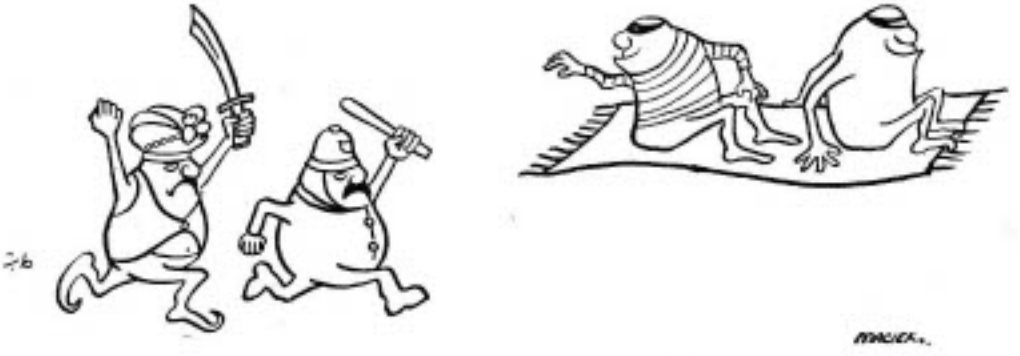
. . . Jane Blessington has taken David and she will get his name changed to hers. "But I won't pretend I'm his mother," she told me—she's very like Pat, the same serenity, I suppose that's why he chooses her for his wife.

The trial is next week.

I shall use my time wisely, for, as David said, his mother killed herself before the trial—

I had my chance and I didn't take it; yet perhaps I am fortunate, for I have no worry about David. I know that he will be happy, that he will be all that I could hope for and I know Pat will be a wonderful mother—to my grandchildren, and I know that she will never be jealous . . .

I know, too, that David has forgiven me—he said I was beautiful.



THE CARTOONIST AND THE CRIME WRITERS

LIONEL DAVIDSON

The Troubled Lady

BERKELY MATHER

The quick deal is always a reliable way of making an even quicker profit

ONLY JACKIE-JACKIE, the barman, smiled when Cronshaw came into Brady's out of the sunlight, and that was merely because Mrs. B. looked away long enough for him to get his slim, brown fingers into the cash drawer to palm two shilling bits. The others, even though Cronshaw held most of them in hock, pointedly ignored him. All except Blevins, that is, who had no reaction at all. Alone in his corner, he sat unmoving, hooded eyes blinking, as if by some ocular magic he could refill the empty glass in front of him. From the doorway, Cronshaw picked out the usual twenty or so who liked to gather here in the dark bar on hot Saturday afternoons—a couple of schooner skippers, three Fly River miners, some Jap divers from the pearling lugger anchored off the reef, a few fellows from the airport outside town, and Brannigan, the on-duty police sergeant, now hiding his stripes behind a Cascade beer ad on the end of the bar.

Cronshaw crossed the room and stood in front of Blevins. "Well? What did he say?" he asked.

"What would you expect him to say?"

"I'm asking *you*," said Cronshaw.

"Fine. I'd be delighted to tell you. He said you were the slimiest, lousiest, crookedest son of a pedigree lady dog that ever hit New Guinea, and that—"

"Wrap it up," Cronshaw snapped. "You know what I mean. About the contract?"

"He didn't say anything. He just signed it." Blevins drew a limp sheet of paper from the inner pocket of his sweat-blackened

duck jacket.

"Good," said Cronshaw, half-smiling as he read the contract. "Here's your fee for drawing it up." He dropped a crumpled pound note on the table.

"Even O'Reilly gets more than that for two hours' piano-playing at Madame Eileen's."

"Matter of supply and demand," Cronshaw explained. "O'Reilly's the best piano player on the island. You're only one of three disbarred lawyers."

Blevins let him get to the door before calling softly, "Sorry, Mr. Cronshaw . . ." Cronshaw waved a pudgy hand in magnanimous absolution. "My mistake," continued Blevins. "The client said your mother was a *non*-pedigree lady dog." Cronshaw went back out into the sun, glaring at the sound of laughter behind him, and Mrs. Brady let Blevins have two doubles on the house. Cronshaw —property owner, trader, moneylender—was very rich, very tight with it, and loved by no one.

He stopped when he saw the girl under the jacaranda tree. She was young and lovely, and she was talking to his clerk, Hun Ming.

"This Missee Archer," Hun Ming said. "Come long way. Want see you right away."

"So?" Cronshaw asked brusquely. The last film he had seen was a thirty-five-year oldie featuring Erich von Stroheim, and the image of the German actor had remained with him as worthy of emulation.

"I'm sorry," said the girl. "I know it's out of office hours, but your clerk said that I might possibly find you here."

"What's the trouble?"

"No trouble," the girl said, but Cronshaw, to whom stresses and strains and others were aces and kings, could tell there was. Her hands trembled, and she avoided his eye. "I believe you deal in jewellery?"

"Might and mightn't. All depends. You buying or selling?"

"Selling," she answered, producing a small morocco-leather case from an air-travel bag slung over her shoulder.

"Ah," said Cronshaw. "Bad time for selling. Prices down to hell for everything. But let's 'ave a squint at it."

She held the case out hesitantly, as if she were reluctant to let it go. He took it, snapped it open, and shrugged with elaborate indifference. "Hm, pretty little thing," he said. "Could be quite valuable—*if* it was genuine."

"Oh, but it is."

"Ah," said Cronshaw again. There was a lot of feeling in that "Ah." It said plainly that he was not a man to call a lady a stinking liar, even in the cut and thrust of commerce, but that there were limits to his credulity.

"But please," said the girl, clearly distressed. "I have the insurance valuation certificate and the receipt for it here." She handed him a long buff envelope.

Cronshaw fished two papers from inside and read aloud. "One Grafberg lady's bracelet-watch. Movement number 27544. Platinum. Set with sixty three diamonds, plus eleven rubies in clasp. Purchased from Sepstein and Greely, Bond Street, London, August eighth, 1962, by Eugene Farmer, Esquire . . ."

"My father," explained the girl.

". . . for the sum of six hundred and fifty pounds." He pursed his lips and cocked his pink head at her. "Hm, pity. No demand for this sort of stuff nowadays. Not in New Guinea, anyway."

"I see," whispered the girl. She held out her hand for the case. "I'm so sorry to have troubled you."

"That's what I'm here for," Cronshaw assured her expansively. "Might be able to do something for you, in spite of the market. Blimey, it's hot out here, though. Can I offer you a cool drink in Brady's?"

"That's very kind of you, but . . ."

He took her elbow. "Come on, Miss—?"

"Mrs.," she corrected him. "Archer."

"Brady's no place for a lady—sounds like a comic song, that, don't it?—but it's the nearest we have to a Ritz in Palangi." He steered her to a table at the secluded end of the verandah. "Don't think I've seen you here before."

"I've just come down from Fly River," she said.

"You don't look like a gold miner's wife to me."

"My husband's an engineer."

He nodded. "College-trained, diplomas and things. That's the way it goes nowadays. I remember when they used to go in with shovels and pan-rockers loaded on donkeys." His fingers beat a light tattoo on the tiny jewel case. "Still, to come back to biz. You want to get rid of this bit of nonsense, do you? What were you thinking of asking for it?"

She swallowed hard, and he could see she was screwing up her courage. "I was hoping for five hundred."

He shook his head sadly. "Sydney, now, or even Brisbane, different thing. Up here? Well, I ask you. I could be stuck with

it for years. Supply and demand, you see. Sorry, little lady."

"Then what . . . what could you offer?"

"I'd be taking a flyer if I went up to—well, even a couple of hundred."

"I quite understand. It was only an idea. Stupid of me . . ."

"You won't do better than that with anybody else," he said. "Comes to that, there ain't anybody else, not in Palangi."

She rose and reached for the case. "I'm sorry to have troubled you," she said, "but I must go now. I have to get back to the airport or I'll lose my refund."

"Refund?"

"Combined ticket," she said. "Air to Brisbane, P. and O. boat on to London. They'll only hold it until four o'clock."

"I *see*," said Cronshaw. "And you're a bit shy on the fare?"

She nodded, her lips compressed.

"What about your husband?"

"I'm not prepared to discuss that."

"Like that, eh? How much you short of?"

"Seventy pounds."

"You're lucky. I've got exactly a hundred in my wallet, and the bank is closed till Monday."

"I couldn't sell it for a hundred, but thank you all the same for being so patient, Mr. Cronshaw."

He looked reproachful. "You don't think I'm trying to beat you down, do you? I was offering to *lend* it to you."

"*Lend* it to me? But you don't even know me."

"Oh, strictly business, little lady. I'll charge you interest on it. You bet your life I will. Five percent, in fact. You can leave this with me for security, and I'll mail it to you as soon as you let me have the money back."

"Oh, Mr. Cronshaw . . ." Words failed her, and she turned away.

"Think nothing of it," he muttered, genuinely embarrassed. "If a fellow can't help out occasionally—well, what the hell?" He rose and patted her on the shoulder. "I'll get a little paper drawn up, just to put it on a proper footing. Won't take a couple of shakes. Just you sit there."

Blevins, comforted by the two free drinks from Mrs. B., was dozing in his corner. Cronshaw shook him.

"Wake up," he snapped. "I'm lending a Mrs. Archer one hundred pounds sterling at five percent on a Grafberg platinum, diamond and ruby bracelet ticker as per details in this receipt.

Knock that out in duplicate on Ma Brady's typewriter."

"Any terms?"

"Yuh, one month from date."

"That'll cost you two pounds, Cronshaw. Lot of trouble for a three-pound profit."

"That's got damn-all to do with you. Just get it down. And listen, I want the one month tucked away into the legalese so that it doesn't hit you straight in the eye when you read it."

"I don't get it."

"Dig the fluff out of your ears. What I mean is, if she pays me the sum of one hundred and five pounds any time within the next thirty-one days she gets her watch back. If she don't, it becomes my property."

"Nothing too big or small or dirty . . ." said Blevins, climbing to his feet.

"Get a move on," said Cronshaw. "The lady's got to catch a plane at four—then she's got five weeks on a slow boat ahead of her, poor little soul."

★

After Cronshaw had had his dinner, and checked the receipts at Madame Eileen's, at the pool hall, and at the twenty-four-hour poker game he ran in the coconut grove behind the Methodist mission, he dropped into Brady's again for a final drink. The company had grown, as had the volume of noise it was producing, and Mrs. Brady was looking anxiously at Sergeant Brannigan. With good reason. As Cronshaw came through the door, a schooner bosun took a swing at a beefy young stranger, in the process overturning a tableful of glasses and bottles onto the floor. At once, Sergeant Brannigan and Jackie-Jackie went into action, with nightstick and sawed-off billiard cue respectively, in an often-performed and highly perfected manoeuvre that, tonight, took only seven seconds longer than the all-time record of two and a quarter minutes. The sergeant delivered his statutory admonition on affrays and breaches of the peace after licensed drinking hours, shoved the grumbling crowd out into the night air, and departed.

Only three customers remained: Cronshaw, who was above the law; Blevins, who had slept through it all in his usual corner; and the young man who had been at the centre of the fight and who now grinned disarmingly at the others from the top of the piano.

Mrs. B. advanced on him with grim determination.

"Okay, you bastard," she snapped. "Pay up and get out."

"I'm not going anywhere, ma," the young man said mildly. "I've got a room here."

"Out!" she repeated. "And I'm holding your gear until you come back and settle for the damages and that last three rounds."

"I'll settle for it now if it'll make you happier," he answered. "How much?"

She ran her eyes round the bar-room like a radar scanner. "Fifty quid if it's a penny," she said without blushing.

He slid down off the piano, pulled a harvest of crumpled single and five-pound notes from the pocket of his khaki shorts, and tried unsuccessfully to count them out. Cronshaw, as a matter of instinct took over. "Sixty-four quid," he announced.

The young man smiled beatifically. "Well, that takes care of that. Help yourself, ma, and the balance'll see the next coupla rounds through. Join me in a jar, sir . . . and you, ma . . . an' the barman . . . oh, and the gent sleeping it off in the corner."..

Mrs. B. scooped up fifty pounds, stuffed them down the front of her dress, and then smacked her palms down on the counter. "Name it, mates." Blevins, eyes still half-closed, ghosted up beside them, homing to the sound of opening bottles. The young man raised his drink to the group.

"Me pals up there, and the little girl who waits down there," he toasted.

"What little girl?" Cronshaw asked.

"Don't start him off again, for God's sake," Mrs. B. said. "His intended. Miss Marylin Gunter of Marrickville, New South Wales. Been on about her all night."

"And why shouldn't I have been on about her all night?" the young man demanded belligerently, with a drunk's lightning change of mood. "Answer me that, you bloody old—"

"No vulgarity here, *if* you please," Mrs. B. said sternly. "If you can't keep proper control over your language you'll go out on your flamin' ear so damn fast that—"

"Miss Gunter of Marrickville," Cronshaw interposed tactfully. "Good women are to be prized above rubies."

"Pearls," corrected the young man.

"Or pearls," Cronshaw agreed.

"That's what I want," the young man said. "Put 'em straight round her li'l neck when I get off the plane in Mascot. A dirty, big string o' pearls. Three years she's been waiting for me down

there."

"You mean you want to buy some pearls?" Cronshaw asked, taking a deep breath.

"Three years, while I been toiling and moiling up there in those damn diggings, feeding on beans and bloody bananas until I made me pile."

"And now you're going to take her some pearls?" Cronshaw's eyes moistened. "Now, that's what I call really beautiful sentiment. How much was you thinking of going to?"

"What does that matter? You call it, I got it. Three years, I tell you, and there's been times when I nearly slung it in and went home empty-handed."

"Providence brought us together this night," Cronshaw said with feeling. "I'm in the business."

"Who the hell are you?"

"Cronshaw's the name."

"Bill Wybrow . . . and don't say 'rhymes with eyebrow' or I'll belt you one on the kisser. Nothing gets me madder than some silly idiot saying that. Have a drink."

"No, with me."

"I'm in the chair. Don't argue." He waved at Mrs. B. "Fill 'em all around. Doubles."

"Now, about these pearls, Bill. If you could give me some idea . . ."

"Big, big, big. Double string. Nice shiny diamond catch. Top-quality case with a silk lining."

"Ah, now, wait a minute. We deal in the raw material here, straight out of the ocean. I'd match 'em and size 'em, of course, but you'd have to have 'em pierced and strung in Sydney."

"No good. I want to lasso her with 'em as soon as I get off the plane. Don't want 'em rattling around in a dirty little canvas bag."

"Ah, but you don't understand—" Cronshaw began.

"Don't understand *what*?" Wybrow demanded. "You want to watch it, mate. Coming in here slinging your weight about. Who the hell do you think you are?"

Mrs. B. prudently scooped up the pound notes remaining on the counter and felt for the sawed-off billiard cue. Cronshaw smiled at her and shook his head.

"No, no, Bill. What I meant was . . ."

"And what *I* meant was, if you got what I'm looking for, I'll buy it. I could buy you and this joint as well, if I felt like it. If you

haven't got it, drink up and shut up and don't talk out of the back of your neck'"

"Of course, Bill," Cronshaw said soothingly. "No, I'm afraid I've got nothing ready made up. Not in the pearl line, but diamonds now, with a few rubies . . ." His fingers closed around the morocco case in his pocket.

"You talk too bloody much," Wybrow said, and yawned. " 'Nother drink?"

"This sort of thing, f'r'instance," Cronshaw said, and flicked the case open. The little bracelet-watch cast dancing facets of light onto the darkened rafters above.

"You talk too much with nothing to back it up." Wybrow stopped speaking, his eye caught by the sparkle, and leaned forward. "Wait a minute . . ."

"I couldn't let you have this, of course." Cronshaw said gently. "It's on order to a very wealthy Chinese shipowner—for his newest concubine—but it does serve to show you the type of stuff I handle. Nothing but the best."

"That's it," said Wybrow. "Why the hell didn't you show us this, instead of giving out all that blether about pearls? How much?"

"Sorry, Bill, I can't disclose that. On order, see?"

"I said how much?"

"Nothing doing," Cronshaw said. "I couldn't sell it."

"And for once the bastard's telling the truth," Blevins murmured, yelping as Cronshaw kicked hard at his ankle.

"Come on, gents," Mrs. B. said, yawning. "Last orders, please."

"How much do you want for the watch?" said Wybrow. He pulled out a cheque book.

"Can't you take no for an answer?" said Cronshaw, getting irritable. "Here, give it back. I have to go to the john, and I'm not going to leave this room without the watch."

"Don't you touch it. You're as drunk as a skunk. Probably drop it down the toilet or something."

"Now look, Bill," Cronshaw wailed, but to no effect. The other had the watch and was not giving it up. Cronshaw shrugged, shot Blevins a warning glance, and wandered out to the rear regions of the building. He returned ten minutes later, looking really worried. "Bill, let's be sensible. Old Ching Moy could make things pretty awkward for me."

"Who the hell's Ching Moy?" Wybrow asked.

"Fellow that ordered this. The Chinese shipowner. Wants it for his new concubine."

"Never heard of him. What's he paying?"

"A thousand pounds. Out of your class, Bill. Now be a good bloke and hand it back. I'll find some nice little thing in my stock—"

"What do you mean, out of my class?" Wybrow roared. "I could buy and sell any one—any *six*—of you jerks before breakfast, without feeling it. Give you eleven hundred."

Even Mrs. B. felt constrained to join in now. "Watch it, son," she said. Cronshaw shook his head, his hand still outstretched for the watch.

"Twelve," said Wybrow.

Cronshaw sighed. "You're making it damned hard for me, Bill," he said piteously. "Old Ching Moy could run me out of business for this. But, if you insist twelve hundred it is. You're witnesses, you others. I didn't want to sell it. I did my best to get it back. Gawd! Who'd be in business in a place like this?"

Wybrow's pen was poised over the chequebook. "I know me own mind," he said. "What's your full name?"

★

Wybrow looked like a sick man when he staggered into the bar the following morning. Mrs. B. regarded him without favour and mixed him a Dead-man-go-jump-up, a concoction of pawpaw juice, Worcestershire sauce, and gin in equal proportions, poured over cracked ice. It was the staple Sunday-morning breakfast of her establishment.

"What did you let me do it for?" he croaked.

Mrs. B. raised her eyes heavenward. "Wouldn't you know it?" she asked. "They pour it down their bleeding necks like the Niagara Falls, then come and hang it on *me* next morning."

"I'm not talking about the booze," Wybrow said. "I mean this damn watch."

"What about it?"

"I don't want it."

"You've got it."

"You can have it for a thousand."

Mrs. B.'s eyes narrowed. "You mean you're willing to drop two hundred in cold blood, just like that? Why?"

"Just don't like it, that's all. Come on, help a bloke out."

Mrs. B. shook her head. "Wouldn't touch it."

"Eight hundred."

"Why don't you take it back to Cronshaw and get your cheque off him?"

"That would be a climb-down," Wybrow said miserably. "I've got me pride. Five hundred. Come on, I'm checking out."

"No plane on Sunday."

"Going by schooner."

"Then you'll be wanting to settle your bill."

"Sure," said Wybrow, and produced his cheque book.

"Forty-three pounds ten and eight-pence," Mrs. B. told him, and added, "Cash, please. Rule of the house."

"Er, I'm a bit short of the ready."

"Wait here," she said, and disappeared quickly through the rear door.

Blevins was sleeping it off on the back verandah. She stirred him with her foot, and said grimly, "Better go and find that boss of yours. I think that fellow Wybrow's slipped him a rubber cheque."

"Fine," murmured Blevins. "I hope it bounces higher than Mount Everest."

"Well, *I* don't," she said. "Cronshaw holds the lease on this place. He could make it awkward for me."

Blevins sighed, climbed to his feet, and staggered through the blinding sun to Cronshaw's house. But he didn't find him, either there or in any other of his known haunts, and by mid-afternoon, Mrs. B. was getting very anxious. "There must be some way of holding Wybrow," she said to Blevins. "That damn schooner pulls out before sundown."

"You could swear out a warrant for your bill," he said, but she shook her head.

"He's raised it in cash," she said. "Come on, think of something. You're a lawyer, aren't you?"

"Ex," he answered. "No, there's no way of holding him if he wants to go. Other than Cronshaw having him pinched for obtaining goods by false pretences."

"Couldn't you do it for him?"

"Not bloody likely. He hasn't taken *me* for anything. Serves that fat crook right. Now, how about a drink? I've tramped my feet off around this darned town."

Cronshaw came into the bar shortly after ten the next morning

and greeted Mrs. B. and Blevins affably.

"Where the hell have you been?" Mrs. B. squawked.

"Up the reef, fishing with old Len Marsh. Why?"

"That bully boy slipped you a bad cheque. I'm sure of it. We've been looking for you everywhere."

"Glad you didn't find me," Cronshaw said. "A man needs a nice relaxing day sometimes. But what makes you think it was a bum cheque?"

"He tried to sell me the watch," Mrs. B. went on breathlessly. "Came down to five hundred."

"No sense of values," Cronshaw said sternly. "It's blokes like them Fly River fellows that inflates the market. Tch, tch. Fancy buying a nice little bit of nonsense like that for twelve hundred and trying to *give* it away for five. Oh, well, easy come, easy go's their motto, I suppose." He suddenly beamed. "But that cheque didn't bounce. It's just been paid into my account." Then he started to laugh. He laughed until the tears ran down his blubbery cheeks.

"Oh, blimey!" he gasped. "Oldest one in the book. A fellow hits town on a Saturday after the banks have closed, makes a splash, very free with the drinks. He buys something expensive from a local resident—pays by cheque—then later tries to sell it for a quarter of its value, knowing damn well that somebody will tip the mug off, and the mug will panic and have him pinched and slung in the clink over the weekend. Then on Monday the cheque is honoured, and the fellow has a lovely case against the mug for defamation of character and wrongful imprisonment. A jeweller in Bombay once got caught for fifteen thousand in damages that way. Can you imagine what a local jury would have carved *me* up for?"

"But, but . . ." stammered Mrs. B. "Everybody would know it was a trick."

"Of course they'd know, but that doesn't alter the law, does it, Blevins?"

" 'S'right," Blevins said. "You have a man wrongfully committed and you're wide open. But you still took one hell of a risk. The cheque might *not* have been honoured."

Cronshaw smiled again and dug Blevins in the ribs.

"Me? Take a risk?" He chuckled. "Not Mrs. Cronshaw's little boy. Why do you think I left the bar the other night? I phoned old Temperley, the bank manager—got him out of bed. He didn't like it, but he told me what I wanted to know. Sure,

Wybrow had opened an account with him on Saturday morning—fifteen hundred pounds—in cash. I was waiting on the doorstep when they opened this morning, before me laddo had a chance to stop payment."

"Talk of the devil," said Mrs. B., and looked past them toward the door. Wybrow was just entering. He grinned at Cronshaw.

"You win," he said. "No hard feelings, I hope?"

"Not a one in the world, boy," Cronshaw boomed.

"Then how about buying it back from me?" Wybrow said. "Reasonable profit to yourself, of course."

Cronshaw winked. "You keep it for the little lady—Miss Gunter of Marrickville. She'll love you for it." And he rolled out, bellowing and choking, the dejected Blevins following on his heels.

He was still laughing when he reached his office. He stopped when young Mrs. Archer rose from the chair in front of his desk.

"I missed the plane," she said timidly, "so I stayed at the Y.W.-C.A. hostel, and I had time to think. I'm going back to my husband to make a new start." She held out a sheaf of pound notes. "One hundred and five pounds, Mr. Cronshaw, and thank you so very much for your kindness. May I have my watch, please?"

Cronshaw, his mouth opening and closing soundlessly, mumbled something and pulled Blevins out onto the verandah. "What can she do?" he asked. "Blevins, you've got to help me. I've been a pretty good pal to you, one way and another."

Blevins stroked his chin pensively. "Largely depends on the jury, of course. They dislike you so much locally, don't they? Stealing while bailee—Police Offences Ordinance of the Territory of New Guinea. Possibly two years on conviction, with automatic deportation, of course."

"Get it back from him, get it back!" Cronshaw babbled. "I'll keep her here."

"Better let me have a blank cheque," Blevins said. Tears welling in his eyes, Cronshaw made one out.

It cost him twenty thousand, and, that afternoon, Mrs. Archer and Mr. Wybrow—Mrs. and Mrs. Archer-Wybrow, to be more exact—flew on to new pastures, taking Blevins, their newly appointed business manager, with them, and leaving behind Cronshaw, staring into space in the shade of the jacaranda tree.

EWMM TRUE CRIME CLASSIC

The MAN in the TRUNK

NIGEL MORLAND

A classic of medico-legal work which anticipated the Ruxton and Dobkin cases by well over half a century

THE SUMMER SUN was very hot over Provençe. A faint wind brought the river smell of the neighbouring Saône to blend with the hot harvest scents of the shimmering land. And in a small acacia wood near the tiny village of Irigny—close to Lyons—a road repair man named Denis Coffy was sitting down to his handkerchief-wrapped lunch. He was not, he said later, thinking of anything in particular. He was half-way through a mouthful of red wine when he lowered the bottle and sniffed at it.

It was certainly not the meal provided by Madame Coffy, but something unpleasant. He stared round, at the ring of trees, the untidy grass and the insects dancing from sunlight to shadow.

Denis Coffy should have returned to the road and his work, but he knew there was something really wrong. He decided, with the curiosity of the French peasant, to find the source of the smell. A few yards from where he had been sitting he found a large cloth-wrapped parcel. Coffy used the pocket knife with which he had been cutting his lunch to hack open the parcel. The contents sent him running towards Irigny and help.

The local police took charge immediately; more innured to horrors than the roadmender, they were, nevertheless, shocked at the contents of the parcel.

The Faculty of Medicine at Lyons had the grimmest task, for

there the body was rushed so that a hurried autopsy could be made.

The staff-man, a young doctor, ordered to examine the remains was able to reach certain obvious conclusions. It was impossible to decide any age; the body was male, and the hair and beard appeared to be dark brown or black. There was a gap in the centre of the front upper teeth, and the weight of the living man was assumed as having been somewhere around eleven stone. Beyond that it was not possible to go, though two decisive facts emerged and were noted: the unknown had been dead for the best part of a month and it was murder, by strangulation.

It was difficult to assess much more than this from the cadaver. The enquiry was largely routine and followed the usual channels proper to such matters. The police were given the findings and it was left to them to see what could be done.

In the meantime something was developing from an ancillary angle. A man, whose name has not survived, was wandering somewhere between Irigny and Millery, four days after Coffy's discovery in the acacia wood. The man was moving casually, with no thoughts outside his task—the very pleasant one of searching for the small edible snails which appeal so exquisitely to the critical Provençal palate.

He almost fell over the remains of a very large trunk, a lumpy wooden thing covered with oiled cloth and protected by laths secured by iron bosses—a very typical object used by travellers of those days. Superficial examination convinced the seeker for snails that this was no abandoned relic of some careless household. It bore dark stains he could only guess at, but its raised lid instantly gave out that same smell Coffy had noticed.

This time the police were deeply interested, and the first facts began to emerge. That the trunk had contained that wrapped body was not doubted, though how the two objects came to be separated was not pondered at the time. What was startling was a queer discrepancy: the Faculty of Medicine had told the police the body was perhaps a month dead, five weeks at the outside. The trunk bore a railway label showing the station from which it had been dispatched as Paris—the date of dispatch was the preceding year. In other words, the cadaver had been dead a few weeks, yet the trunk indicated it had been sent by rail no less than thirteen months previous to its discovery. This point was later cleared up as a railway clerk's dating error, but not before it had caused vast confusion.

The *Sûreté Lyonnaise* stepped in and as a start the wrecked trunk was confirmed as having contained human remains—certain rather grim factors showed those remains to be the same as Coffy's discovery—and, with that settled, the trunk was put in the hands of C.I.D. experts to rebuild so that it duplicated its original appearance.

The next thing was to find out just who had vanished recently bearing some resemblance to the bearded dead man. Almost immediately the files provided particulars of a Parisien solicitor named Gouffé, who had disappeared, but this, in itself, was not remarkable. It appeared that Gouffé was a respectable, honest, and respected middle-aged solicitor whose professional dealings with the world were above reproach.

But, away from his office, he was a veritable goat, an amorist of formidable qualities, given to prolonged absences regarding which he provided no explanations.

Lyons decided that it had Gouffé, and Paris was advised. Gouffé's brother-in-law—the solicitor was a widower—came to Lyons, in the company of a Parisian *inspecteur* who had known Gouffé, to identify the cadaver. They were taken to the morgue where every attempt had been made to preserve Gouffé's remains, no easy task in the heat. They took one look at the hair and beard and made an emphatic statement to the effect that it was certainly not Gouffé. The Lyons *Sûreté* did not want the cadaver and its problems left on its hands, once the formal inquest was over. Efforts were made to suggest that this must indeed be Gouffé.

The brother-in-law and the Parisien inspector were not to be moved, and, for some unknown reason, nobody thought of suggesting that Gouffé, perhaps, on one of his amorous adventures, might have dyed his hair from its true colour, which was auburn, to that on the cadaver. It is possible the would-be identifiers had not sufficient imagination to see any resemblance to Gouffé in the remains.

Both men returned to Paris, then, with all the surprise of a plot twist in a good detective story, the *juge d'instruction* in Lyons, who was in charge of the investigation, turned up a new and sensational piece of evidence. A coach driver named Laforge had been boasting over his liquor in public taverns that on 4 July he had driven three young men and a large trunk to Millery.

Laforge was hurriedly fetched by law enforcement officers and shown the rebuilt trunk. He positively identified it as the one

he had carried on that July day.

This created a furore. The newspapers made the most of it, devoting whole columns to interviews with the coach driver who of course, was instantly summoned before the *juge d'instruction* and ordered to tell his tale in full.

Laforge gave a colourful but apparently precise account of the three young men he had driven in his *fiacre*. He described them individually and well, excellent *portraits parlé* on which the police could work.

Excitement rose abruptly with Laforge's statement. The newspapers broadcast his tale and even sketches of the trunk until, infected by the uproar in Lyons, foreign newspapers picked up the story. Laforge was a hero, but the adulation he received was nothing to the new sensation when it was found the three young men were already in the hands of the police.

They were implicated in a murder case that had nothing to do with the trunk murder. Laforge was rushed to the police station where the trio was held. The three young men paraded in charge of their warders.

Laforge settled it then and there. " They are the guilty ones !"

The newspapers were cock-a-hoop with excitement. The problem had been solved. The case of the bloody trunk had nothing whatsoever to do with the missing Gouffé. Admitted the parcelled body was not identified, and Gouffé could not be found but that, after all, was a worry that belonged to Paris, not Lyons. Most important of all, the Millery murderers were held, identified by an assured witness.

The Lyons *juge d'instruction* was naturally pleased that Laforge's statement had advanced the case, until a very disturbing factor emerged. It was one of those minor details a less diligent man might have overlooked in a mass of material before him. It was no more than an item of news from the police at Millery.

★

Laforge was ordered to attend the *juge d'instruction*, which he did, to find himself being taken through his entire statement. So far this was straightforward and Laforge retailed his evidence all over again, unaware that the grimness on the examiner's face was due to a very odd contradiction.

' Laforge, one would wish to be enlightened. Is it or is it not true that on the day you state you drove these three men to

Millery, you did not have your *fiacre*?'

He blustered and protested. Then, he admitted, perhaps in the excitement he may have made a small error in the date, a tiny error.

The *juge d'instruction's* expression held all the chill implacability of disinterested justice when he told Laforge that on the material date he did not have his driving permit, that it had been officially taken from him. More: *had* he driven the three accused in his *fiacre* on that or *any other* date?

'It is, perhaps, one exaggerates but a small trifle . . . it is pleasant to receive public adulation . . .' Laforge obviously tried to charm a smile from the examiner. He did not succeed. Reluctantly, hesitantly, and then with shameless frankness he told the whole story.

The newspapers had an even bigger sensation for their readers this time. Laforge had lied from beginning to end. Not one fraction of his admission was true. He knew about the three held for murder, had seen them, and brought them in as the vital part of his circumstantial tale.

That he was at once thrown into prison for what he had done was some consolation to the misled public. What had happened was the tragic waste of time. The detectives were disheartened at such ill luck, for there is nothing quite so difficult as a trail that has been permitted to grow cold because officialdom has pursued a wrong lead and must return to the original set of clues again.

The Paris police had not been idle. Their search into Gouffé's life had been vigorous and painstaking. People with whom the solicitor associated, both respectable and disreputable—there were quite a number of the latter—were carefully checked and even re-checked. There was one small clue which could scarcely be dignified by such a name—indeed, the Paris C.I.D. looked on it as a minor coincidence. This was the disappearance of a bearded adventurer named Michael Eyraud and Gabrielle Bompard, his mistress. The pair had been associated with Gouffé. That they vanished at the same time could not be regarded seriously, though, indeed, the Paris C.I.D. began to probe in case the pair might have suffered Gouffé's presumed fate.

An impasse had been reached in Lyons. It was impossible to move another step in any direction. Every lead had been followed; everything possible had been done. When the *Sûreté* re-examined the whole case it was realised, with very considerable

dismay, that it was not much beyond its original position as when Denis Coffy arrived with the news of the unknown and still unknown body in the parcel.

Since the police could do nothing, the *juge d'instruction* decided he would call on science to attempt the impossible.

The initial examination of the body had been made by the doctor on duty at the Faculty. He was neither good nor bad, a reliable workman who had naturally done his best with what was, after all, a most uncompromisingly decayed corpse. That had been some time before. Refrigeration towards the end of the nineteenth century had by no means reached anything near modern standards. It meant that somebody would have to achieve the literally impossible with something that had been in bad condition when it was first examined: now it would be almost beyond recognition.

They called on a great man to tackle this job, Professor Alexandre Lacassagne of Lyons, a giant among medical jurists who was fond of saying an autopsy that had been badly done could not be done again. It was this scientist who was being asked to go against his own principles and, worse, correctly assemble a human jigsaw.

When he came into the autopsy room at the Faculty of Medicine he was dazed at what he had to work on. It was no longer even remotely human.

Once he had made his preparations and was ready to start Lacassagne commenced on what became a classic of its kind. He has told the story (*L'Affaire Gouffé*, by J. A. E. Lacassagne, Lyons, 1891) and those who have a taste for the dry but intensely dramatic factualities of science should read it.

The height had to be determined, and from those bones it was possible to be uncannily accurate. He was able to state that the height was 1.785 metres. From the bone structure, the probable corpulence and the estimated height, a figure of 80 kilos was settled at the probable weight of the corpse when living.

The going became more exacting. The condition of the hair and teeth, and the ossification of the bones, had to be considered in arriving at the approximate age of the man at the time of his death. Lacassagne decided, on his evidence, that fifty years old was correct.

He washed the hair and beard and found them to be not black or dark, as it was initially assumed, but auburn. A microscope check easily enabled a decision to be reached that the hair and

beard had been dyed.

But the skeleton, that uninhibited witness, had by no means been discarded. Dr. Gabriel Mondan was called in. A specialist in bone diseases and lesions, he collaborated with the professor in disinterring more facts. It was shown that the dead man had dragged his right leg when he walked because of a slight shortening due to an old tubercular lesion of the ankle. He had suffered from synovitis of the right knee and in the big toe of the same foot he had once had a touch of gout. The skull showed the gap in the middle teeth, of course, and the first upper right molar was missing. Naturally, the obvious measurements like that of the cranium and so on were noted.

There remained only one thing to be done with all that carefully accumulated evidence and that was what to make of it. The conclusion was definite as the evidence was blinding: It was Gouffé.

Consider this *portrait parle* of Gouffé against what Lacassagne had determined. The solicitor was forty-nine years old; he weighed 80 kilos; he was 1.78 metres in height; he had auburn hair; he had injured his right heel during adolescence; his right leg was a trifle shorter than the left; he had suffered from fluid on the knee; a right toe had caused him pain through an attack of gouty rheumatism; his incisors were wide apart and one upper right molar was missing. Finally, the measurements of the hair from the cadaver matched in exact diameter the hairs taken from Gouffé's comb. His hatmaker provided his cranial measurements, which were exactly as those obtained from the corpse. It might be said that anybody would have washed the hair of the corpse and discovered its true colour. The point is, nobody did it until Lacassagne dealt with the matter.

★

The investigation had been led astray, had been blocked by one misfortune after another, and might have remained in its impasse, but now Professor Lacassagne had spoken.

The inquest was resumed and the police brought their resources to bear on solving the problem.

The beginning of the Gouffé case properly begins with a young woman from Lille by the name of Gabrielle Bompard. Her photograph shows her to be a very typical middle-class French woman with a hard mouth, and the smirking expression of one

convinced she was beautiful, and dangerous to men.

She was regarded as something of a beauty in Lille, where young men may not have fought one another for her favours (she bestowed them too readily), but they certainly vied with rivals to gain them. The heady wine of adulation soon went to Gabrielle Bompard's head, which meant Lille was too small for her.

She came to Paris fully prepared to conquer. She was still barely twenty-two when she arrived there, but with all her sophistication, which had so shocked Lille, she found it hard to cope with the efficient harpies of Paris. It is probable that she had an extremely rough time in her early days there; her experiences certainly toughened her outlook, replacing a wanton morality with a genuine tendency towards evil.

It is curious how unfailingly like attracts like. Michael Eyraud's meeting with Gabrielle Bompard was no more than an incident, normally not worth recording: the results were tragedy, and a very considerable call on the purse of the Republic.

The pair got along excellently; Eyraud acquired a mistress who appealed to his tastes, and who saw eye to eye with him in an outlook completely devoted to Eyraud.

He was not interested in the lawful acquisition of money, and living off Bompard's earnings did not appeal to him, not because she was unwilling, it would seem, but the process was too slow. He wanted money quickly, in quantity, and he had no scruples about going after it.

He saw that his Gabrielle's looks had a curious quality of appeal for middle-aged men, who regarded themselves as blasé amorists. This field, properly exploited, might yield some excellent pickings; it was therefore worth while surveying it with care.

Eyraud knew his countrymen extremely well and he was anything but a fool. He realised that Gabrielle Bompard had not the necessary extra qualities to make even the most besotted amorist throw his purse over the moon.

Therefore if money was to be gained, it had to be taken by force from an owner who could do nothing to prevent it. Since the would-be wrongdoer begins to lose his horror of murder when substantial financial rewards are waiting, Eyraud faced up to the position.

There is no indication of when or how he enlightened Bompard on what were, perhaps, no more than vague ideas in his own

mind. What is clear is Gabrielle Bompard's ready acceptance of murder. She did not seem at all alarmed or disturbed by such a crime: she was prepared to do her part; perhaps—again we can only surmise—take an active part in it.

Among Gabrielle's acquaintances Eyraud chose a middle-aged widower who had courted her for some time. He had not pressed his suit with great fervour, for, being an experienced amorist, he could wait. But he was always there, on the sidelines, a man named Gouffé.

So Eyraud investigated Gouffé and liked what he found. Here was a solicitor in a quiet way of business, a man who fancied himself as a demon lover and who kept considerable sums of money in his office.

The willing Gabrielle was told to encourage Gouffé, to arouse his interest, which she undertook with enjoyment.

At the time Eyraud had some capital and spent it willingly in furthering his plan. One of the first things in the plan was a suitable apartment for Gabrielle. They found a quiet street in Paris, the Rue Tronson-Ducoudry, where a room was chosen. On the ground floor, it contained an alcove in which the bed stood, hidden, in the daytime, by curtains which could be drawn across. In front of this alcove was a comfortable settee, the other furniture being reasonably good.

Gouffé was encouraged according to the rules of the game. Gabrielle made them quite clear, and Gouffé, the old hand, though he knew what he was supposed to know.

Eyraud saw the way things progressed. He decided on the climax and to that end he made the next move in his elaborate plans—somewhat heavy-handed and clumsy though no doubt a cautious move in his eyes. He took Gabrielle with him to London to buy a trunk. They crossed the Channel—leaving a trail as wide as a street—to visit a chance-chosen shop by the name of Schwartiger, in Euston Road, to buy this trunk, take it back to Paris and hide it at the back of the building where Gabrielle Bompard lived.

Then the last scene was set. Gabrielle invited Gouffé to visit her apartment. It was to be very circumspect; it was also the first time Gouffé had been invited.

The mind of the murderer is baffling because it is composed equally of stupidity and blindness. Here was Eyraud, perfectly prepared to slaughter an innocent solicitor for his loose wealth, whatever it might be. Gabrielle Bompard saw nothing wrong with the plan and helped him, even to that journey to London to

buy a trunk and lay a false trail.

Everything was ready in Gabrielle's apartment. Eyraud rigged up a pulley which he attached to the ceiling behind the curtain separating the bed alcove from the room. The rope hung down (a simple hook at one end, concealed by the folds of the curtain), so that it was close to the back of the settee. The other end of the rope, threaded through the pulley, hung to the level of Gabrielle's bed. When everything was ready Eyraud squatted on the bed gripping the rope, hidden.

A knock on the door brought Gouffé, smart, suave, and very pleased with himself. Gabrielle brought wines and biscuits, and they both enjoyed them. Gouffé was at the top of his form, full of compliments, almost in an excessive state of *gaieté de coeur*, and scintillating as only the amorist at the peak of his intentions can be.

He drank well and enjoyed the wine. Possibly at Gabrielle's gesture he made himself easy on the settee and that she should sit on his knee was automatic. The game was going strictly according to the rules. As a little joke she slipped the cord from her gown, putting it round Gouffé's neck, threading it deftly like a man's necktie.

Eyraud moved as Gabrielle flung herself aside: Gouffé would barely have understood that she had moved away before Eyraud jerked the hook under the cord, leaned his weight on the rope's slack end, and Gouffé strangled without a cry.

The pair had committed their crime. They lowered the body and loosened the cord. Eyraud searched the dead man's clothes, taking his gold watch, a handful of francs and, most important of all, his bunch of keys. The body was stripped, laid on the settee and covered with a cloth.

Eyraud returned to his own room that night while Gabrielle Bombard slept soundly and well, three feet from the unfortunate Gouffé. On the following day Gouffé was crammed into the trunk, then placed in a cab and thence to the station and to the Lyons district where, in the place it was found, the body was turned out of the trunk and left in the acacia wood to await Denis Coffy, the roadmender. The trunk was thrown away a short distance farther on.

The pair fled back to Paris and their reward in Gouffé's office in the Rue Montmartre. Eyraud went there alone, armed with the bunch of keys, but was entirely unable to open Gouffé's safe. He tried every trick he knew, when the keys failed him. It was useless. He gave it up, leaving the office in a state of despair, not dreaming

that Gouffé had secreted a considerable roll of banknotes in a plain cardboard box that was in full view all the time.

All the pair had were the gains from the dead man's pockets. Their planning, their patience and their undoubtedly heavy expenses had only this meagre result.

They lost their heads and, with the last of their money fled to the United States.

Eyraud with flight had suddenly got firmly hold of the principle of *suave qui peut;* He left his mistress and fled on toward South America and greater safety.

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In Lyons the problem of Gouffé's body had progressed through its difficult stages, then, with the false trails charted correctly, luck ran toward the police. With the widespread newspaper publicity, a drawing of the reconstructed trunk brought information from London and descriptions of a man and woman of French origin as the purchasers. It was seen that Eyraud and Bompard, who vanished around the time of Gouffé's disappearance, were more than mere ciphers. The hunt began.

Gabrielle Bompard either resolved things in her own mind by deciding that Eyraud was the criminal and she was free to do as she chose, or, more than likely, she wanted Paris again and thought that if she denounced Eyraud she would be forgiven. She made herself agreeable to a man who was an easy victim of her charm. With him she returned to Paris, convinced the police were no more than men and where men were concerned, Gabrielle Bompard was irresistible.

The police did not share this point of view. They swooped on her almost the very moment of her arrival in Paris; she went to wait in all the miseries of a French prison cell until Eyraud could be found.

He was found some time later, lurking in Cuba, a foolish place for a wanted man to go since the island was seething with revolt and suspicion. Every stranger was suspect and Eyraud was swiftly discovered and put under arrest.

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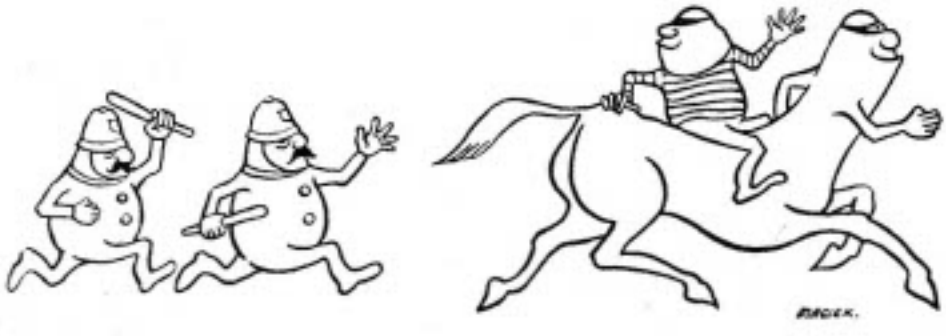
The trial before the Paris Assize Court in December, 1890 attracted as much attention and excitement as the hunt itself.

Eyraud did not hesitate to put the whole blame on Gabrielle Bompard. She promptly deluged him with a storm of denunciations at which a woman of her type and class is usually adept. The vituperative uproar must have made a great deal of impression on the court, for Bompard was found guilty of murder in extenuating circumstances. She got away with twenty years' hard labour.

Eyraud was unlucky; he was condemned to the knife which Bompard escaped. His behaviour in court was unpleasant, something that did not improve as time marched towards the day of his final punishment. There was every reason to expect it would be a shocking execution at which everyone's nerves would be shredded.

But, to general surprise, it was not like that at all. The morning was neither warm nor comforting when Eyraud was woken in his last hour at the Roquette Prison. He was no longer difficult and the antagonism seemed to have drained out of him; he was even courteous and gentle with his captors. Above all, when the executioner arrived, had made his preparations and finally saw Eyraud, he uttered that time-honoured formula (which more than once, has been received very differently): '. . . *le moment d'être courageux est arrivé*' the admonition was taken at face value. Michael Eyraud was calm of demeanour, his face unafraid and he was captain of himself. More, he died like a man.

Gabrielle Bompard left prison unbowed—the tough, able and resilient Gabrielle Bompard. She was going to show the whole world how she had been wronged. With typical verve and audacity she got down to the task of writing, pouring out everything in memoirs, thousands of words about nothing at all, constantly repeated. That is all there is of Gabrielle Bompard. Where she went and what happened to her will probably never be known in detail.



THE GREAT GUINEA-PIG MYSTERY

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

This intriguing story from Eden Phillpott's (1862-1960) The Human Boy *series is not only a schoolday gem, but an adroit whodunit in the best Baker Street tradition*

BEING FROM THE FIRST the chum and friend of Peters, I can tell about his curious ways better than anybody. In fact, we shared our pocket money, which is always a great sign of friendship; and it was understood that if ever I get into trouble when I grow up, and am accused of murder or forgery, or anything like that, which does often happen to the most innocent people, Peters is going to give up anything he may be doing at the time, and devote his life to proving me not guilty.

I remember well the day he came. I was in the big schoolroom at the fire, roasting chestnuts and talking to Gideon; and Westcliffe and Fowle were also there. The Doctor came in with a new boy and said:

"Ah! There are some of the fellows by the fire, Peters."

Then he called out to Westcliffe and me, and said:

"Westcliffe and Maydew, this is Peters. Make him welcome, and if there are chestnuts going, as I suspect, share them with him."

Then the Doctor went off to have some final jaw with the mother of Peters; and Peters came down the room and said, "Good evening!" in a very civil and quiet tone of voice.

He was thin and dark, and when he warmed his hands at the fire, it was easy to see the light through them. He also had a pin in his

tie in the shape of a human skull, about as big as a filbert nut, with imitation ruby eyes.

We asked him who he was, and he said he came from Surrey, that his father had been a soldier, but was unfortunately dead. His name was Vincent Peters.

Then Westcliffe, who is a silly ass, and only in the lower fifth, though quite old, asked Peters the footling question he always asks every new boy.

He said: "Would you rather be a greater fool than you look, or look a greater fool than you are?"

Of course, whatever you answer, you must be scored off. But young Peters seemed to know it. Anyway, instead of answering the question, he asked another. He said:

"Would you rather be uglier than you look, or look uglier than you are?"

Gideon was interested at this, because it showed at once Peters must be a cool hand.

"What are you going to be?" Gideon asked; and then came out the startling fact that Peters hoped to be a detective of crime.

"If you go detecting anything here, you'll get your head punched," said Westcliffe.

"I may or I may not," answered Peters. "But it's rather useful sometimes to have a chap in a school who has made a study of detecting things."

"You can begin tonight, if you like," I said, "because Johnson major's bat was found to have seven tacks hammered into it last week, when he took it out of the case to give it a drop more oil; and if you find out who did that, I've no doubt that Johnson major will be a good friend to you— him being in the sixth and captain of the first eleven at cricket."

"I don't know enough about things yet," answered Peters. "Besides, you have to be sure of your ground. In detecting, you may make friends, or you may not; but you will make enemies, to a dead certainty. In fact, that's the drawback to detecting. Look at Sherlock Holmes."

"That's only a yarn," said Gideon.

But Peters wouldn't allow this. He evidently felt very deeply about Sherlock Holmes.

"He is founded on fact—in fact, founded on thousands of solemn facts," said Peters. "The things he does are all founded on real crimes, and if anybody is going to be a detective, he can't do better than try to be like Sherlock Holmes in every possible way."

The tea-bell rang about this time, and Peters sat next to me and told me a good deal more. He said he was very thankful that he was thin, like Holmes, and wiry, and had a beak-like nose. He asked me if he had piercing eyes; and I could honestly say that they were pretty piercing. Then he brought out a picture of Sherlock Holmes, which he always carried, and showed me that, with luck, when he grew up, he ought really to be very much indeed like the great Holmes.

He was learning to play the violin also—not because he liked it, but because of the importance of doing it in moments of terrible difficulty. He said that it soothes the brain and helps it to do its work—but not so much while you're learning. He said that after he had thoroughly mastered one of the favourite pieces of Holmes's, he should be satisfied, as there would never be any occasion for him to play more than one piece.

Chaps like Peters fare very well. He was a good football player, and very good at outside right. He was fast, and told me that speed often made all the difference to the success of a criminal case. Pure sprinting had many a time made all the difference to Holmes. Peters didn't know much in the way of learning, but he dearly liked to get hold of a newspaper and read the crimes. He didn't find out about Johnson major's bat, however; but he said it wasn't a fair test, because he never heard clearly all that went before the crime. A few small detections he made with great ease, and found the half-crown that Mathers had lost in the playground. This he did by cross-questioning Mathers, and making him bring back to his mind the smallest details; and then Mathers remembered turning head over heels while only touching the ground with one hand, to show how it could be done. And on the exact spot, in some long grass at the top of the playground where he had performed this feat, there was the half-crown. Mathers offered Peters sixpence on the spot, but Peters said it was nothing, and wouldn't take any reward.

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He generally knew by the mud on your boots which of the walks you had been on, and he always could tell which of the masters was taking prep before he went into the room, by the sounds or silence. He also had a very curious way of prophesying by certain signs if the Doctor was in a good temper or a bad one. He always knew this long before anybody else, and it was a very useful thing

to know, naturally.

But Peters did not really do much till his own guinea pig was found dead in its lair, about halfway through his second term at Merivale. He did not care for animals in a general way, excepting as they helped to throw light on crime; which, it seems, they are very much in the habit of doing, though not intentionally. But this particular guinea pig was far from a common creature, being a prize Angora, and having been given to Peters during the Christmas holidays by a friend of his dead father. It had long hair, and looked far more like one of those whacking chrysanthemums you see than a guinea pig. It was black and yellow, and had a round nose like a rabbit, and seemed so trusting and friendly that everybody liked it. One other boy—namely, James—had a guinea pig also, because these were the days before we took to keeping lizards and other things in our desks—which were discovered by a dormouse of mine coming up through the inkpot hole in my desk under the Doctor's nose, and so giving itself away. And though James's pig was a good white one, with a black patch on his right side and one little dab of yellow fur where his tail would have been if he had had one, yet, compared to Peter's guinea pig, he was nothing. James, however, didn't mind the loss of admiration for his pig, and he offered Peters to let the pigs live together, which would be better for both of them, because a guinea pig is the most sociable thing in Nature, and is known to pine, and even die, if kept in single captivity. But Peters had a secret fear that James's pig was not sound in its health. He told me that he had made a most searching examination of James's pig, and discovered a spot of pink skin on its chest. He said it might be nothing, but, on the other hand, it might be some infectious disease. Also, James's pig was inclined to go bald; so he thanked James very much, and said he thought that if the pigs saw each other through the bars from time to time, it would be all they wanted to brace them up and cheer them. But he thought, upon the whole, they had better not meet

James didn't like this. He was rather a rum chap in many ways, but very good at grammar and chemistry; and he had invented a way of cribbing, while a master was actually in the room, that many copied afterwards. James got rather rude about Peters's guinea pig, and seemed to think in some way that it was the pig, and not Peters, that had decided not to live with his pig.

He said one day, when looking at the champion pig: "I suppose the little beast thinks it's too big a swell to live with my honest, short-haired pig. All the same, if they had a fight, I know which

would jolly well win."

"So do I," said Peters. "If a race horse had a fight with a cart horse, the cart horse would win. This is not a prizefighting pig."

Bray was there and said the same. He, of course, understood all about prizefighting, owing to his brother being runner-up in the middle-weights at the amateur championship of the Army; and he said that if these pigs fought, the superior weight of James's pig behind the shoulder would soon settle it. Besides, of course, the other one's hair streamed all over it like a Skye terrier's. You could see at a glance that it was never born to be a fighter.

"However, if you want a fight," said Peters, who was always cool and polite, owing to copying Sherlock Holmes, "if you want a fight, James, I can oblige you."

They were both fourteen and a half, and James was a lot fatter, but not so tall as Peters.

"No," said James, "I don't want to fight. I didn't mean anything of the sort."

"I may be able to get you a guinea pig like mine next holidays," said Peters. "If I can, I will."

"I don't want it," said James. "I don't care about these guinea pigs that look like penwipers gone mad. I'd rather have mine."

This, of course, was mean and paltry jealousy, and we rotted James till we rather got his wool off.

A week afterwards the champion pig was found dead on its back, with its paws in the air and its eyes open. They had a look of fright in them; and it was very interesting indeed, this happening to Peters, because it would be sure to show if his detective powers were really worth talking about.

Of course everybody said it must be James, and James said, and also swore, that it was not.

Peters told me privately that he was trying to keep a perfectly open mind. He said there were many difficulties in his way, because in the event of a human being dying, you always have a post-mortem, followed by an inquest; whereas, with a mere guinea pig, belonging to a boy in a school, there is not enough publicity. He said that up to a certain point publicity is good, and beyond that point it is bad. Sherlock Holmes always set his face against publicity until he'd found out the secret. Then he liked everybody to know it, though often not until the last paragraph of the story. That showed his frightful cleverness.

I said: "I suppose you will ask yourself: 'What would Holmes

do if one evening, while he was sitting improving Watson, there suddenly appeared before him a boy with a dead guinea pig?' "

And Peters said: "No. Because a guinea pig in itself would not be enough to set the great brain of Holmes working. If there were several mysterious murders about, or if some dark and deadly thing had occurred, and Holmes, on taking the pig into his hand and looking at it through his magnifying glass, suddenly discovered on the pig some astounding clue to another fearful crime, then he would bring his great brain to work upon the pig; but merely as a guinea pig suddenly found dead, it would not interest him. In my case it's different. The pig was a good deal to me; and this death will get round to the man who gave me the creature. He'll be sure to think I've starved it, and very likely turn from me, and being my godfather, that would be jolly serious. In fact, there are several reasons why I ought to find out who has done this, if I can."

I said: "It may be Fate. It may have died naturally."

He admitted this. He said: "That's where a post-mortem would come in, if it was a human being. Of course, Holmes never did post-mortems himself; but I've got to make one now. It may or may not help me."

He made it, and it didn't help him. My own opinion is, he didn't much like it and hurried it a good deal. He said there was no actual sign of violence on the surface of the guinea pig, and the organs all seemed perfectly healthy. But when I asked him what they would have looked like if they hadn't been healthy, he avoided answering, and went on that the pig's insides ought to have been sent up to Somerset House for examination by Government officials, in a hermetically sealed bottle. Peters rather believed that the public has a right to demand this service for the stomachs of friends if foul play is suspected; but not in the case of a domestic beast like a guinea pig.

So the pig was buried, and not until then did Peters really seem to set to work. The actual horror of the death gradually wore off, and he told me that he should now seriously tackle the case.

There was a most unusual lack of clues, he said; and he pointed out that even Sherlock Holmes could do nothing much until clues began to turn up. Peters warned me against always taking it for granted that James had done it. In fact, he said it was very unlikely to have been James, just because it looked so likely.

I said: "That may be the way Sherlock Holmes talks; but it seems to me to be rather footle."

And he said: "No, Maydew; it isn't footle; it is based on a study of the law of probabilities. If you read accounts of crime, you will see that, as a rule, the person who is suspected is innocent; and the more he is suspected, the more innocent he is."

I said: "Anyway, James has changed. He's gone down four places in his class, and lost his place in the second footer eleven also. There's something on his mind."

"Yes," said Peters, "that's true. Everybody believes that he killed a valuable guinea pig, and treats him accordingly. That is quite enough to send him down four places in the class; but if he had killed the guinea pig, he would have brazened it out and have been prepared for this, and taken very good care not to show what he felt."

"In fact, you don't think he killed the pig," I said.

Peters said he didn't think James had; but he was keeping an open mind.

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Then came the most extraordinary clue of the ten-shilling piece. Happening to go to his desk one day for toffee, Peters found in it a bit of paper tightly screwed up. He opened it and discovered in it no less than a gold ten-shilling piece; and on the paper, printed in lead pencil, were these words.

FOR ANUTHER GINNEA PIG

He said nothing to anybody but me—he seemed to think I was a sort of Dr. Watson in my way. Besides, it simplified the workings of his mind to talk out loud. So he showed me the clue and then asked me what I thought. I had rather picked up his dodge of talking like Sherlock Holmes, so I said:

"The first question is, of course, to see what is the date on the half-quid."

I thought this pretty good; but Peters said that this was not the first question, and didn't matter in the least.

He said: "My dear Maydew, the money is nothing; the paper in which it is wrapped up is everything."

So I turned to the paper.

"What does it tell you?" he asked.

"It tells me that some utter kid did it," I said, "for he can't spell 'another' and he can't spell 'guinea pig.' "

But Peters smiled and put the points of his fingers together like Sherlock Holmes.

"My dear Maydew," he said, "might not that have been done on purpose?"

Then I scored off him.

"It is just because it *might* have been done on purpose," I said, "that I think it was done accidentally."

He nodded.

"Of course, it may be the work of a kid," he admitted. "But, on the other hand, it may be a subterfuge. Besides, no kid would have killed my guinea pig. Where's the motive?"

"The great thing is that you've got a half-sovereign, and we share pocket money," I said.

But he attached little importance to that, except to say the half-sov. wasn't pocket money, though I might have half.

"Now examine the paper," he said.

I did so. It was a sheet of one of our ordinary lined copybooks, used for dictation, composition, exercises, and suchlike.

"Evidently torn out of one of the copybooks," I said.

"Exactly. But which one?"

"Ask me another," I said. "You'll never find that out."

He smiled and arranged his hands again like Holmes.

"I have," he said.

"Then you know?"

"On the contrary, I know nothing."

"It wasn't James's book?"

"It wasn't. The first thing was to find a book with a sheet torn out. I tried 25 books, and seven had pages torn out. But James's book had not. Then judge my surprise, Maydew, when, coming to my desk and looking at my own exercise book, I found a sheet torn out; and this is it, for the tear fits!"

"What frightful cheek!" I cried out.

"I don't so much mind that," said Peters, "but the point is that, splendid though this clue seems to be on the surface, I can't get any forwarder by it. In fact, it may be the act of a friend, and not a foe."

"What would Sherlock Holmes do?" I asked; and Peters gave a sort of mournful sound and scratched his head.

"I wish I knew," he said.

Gideon was helpful in a way, but nobody could make much of it. Gideon said that it was conscience money, and was often known to happen, especially with the Income Tax; because people,

driven to desperation by it, often pay too little, and then, when things brighten up for them afterwards, it begins to weigh on their minds if they are fairly decent at heart, and they remember that they have swindled the King and been dishonest; and so they send the money secretly, but, of course, are too ashamed to say who they are.

I asked James if he had sent the money, and he swore he hadn't; but he did it in such an excitable way that I was positive he had. Peters wouldn't believe or disbelieve. He went quietly on, keeping an open mind and detecting the crime; and when the truth came to light, Peters was still detecting.

But in the meantime happened the mystery of the pencil sharpener, and the two great mysteries were cleared up simultaneously, which Peters says is a common thing. You couldn't say that one cleared up the other, but, still, it did so happen that both came out in the same minute.

There was a boy whose name was Pratt. His father was on the Stock Exchange of London. When the father went out to lunch, he saw many curious things sold by wandering London men, who are too poor to keep shops, but yet have the wish to sell things. These men stand by the pavement and display most queer and uncommon curiosities, such as walking spiders and suchlike; and once from one of these men Pratt's father brought quite a new sort of pencil sharpener. It was shaped like a stirrup, and cut pencils well without breaking off the lead.

After a good week of this pencil sharpener, Pratt found it had been stolen out of his desk, and he told Peters about it, and Peters took up the case. I asked him if he was hopeful, and he said that there was always hope; but he also said rather bitterly that it was curious what a frightful lot of hard cases he had had since coming to Merivale. He said it was enough to tax anybody's reputation, and that each case seemed more difficult than the last.

I reminded him of one or two rather goodish things he had done in a small way, but he said that as yet he had not really brought off a brilliant stroke.

A week went by, and then Peters came to me in a state of frightful excitement.

"The pencil sharpener!" he said.

"Have you got a clue?" I asked. But he could hardly speak for excitement, and forgot to put his hands like Holmes, or to try and arrange a faraway look on his face, or anything.

"Not only a clue," he said. "I know who took it!"

"This will be a great score for you when it comes out," I said.

"You swear you won't breathe a word?" he asked.

And I swore. Then he whispered the fearful news into my ear.

"The Doctor's taken it!" he said.

"He never would," I answered. "Pratt is positive that he left it in his desk."

"It is a case of purloining," said Peters, "and I wish it had happened to anybody else but the Doctor. It's rather terrible in its way; because if he once gets this habit and yields to temptation, with his unlimited power, who is safe?"

"It's much more a thing Browne would have done," I said, meaning a particularly hateful master who wore pink ties and elastic-sided boots.

Then Peters explained that when alone in the Doctor's study, waiting to give a message to Doctor Dunstan from Mr. Briggs, he chanced to look about, and saw on the mantelpiece Pratt's pencil sharpener and a pencil in course of being sharpened. The Doctor had evidently put them down there and been called away and forgotten them.

"What did you do?" I inquired.

"Well, Maydew," he said, "I asked myself what Sherlock would have done"—in confidential moments Peters sometimes spoke of the great Holmes as 'Sherlock'—"and I remembered his wonderful presence of mind. He would have struck while the iron was hot, as the saying is, and taken the pencil sharpener there and then."

"By Jove! But you didn't?" I said.

For answer Peters brought the pencil sharpener out of his waistcoat pocket.

"Are you positive it's Pratt's?" I asked.

"Absolutely certain," he said. "It has the words 'Made in Bavaria' upon it; and, of course, this is a frightfully delicate situation to be in for me."

"Especially if the Doctor asks for it," I said.

"He won't dare," answered Peters; "but I've got a sort of strong feeling against letting anybody know who has done this. On one or two occasions, I believe, Holmes kept the doer of a dark deed a secret—to give him a chance to repent. It seems to me this is a case when I ought to do the same."

"If the Doctor cribs things, I don't see why you should keep it dark," I said; and Peters treated me rather rudely—in fact, very much like Holmes sometimes treats Watson.

"My dear Maydew," he said, "the things you don't see would

fill a museum."

"Anyway, you'll have to give Pratt back his pencil sharpener," I said; and he admitted that this was true. The only thing that puzzled him was how to do it.

But, after all, Peters didn't puzzle long. He was thinking the next morning how to return the pencil sharpener to Pratt in a mysterious and Sherlock Holmes-like way, when just after prayers the Doctor stopped the school and spoke. He said:

"Boys, I have lost something, and though an article of little intrinsic worth, I cannot suffer it to go without making an effort to regain it. I say this for two reasons. The first and least is that the little contrivance so mysteriously spirited from my study is of the greatest service to me; while the second and important reason your own perspicuity may perhaps suggest. Things do not go without hands. Somebody has taken from my study what did not belong to him: and somebody, therefore, at this moment moves among you with an aching heart and a wounded conscience. Let that boy make his peace with God and with me before he closes his eyes tonight; and that no doubt or ambiguity may obscure the details of this event, I will now descend to particulars.

"Not long ago, a kindly friend conveyed to me a new form of pencil sharpener, which he had chanced to find exhibited in a stationer's shop at Plymouth, our great naval port. Knowing that my eyesight is not of the best, he judged this trifle would assist me in the endless task of sharpening pencils, which is not the least among my minor mechanical labours. And he judged correctly. The implement was distinguished by a great simplicity of construction. It consisted, indeed, of one small piece of metal somewhat resembling the first letter of the alphabet. I last saw it upon the mantelpiece in the study. I was actually using it when called away, and on my return forgot the circumstance. But upon retiring last night the incident reverted to memory while divesting myself of my apparel, and so indispensable had the pencil sharpener become to me that I resumed my habitiments, lighted a candle, and went downstairs to seek the sharpener. It had disappeared.

"Now, yesterday, several boys came and went, as usual, through the precincts of my private apartments. Furthermore, the Greek Testament class will recollect that we were engaged together in the evening from seven until eight o'clock. I need say no more. The loss is discovered and the loss is proclaimed. I accuse nobody. Many things may have happened to the pencil sharpener, and if

any boy can throw light upon the circumstance, let him speak with me tonight after evening chapel. I hope it may be possible to find an innocent solution of my loss; but if one of you has fallen under sudden temptation, and attracted by the portability and obvious advantages of the instrument, has appropriated it to his own uses, I must warn him that my duty will be to punish as well as pardon."

Then he hooked it to breakfast, and I spoke to Peters. I said: "This is pretty blue for you."

But he said, far from it. He said:

"On the contrary, Maydew. It's blue for the Doctor; and it shows—what he's always saying to us himself, for that matter—that if you do a wrong thing, you've nearly always got to do another, or perhaps two, to bolster up the first. He has told a deliberate, carefully planned lie—and a barefaced lie, too; because he must know that he stole the thing out of Pratt's desk. Anyhow, my course is clear."

I said I was glad to hear that, because it didn't look at all clear to me. Then Peters said:

"I, personally, have got nothing to do with the Doctor's wickedness in the matter. In my opinion that is Pratt's affair."

But I felt pretty sure Pratt wouldn't bother about it.

"Anyway," said Peters, "I now return Pratt his pencil sharpener, and there my duty as the detective of the case ceases."

So the first thing after morning class we went to Pratt, and Peters put on his Holmes manner and said:

"Well, Pratt, no news of the missing pencil sharpener, I suppose?"

Pratt said: "Mine or the Doctor's?"

And Peters said: "Yours."

"Yes, there is," said Pratt. "I found it in my lexicon three days ago. I'd marked a word with it and clean forgotten. So that's all right."

"Not so right as you might think," I said.

But Peters kept his nerve jolly well, and, in fact, was more like Sherlock Holmes at that terrible moment than ever I saw him before or after.

"I'm glad it's turned up," said Peters, "and hope the Doctor's will."

Then he and I went off, and I congratulated him.

"You've got a nerve of iron," I said.

"Yes," he said, "and I shall want it."

Then he told me there was nothing like this in Sherlock Holmes, and that the whole piece of detective work was a failure, and a very painful failure to him.

"I don't mind the licking, and so on," he said, "but it's the inner disgrace."

"It was a very natural mistake," I said, to cheer him up.

"Yes," he said, "but the detectives of the first class don't make natural mistakes—nor any other sort, either. It's the disappointment of coming such a howler over a simple felony that is so hard. At least, of course, it's not a felony at all."

"All the same, it can't be helped, unless you chuck away the pencil sharpener and sit tight about it," I said.

"No, Maydew. Of course, I could evade the consequences with ease, if I liked. But I have decided to give this back to the Doctor and tell him the whole story," said Peters.

"Sherlock Holmes would never have done that," I said.

"No, he wouldn't," admitted Peters. "Because why? Because he'd never have been such a fool as to be deluded by a false clue."

"Well," I said, "if you take my advice for once, you'll do this: You'll leave that thing on the Doctor's desk in a prominent place next time you're in there alone, and you'll bury the rest in your brain. What's the sense of going out of your way to get a licking?"

"If I told him the truth, I don't believe he would lick me," said Peters. But I jolly soon shewed him that was rot.

"My dear chap," I said, "you go to the Doctor and say: 'Here's your pencil sharpener, sir; I saw it on your mantelpiece, and thought you'd stolen it from Pratt, who has one exactly like it. So I took it to give to Pratt, but his has turned up since.' Well, what would happen then? Any fool could tell you."

★

All the same Peters went up next day at the appointed time, and, curiously enough, James was in the study waiting for the Doctor, too. The muddle that followed was explained to me by Peters afterwards.

He and James began to talk; then James said to Peters: "I'm here, Peters, about a very queer and sad thing, and it is evidently Providence that has sent you here now."

Peters said: "No, it isn't. I'm here about a very queer thing, too, and it may also turn out to be sad—for me."

Then James, who was excited, said these strange words: "I had

come to confess that it was me killed your guinea pig. I couldn't hide it any more. It's haunting me—not the pig, but the killing of it. I hoped, and even prayed in my prayers, that you might detect me, but you didn't. Then I wrote home for ten shillings for a debt of honour, and put it in your desk, and disguised the writing and spelling. Now, as you're here, I confess it openly to you that I killed your beautiful, kind-hearted pig, and I hope you'll forgive me for doing a beastly thing. And if you can't forgive it, I'll tell the Doctor and get flogged rather than go on like this; because it's haunting me."

Peters said: "How did you do it?"

And James said: "With poison from the laboratory."

And Peters was so much rejoiced when he heard this that he forgave the worm, James, on the spot.

"That is where sending the stomach to Somerset House would have come in!" said Peters. "But as I was not in a position to do this, I do not feel the slur of not having discovered you were the criminal."

He forgave James freely. Then he said: "You may be amused to know that I'm also here about a crime. I thought I'd found one out, and, instead of that, I've jolly well committed a crime myself."

Then he told the story of the pencil sharpener to James, and showed James the pencil sharpener to prove it. James actually had the pencil sharpener in his hand, when who should come in—not the Doctor—but the matron, with the extraordinary news that the mother of Peters was just arrived and had to see him at once! This was so surprising to Peters that he went straight away to the drawing-room and left the pencil sharpener with James. In the drawing-room were the Doctor and Peters's mother, who, after all, had merely come to tell him that his uncle was dead. But far more important things than that happened in the study, because when Peters arrived to see his mother, the Doctor having said something about bearing the shocks of life with manly fortitude, went off to his study, and there, of course, was James waiting for him.

We heard afterwards what James did. First, on thinking it over, he began to doubt why he should confess about the guinea pig to the Doctor, now that Peters had utterly forgiven him. And he speedily decided that there was no occasion to do it. But then, out of gratitude to Peters, he determined to carry through the delicate task of getting the pencil sharpener back to the Doctor. And he did. He told the Doctor that he had taken the thing,

because he thought it was Pratt's. He said he felt sure Pratt must have left it in the study by mistake. But he didn't say anything about thinking the Doctor had stolen it, and, in fact, was so jolly cunning altogether that he never got into a row at all. The Doctor ended up by remarking that Pratt's having one was a curious coincidence, and he said to James: "As for you, James, you stand acquitted of everything but too much zeal. Zeal, however—" and then he talked a lot of stuff about zeal, which James did not remember.

I said privately to Peters afterwards:

"How would Holmes have acted if this had happened to him?"

And Peters said: "For once I can see as clear as mud what Sherlock would have done. He would have said: 'I think in this extraordinary case, Watson, we may safely let well alone.' "

And that's what Peters did.

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THE
Kamalu Men

AKPAN EYEN EFIK

This is the first time EWMM *has been able to publish a new story from, and about, one of the freshly independent nations of Africa. Akpan Eyen Efik knows how a good thriller is evolved and this, his first story published outside Nigeria, is a very promising beginning on the road to what we hope will be a highly successful future*

OKON ATA was travelling by lorry to Port Harcourt. As he settled himself at the end of one of the planks serving as benches, where he would be able to get some fresh air if the lorry became full, he saw a man loading a number of baskets of what appeared to be kola nuts into the lorry.

The man supervising the loading was a tall, fair African who, to Okon Ata's eyes, was obviously an Aro. He had a small, scarlet spot on his left cheek.

This scarlet spot, a tattoo mark, took Okon Ata's thoughts back to his first real adventure with criminals, when he was a boy.

He had just left primary school at the age of 14 and his father was finding it difficult to scrape together enough money to send him to a secondary school.

To help his father, he was working as a house-boy to an Aro trader in Uyo.

He slept in the living room under the table which his master used both as a desk and as a dining table.

He woke one night to find his master in deep conversation with four strangers.

From their conversation, it was clear that they were members of a secret society and were planning the burglary of a big store in

Uyo Town. They were debating whether it would be necessary to kill the night watchman or whether he could be less drastically disposed of.

Okon Ata was frightened. He did his best to feign deep slumber. Probably it was the change in his breathing that gave him away—his conscious, heavy breathing in feigned deep slumber was obviously more laboured than his natural breathing of deep sleep, for it attracted the attention of one of the conspirators.

He pushed aside the overhanging table cloth and exposed the sleeping boy.

"Ah! What have we here?" he demanded, as he hauled the boy out by the ankle.

Okon Ata yawned and pretended to be drunk with sleep. It did not help him.

"This young swine has heard our secrets," the man continued. "We'll have to cut his throat."

"No," temporised Okon Ata's master. "I can't have that. I owe a deep debt of gratitude to his father. I suggest we make him a member of Kamalu and mark him with the Kamalu mark. He will not dare to break his oath."

The suggestion was adopted. It turned out that Kamalu was a secret society that worshipped a juju of that name.

Each member was marked with a scarlet spot high up on his left cheek. To reveal the secrets of the society meant death.

Okon Ata had taken the oath and kept it.

In the first place, of course, his loyalty had been due to sheer terror. It was from fear of Kamalu that he had gone to Lagos to join the Police Force and done his Police training at the Police College at Ikeja, near Lagos.

When his uncle died and left him £1,500 and he had resigned from the Police Force and gone to London to study law, he had had his Kamalu mark removed by plastic surgery.

★

The Aro man was undoubtedly a member of the Kamalu. Okon Ata wondered if these numerous baskets of kola nuts really contained nothing but kola.

The Kamalu man paid a third class fare to Aba, sat beside his baskets and kept a sharp eye on them. It meant that Okon Ata had no opportunity to make a surreptitious examination of the contents.

When the Kamalu man left the lorry at Aba, Okon Ata noticed that, of the three labourers who came to take the baskets out of the lorry, two also had the Kamalu mark.

Okon Ata got to Port Harcourt in the early afternoon, and spent some time looking for his cousin's house. When he found it, he received a warm welcome.

When he came to the reason for his visit, his cousin expressed mild surprise that a brilliant young barrister should need to borrow money from what he called 'a struggling business man'.

When he had heard all the details of Okon Ata's woeful condition, he said: "It's a problem. Business has not been all that good of late."

"Of course, fifty pounds is out of the question. I might possibly manage twenty-five. I'll have to think it over carefully, though.

"In the meantime, go and have your bath. When you've finished, the boy will pass you beer. I have to balance my books and close up the shop. Then we'll have supper."

After Okon Ata had returned from having his bath and was sitting on the verandah drinking his beer, he picked up a paper from the small table beside his deck-chair. It was *The Daily Record*—the front page bore a splashed headline:

BIG BANK ROBBERY—£350,000 MISSING

The paper told him that a bank had been burgled the previous night and the vaults had been broken into by the use of some well muffled explosive.

The mystery was why nothing was heard or suspected, in spite of a police guard, until the officials opened the bank the next morning.

The paper went on to explain that the directors of the bank had offered a reward of £3,000 for any information which might lead to the apprehension of the burglars or the recovery of any substantial portion of the money.

I wonder, mused Okon Ata, if this burglary has anything to do with the Kamalu man I travelled with. The fact that he joined the lorry at Onitsha with those baskets after the bank was robbed at Onitsha may or may not mean a hell of a lot.

If I could crack this crime and get the reward, I might be able to set myself up as a private detective. Why not a private detective *and* criminal lawyer? The two seem to go together!

One can be quite sure the Kamalu man was up to some sort of

rascality. I'll bet my bottom dollar he wasn't just an innocent Aro farmer taking his kola to market; he looked too innocent, and it's all too coincidental for my liking.

After supper he and his cousin discussed the bank robbery. But Okon Ata gave no indication that the subject had any special personal interest for him. Instead he pressed his cousin to hurry up with the £25.

He said he had some scheme in Lagos for making money, but it was urgently necessary for him to pay his debts and have a little money in hand. He added that if he could start on his journey back the following morning, it would be so much the better.

"Right," said the cousin. "I'll let you have the twenty-five before you go."

In the morning, having got the money, Okon Ata set out for the lorry park and joined a lorry to Aba. He had intended to travel third class, but when he saw a really pretty girl sitting next to the driver he decided to join her. Because she was friendly, and excellent company, the journey seemed to be regrettably short.

At Aba lorry park he went round asking bus and lorry drivers if they had seen some Arochuku men with red spots on their cheeks. He said they were friends of his and he had been unable to meet them in Aba yesterday as arranged, as he was delayed in Port Harcourt by the illness of his sister.

At last he met a young lorry tout who replied: "Yes Etubom. I see some three or four man with a mark like that for dis lorry park yesterday. I no know say they come from Aro.

"I think it is some stranger tribe mark their face like that or may be it is medicine. I never see such mark before."

Okon Ata replied: "Yes. That is my company. The mark is for medicine. It is Arochuku medicine. Which side they go?"

"They take lorry for Itu."

"Thank you, boy," Okon Ata said and raced for a lorry just leaving for Itu.

He got to Itu late in the afternoon. He told himself, it might not be wise to make open enquiries about the scarlet tattoos so near to Arochuku. There were probably Kamalu men in Itu and if they learnt of my enquiries, it might be very unhealthy for me.

He told himself he could take it for granted that if the men were carrying big loot like the £350,000 from the bank robbery, they would take it back to the shrine of Qamalu, where it would be shared out among them by the priest, after the necessary ceremonies had been gone through. The thing is to get to Arochuku

and find out where the Kamalu shrine is.

There were no lorries going over the Cross River ferry so late in the afternoon. He had to make do with a room in a cheap hotel in Okopedi Itu.

★

The following morning he was one of the first to join a lorry about to cross the ferry on its way to Arochuku.

As usual, the driver waited until the lorry was nearly full before he started off, which meant it was 10 o'clock before they were on their way.

The lorry dropped or took on passengers at every petty village en route and, half way, they had engine trouble. It was late in the afternoon before they got to Arochuku.

It stopped in the market, near the prison. Opposite the market was a small two-storey building in its own yard. The ground floor was a shop where they sold provisions and served drinks. Okon Ata walked in.

The girl behind the counter was pretty and wore a smart green frock, and high-heeled sandals. She gave Okon Ata a bright smile.

"Two bottles of beer and two glasses," he told her. "One is for you."

"Sorry," she replied, with an even brighter smile. "My boss wouldn't like me to drink with customers. "But I'm off duty at seven and there's another beer shop on the other side of the market."

"Thanks for the information. We'll talk about that later. But right now, I'm dead beat. Can you tell me where I can get some supper and a bed?"

"Why, right here, sir. Supper two and six, bed and breakfast six and six. If you like, I'll show you your room as soon as you've finished your drink."

He took his time over the beer, and when he was shown his room, and asked for supper to be served there in an hour, to give him time for his bath.

He brooded over his problem—how to find the Kamalu shrine before the Kamalu men find me? If they hear about my enquiries at Aba, they'll be looking for me and they won't be aiming to improve my health, either. There are seven villages in Arochuku and the Kamalu shrine might be in or near any of them.

After he had smoked several cigarettes, sitting in his room or pacing up down the verandah, he went out for a moonlight stroll. It was on the way back that he had the feeling he was being followed.

Just outside the compound gate, he turned suddenly. He thought he saw a shadow flit behind a palm tree, but couldn't be sure. He went on up to his room.

When he got there, he took a handful of clothes out of his portmanteau, put them on his bed, added the bolster and made a bundle that looked vaguely like a man resting on his side. He covered the bundle with his sleeping cloth.

Then he stripped himself naked, put on a pair of shorts and loaded his revolver. He then put out the light and made himself comfortable with his pillow under the bed, with his hand over his nose to prevent any dust from making or provoking a betraying sneeze.

★

He was nearly asleep when he heard a sound outside the window leading to the verandah. He could just make out a slim, dark figure, clad in a very brief loin cloth.

The figure climbed over the window sill and approached the bed stealthily.

As the figure hit the bundle of clothes on the bed with something, Okon Ata thrust his hand from under the bed, seized it the right ankle and twisted. The unknown crashed to the ground with Okon Ata on top.

They fought silently, but Okon Ata had the advantage of surprise, and was the heavier of the two. He got a jiu-jitsu hold on the man's neck and pressed back until there was a dull click. The neck was broken and an inanimate figure slumped into his arms.

As soon as he was sure that his opponent was dead, he dragged the corpse under the bed and lay alongside it. After twenty minutes with his silent companion he got up.

In the dim light of the room, reflected from the moonlight outside, he saw a long knife sticking out of the bundle of clothes on the bed.

He peered cautiously out of the window. Nobody was on the verandah, but in the yard there was a small clump of banana trees and beneath them sat a figure, peering up at the house.

Okon Ata's room was on the first floor. The door was partly hidden from the man under the banana trees by one of the pillars which stretched from the ground to the roof.

It meant Okon Ata could open the door a little, and was able to pour himself out on his belly like a snake. He eased the door shut after him while still in the same flat position, and started to crawl along the verandah to the back of the building.

There he got up, climbed over the verandah railing and down one of the pillars into the yard. Progressing an inch at a time, he crept along the side of the fence until he was on the other side of the clump of banana trees. He was now in a position to watch the watcher.

After a while, the waiting man hooted in excellent imitation of an owl. He seemed to listen for a response. There was none. Then, rising stealthily, he walked out of the gate. Okon Ata followed at a distance, with equal stealth.

They went along the main road for some minutes and then took to a bush path, where the lush vegetation screened Okon Ata.

After going along the path for another 20 minutes the fellow began some more owl imitations. This time he was answered: 'tu-whit tu-whoo.'

They turned a corner in the bush and came to a gate in a stick fence. The gate was open and in it stood a tall, thin, grey-headed man in a white loin cloth.

"Where is Ita?" asked the grey-headed elder in Efik dialect.

"Maybe dead," the other replied in the same language. "He went into the policeman's room to kill him, as planned. But he never came out. He never answered my calls. There was no noise. Not a sound. Maybe the policeman killed him, perhaps with his own knife. It's a mystery to me. There was not a sound."

"I keep on telling you the fellow is no longer a policeman, but a lawyer," the elder man corrected.

"Well, he was a policeman once, and in Lagos he had the reputation of being a very smart policeman, indeed. He still seems to have been smart enough to have done for Ita."

My God, thought Okon Ata. These people seem to have a very efficient intelligence service.

"I wonder if this lawyer, as you call him, knows where we are. Perhaps he plans a police raid on the shrine."

"No," the elder assured him. "He doesn't know where we are. How can he find out? I think we can afford to forget him for the

time being. It's a pity about Ita. We'll get that damn lawyer-policeman sooner or later. We always get our man."

"The thing to do is to see about the money. It is, of course, in the cave beyond the shrine. It will not be divided up as usual. The police will have the numbers of the notes."

"Then what use will the notes be to us?" the younger Kamalu man enquired.

"Tonight, after we have gone through the usual ceremonies following a victorious coup, the notes will be divided into three lots.

"One lot will go by canoe to Duala, another lot to Santa Isabella and the third lot to Libreville. Our friends in these countries will exchange them quickly for notes of their own currency.

"The notes will be brought back to Nigeria and one can exchange them openly and legally for Nigerian notes. The canoes, with their baskets of kola nuts will be on their way down the Cross river before midnight."

"I suppose Kamalu is going to be adequately thanked for such a rich haul?" queried the younger man.

"Of course; but there are to be two human sacrifices. The lawyer-policeman and a woman.

"We realise that the man would probably have to be killed where and when the opportunity arose, but the killing would be dedicated to Kamalu. The other, a young girl, is to be formally presented to Kamalu and her blood smeared on his sacred stone in the usual way.

"A suitable girl has been procured. All is now ready. You are just in time. The ceremony will take place in a little while."

The younger Kamalu man passed through the stick gate, closed it and tied it with bush rope. Then Okon Ata heard their steps receding.

The problem was how to get in and attend this ceremony, and as a spectator and not a victim.

Okon Ata pulled a stick from the fence and began to dig with it at the foot of the fence, but before he had dug six inches deep, his stick broke. He picked another stick from the fence and went on digging.

Six sticks and at least half an hour later—seemed like six hours—he had dug a hole large enough to wriggle through to the other side of the fence. He did this and saw a well-beaten narrow path and followed it to a tunnel cut through the side of a hill.

Okon Ata continued through the tunnel until he bumped into somebody in the darkness. He clapped his hand over the mouth of his victim in such a way that the edge of his palm held the chin. He got a leverage with the other hand on the unknown's shoulders and pulled back till the neck snapped.

He eased the corpse to the ground and continued his journey more slowly and carefully.

When he came to the end of the tunnel, he pressed himself against the wall on one side, and looked out. He saw a group of men in white loin cloths around a red stone phallic pillar. He heard a female voice screaming shrilly in terror as a bass drum beat louder and louder, at a continually faster pace.

At the foot of the pillar lay a naked female figure, tied at wrists and ankles. Above her stood the grey-headed priest—his assistants behind him—holding a large knife.

Okon Ata drew his revolver, aimed with care and fired.

The sacrificial priest fell; he went on firing till he had only one round left in his revolver.

Most of the subordinate priests lay tumbled about their leader. The others dashed for a canoe on the bank of a small stream on the other side of the phallic pillar.

They seized the canoe, ran into the water with it and jumped in. One of them grabbed a paddle which lay in the bottom of the canoe and began paddling furiously.

Okon Ata picked up the sacrificial knife, which had fallen from the hands of the dead priest, and began cutting the girl loose. He recognised her as the girl who had served him in the small hotel where he was staying.

She started to thank him effusively, but he gestured her to silence. "We have no time for that," he told her. "Take this priest's cloth and cover your nakedness. Now listen.

"You are an Aro girl, or at any rate you know this town. I want you to run like hell to the police station and bring help. I shall be waiting right here. And if you don't hurry up and come back quickly with the police, someone is going to cut my throat."

He sent the girl, because he felt that if the police were fetched by a half naked girl, frantic with the experience she had been through, they would come, but if he went himself, there would be a lot of unnecessary talk. He no longer had any authority in the police force; besides, the girl would be frantically anxious to have her preserver rescued, he hoped.

The salutary treatment of the priestly circle either had been seen

by others of the gang, or the priest who had fled in the canoe were still running. Either way nothing happened. The arrival of a small posse of police, apparently surprised that the girl really was telling the truth, ended any danger to Okon Ata.

He was aware of a feeling of reaction that the high adventure had dwindled to a featureless ending, for there was no sign of any other Kamalu men, and the recovery of the stolen money was merely a matter of walking into a cave and gathering it together.

The girl whose life he had saved did her best to cheer him, and she succeeded in showing her gratitude. But in his own mind, set as it was on his future, the knowledge that the police had assured him he would get the substantial reward was everything he asked.

When he went to bed that night, Okon Ata thought his first case, bloody as it had been, ended better than he had hoped or even expected.

period piece

THE WRONG BED

WALTER LOGAN

The 29th story in this unfailingly popular series was written about 1810, *the type of farcical, punning tale, with a touch of crime, much favoured in the early* 19*th century*

'THE MORN was fair, the sky was clear,' when Mr. Andrew Micklewhame set his foot aboard one of the Stirling, Alloa, and Kincardine Steam Company's boats, at the Chain Pier, Newhaven, for the purpose of proceeding to the first-named place, on a visit to his old friend, David Kerr, who had been, for upwards of twenty years, a respectable ironmonger in that romantic town.

On reaching Alloa, Andrew ascended from the cabin where he had been luxuriating over the only volume—the first of *Wilson's Tales of the Borders*—of which its library could boast; and unfurling his umbrella, walked ashore in the fond hope of seeing or hearing something worth the seeing or hearing.

And he was not disappointed; for, to his delight, he descried against the gable-end of a white house, a play-bill, on which *Venice Preserved* appeared in letters of half-an-inch deep; the part of Pierre, by Mr. Ferdinand Gustavus Trash, and Jaffier, by Mr. Henry Watkins. The afterpiece, *Rob Roy*.

Being extremely partial to theatrical amusements, of whatever

description, and, moreover, being a contributor to a dramatic review, published weekly in the Scottish metropolis, it occurred to Andrew Micklewhame that here he might, in all probability, find materials sufficient on which to establish a funny critique, that would print to the extent of at least six of the twelve pages of the aforesaid dramatic review, and yield him good pay. Such an opportunity was not to be lost. He, therefore, resolved on remaining at Alloa that night to witness the performances, and proceeding to Stirling next morning by the earliest conveyance.

Having arranged this to his own content, he stalked into an inn without stopping to notice the sign which projected angularly over the door, bearing the representation of a ship in full sail, among emerald waves, with moon-rakers and sky-scrapers ingeniously mixed up with the indigo clouds above—and called for a pint of porter and a biscuit, to take the edge off his appetite.

This inn rejoiced not in a landlord; he that *was* the landlord had, some twelve years before, taken himself off to 'that undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns'; and his widow had not been lucky enough to meet with another ready and willing to let himself become entangled with her in the meshes of matrimony. The waiters who had, in her husband's time, been wont to serve the customers, had either died out, or gone to other and better situations, and left her with one solitary maid of all work—the same who had officiated as barmaid to the inn for fifteen years.

This maid of all work—Kirsty by name—was a tall, hard-featured woman, of—by her own acknowledgment—two-and-forty; not very tidy in her adornment, nor very bewitching in her manner. She brought Andrew Micklewhame the pint of porter and the biscuit.

"I suppose I can have tea, and a beefsteak, or something of that kind, to it, in"—(here Andrew stopped, and looked at his watch, from which he ascertained that it was then half-past four o'clock)—"in an hour and a half; and as I purpose staying here to-night, I should like a bed. Will you arrange this for me?"

"Ye can easily get your tea, sir," said Kirsty, "but as for the bed, unless ye like to sleep in a double-bedded room, we canna gie ye accommodation. The lad that sleeps in ane o' the beds is a decent sort o' a callant. We dinna ken much aboot him, though; for he only comes here at nicht for his bed; and in the mornings, after his breakfast, awa' he gangs, and we never see his face till nicht again; except upon the Sundays, when he aye has a pairty o' braw leddies an' gentlemen to dinner wi' him. He has leeved that

way for a fortnicht or three weeks; an' my mistress hasna been the woman to ask him for a penny. Fegs! I'm thinkin' she has taen a notion o' the callant. What he is or what he diz we dinna ken, an' naebody can tell us."

Micklewhame said,"Is he genteel in appearance? of good address? of pleasing manner? Is he——"

"Ou, ay!" was the reply; "he's a' that. I never seed a genteeler young man in a' my days; and sae handsome too; sic black whiskers, an' sae broad aboot the shuthers. My certie, he's a stalworth chiel. An 'as for his address, heth, man, he often gies me a kiss in the mornings as he gangs oot, and promises me anither whan he comes back again. Ye need a be the least feared to sleep in the same room wi' him."

"Feared!" muttered Micklewhame. "Afraid of a man with black whiskers and broad shoulders! I flatter myself I never was afraid in my life. Ye may prepare the bed for me; I'll sleep in the room with this mysterious man; and, while the tea is getting ready, I'll just take a short stroll."

With these words he left the inn.

Andrew Micklewhame was a middle-aged man, with a rotundity of corpus, and a bachelor to boot. In his youthful days his love for the fair sex had partaken more of a general than a particular character; and now that he had arrived at the meridian of life, his taste had grown too particular for him to choose a partner for the remainder of his days from those unmarried ladies whom he ranked among his acquaintances. 'Girls,' he would say, 'are not half so pretty, nor half so domestic, as they were in my young days.'

The localities of Alloa were quite unknown to Andrew, for the best reason in the world—he had never been in it before; but, by dint of attending to the usual expedient resorted to on like occasions—that of following his nose, in the space of a few minutes he discovered that his feet, or fate, had led him into a dockyard, where a vessel was just upon the point of being wedded to the ocean.

Some women and men—the former, as usual, predominant—were seated on logs beneath a shed; others, the more impatient, seemingly, were walking about with umbrellas and parasols above their heads, young men with young misses, old men and babes. Children in their first childhood, of various shapes and sizes, chiefly bare-footed, were scampering among the wet sawdust, round about the logs of wood, in the shed and out of it, quite

absorbed in the spirit-stirring game of tig—ever and anon yelping out each other's names, and otherwise expressing their joy at not being 'it.'

Among their seniors there was a great deal of gabble to very little purpose, with a preponderate share of bustle and agitation.

Carpenters were thumping away at the blocks on which the vessel rested, making more noise than progress. At length the blocks were fairly driven out, and away boomed the vessel into the Forth, amid the cheers of the assembled spectators. The general interest then subsided; and in a few minutes thereafter, with exception of the carpenters and some stray children, the dockyard presented the picture of emptiness. The din had ended; and the multitude, reversing the condition of Rob Roy, had left desolation where they had found plenty.

Tea over, Andrew Micklewhame, having first seen to his accommodation for the night, and secured a place in the Stirling omnibus, which was advertised to start the next morning precisely at nine, wended his way quietly to the theatre.

It was in the Assembly Room—a rumbling old mansion, on the windows of which 'Time's effacing fingers' had taken *pains* to leave their marks so effectually, that sundry detachments of old soot-bedizened clouts filled up those interstices where glass had once been. 'The nonpareil company of comedians' entertained their audiences and held their orgies on the second floor—the first being occupied by an academy where 'young gentlemen are taken in and done for.' The scenes in which the establishment rejoiced were five in number.

Luckily, *Venice Preserved* did not require so many; but in *Rob Roy* the manager was compelled to make them perform double duty; and, consequently, the same scene was thrust on for the inside of a village inn, apartment in Bailie Nicol Jarvie's, and the interior of Jean M'Alpine's change-house. The audience department was most gorgeous: there were boxes, pit, and gallery; or, in other words, front, middle, and back seats—the term boxes being applied to the front form, to which there was a back attached, most aristocratically garnished with green cloth, with brass nails in relief. At the farther end of this form 'an efficient orchestra' was placed.

It consisted of a boy to play the pan-pipes and the triangles at one and the same moment, a lad to thump away at the brass drum, and a blind man to perform on the clarionet—the last being dignified in the bills by the title of 'leader of the orchestra, and conduct-

or of music.' The whole under the immediate superintendence of Mr. Ferdinand Gustavus Trash.

After an immensity of preliminary puffs into the clarionet, occasional rattles on the drum, and consultations among themselves as to the air to be played, the musicians struck up the spirit-stirring *All Round my Hat*; which, though achieved in beautiful disregard of time and concord, was received with great—ay, with very great applause, by the momentarily increasing audience, some of whom mistook it for *God Save the King*, and, in an extreme fit of loyalty, bawled out—"Off hats! stand up!" with which command many did not hesitate to comply.

There was a pause, interrupted at length by the loudly expressed wish of the gods that the curtain should draw up. Up it went accordingly, and *Venice Preserved* commenced with some show of enthusiasm. Belvidera was personated by an interesting female of five-and-thirty, who, after parting in tears from Jaffier, a youth of eighteen, as the means of acquainting the audience with her extraordinary vocal abilities, consoled herself and them with that very appropriate ditty—*Within a mile of Edinburgh Town*, accompanied by the orchestra. The Doge of Venice, not to be outdone, as it were, left his throne after the terrific disclosures of Jaffier, and, in honest exultation at the discovery of the horrid plot, solaced the mysterious Council of Ten with—*I was the Boy for bewitching them.*

The meagreness of the company compelled several of the principal performers to play inferior parts, in addition to those against which their names appeared in the bill. For instance, in *Rob Roy*, the same person who performed Rashleigh had to go on in the capacity of a peasant, and sing a bass solo in the opening glee. Owen and Major Galbraith were *done* by the same individual. Mattie sang in the opening glee, and danced the Highland Fling, at the Pass of Lochard, with Dougal and Bailie Nicol Jarvie. Some of the audience were scandalised at the appearance of Mattie on this occasion, and began to entertain great doubts of the morality of the Bailie, when they saw his handmaid in his company so far from the Trongate.

Seated on *the* front form, with green cloth back studded with brass nails, and immediately behind a row of six penny dipped candles, tastefully arranged in order among an equivalent number of holes in a stick placed in front of the drop-scene, to divide the audience from the actors. Andrew Micklewhame gazed on all this with the stoical indifference of one who is used to such things: in short, he gazed on it with the eye of an experienced critic—the

best of all possible ways to mar one's enjoyment of a play.

Occasionally, however, he felt inclined to indulge in a hearty laugh; but the dignity of the critic came to his aid, and he restrained it by turning away his face from the stage, and casting his scrutinising glance around the inhabitants of the seats in the rear, or listened to the remarks of those in the pit. It was during the latter part of the performance of the first act, and the interval between it and the second, that he, in this manner, overheard the fragments of a conversation carried on, *sotto voce*, in the seat immediately behind him.

He had the curiosity to steal a glance at the speakers. They were a young woman, with fine dark eyes, and a young man of apparently five-and-twenty years of age, with cheeks *red*olent of rouge, enveloped in a faded Petersham greatcoat, whom Andrew immediately set down as belonging to the company of comedians. He could hear the young woman with the dark eyes upbraiding the young man with the coloured cheeks for deserting her; then the young man said he had intended to write her soon, with some money, so she ought not to have followed him.

"I am pretty well situated in lodgings here at present," continued the young man; "but I cannot venture to take you there to-night, for the fact of my being a married man would not, were it known, raise me in the estimation of the landlady. But I will procure other lodgings for you after the play is over; and if you do not hear from me in the morning at farthest by ten, you may call for me at the inn where I am staying."

He ended by observing that he was wanted in the next act to go on as a Highlander; and, accordingly, he left her, and crept in behind the curtain.

There was nothing very extraordinary in all this; yet, though Andrew knew that such occurrences happened daily, he could not help thinking of what he had just overheard, and feeling interested in the damsel of the sparkling eyes. He did not dare, however, to take another peep at her, as he thought it would be too marked; and when he rose, at the termination of the performances, to go away, the seat behind him was quite vacant; nor could he discern among the dense mass of human beings that obstructed the doorway, the slightest vestige of her, or the youth in the shabby greatcoat, who had acknowledged himself her husband.

The rain had not ceased when Micklewhame left the Assembly Room, so he hurried to his inn with all possible despatch. Micklewhame prided himself on his knowledge of the principles of

economy; and when he travelled, he invariably made it a point to take no more than two meals per diem—breakfast and tea—both with a meat accompaniment; but this evening—this particular evening—as he sat toasting his toes before an excellent fire, in a comfortable parlour of a comfortable inn, and heard the rain pattering against the casement, it somehow or other entered into his head that a tumbler of punch would be by no means amiss.

A tumbler of punch was ordered in accordingly; after that came a second and a third. There was a marked inclination first towards one side of the staircase, and then towards the other, in Andrew Micklewhame's ascent to his bedroom that evening. Nay, more: he attempted to kiss Kirsty as she was depositing the candlestick upon the table; but he missed his aim, and measured his length on the floor. By the time he was up again, Kirsty had vanished.

Micklewhame was a little annoyed that he could not use the precaution of bolting his door. The mysterious man, with the black whiskers and broad shoulders, had not yet claimed his bed.

"I don't half like this sleeping in a double-bedded room, with a man I never saw," he thought, but did not venture to say it aloud, lest some one might be within ear-shot, and set him down as a coward. "I wonder," exclaimed he, as he proceeded to undress before the yet glowing embers of a consumptive fire, "whether—hic—whether the f—f—fellow snores? I shan't sleep, I'm sure—hic—I I shan't—hic—sleep if the f—f—fellow snores."

Having delivered himself of this very sensible observation, he got into one of the beds in the best way he could, covered himself up warm, and fell fast asleep.

Dreams visited his pillow: distorted visions, in which Kirsty, the dark-eyed damsel, and the man with the black whiskers, bore prominent parts, flitted across his fancy. Then he felt himself borne through the air by a vulture in a shabby brown greatcoat, which set him down on the top of a high house, and flew away. He thought he got up and groped his way along the house-top; but, missing his footing, he fell over, and would certainly have had his brains dashed out upon the pavement below, had not the motion of his descent caused him to start and awaken.

All was still within the chamber. He looked out of bed, but could discover no signs of the appearance of his mysterious neighbour; so he composed himself to sleep again.

This time, however, he was not so successful as at first; for it was only after some time that he could coax himself into a sort of doze—something betwixt sleeping and waking. While in this state he

fancied he saw the man in the brown greatcoat enter the room; then he saw a flash of light; then he imagined he smelt sulphur; and then, all of a sudden, he felt himself in reality pulled half out of bed.

"Hollo! hollo!" cried he; "what the deuce is the matter?" and he rubbed his eyes until he found himself wide awake.

"Sir, sir!" cried a voice, "you've made a mistake—you've got into my bed in place of your own."

Any one in Andrew's place but Andrew himself would have cursed and swore like a trooper at a person daring to awaken him from a comfortable snooze upon such slight pretence; but Andrew was a peaceable man—he never liked to make any disturbance—and he actually, without saying a word, turned out of the bed he had warmed for himself and allowed the stranger to get into his place. He was sure, at all events, that he had not given up his bed to any but the lawful tenant of the room; for a blink of fire-light gleamed upon a pair of extensive whiskers, with shoulders to correspond.

The features struck Andrew as being familiar to him; but he could not, though he tried, for the life of him recollect where he had seen them before. He cursed the fellow's impudence, as he discovered that the smell of sulphur was *not* the smell of sulphur, but of a candle having been blown out.

When he awoke, the morning light was streaming into the room through the chinks of the shutters. He wondered very much what o'clock it was, as he remembered that he purposed setting off by the omnibus at nine, and groped about for his watch. He had left it beneath the pillow of the other bed.

Jumping to the floor with considerable agility, and opening the shutters with a bang, in the hope that noise and daylight would bring him courage, the first objects that met his astonished gaze were a shabby brown greatcoat and a shocking bad hat, lying carelessly on a chair.

That the shabby brown greatcoat and the shocking bad hat belonged to the mysterious man with the black whiskers, and that the mysterious man with the black whiskers and he who had sat beside the damsel with the bright eyes, at the play were one and the same individual, Andrew Micklewhame had not the smallest doubt, and thereupon he began to get a little fidgety regarding his watch. The curtains of the bed were closely drawn—so closely that Andrew could not see in; and he did not just like at first to open the curtains and disturb the whiskered youth in the same manner

as the whiskered youth had disturbed him.

He paced the room for some time, fancying all sorts of things about the owner of the shabby brown greatcoat, but never taking his eye off the curtains, resolved to rush forward on the first appearance of their opening.

"'Tis for no good this fellow lives here,' thought Andrew. 'All a sham, too, his being connected with these players. I have no doubt in my own mind that he is either a famous murderer in disguise, or a resurrectionist. Ah! perhaps he has run away from the world, and come here for the purpose of committing suicide in a quiet way. But, no; why should he? That's quite improbable.'

And, after thinking all this, he paused for about five minutes; then said to himself, "I can bear this suspense no longer. Ecod! I'll ask the fellow who he is, and, at the same time, claim my watch!"

So saying, he rushed forward with a determined air, drew the curtains, and discovered—the bed was empty!

'He can't have gone far, for he has left his coat and hat behind him,' were Andrew's reflections; and as he said this, he looked for his watch, and then for his clothes.

Amazement! they were all gone—watch, shirt, coat, vest, and inexpressibles—all had vanished. In a paroxysm of fury he rang the bell; and presently the voice of Kirsty, from without, enquired, as she half-opened the door, and thrust forward a pair of well-worn Wellingtons, which Andrew recognised as not belonging to him—"D'ye please to want onything else?"

"Anything else!" roared Andrew, choking with rage, and utterly regardless of the respect due to the sex of the speaker. "Come in here, and help me to find my trousers!"

"O you—ye'll wait awhile, I'm thinkin', or I do siccan a thing."

"Zounds! that infernal fellow must have carried them off!" muttered Andrew.

"Na, na," said Kirsty; "it's no the infernal gentleman ava, man. I wadna be the least surprised but it's that auld bunchy buddy that sleepit in this room last nicht, and ran awa' this morning, wi' the nine o'clock omnibush, without payin' his reckonin', that's taen yer breeks; but ye needna mind, ye can just pit on *his* for a day."

This was too much. To be told that he himself was the thief and that he had run away that morning without paying his reckoning, was more than Andrew Nicklewhame could bear.

"Are you mad, woman?" cried he. "Confound you, I'll leave your house instantly, and bring an action for the recovery of my

clothes."

"Your claes, quotha—your claes! My man, thae tricks winna do here, I can tell ye. Ye're fund oot at last. My certie, to hear a fallow speakin' o' claes, whan it's well kenned he had nae mair than a brown greatcoat, an auld hat, an' a pair o' boots I wadna gie tippence for. Ye're fund oot at last. There's twa chaps below has twa or three words to say to ye."

"They may go to the devil, and you along with them!" was Andrew's pert rejoinder.

"Bide a bit—jist bide a bit. Hi," cried Kirsty, seemingly over the banister of the stair, to some unknown individual or individuals below. "Stap up this way, will ye?"

And fast upon the heels of this summons, in walked two justice of peace officers, who despite the asseverations of Andrew Micklewhame that he was himself and no other, ordered him to don the brown greatcoat, and the shocking bad hat, and follow them.

"We've pursued you from Queensferry," said the first, "round by Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Stirling; and Grog the innkeeper is determined to punish you, unless you pay him for the eight weeks' board you had in his house, and our expenses over and above."

It was in vain that Mr. Micklewhame protested he had never been in Queensferry in his life; nor had he the honour of the acquaintance of Grog the innkeeper; but, at length, seeing that it was impossible to convince the officers to the contrary, he thought it advisable to pay the amount of their demand, and trust to law and justice afterwards for retribution. Even with this he found himself unable to comply—his purse, containing every rap he owned in the world, was in the pocket of his inexpressibles.

There was no help for it. With despair in his countenance, he donned the shabby brown greatcoat and the dilapidated Wellingtons, took the shocking bad hat in his hand, and in silence followed the officers of justice downstairs, determining to appeal to the generosity of the landlady, who, he had no doubt, would give full credence to his story.

The present mishap of Mr. Micklewhame had arisen solely from the fact of his having taken so much toddy overnight, which was the cause of his sleeping longer and more soundly in the morning than usual. Kirsty, ever vigilant, had gone to the door of the double-bedded room and knocked, at the same time calling out, with a stentorian voice, that 'the omnibush was ready to start.'

All this was unheeded by Andrew, who slept on, utterly un-

conscious of the progress of time. Not so, however, was it with the other occupant of the chamber; for no sooner did he hear Kirsty's summons than a lucky thought occurred to him; and he bawled through the door that he would be down instantly. He then proceeded, in the coolest manner possible, to adorn himself in the habitiments of his somniferous neighbour.

Thus equipped, he removed Andrew's watch from beneath the pillow, and placed it in the same pocket it had occupied the preceding day; took off his portable bushy whiskers, and put them in his pocket; then bidding adieu to his brown greatcoat and napless hat, which, with the accompaniment of a pair of well-worn Wellington boots, had been his only attire for many a day, he strode from the apartment, carefully shutting the door behind him. As he got to the foot of the stairs, there was Kirsty in the outer passage.

For a moment he felt undetermined what course next to pursue; but his never-failing wit came to his aid, and stepping into a side room, the window of which looked out into the street, he desired Kirsty to bring him his bill of fare—*i.e.* the bill of fare peculiar to Mr. Andrew Micklewhame—and a sheet of writing-paper, with pens and ink. These being brought, and Kirsty having shut the door, he scribbled a few lines on the paper, and made it up in the form of a letter.

This was no sooner done, than the omnibus cad, who stood on the opposite side of the street, just behind the omnibus, holding open the door with his left hand, blew a blast so loud and shrill, that all those in waiting in the street, who had serious intentions of proceeding to Stirling by that conveyance, seemed of one accord to know that it was their last warning; so shaking hands with the friends who had come to see them off, they scrambled nimbly up the steps of the omnibus, and passed from before the view of the bystanders into its ponderous interior.

Our actor saw this. He opened the window and jumped into the street. His letter he deposited in the post office receiving-box, and his body in the omnibus, which, being now full, the cad banged-to the door, gave the signal to the driver, and off the omnibus rattled; nor did Kirsty or her mistress know of the escapement of their guest, whom they both believed to be Andrew Micklewhame, until he was a considerable part on his way to Stirling.

Kirsty was in the bar, stamping the postmark on some letters—for her mistress was post*master*—and talking to a young woman

with bright eyes.

"The villain that he is!" said Kirsty. "A married man! Wha wad hae thocht it? an' a play-actor too, crinky-patie. He'll be doon the noo, and ye'll see him then. There's twa gentlemen gaen up to him a wee while ago."

At this moment the landlady opened the door of a parlour off the bar, and handed to Kirsty some letters, which she had been ostensibly arranging for delivery—in reality, making herself acquainted with their contents.

"Here's six for delivery, and one to lie till called for." Kirsty took them; and as her mistress shut the door, read aloud from the back of the latter. "'To lie till called for.' The name, 'Mrs. Isabella Young.'"

"What!" exclaimed the dark-eyed young woman, starting, "a letter for me?" And she almost snatched it out of Kirsty's hand. A gleam of joy played upon her handsome face as she read—

> DEAR ISY—I enclose you a crown; if you want more, apply to Manager Trash for my arrears of salary. I'm off to Perth with the toggery of an old fellow who slept in the same room with me last night. They'll perhaps talk of pursuing me; if so, detain them as long as possible, and follow at your leisure.
>
> Your affectionate
>
> PATRICK YOUNG.

At this juncture appeared Andrew in the custody of the two officers; and the damsel of the dark eyes, taking her cue from the document she had just perused, rushed forward and threw herself into his arms, exclaiming, "My own, my lost one!—Oh, do not—do not drag my husband from me!" The latter part of her sentence was addressed to the officers of justice.

"Loshifycairyme!" cried Kirsty; "he's lost his bonny black whiskers, and turned fatter nor he was!" Then, after a moment's reflection, she added—"But thae player-buddies can do onything!"

"My pretty one," said Andrew, "I know nothing of you!" Yet the young woman still clung to his embrace. "You vile woman," he continued, waxing wroth, "get you gone. I'll tell your husband if you don't!" But Mrs. Young clung closer and closer to him. He then addressed himself to Kirsty, desiring to inform her mistress that he wished to say a few words to her. "Tell her," he continued, "that I am in great tribulation here, and I wish her to advance a small sum of money to these gentlemen, which will be returned with grateful thanks as soon as I get to Edinburgh."

Kirsty grumbled a little at being sent on such an errand, but proceeded into the little parlour of the bar. In a few seconds she returned, saying—"My Mistress'll no advance money to ony man unless to her lawfu' husband; and she says gif ye like to marry her she'll do't, but no unless. I'm sure I dinna ken what she means, seeing you're a married man already!"

"What!" excalimed Andrew; "marry a woman I never saw!"

"On nae ither condition will she advance the money. Between oorsels, my mistress is worth at least twa thousand."

'Two thousand pounds!' thought Andrew. 'The speculation wouldn't be such a bad one after all.' And, after a show of hesitation, he gave a reluctant consent, as the only way, and a speedy one, to relieve him from his difficulties. His private debts amounted to at least a hundred pounds; and with two thousand pounds he could pay that, ay, and live like a prince besides.

The whole party was ushered into the little back parlour, where, to complete Andrew's amazement, he descried, seated over a cup of coffee, the identical Widow Brown to whom he had given the slip six years before. She rose and shook him by the hand.

"Be not amazed!" she said. "The moment I saw you, from the window of this room, enter my inn yesterday, I recognised you, and my love for you returned. I know all." She certainly did, for she had read Patrick Young's letter to his wife. "I shall procure your immediate release; and should you rue the consent you have just given, you are free to return to Edinburgh as you came—a single man!"

"Generous woman!" cried Andrew. 'This —this is too much! Think ye I could again desert you? No, by heaven!"—Here he laid his hand upon his breast, and turned up the white of his eyes in an attempt to look pathetic. The widow led him to a seat. The officers were dismissed; and the damsel with the dark eyes escaped through the open door as they went out, fearful of being detained for her deceitful attempt upon the person of Andrew Micklewhame.

In a few days the nuptials were solemnised; and Andrew Micklewhame ever blessed the lucky chance that led him to Alloa.

History is silent regarding the ultimate fate of Mr. Patrick Young; but it is to be hoped that he was either hanged or sent to Botany Bay. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Micklewhame thought it worth their while to pursue him for the injuries he had done them; and Grog the innkeeper could not, for his myrmidons had lost the scent of the stroller from the moment he fled from Alloa.

NEW BOOKS

JOHN de SOLA

non-fiction

WOMAN IN THE CASE, Charles Franklin (*Hale*, 21*s.*)

An enthusiastically written study, ranging from Charlotte Corday to Valerie Storie, by way of such characters as Gay Gibson, Starr Faithfull, Jeanette Edmonds and others. This is a balanced, well observed book whose author deftly keeps his own opinions in the background—the study of Corday is, to my mind, far and away the best; that of Valerie Storie carefully avoids any opinion about James Hanratty, and as a man named Alphon has, at the writing of this review, allegedly admitted that *he* was the A6 murderer then, perhaps, the truth will now come out? *EWMM* readers have never doubted Hanratty's innocence as they have frequently said in their letters.

WORLD'S STRANGEST CRIMES, The; C. E. Maine (*Odhams*, 21*s.*)

A curious collection of episodes which cover a remarkable display of human oddities. The gruesome saga of Sawney Beane adjoins the tale of the *Santa Maria* piracy, and the murder of Mr. Percival, the Chancellor of the Exchequer is close by the Setty murder. Because few people can resist the bizarre and incredible, this should be a popular volume of events which are so unbelievable that they certainly rival even the wildest fiction.

fiction

AVENGER, THE; BIG FOOT, Edgar Wallace (*John Long*, 16*s. each*)

Two EW novels back in hard covers again, and very welcome they are, both to re-read and as collectors' pieces. The first adventure features Mike Brixan, a Foreign Office investigator, who is put on the trail of The Avenger when (which is his trade-

mark) a 12th severed head turns up in seven years. In *Big Foot* Superintendent Minter—'Sooper'—comes up against Cardew the criminologist, who has theories about everything, even about the mysterious criminal whose huge, naked footmarks appear where he has been at work. As *The Daily Mail* once said: 'It is impossible not to be thrilled by Edgar Wallace', a claim which, even in these blasé days, is exemplified in these books.

DEATH BUSINESS, The; Anthony Graham (*Boardman*, 16*s*.)

This is a real rough-and-tough story about gangs quarrelling in a west coast American township. Private eye Frank Richmond is both deeply involved, and a linch-pin of several mysteries. Anthony Graham has all the tricks at his command of the hard-boiled crime novel, and has a neat gift for characterisation and gripping reality.

DEADLINE, Thomas Dewey (*Boardman*, 16*s*.)

A youngster named Davidian is four days away from the electric chair, condemned for the mutilation murder of a small town girl. A group of people who will not accept the verdict hire 'Mac' (the private eye without a surname) to see if he can upset the court's decision. He can, and does, with a great deal of breathless excitement to help along this excellent tale.

DEATH BY INCHES, Dell Shannon (*Gollancz*, 21*s*.)

Lieutenant Mendoza, of the Los Angeles Police Department, the Mendoza of the elegant cars and exotic cats, is back again to crack a case which is less one problem than a whole series of them, interwoven and inter-related. But the real detective in this tale is Alison Mendoza, who solves the mystery by putting her finger on an obvious key point which she, womanlike, hands over as a sort of an aside. First-class reading.

DEATH IN THE EAST, Charles Franklin (*Hale*, 15*s*.)

This is rather neat, a change from the usual espionage routine. The central character, Robin Kingsland, takes over the problem of a British agent whose cover has been pulled aside, and is fleeing eastwards to possible safety. All the usual characters are here, but none of the usual stock situations. Exciting and fast.

ELLERY QUEEN'S CRIME CAROUSEL (*Gollancz*, 25*s*.)

A collection of 21 crime stories by such favourites as Christianna

Brand; Stanley Ellin; Michael Gilbert; Julian Symons, and others, chosen with impeccable taste and ranging over the whole gamut of the crime story from the off-beat touch of Ellin's *The Day the Thaw Came to* 127 to Gilbert's really brilliant *Operation Prometheus*. Warmly recommended.

FIFTH CORD, THE; D. M. Devine (*Crime Club:* 16*s*.)

A whodunit in classical form, which presents fairly to the reader all the clues and keys. The story concerns a series of murders by a Ripper-like killer, possessing a taste for exhibitionism. The narrator is a journalist who plays the game according to the right rules and has the advantage of felling the (totally unexpected) murderer at the end. A real crackerjack of a story, very well told indeed.

FORECAST—MURDER, Alfred Tack (*John Long*, 15*s*.)

This one has a most adept opening chapter, in which the murderer and his victim, secretary Pat Doyle, are together. The basis for murder emerges, the lead up to it and then the crime; we see the murderer but do not learn his name. The death is accepted as suicide by everyone except the girl's boss. He goes to work and,

most ably, solves the case. A logical, clever book which might almost be a form of biography concerning an event from a newspaper.

JAMES JOYCE, MURDER THE; Amanda Cross (*Gollancz*, 18*s.*)

Published with superb timing, when the great controversy is raging over the James Joyce film in London, this is set around the country house belonging to Joyce's first, long dead, American publisher. The story is complicated to follow, but, if the title is kept in mind, runs very smoothly. Not everyone's cup of tea, but superbly told, and with a first-class twist at the end.

LIGHT IN THE WINDOW, A; Margaret Lynn (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 18*s.*)

Opens with the leading character being telephoned by her husband that he is leaving her. She promptly goes to the cottage from which he says he was speaking, and gets involved in a car crash on the way. She finds her husband gone and then happens to go near an abandoned well . . . a real cliff-hanger, told with a fine eye for drama.

LITTLE DRAGON FROM PEKING, James Eastwood (*Cassell*, 18*s.*)

Anna Zordan's second case in which this wholly ruthless and most adroit agent is involved with a family who by repute 'dwarfed the Borgias' in their power-mad hunger. There are all the usual plots and counter-plots but told with a brisk air of freshness which makes for a thoroughly readable story. The detail and backgrounds are very well done.

MADAME AUBRY DINES WITH DEATH, Hugh Travers (*Elek*, 21*s.*)

The leading character is involved in the investigation, at the request of Paris *Brigade Criminelle*, of the murder of a French countess. The story is cleverly told and the air of France almost palpable, while Madame Aubry is a most interesting person. Readable, if a little old fashioned in tone, and perhaps a signpost to better books to come.

OPEN MOUTH, THE; Macgregor Urquhart (*Boardman*, 16*s.*)

Set in Suffolk, this is a rural murder story which more or less

begins with the discovery of a girl's body in a stream; the cause of her death is a mystery. Another crime follows and the brusque Chief Inspector Josh Smarles takes over, to reach a swift and surprising conclusion about a new and stomach-turning form of murder. Suspense plus; well told, and well observed.

WHAT SHOULD YOU KNOW OF DYING? Tobias Wells (*Gollancz*, 21*s.*)

A curious tale, which starts off with a five-year-old-boy found dead in an old ice-box, in New England. The plot is twisted and fascinating, and the author has a way of stripping the protective layers off human motives. Very readable, and recommended.

A SCATTER OF PAPERBACKS

ASSIGNMENT: CONG HAI KILL, Edward S. Aarons (*Hodder*, 3*s.* 6*d.*

A real blood-bath of a story, which opens with the hero almost dying, then he plunges into the job of bringing back a sadist-defector from the Reds. Brisk.

DOLL FOR THE TOFF, A; John Creasey (*Hodder*, 3*s.* 6*d.*)

Somebody sends the Toff a naked doll, with a knife stab in it, and the trouble starts. This one has Voodoo as its motive, and a full supply of Creasey thrills.

JAMES BOND DOSSIER, THE; Kingsley Amis (*Pan*, 3*s.* 6*d.*)

A kind of look at the Bond world, and the material things which comprise it. Much detail and factual reporting. A good read for Fleming fans, only.

MAN WHO CHOSE DEATH, THE; Eric Allen (*Sphere*, 4*s.*)

There is a Florentine background, a dead man and a beautiful model, to say nothing of a stolen painting. Good fast stuff, well told and entertaining.

MAN WITH THE GOLDEN GUN, THE; Ian Fleming (*Pan*, 3*s.* 6*d.*)

Bondmanship again, this time with brain-washing, warmongers, the usual horrors and tricks, told with the brisk style of the whole series. Readable.

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.*

Prolix

Can you tell me why so many critics are so verbose? I am a reader of several newspapers and magazines, and, invariably, reviews are needlessly long-winded (this does not apply to crime fiction, I see).

Often a critic I like to follow reviews *one* book and does it at length. If I read one book a week, and intended to read *whatever* a critic reviewed, then that is all right. But I (and, I am sure, many readers) can get through more than one book a week, and certainly do not wish to be confined to one in which perhaps I am not interested.

Surely several shorter reviews are to the point? This gives me a variety (of subjects), and I still read a book my favourite critic has commended.

E. EMMETT-MITCHELL.

Hendon, Middx.

● *This is not unlike the length of a piece of string! Critics are a law unto themselves and their editors; some, like John de Sola can tell you everything in* 150 *words—others (no names, no pack drill!) are happily nowhere at the end of* 1,000 *words. You will have to find a short-winded critic and stick to him.*

Beverly Hills

I am new to your magazine, but read with great interest your article by Walter Reisch on the house where Edgar Wallace was staying on his death.

I have seen this house and know it quite well. I not only know it recently, but I remember when Mr. Wallace was there; I was working myself in Hollywood as probably one of the lowest creatures in the moving picture set-up, a writer of additional dialogue (even extras rate higher!). I met Mr. Wallace twice and

recall well his charm of manner, and his very genuine kindness to a youngster then just starting. It is nice to know how highly the world still thinks of such a very great man.

M. M. JOHN RENNITT.

*London, W.*1.

Kennedy

In all the wild assumptions and guesses as to *who* killed President Kennedy, may I congratulate the author of *The Long Day*, in your April issue?

The suggestion made seems frighteningly feasible, and one wonders if perhaps the author has hit on the possible truth.

In the murder of a head of state, all sorts of wild surmises are bound to occur, when there is no real proof. I therefore suggest that *The Long Day*, though a work of imagination, may contain more real possibilities than any of the books I have read about the case.

D. L. PRENTICE.

Cardiff.

Bouquets

John de Sola really does manage to review a lot of books in a brief space, and does it well. Many thanks. As a 'chain-reader' of crime stories, he helps me get what I fancy.

E. M. ROSERY.

Liverpool, 1.

The Wimbledon Vampire [April] was typical EW, and most enjoyable. The Steinbeck story was unusual, and Penelope Wallace has definitely got her father's touch. Congratulations.

B. D. A. TIMERY.

*London, E.C.*3.

A word about your bright covers. They are so cheerful that I quite enjoy looking forward to seeing them; they match the excellent material inside.

(Mrs.) E. D. KINNLE.

Cambridge.

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