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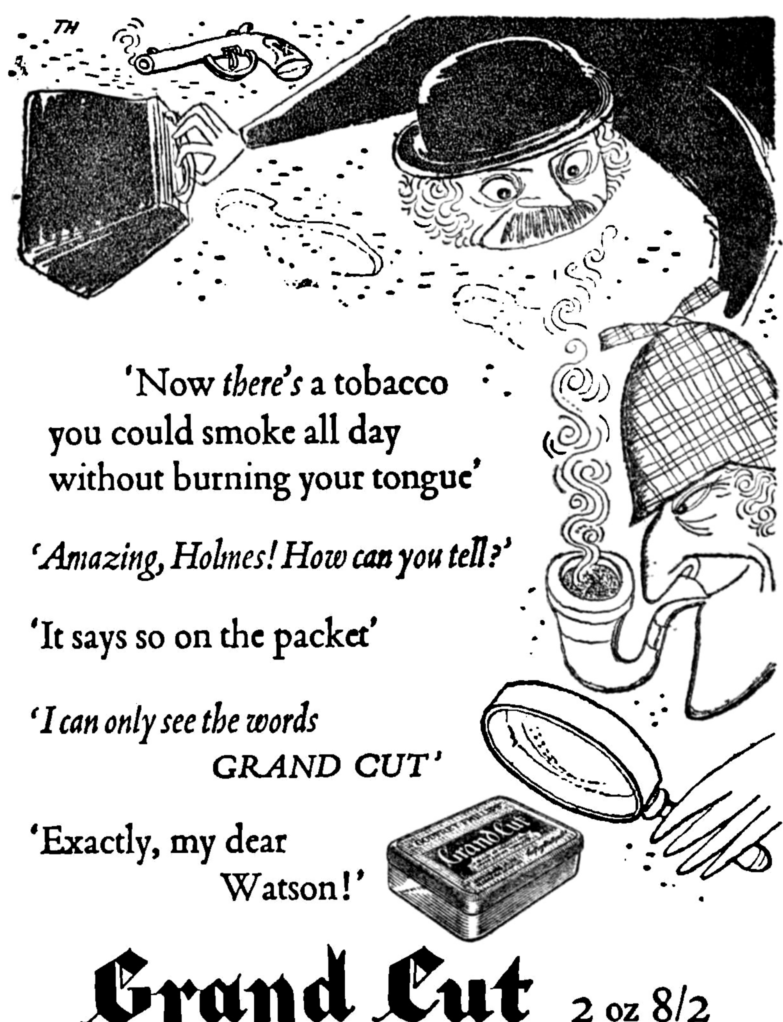

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(P.193B)

THE LONDON MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Season of fogs and mellow frightfulness. The winter days shorten and the nights enlarge. Indoors it is the comfort of heavy curtains, blazing log fires, sparkling decanters of port, polished balloon glasses of matured brandy and the cosiness of the raconteur's ghost story. Outside it is the thick yellow asthmatic air, tangible and enclosing. All sounds are muffled as though heard through layers of velvet, and each passer-by carries with him a small sealed circle of awareness beyond which lies fog, mystery, the world—and Terror.

Time has no meaning. Ships and aircraft may use radar, but ambulatory man still requires flares, and the scene, intense at the small centre, shading off into a ring of fog at the edges, might equally well be the London of hansom cabs as of Comets. The Thames is as grey and quietly eschatological as at the turn of any past century, and the bodies as bloated that are fished out of it. The Mile End Road and its purlieus has the same fearful loneliness for the imaginative as when Terror stalked the drab demi-monde in the mysterious person of Jack the Ripper. London in the winter, we are pleased to remember, is still the City of teeming life, strange crimes, odd mysteries and sinister atmosphere. The mid-twentieth century has not altered that. But now there is talk of scientists and fog-dispersal equipment. . . .

LONDON MYSTERY MAGAZINE, perched in an office high above Trafalgar Square looking at Nelson on top of his column, in a building which was once the hotel where the new Baskerville baronet, lately from Canada, stayed and lost one shoe and thus set off the most thrilling chain of adventure and deduction in the Holmes saga, still provides the chilling winter back-cloth. We wish all our readers greetings of the season, and good mystery reading—years of it. We should thank all our loyal supporters and our critics, and remind them that we supply the most intelligent and the best-quality new stories and articles, and that a year's subscription to L.M.M. is a fine gift for any friend of taste and discrimination.

EDITOR

The American Edition of the London Mystery Magazine is published quarterly by the Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, editorial offices 366 Madison Avenue, New York 17, New York. No manuscripts, illustrations, or other editorial material can be considered, as this publication originates in England. The British edition is published by Norman Kark Publications, London.

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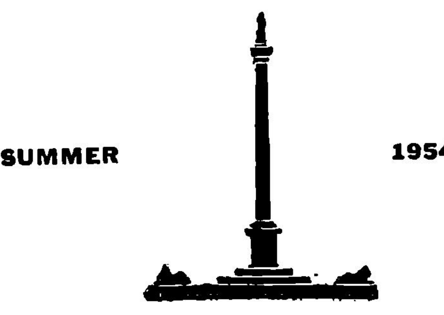

SUMMER 1954

THE LONDON MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY
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366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, New York

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THE LONDON MYSTERY MAGAZINE IS PUBLISHED QUARTERLY IN ENGLAND BY THE NORMAN KARK PUBLICATIONS, LTD.

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LONDON MYSTERY MAGAZINE, Summer 1954, is published quarterly by the Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, William B. Ziff, Chairman of the Board (1946-1958), at 366 Madison Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. Application for second-class entry pending at Post Office, New York, N. Y.

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

All this...

and a 7 too!

NUMBER SEVEN

'Virginia' Cigarettes 20 for 3/11

ALSO *Abdulla Turkish and Egyptian*

AT THE HEART OF IT

MICHAEL HARRISON

Illustrations by Jensen

Not bread alone but also books. These provide the staff of life for civilized man. They are a power for good—or for evil.

OLYWELL STREET is gone, with its fine old overhanging, gabled houses of lath and plaster. So is the old Olympic Theatre and the Rising Sun Inn. No one could now tell you where that holy well stood from which the old street took its name, and no ghost could with fitness haunt the matter-of-fact modernity of Australia House.

But in 1893, when the inexplicable death of Mr. Rufus Hopkins caused such a stir, not only in adjoining Wych Street and Clare Market but throughout the length and breadth of Britain, the dingy purlieus of St. Clement Danes seemed a most proper place for that sort of thing; and it was felt to be eminently suitable that the whole business should reek of a sinister mystery which to this day has not been resolved.

Mr. Hopkins at the time of his death was something over 50; one of the many booksellers who had given to Holywell Street the unofficial name of "Booksellers' Row." He had a little eighteenth-century shop with a bow-front, and in the panelled rooms above he lived with his family: his wife and two grown-up sons.

When the evidence of these people was taken at the inquest, together with that of neighbours who had known the deceased, it was testified that all his life Mr. Hopkins had been singularly free from any mental aberration or nervous upsets. The business, while on a small scale, was yet of sufficient size to provide necessities and comforts for them all, and the trade was steady. So that there was no reason why Mr. Hopkins should suddenly have become a prey to the most disturbing fancies, nor one morning be found dead of a seizure.

The shop had belonged to his father, and on leaving school Rufus Hopkins had started working for his father: running errands, cataloguing the purchases, keeping the day-book; then, as he made progress, attending sales and searching the stalls of Petticoat Lane and the Caledonian Market. For more than thirty-five years he had sold books in Holywell Street; watching through the bottle-glass panes of the window the heads bent over the boxes outside—"all in this box 2*d*."

He used more often to sit watching the faces in the street than reading. It was an entertainment which never palled on him. The endless

variety of human beings that came poking about in the twopenny and fourpenny and sixpenny boxes. Scholars on the search for some rare item to titillate their literary fancy; schoolboys looking for cribs; the knowing-ones on the look-out for first editions of *Paradise Lost* or Aldine *incunabula*; and idle Autolyci, just looking. . . .

They were always different, the faces, and when one sometimes reappeared Hopkins would always recognize it, even though years had passed since its last visit. Sometimes he would see a man whom he had known as a boy, looking now for *curiosa*, where long since he had searched for Bohn's *Thucydides*. The bookseller never forgot, so that the tall dark man who went so meticulously over the titles in the boxes came to be quite an old friend.

He was not young, Hopkins could see that; and he was shabby, being dressed in a long black cloak buttoned up to his neck, and a wide-awake hat green with age. His face the bookseller could never see clearly, as he was always bent over the trays and the brim of his hat concealed his features; but Hopkins had an impression that the man's face was long and thin, like his figure; lined and old.

Hopkins had seen him first when he was just out of school; and twice a year since then the man had come searching through the cheap boxes. Sometimes he had books under his arm, but he had never in all those years bought even a twopenny volume from Hopkins's shop, nor had he ever enquired inside for the object of his search—if indeed he had one.

And the bookseller often wondered what it was that the man had sought so long—and why he had never enquired inside. Hopkins supposed that it was because of the man's poverty; that if the book he wanted were not included among the cheaper volumes, he could never hope to buy it.

Mr. Hopkins loved a mystery; and this tall, black-cloaked man was an undoubted mystery. For one thing he never came during the day, but only in the evening, just after the lamps had been lit, and then only twice a year, in June and October. It was not until many years had passed that Mr. Hopkins realized that the days were always the same: June 24th and October 31st; nor was it until some time after that he recollected that the first was Midsummer's Day,

and the second All Hallow's Eve.

"What a curious thing!" he reflected. He supposed it was on those two dates that the man's dividends came in; but still, it seemed curious that the second payment should come in October and not at Christmas.

Now Mr. Hopkins was not devoid of romantic impulses, but so many and so varied were the types he saw each day from his window that he was too apt to overlook the pathetic aspect of this endless searching among the twopenny and fourpenny assortments of his stock. And so it was that many years passed before the idea came to Mr. Hopkins to ask the man if he could help him to find the book that he wanted. It was only that the man was, after all, just another customer, and also that he was obviously of that sensitive nature that goes too often with poverty, that the bookseller hesitated to break in upon his solitary quest.

But once the decision was taken, Rufus Hopkins was all eagerness for the next date to come round: October 31st. He would, he decided, enquire of the man what he wanted, and then, next June, as he saw him come along the street, Hopkins would slip the book (whatever it cost) into the twopenny box, so that the customer would be sure to see it. Hopkins was quite bitter with himself for having waited so long on a generous impulse. All sorts of little nagging thoughts were carking to him. Suppose that the book that the man had wanted had been lying on Hopkins's shelves marked at one shilling—the book that all these years the poor old man had hunted so faithfully and pathetically!

"Rufus," he said to himself, "you're getting hard-hearted in your old age."

And so he resolved that if the old man's book could be bought anywhere, he should have it.

Now, all those who have planned these happy little deceptions, surprises, what you will, will understand the eagerness with which Rufus Hopkins awaited All Hallow's Eve. So that soon he began to fear that the man would not appear, or that this year he would choose another day, when the bookseller would be out. A dozen fanciful fears that the good action would never be done.

But on the night in question—a dark, drizzling sort of night—just before eight o'clock, the old man came up to the shop window. Rufus could hardly find the patience to allow him time to search through the boxes.

Since June Hopkins had fixed an arc-lamp outside his shop to en-encourage night-trade, and now, in its blue-white glare, the poverty of the man was more evident. His cloak was patched and darned, and his big black hat was shiny with grease. He was tall but sadly stooping; and he shuffled up to the books with a walk that bespoke the utter acceptance of weariness and despair.

Rufus watched him through the window with the eagerness of a cat, fearful that the old man should see him and be embarrassed. But the head was bent over the books and the brim of the hat hid the face.

Long white fingers turned the

books over; over and over again. And then the bent, worn figure turned to go. It was the long-awaited moment. Hopkins, gulping with inexplicable nervousness, pulled the door open with a violence which set the crazy bell bobbing and jangling on its curved spring.

Talking of the matter later that night, he told his wife that as he came up behind the tall figure he was suddenly seized with an unaccountable distaste for the whole business and with the strongest possible impulse to let him go. But a moment's recollection of his good intentions overcame the bookseller's diffidence, and he tapped the man's arm.

"Excuse me," he said.

The old man turned; and Rufus was silent before the age and suffering which now faced him. For a long minute he gazed at the old, troubled face before he remembered what he had come to do.

He said, "Excuse me, sir; but I've seen you so often searching in the boxes, that I thought perhaps I could help you find some special book."

The old man's fevered eyes seemed to burn into him as he said it. Then he answered, "Thank you, but . . . well, I can only buy the cheaper books."

Hopkins gave a little nervous laugh.

"Well," he said, with a jocularity that he did not feel, "after all, there's a *camaraderie* among us folk who like books, and I've *dozens* of books inside." He took the man's arm as he said it and led him back to the shop. They entered and he pushed a chair forward.

"Sit down. Nobody'll come in now."

The old man sank into the chair with a sigh, and folded his white hands on the head of his cane.

"*Now*," Rufus asked briskly, rubbing his hands, "let's see what we can do."

The old man smiled and gazed round the shop.

"It hasn't altered much," he said.

Rufus, in the act of fetching his ladder, spun round like a top.

"You don't mean to say you've been here before?"

"Yes—many years ago."

The bookseller nodded.

"I should say it *was*! Not in *my* time—and *I've* been here thirty-five years."

The old man said, "No. It was before your time."

Hopkins, holding the ladder with one hand, indicated his stock with the other in a wide, sweeping motion.

"Now, tell me the name of the book you want?"

He waited expectantly while the old man considered a little pocket-book.

He said, "The title is *Domus Vitæ*; it was written by an Englishman named Edward Chardell, and published by the van Epps."

"Amstelodami?"

"Yes. Do you know it?"

"No," said Hopkins, "I've never heard of it; but I know the brothers van Epp."

The old man shook his head.

"I was afraid not," and he got up to go.

Rufus said, "Wait a bit. I don't do

all the cataloguing here. My assistant does a bit of it, and I don't know every book that's here."

He searched his shelves intently for a few minutes.

"Looks as though it isn't here." He turned to his visitor as he said it.

"Yes . . . I was afraid you'd not have it. It's a very rare book."

The bookseller descended the ladder and went to his little desk. He said, "I'll make a note of it; you never know."

He wrote in his journal, reading aloud:

"*Domus Vitæ*, by Edward Chardell. Published van Epp, Amsterdam. . . . What year?"

"Seventeen fifty-three."

The bookseller wrote down the date.

"It's a small book," said the old man, "duodecimo . . . and the twenty-four copies printed were bound by the van Epps themselves; so you may find it in its original vellum binding, with the arms on the cover of Lord Edward Sempiter, Chardell's patron, embossed in gold."

"Sempiter!" Rufus whistled, raising his eyebrows at the name.

"You know about him?"

Hopkins shook his head.

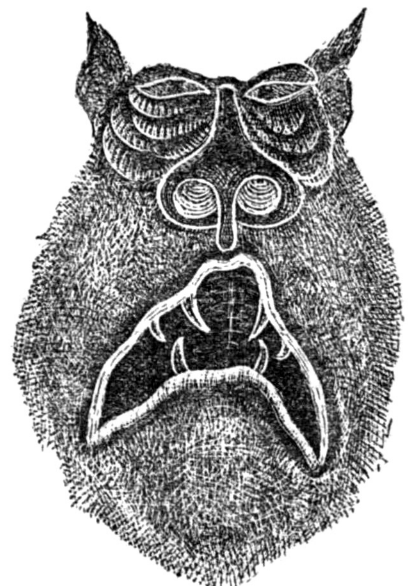
"Not much . . . but he was a member of the Hell-fire Club, and in their memoirs they talk of the wickedness of Sempiter."

There was a silence, and Rufus looked up from his writing to find the burning eyes fixed on him in an unwinking stare.

"Not wickedness. . . . A contempt, if you like, for petty convention and prejudice; but, wickedness . . . no!"

Rufus closed his ledger. He said:

"I'll look for Chardell's book. It's in English?"



"Partly; some of it's in Latin."

"I see. And now, Mr. ——"

The old man looked at him before answering . . . and afterwards Hopkins, in telling his wife, assured her that he commenced to say some name that began with "Ch . . ."; then he shook his head and said:

"Sempiter."

Rufus looked at the old man, wondering whether he had heard aright; but his visitor nodded.

"Yes. Sempiter. Lord Edward was my . . . was an ancestor of mine."

So Hopkins wrote down in his

journal: "October 31st, 1892. Mr. Sempiter enquired after the *Domus Vitæ*, by Edward Chardell."

From his desk he asked, "Mr. Sempiter" (and here it seemed a smile passed quickly over the white face), "it occurs to me that I might come across the book with its cover and title-page missing. Could you give me some idea of its contents; so that I'd have a chance of recognizing it?"

And here again it seemed that Sempiter was about to say something and then changed his mind, for he started, "Chardell told me . . ." and continued, "I mean, Chardell says in his book that life is immortal not so much in *time* as in *essence*. This book 'The House of Life,' was published as Chardell lay dying, and it contains all the sum of his enquiries, spread over a lifetime of careful experiment.

"He says," the old man explained, "that life exists outside of, and independent of, Creation, and independent, too, of the accidents of birth or dissolution. He claims that life (by which he means consciousness or volition) can and does attach itself to inanimate as well as to animate objects. A book—a house."

Rufus shook his head.

"You doubt it?" the old man asked.

"N—no. I was only wondering."

"For instance," Sempiter continued, "you don't disbelieve in what are commonly called ghosts?"

"I've never seen one," said Rufus.

"No? But that's what a ghost must be. The transference of consciousness from an animate to an inanimate object—a mere alteration of *locus*; no more. I'm surprised, though, that there isn't a ghost here."

"Here?" Rufus asked uneasily.

"Yes. 20A Holywell Street. . . . Heard of Digby Gascoigne? Byron's friend. . . ."

"Yes. I've his poems here"; and he turned to a bookshelf behind him. "Here it is." He handed a slim green morocco volume to Sempiter, who opened it, and commenced to read aloud:

"We who all day had striven for the best;
in dreams, in sinfulness and song;
now the twilight finds us here oppressed
by haunting memories of happiness escaped.
So we stand
silent; hand interlocked in hand;
silent, on the lone last crest
of a temporal sea;
and wonder at the buffets; at the wounds that gaped; and the loveless prospect of eternity.
So had we shared thoughts, as we shared food . . .

"Oh yes; that's Gascoigne right enough! I wonder he never came back, with so much to finish; why he went so quickly."

Rufus said nothing, and the old man asked,

"You've read those verses?"

"Once or twice."

He shook his head wonderingly.

"And you've never felt him near you?"

"No . . ." a little uncertainly. "Why should I?"

"He died here," said Sempiter. "He hanged himself in this very shop."

He rose painfully from his chair, and Rufus to change the unpleasant subject said, "I'll find your book, Mr. Sempiter, if I have to ask every bookseller in London. I'll expect you on June 24th, as usual."

The old man, who had been walking slowly to the door, stopped dead.

"June 24th!" he whispered. "Now, *how* could you know that?" And his febrile eyes seemed to burn themselves into Hopkins's brain.

The bookseller stammered. "Why . . . I, I've seen you so often on those dates." And the old man seemed to relax. He turned and passed through the door which Hopkins held open for him, and as he went down Holywell Street the bookseller thought he heard him mutter:

"Walburga's Eve . . . I wonder if he knows *that*?"

☠ ☠ ☠

Now, the curious thing about the book for which Mr. Sempiter had been looking was this: that an advertisement in a trade paper brought two replies within the week, and rather than miss the chance of securing a copy, Mr. Hopkins wrote for both. They were in equally good condition; one even had a few uncut pages; and he paid seven-and-sixpence for one, and ten shillings for the other.

On the morning that they arrived the bookseller sat down in his shop and began to read the *Domus Vitæ* of Edward Chardell. He described his emotions afterwards to his wife, who later tried to repeat to the coroner what he had said.

He had opened the book with interest; not unnaturally, when one considers how he came to be reading it. It was exactly as described by Mr. Sempiter, and was in the elegant typography that characterized all the work of the van Epp press. It was a slim book; not more than thirty-two duodecimo pages, and contained four mezzotint engravings.

He took it upstairs to show his wife, and they stood examining the drawings together.

"Throw the dirty thing away," said Mrs. Hopkins. "No good'll ever come of having things like *that* around!"

She repeated her words at the inquest, finding in them a sort of prescience with which women are only too ready to credit themselves.

The coroner had asked her, a little unnecessarily perhaps, to describe the

nature of the engravings; and Mrs. Hopkins had found herself quite unable to do this. But by dint of careful questioning, the coroner had learnt that they were not obscene in the ordinary sense—that they were more *horrifying* than salacious. As she explained, "one look was enough for her."

But in his shop her husband had leisure to examine the pictures at length; overcoming an initial reluctance no less intense than his wife's. And he confessed to her that he had found them the most extraordinary compositions he had ever seen—and thousands of illustrated books passed through his hands each year.

The frontispiece, for instance, showed a man and woman seated at a table in a rich, gloomy room; and, with expressions of an animal lust writ on their faces, they were devouring the body of a child.

But horrible as their meal was—the full evil of the picture was in something hinted—some nameless, purposeful horror that hung over the whole scene. As though the villainy of the ghastly feast was not in the alimentation itself but in the *reason* for it.

The three others were variants of the same theme. In one two plants had twined about a third; in another two scorpions were attacking a butterfly; in the third two babes (if one could call such horrors infants) were devouring the body of a cat. All were informed with that shifting quality of dreadfulness far above the intrinsic frightfulness of the scene itself. And under each was the legend: "*Mors domus vitæ*"—"Death is the abode of life."

Every morning, such fascination did the book possess for Mr. Hopkins, he opened and read it. But after a month he was no wiser than at the beginning. He understood, of course, what Chardell was saying. The theme was simple and clearly expounded. In poetry Wordsworth had said the same thing in the lines:

"*Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:*
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar . . ."

Chardell claimed that this corporeal existence of ours was only one of many; but (and here he differed from those religions that make a similar claim) he asserted that our transmigrations are changes only of *venue* and not changes of *state*. And more, he insisted that the true life is *consciousness*, and that as a body can be living without consciousness (as in sleep and catalepsy and idiocy), so can consciousness exist without a material body to support it. Indeed, to him consciousness was an entity, no less material than our bodies and capable of carrying on an independent existence.

Well, so far so good. It was a plausible mixture of Plato, Paracelsus, Aquinas, Swedenborg and Joseph Glanville; and Mr. Hopkins in spite of little clucking noises that he chose to make, was against his better judgment impressed.

But the curious thing about the book, as he told his wife, was this: that it seemed to hint, in some odd fashion, that there was some hidden meaning behind all these clear phrases. And often the bookseller had found himself trying to separate two pages, only to discover that the leaves were not fastened together. Yet so clear had been the impression that he had skipped something that he had sought to separate a single page.

And this had happened not once but many times.

Still, he continued to read the book, and towards the end of the second month the impression of a hidden meaning became a certainty with him. In particular, he noticed that between the pages 28 and 29 there was a distinct cæsura; that although the pages followed on, there was a break in the sense.

He made a note of it, and by endeavouring to identify his mind with that of the author, he found he could mark a dozen other places in the book where, it seemed, Chardell had had to omit something and continue. Indeed, reading the book carefully, the bookseller came to the conclusion that the book was only an emasculated version of an original in which Chardell had confessed his whole faith.

And again, it seemed to Hopkins as he resolved these fine questions that an extra-personal influence was at work helping him to solve the problem of the lacunæ.

It occurred to him that there might be a cipher—and he read many works on cryptograms and hidden writing, applying all he found to the solving of this deep riddle. But he knew, after working days at his task, that there was no cipher used in the writing of *Domus Vitæ*.

It was about this time that Mrs. Hopkins, according to her evidence, began to be worried about her husband. As she explained to the coroner, it wasn't that he was jumpy or slept badly, but that he seemed obsessed; taking little interest in anything beyond the book. But he wasn't unhappy. For him the solution of what he now felt was a first-class mystery engrossed him, and the hours passed all too quickly as he sat, pencil in hand, before the ever-open volume.

Then it occurred to him to endeavour to fill in the gaps himself; to start reading aloud slowly, and then, whenever there was an elision, to try to provide what must have been the author's intention.

He took a sheet of paper, and started to read the words that he now knew so well. And instantly it seemed that he was reciting from memory—a memory out of the forgotten years—and into his mind came memories of such dark grandeur as one might glimpse in the mezzotint illustrations of the book. And almost without volition—certainly without much consideration—he commenced to write. Quickly his pencil covered a quarto page, and then another and another. . . .

When he had finished, he read through what he had written; and, rising, he went trembling and with a white face to the fire; and there he tore up the three sheets and put them

into the little iron stove. But a fragment of one sheet fell to the floor, where it was discovered only just before the inquest. On it was written:

> "... so that it is as Sempiter says: a book, a picture, a jewel; all can house the Living Essence that is beyond life. Thus, as my body lay dying, it came to me to provide such a resting-place for that Spirit which was going out on yet another journey. So I wrote this in order that ..."

And after that Hopkins picked up the book and put it with its twin upon one of the upper shelves of his shop. He never, as far as was known, looked at it again.

When his wife asked him what he would charge the old man, he shuddered and said: "Mother, he's *welcome* to them!"

☠ ☠ ☠

It is to be presumed that old Mr. Sempiter called for his book on Midsummer's Eve, as only one copy was found in the shop after the bookseller's death. Mrs. Hopkins remembered on that night hearing the shop door-bell ring somewhere about nine o'clock and her husband talking to someone, but she attached no importance to it.

She told the coroner that when he came up to his supper, he seemed "very quiet."

The coroner said he had hoped that this Mr. Sempiter could throw some light on the business, and that he had ordered the inquest to be adjourned so that the witness could be traced; but so far they had had no success. Indeed, search in the reference-books showed that the last Sempiter had died in the eighteenth century—that Lord Edward Sempiter who had been a member of the Hell-fire Club.

The coroner observed that it was possibly an assumed name. Then he proceeded to the cause of death. The Home Office pathologist, giving evidence, stated that Hopkins seemed to have been seized with a syncope at the top of the ladder, and that the bruises on his head were consistent with his having fallen from the said ladder. He had apparently got up in the very early morning, without awaking his wife, and was taking a book—*Domus Vitæ*—from the shelf when he had had the seizure and fell.

In answer to the coroner, the pathologist admitted that he could not account for the fact that the body seemed drained almost completely of blood. He mentioned some rare Oriental diseases, but could not suggest how Mr. Hopkins could have contracted any of them.

The other curious thing is the unshaken testimony of Mrs. Hopkins. She was, she says, awakened by the noise of her husband falling; and running downstairs she found him dead. By his side was the book that she had implored him to destroy.

She picked it up, and then, in unconquerable horror, threw it violently from her. For she swears that, as she held it in her hand, it seemed to throb and flutter and palpitate *like a living heart.*

A POLICEMAN'S SOLILOQUIES

DEATH AT A DRESS REHEARSAL

H. F. ROSSETTI

Illustrated by Hazel Cook

THERE WAS, I gathered, no regular Amateur Dramatic Club in St. Michael's, a small community perched on the Chiltern Hills, half rural village folk, half well-to-do settlers and commuters from London. It was the latter element who had organized the play. They had done so out of the goodness of their hearts to help raise funds for a new village hall for the "locals"—and also, of course, from that love of revealing their inability to act which assails, at times, so many men and women.

In St. Michael's it was mainly the men who had been assailed on this occasion, which in part perhaps explains why they had chosen *Julius Cæsar* with its predominantly male cast.

It seemed that the project of doing a play at all had first originated with Mr. Brewster, who, being thin and sour-looking, had been cast for the part of Cassius. One of the few "locals" to take part had, oddly as it seemed to me, been chosen for the

noble Brutus. He was a good-looking fellow, big and brawny, but his voice, with its Buckinghamshire accent, must have sounded somewhat out of place in Brutus' part among the more refined London tones of the other conspirators. A mainspring of the whole enterprise had been a certain Mrs. Johns, for whose husband the affair had ended so disastrously. She herself had refused to take a part, claiming to be too nervous to appear on the stage, though she had consented to be prompter. She had been present in this rôle at the dress rehearsal when her husband had been stabbed to death, expiring even before he could say "Et tu, Brute." The real performance, as a result, never came off, but if the village didn't get any cash for its new hall from the dramatic enterprise of the Londoners in its midst, it certainly got a deal of notoriety. The local police called in Scotland Yard, and I was sent down.

The daggers which the conspirators should have used, and which all but one of them did use, were the usual "stage" affairs, with blades of some dull metal which sink into the shaft when pressed against a firm object and then come out again, helped by a spring, when pulled away. They are perfectly safe and give an excellent illusion of stabbing. Alas for Mr. Johns, someone had replaced one of these daggers on the evening of the dress rehearsal by another, more or less the same in weight and appearance, but with a blade of finely tempered; razor-sharp steel, which did *not* sink back into the shaft when used; instead it had penetrated Julius Cæsar's heart in earnest and the mock tragedy had become real.

It was Brutus who had done the fatal stab. This was unfortunate for Mr. Johns, for none of the other actors put quite so much gusto into their histrionics as did this local farmer, and perhaps they would not have inflicted a fatal wound.

Brutus, or rather Mr. Porter, swore that he had had no notion that his dagger was not the same as the one he had always used. He seemed frank and decent, if rather oafish, and I found it hard not to believe him. Some of the conspirators, including Porter, had been in the habit of taking their "daggers" home with them in order to get as much stabbing practice between rehearsals as the patience of wives and other relations would permit. The reason why Porter was quite certain that his "dagger" had been the usual stage affair when he had set off for the rehearsal was because he had "killed" his wife, and also his daughter, with it several times just before he left home. His daughter, a school-girl, was out when I looked round, but his wife confirmed what he had told me. She was expecting a baby, and she remembered particularly that the doctor had been there that evening and had stopped her husband, after his fourth "stab," from going on, saying such horseplay was not good for a woman in her condition. Porter had then turned for a final practice on his daughter, and shortly afterwards had left home, carrying the dagger with him in the small case in which he also carried his toga and wig. To make assurance

doubly sure, I went to see the doctor and he confirmed all that Mrs. Porter had told me.

When I turned to consider how the daggers could have been changed after Porter had got to the club, it seemed, on the face of it, that this would have been easy enough. The question was—who had done it?

Finger-prints led nowhere. The dagger was liberally covered with those of Porter himself, but no others could be distinguished underneath them. In any case, the man who had done the substitution had probably had the sense to wear gloves.

I say "*the man* who had done the substitution" because it was long odds against the culprit being a woman. There is an almost Victorian atmosphere about St. Michael's society, which kept the women-folk rigidly out of the room where the men donned their togas. A woman daring enough to go in would almost certainly have been noticed. It seemed out of the question that any woman, bent on murder, would have taken such a risk; certainly none *had* been seen in the dressing-room.

As for the men, the more one looked beneath the surface, the less easy did it seem for any of them to have done the substitution. The dressing-room was a scene of constant coming and going, and there were, in addition, two men, a Mr. Michaelson and a Mr. Chalmers, in charge of costumes and make-up respectively, who were there all the time. Certainly someone *could* have got at Porter's bag and changed the daggers, but it would have been out of the question for him to be sure that he would not be seen. This might not have mattered at the time, for no one would have been on the watch for hanky-panky, but later, when the incident was recalled, its significance would have been appreciated with fatal results for the criminal. I found it hard to believe that anyone who had gone to all the trouble involved in making the counterfeit dagger would have been so wildly imprudent. And yet, if the substitution were not done in the dressing-room, when was it done? Porter was positive that he had gone straight from his home to the hall, and that on getting to the hall he had gone straight to the dressing-room. It seemed that I must reckon with the possibility that the murderer had seen no way to make the change of daggers except in the dressing-room, had determined to be bold and had been lucky.

Even more mysterious, however, than where the fatal dagger had come from was where Mr. Porter's sham one had gone to. Luckily, the local police had shown great good sense on this point. As soon as Mr. Johns died the doctor and the police had been sent for. The local constable had had wit enough to insist on everyone staying put until the C.I.D. men turned up from High Wycombe, and the chief of these, when he arrived, saw at once the significance of the missing sham dagger. No one who had been present at the dress rehearsal had left before the stabbing; no one, thanks to the constable, had left afterwards; and the C.I.D. man insisted on every man and woman in the hall being remorselessly searched, as well as every nook and cranny in the building. But no sham dagger was found other than those which had been used by Brutus' fellow-conspirators. The only explanation which the inspector could suggest to me, when I turned up next day, was that someone in the cast was a sword-swallower and had gulped down the dagger.

I had the hall re-searched with more than painstaking thoroughness, as well as all the land around within throwing distance. Nothing was found. I confirmed that it was certain that no one had left the hall, even for a few minutes during the evening. There had been a man on duty at the door to make sure that unauthorized villagers did not get in, and he was positive no one had gone out. The mystery was complete. Someone, somehow, had contrived to put a real dagger in place of the sham one, and then to make the latter disappear. The only other explanation was, of course, that Porter was guilty and, having carried out as bold a murder, before a score of witnesses, as one can well imagine, was boldly bluffing it out. But he had an excellent local reputation, he seemed to be honest, as well as to be genuinely bewildered, and no one knew of any reason why he should have wished, at such great risk and with so much trouble, to kill Mr. Johns. It *might* be he—I could rule nothing out; but before rushing to any conclusions on the point, I began to look more generally into the question of motive.

Who would profit by Mr. Johns' death? Well, it seemed that no one did, financially. He and his wife were reasonably well-to-do, but the money was hers. Had the wife, I wondered, other reasons than financial for wishing to kill her husband? She was younger than he was by many years —in her early thirties, while he was in his late forties—and he was universally said to be both cantankerous and a bore. There were rumours that they had not been too happy together for some time, but of how many wives and husbands could not that be said? Certainly nothing came to light which made it seem that she was likely to have wanted to kill him. Perhaps she was not, as Cæsar's wife should have been, entirely above suspicion, but there was nothing whatever to justify me in suspecting her of murder. All who had been on the spot said that she had been gen-

uinely shocked when the killing occurred. As for my own talks with her, I got the impression of a woman who was certainly intelligent, but with a temperament nervous and impulsive rather than deliberate and calculating. She seemed the last person to work out and carry to successful accomplishment a cold-blooded, intricate murder scheme such as I was here faced with. But I knew well how fatally misleading snap judgments of human beings can be. I reserved judgment on Mrs. Johns, just as I had done on Mr. Porter.

The doctor, a handsome bachelor, aged about forty, came round to see me.

"I'm afraid I've not been of much use to you professionally," he said, smiling. "There's been no need in this case to estimate how long the body had been dead or how it came to be killed, with twenty or more people looking on. But if I can help in other ways, I'd be glad to do so."

"What sort of help do you mean?"

"Oh! I don't mean with your deductions and all that." He smiled again. "I leave that to you. What I meant was, I know a good deal about the people here—doctors do, you know. And while normally I keep my mouth shut, I feel in a case like this it's my duty to tell you what I can, if it would help."

"Naturally, it's a help to know all I can about the Johnses and their circle. You were their doctor, I believe?"

"I'm everyone's doctor hereabouts," he replied. "Not because they choose me, but because there's no one else. Yes, I was the Johns' doctor and I've seen a lot of both of them these last eighteen months. First, he was

pretty ill, but he had an operation nine months ago and was very much better after. But by then Mrs. Johns was ill—one of those awkward cases, more nerves than anything. The old chap hadn't much patience with her, I'm afraid, and I think if it hadn't been she who had the money, he'd have told her to pull herself together and snap out of it. I know he had the nerve to tell me once my bill seemed steep. Some of those well-to-do folk seem to think professional men live on air."

"People tell me he was a bore, old Johns, rather unpopular?"

"The most *awful* bore, *very* unpopular. Especially——" He stopped, looking at me, as though uncertain whether to go on.

"Yes?"

"I was going to say, especially with Brewster—Cassius, you know, the 'lean and hungry look' man."

"Brewster was the man who started the play idea, wasn't he?"

"So I'm told. I don't know much about that."

He then went on, encouraged by me, to tell me about the bad terms between Brewster and Johns. It seemed Johns had sold Brewster some shares, and also a second-hand car, and the purchaser thought he had been cheated over both transactions. There had been an ugly scene between them, and Brewster had even threatened legal proceedings. It hadn't, however, come to that. Outwardly things had been patched up between them, but Dr. Ames knew the bad blood persisted.

"Of course," he went on, "it wasn't only with Brewster. Johns was on bad terms with lots of people. He was an unusual type—a quarrelsome, vindictive bore."

Dr. Ames proceeded to give me some details of these other quarrels. Among others in the cast with whom Julius Cæsar, in private, had been at loggerheads, were Cinna the poet, Cicero, Trebonius, and the Soothsayer, as well as with Mr. Chalmers, the "make-up" man. It was all rather futile, village, "storm-in-a-teacup" stuff, but served to confirm and add point to what I had heard from other sources of Johns—that he was a bad-tempered, unpopular person. The doctor concluded: "Mind you, I'm not saying any of this has any bearing on what happened on Thursday night. In fact, I don't see how it can have, but I thought you ought to know. Well, I expect you're busy, and I must be getting along to my surgery. If I can be of any further use

to you in any way, please let me know."

He was about to go, but I stopped him with a question. "You've said nothing about Brutus—Mr. Porter, I mean. Do you know much about him?"

"As decent a chap as you could meet," he said. "I suppose you've got to suspect him. After all, he did do the killing, and if it *was* he, it gets round all your difficulties about how the daggers were changed. Yet I'd be prepared to swear it can't be him. It's true he and Johns——" He paused again, and again I encouraged him with a "Yes?"

"Well, the truth is—and I suppose I ought to have told you this before —he had good enough reason to hate Johns." He went on to give me details of a most curmudgeonly trick which Johns had played on the young farmer, which had resulted in the latter losing a sum of money he could ill afford. "I didn't mention it," he went on, "because Porter, though very angry at the time, had, I am sure, got over it. He's not the type to bear grudges."

He looked at me and I looked at him. I was beginning to form a possible theory on the basis of all this trivial village gossip. For a moment I was lost in thought, and then his voice came again.

"Well, if you've no more questions, I really must be going." And as I had no more questions, this time he went.

I pursued my new line of thought for some time in silence. The more I reflected, the more promising it seemed. But the big problem was how on earth, if this were indeed the explanation, I could ever hope to prove it. Everything, I came to the conclusion, turned on finding the missing stage dagger. That achieved, the whole thing might become clear; otherwise I resigned myself to failure in solving the mystery.

Next morning I began by posting notices round the village offering £20 reward to anyone who brought the dagger in, and then I went to see the Porters once again. Porter himself was out, but his wife was there, and also, this time, his daughter, a sensible-looking school-girl of fifteen. I got her to tell me in her own words what had taken place that evening. It all tallied. She remembered it clearly, for she was at that rather shy age when a girl doesn't like attention called to her before strangers, and she had disliked it when her father had stabbed her with the doctor there, smiling at her. So she had got up and gone out of the room, saying she had home-work to do. A minute or two later, her father had come up to say "good-night" to her. They had heard the doctor go, so she had come down with her father, and she and her mother had seen him go off with his bag. That was all she knew.

"Thank you, Mary," I said. "You'd make an excellent witness, though let's hope it doesn't come to that." But, as will be seen, it did. "You don't know Dr. Ames well, I gather?"

"Oh no," she said. "I'm never ill, and he practically always comes to see Mother when I'm at school."

"That's right," said the rather fat, stupid, lackadaisical Mrs. Porter. "It's

very rare he comes of an evening."

Porter now came in, and he was put out when I told him I should have to have his house searched to see if the missing dagger was there, after all. He became almost fierce. "It can't be here. Do you think I'm lying—and the missus, and Mary?"

"I don't think anyone's lying—or telling the truth. But I've got to do what I can to find that dagger, and it *might* be here. So do be sensible." I called in the men who were waiting outside, and they got to work, but a most minute search lasting several hours revealed nothing. Porter was fairly contemptuous. "I hope you're satisfied," he said. "Didn't I tell you I took it to the Club?"

I was, I confess, disappointed, but not really surprised. The prospect of finding the dagger anywhere was obviously a remote one, and it was too much to expect to find it at the first attempt. Besides which, I had not really thought it would be in the house. I now told Porter that we must search his garden, and having set my men to this dreary task, I left to have another chat with Dr. Ames.

I told him that I wanted to get quite clear about the timing of events on the fatal evening. At exactly what time, I asked him, had he been at the Porters'.

"A little after seven o'clock. I went there straight after surgery."

"And you left before half-past?"

"Oh! certainly. It was just a routine visit. I was detained a bit by Porter's antics."

"And then you came back here until they rang you to go to the hall?"

"Oh no, I had other visits to make. I didn't get back here at all before they sent for me."

"That was nine-thirty?"

"Yes, about then."

I got him to tell me, and then to write down on a bit of paper the names and addresses of the four patients he had visited after leaving the Porters. He didn't say anything, but I got the impression he thought my behaviour rather odd. As I left him, I was suddenly assailed by one of those fits of gloom which come over you when struggling with a hopeless task. It seemed so clear to me that my theory must be right, and so certain I should be able to prove nothing.

Almost immediately I found that my gloom was misplaced. The search in the Porters' garden had been successful. The lost dagger had been found, deep in a thicket of nettles. Porter, who had continued throughout to protest against our intrusion on his property, was dumbfounded and protested vehemently that he had told me nothing but the truth.

According to my orders, the police, on finding the dagger, had picked it up with the greatest care, and it was now sent, together with the piece of paper on which the doctor had written the names and addresses, to the finger-print experts. The prints were the same, and the case as good as over.

Clear evidence came to light that the doctor and Mrs. Johns had been lovers for several months. It had

started while Mr. Johns was in hospital for his operation, and his wife's subsequent "nerves" had been a contrivance to give them an excuse for further meetings. Much more significant was that Mr. Johns had found out, and that shortly before his death he had written to Ames a letter threatening to expose him to the General Medical Council, which would be sure to result in his being "struck off." There was more than a hint of possible blackmail in this letter, for why should he write thus to the doctor instead of direct to the Council. Well, if so, he got payment quickly enough in a coin he didn't expect.

What never became clear was whether Mrs. Johns was privy to her lover's plans. There were for long two schools of thought on this question, not only in St. Michael's, where the actors in the drama were personally known, but throughout all England, where they became well known through the newspapers. Ames pleaded not guilty at his trial, but with the finger-prints on the dagger and the clear motive, as well as evidence we dug up about his buying the fatal blade from a surgical instrument shop in London, his case was hopeless. After sentence, he confessed, but to the end persisted in denying that Mrs. Johns had had anything to do with it. I think this was not mere gallantry but the truth.

If I may add a word of anti-social advice addressed to would-be murderers. It is this—never come forward unnecessarily, as Ames did, to offer help. His idea, of course, was to confuse me by suggesting all sorts of other people who might have had motives for murdering Johns. But the very triviality of what he had to say

led me to wonder why he said it, and, my attention thus attracted to him, suddenly I saw the significance, which previously had escaped me, of his having paid his well-timed call on Mrs. Porter on the evening of the dress rehearsal. Had he kept quiet, he might now be the husband of Cæsar's widow.

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CRIME AND INSANITY

WILFRED LESTER

We have asked Wilfred Lester, an authority and expert on delinquency and criminal insanity, to write an introductory article on the question of insanity and the law in murder cases. This is a general and non-technical essay setting out the position to-day with its deficiencies, suggesting some possible improvements and considering the recommendations of the recent Royal Commission on Corporal Punishment.

IN THE EARLIEST period of the Law the mental state of the offender was unheeded in order to establish criminal responsibility in the commission of an offence. This was due to the function and purpose of the Law, which was primarily to regulate the payment of compensation to the victim or wronged party, and not to punish for the sake of punishment.

In those days the whole process of Law was governed by *talio lex*, or as the Bible expressed it more realistically, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. "If there is a mischief, then thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise" (Exodus, ch. 21, v. 23, 24, 25).

This crude Talion Law served the needs of communities fairly satisfactorily from pre-biblical times right up to the beginning of the Middle Ages. By the 12th century A.D., however, the growing power of the Ecclesiastical Authorities was beginning to manifest itself in the Common Law of England, by insinuating into it its own laws which aimed at saving souls rather than settling material compensation. In saving souls Ecclesiastical Law was also concerned with the punishment of wickedness, and to do this it had to establish the existence of a Mind which could be made responsible for a wicked or immoral act. Punishment therefore was inflicted not so much for the guilty act, as in olden times, but for the wicked mind which prompted it.

Thus was Mind first introduced into the Law as a fundamental element in assessing criminal guilt, not in the medical sense of insanity or mental abnormality, but in the moral sense of wickedness or moral turpitude. Moral standards were fixed by the community, and an offender's conduct was judged by these standards in the Court of Law. The prisoner was not allowed any opinion as to the rightness or wrongness of his action; that was the prerogative of the Court, who judged him by objective moral standards, laid down by prevailing custom.

Nevertheless, a moral test, no matter how objectively applied, had to recognize the mitigating circum-

stance of harm caused by accidents, or negligence, not amounting to criminal intent. Moreover, if the object or punishment was no longer retribution (compensation), but the reformation of character (the saving of the soul) and the deterrence of crime, then the state of mind of the accused became a fundamental factor in assessing the prospect of reformation as well as the relevance of deterrence.

Thus arose the maxim famous in English Common Law, *Actus non facit reum nisi mens sit rea*, which, translated freely from the Latin, means, "A man's act does not make him guilty unless his mind is also guilty."

In the past this maxim covered the acts of both the sane and the insane. Whenever an attempt was made to introduce insanity as a mitigating factor, there was an immediate irruption of doubt and confusion, for the simple reason that the Law was never able to define the term Insanity. Unable to cope with the vagaries of mental abnormality, and without the legal procedure or machinery to deal with it in any case, the Law imposed the harshest penalties in dealing with the mentally afflicted.

This unsatisfactory state of affairs came to a head in the celebrated case of McNaghten, which was to be a landmark in the legal history of Insanity and Criminal Responsibility. For this reason, the McNaghten case will be described in some detail.

In 1843 a young Scotsman named McNaghten, after suffering for several years from ideas of persecution, determined to do something about it. He was convinced that everybody was against him, that plots were being hatched to ruin him by unseen enemies, who dogged his footsteps and harried him at every turn and move. He tried to escape his tormentors and persecutors by travelling to his native Scotland and to France, but wherever he went he was pursued relentlessly by his malignant enemies. He complained to his father, he protested to the authorities; no one would listen. To his terror was now added resentment and hatred at the callous indifference of his family, his friends and the authorities. He had to act alone. He acquired a pistol, and decided that the only way to bring his increasing misery to the notice of the authorities was to assassinate the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel. Accordingly, one morning he posted himself outside the Premier's house, and watched and waited all day. Towards evening, he saw a man leave the house and followed him. Drawing close, he drew his pistol, took careful aim and shot the man dead. The victim was not Sir Robert Peel, but his private secretary, Edward Drummond. McNaghten was arrested and indicted for murder.

At his trial at the Old Bailey his plea was Not Guilty on the ground of "partial insanity." The defence submitted that McNaghten was suffering from a delusion which affected that part of his mind responsible for the planning and commission of the crime. The jury found McNaghten not guilty by reason of insanity, and

he was committed to a criminal lunatic asylum.

The case caused a great stir in legal circles, and public opinion itself was critical of the plea of partial insanity. The whole issue of Insanity and Criminal Responsibility was raised in the House of Lords a few days after the end of the trial, and the controversy reached such a pitch that their Lordships were constrained to put the issue to the Judges who sat at the trial in the form of four questions appertaining to Insanity and Criminal Responsibility. The answers of the Court were as follows:

If the accused did the alleged act under the influence of insane delusion, but with a view to the redress or revenge of some supposed grievance or injury, or to produce some public benefit, he was nevertheless punishable, according to the nature of the crime committed, *if he knew* when he was committing the act that he was acting *contrary to Law*. The answers to questions two and three became famous as the McNaghten Rules which from that time were to be used exclusively as the sole criterion in assessing criminal liability in cases where a defence of insanity was pleaded.

The Rules are as follows: In order to establish a defence on the ground of Insanity, it must be clearly proved that, at the time of committing the act, the accused was labouring under such *defect of reason*, from a *disease of the mind*, as not to know the nature and quality of the act he was doing, or if he did know it, that he did not know he was doing what was wrong.

It should be added that "doing what was wrong" meant acting against the Law. These Rules remain to this day the sole legal test for insanity, and are always applied where a plea of insanity is raised by the Defence.

When the McNaghten Rules are examined it is seen that the vital and operative clause is "the accused was labouring under such defect of reason from disease of the Mind as not to know."

This phrase delimits insanity to a disease of cognition or intellectual comprehension, and the medical experts at the time the Rules were first formulated found little to quarrel about in this delimitation. To the psychiatric specialist in 1843, or alienist as he might be called then, Insanity was an alienation of the intellect which manifested itself chiefly in mental delusions, such as characterized McNaghten's insanity. The fact that insanity could be caused by emotional aberration as distinct from intellectual deterioration was quite unrecognized in those days, and so legal and medical authorities were in almost complete agreement in their interpretation of the McNaghten Rules.

During the last fifty years, however, advances in psychiatric knowledge have shown that Insanity may be brought about by affective or emotional disease of the mind, leaving the cognitive or intellectual processes intact. This progress in psychiatry caused growing divergence

between the views of the legal authorities who clung to the McNaghten Rules and the psychiatric authorities who maintained with increasing force that the Rules were inadequate and could be positively unjust in certain causes of insanity where reason or cognition was unaffected.

The position of the modern psychiatrist is made clear in the description of a case of insanity in which emotional deterioration is the sole cause of the disease, the intellect or cognitive processes remaining unimpaired.

A middle-aged business-man becomes slowly more and more depressed. He sleeps badly, loses interest in his work, his friends and in his social activities. He feels increasingly hopeless, useless and worthless. He blames himself for the impending catastrophe, which is soon to engulf his beloved wife, and refuses to be reassured that he is mistaken and that all is well. He sits hunched up in his chair at home, wringing his hands and lamenting his wife's inevitable fate. He does not sleep, hardly eats, ceases to shave or dress properly, and continues to be deaf to all entreaties. He cannot bear the thought that his beloved wife will be left to face a cruel and uncharitable world, penniless and forsaken. He decides therefore that it would be better if she left this vale of tears before disaster overtakes her. And so he kills her.

At his trial for murder, he admits quite readily that he knew the nature and quality of his act, and he also readily agrees that he knew that what he was doing was against the Law. But, he insists, in spite of this admission, that what he did was right and proper and in the best interests of his wife.

In this case, there was no defect of reason or mental delusion; the man did not think wrongly, he felt wrongly. He felt depressed, he felt unworthy, he felt guilty. His diseased emotions pictured a world of misery and utter hopelessness for his beloved wife, and so with remorseless logic he did what he considered was right and best for her. Now, to the psychiatrist this man is suffering from Acute Melancholia, a virulent form of insanity. To the legal authority there is no insanity, because he knew the nature of his act and knew that it was against the Law.

McNaghten, however, did not feel depressed, or anything else, at the onset of his illness; he *knew* that he was being persecuted, he heard voices scheming against him. He was convinced through his diseased reason or intellect that unseen enemies were bent on his destruction. It was only when the authorities ignored his entreaties that he felt resentment, anger and finally murderous hatred. Fundamentally, his mental disease was a thought disorder, a defect of reason. Hence the emphasis on a defect of reason "in the McNaghten Rules."

There is also the case of the mother who kills her child as a result of a morbid and uncontrolled compulsion to pick up knives. Here again the intellect or reason is quite intact. The mother knows quite well the nature of her act, and that it was wrong and

against the Law. She simply says, "I could not help myself."

Innumerable cases exist in which the Will, weakened by emotional or neurotic illness, is not proof against powerful and destructive impulses. The "reason" of these sufferers is quite unaffected, and therefore they are not protected by the McNaghten Rules.

The attitude of the Law to the increasing criticism of the modern psychiatrist and his demand for a review of the McNaghten Rules is to demand in turn that the psychiatrist puts his own house in order before attempting to repair the Law's.

In a recent murder trial which aroused great public interest the three medical experts who gave evidence as to the prisoner's state of mind differed in their testimony one from the other. In this case Reginald Christie was indicted for the murder of his wife. The prosecution called an eminent psychiatrist, who testified that, in his opinion, Christie showed no evidence of insanity and was in fact quite sane. The prison medical officer testified that although Christie had an hysterical personality this did not amount to Insanity. The psychiatric expert for the defence submitted that Christie was suffering from Gross Hysteria, a mental disease which constituted Insanity.

Now, where psychiatric experts disagree as to the state of the prisoner's mind (as in the Christie case), the jury understandably enough tends to ignore the medical evidence altogether, and to rely solely on the Judge's direction on the McNaghten Rules regarding the prisoner's sanity or insanity in Law. In the Christie case, the jury rejected the Defence's plea of Insanity, and he was duly sentenced to death. To allay any lingering doubt as to Christie's sanity, the Home Secretary appointed a panel of psychiatric experts to examine him. This panel, which was not bound by the McNaghten Rules, confirmed the jury's findings, and Christie was duly hanged.

This Home Office panel of psychiatric experts may, on medical grounds, overrule a jury's verdict based on the Judge's direction of the McNaghten Rules, which only determine Insanity on legal grounds. Thus it could be said that the whole process of the Law on the question of murder and insanity can be set at naught by an outside panel of medical experts.

The inadequacy of the McNaghten Rules has troubled the lawyer's mind as well as the psychiatrist's. There are certain cases of Insanity, as illustrated above, where the strict application of the McNaghten Rules would call for a verdict of Guilty. Judges in these circumstances have often directed juries in the spirit of the law rather than in the letter, in order to avoid grave travesties of justice, and juries, always more influenced by a common-sense argument than arid legal process, are only too ready to be so directed. Nevertheless, where the Law is disregarded because its strict application leads to injustice, the Law falls into disrepute.

It is no surprise therefore that the present Royal Commission on Corporal Punishment pays particular at-

tention to the McNaghten Rules. With one dissentient the Commission recommends an additional clause (based on a proposal by the British Medical Association) to the Rules as follows: "The jury must be satisfied that at the time of committing the act the accused, as a result of disease of the mind or Mental Deficiency, *was incapable of preventing himself committing it.*" This clause, which has been recommended in one form or another by a number of legal and medical committees (once by Lord Darling, a distinguished ex-Judge, in 1924, in the form of a Bill, The Criminal Responsibility Trials Bill) on various occasions in the last thirty years, embodies the principle of Irresistible Impulse, a principle (up to the present at least) disliked and rejected by both Parliament and Legal Authority. It is not difficult to see the reason for this dislike. Who is to define the difference between Resistible and Irresistible Impulse? Where is the line which divides them to be drawn, and what are to be the criteria governing this decision?

Irresistible Impulse, the result or accompaniment of Insanity, is presumably to go unpunished. Is this also to be the case where Irresistible Impulse is the result of weakness of character only? It is probable that such difficulties as these, in addition to others already mentioned, actuated the Royal Commission (with three dissentients) to recommend the complete abrogation of the McNaghten Rules, to prescribe no legal criteria for criminal responsibility, and to leave the jury to determine whether at the time of the act the accused was suffering from disease of the mind or mental deficiency to such a degree that he ought to be held responsible. So the onus is passed on to the jury.

Twelve lay citizens, with no specialized knowledge or training are to decide an issue which calls for the highest specialized knowledge and training. These twelve citizens (if a further recommendation of the Royal Commission is to be implemented) are also to decide in cases of murder, not only the verdict but also the penalty. Having delivered a verdict of guilty, the jury is then to be asked to consider whether extenuating circumstances exist to justify the substitution of a lesser sentence.

I submit that this is putting an intolerable and unnecessary burden on the jury. Even without abolition of the Death penalty (consideration of which was outside the terms of reference of the Royal Commission), there remains another method of remedying defects in the Law without shifting the responsibility for doing so on to the jury; but this would involve relieving the jury altogether of the responsibility of deciding the prisoner's state of mind.

In every case of murder a Statutory Tribunal of experienced psychiatrists would examine the prisoner at the beginning of the preliminary hearing in the Magistrate's Court, and its report as to the prisoner's state of mind at the time of the alleged murder would be accepted as evidence of fact by the Court. Furthermore, the prisoner's fitness to plead would be decided at the begin-

ning of the preliminary hearing and not at the trial. The question of the prisoner's sanity would be disposed of at the beginning of the trial by the Judge, who would have the tribunal's report before him. This procedure would have the added advantage of ending once and for all the disquieting and often embarrassing spectacle of psychiatric experts disagreeing with each other in open Court and wrangling unbecomingly with Counsel in cross-examination.

The verdict of Guilty but Insane (which is absurd) should be abolished, and the verdict Not Guilty on the grounds of Insanity substituted.

Where mental abnormality is found in a degree that does not amount to Insanity, the provision of a plea of Partial or Diminished Responsibility might be introduced (as in Scots Law). In this case, the charge of murder would be reduced to one of manslaughter or to murder in the second degree. But what is far more important than the lowering of the legal category of the crime is the kind of sanction that would be imposed in those cases where criminal behaviour is the direct result of mental abnormality that does not amount to Insanity.

It could be readily argued that the usual punishment imposed on the ordinary criminal would be quite out of place here. If mental abnormality is the cause of the crime, then punishment should be directed exclusively to cure and reformation. Length of sentence should be a secondary consideration. For instance, whether Christie the wife murderer and necrophiliac was insane or not is arguable; that he was mentally abnormal is quite certain. To murder women and then to have sexual intercourse with the warm corpses cannot on any definition of the term be included in normal behaviour. With the existence of a provision for partial or diminished responsibility, Christie might have been given an indeterminate sentence, and sent to a special institute for the study and treatment of sexual psychopathy. If this condition remained incurable (as it is now), Christie would have faced the prospect of a life sentence without hope of remission.

Public opinion would accept partial responsibility the more readily if it could be reassured that far from leading to an unfair easing or lessening of sentence, it would more often than not mean a considerable lengthening of sentence on account of the extreme difficulties involved in treating and curing such cases. If the Death Penalty could be abolished altogether, invaluable opportunities would be created for much needed research into the psychological and social causes of murder and of delinquent behaviour in the mentally abnormal.

Murderers such as Heath, Haigh and Christie, who were all mentally abnormal, would have afforded a rich field for psychiatric research had the death penalty not been imposed in their cases.

THE FAIRY ON THE CHRISTMAS-TREE

A. M. PEAKE

Illustrations by Dennis Duyt

A crazed old woman mumbling to the set waxen face of a doll—a favourite infant in her weird collection of dream children. On her death, malice possessed her macabre orphans—resentment towards live children, hatred of new dolls.

“ ERE WE ARE,” said Jonathan, pulling on the hand-brake. They all sat looking at the house.

“It's lovely, Daddy,” cried Lois. “This is going to be the best Christmas we've ever had. Let me get out!”

“Mind my nylons, now. You're sure it won't be damp, Jon?” asked Anne, opening the car door to let the impatient twin get out. She followed her and stood gazing at the old Georgian rectory. It was a square stone house with a graceful fanlight over the door, two windows each side and five on the next storey, the whole topped by a stone coping.

“Of course not. Constance and

Ruby will have seen to all that. It's only been empty a year. Do you like it, Lalage?"

The second twin looked solemnly at the grey house. "It's very exciting; like beginning a story."

Jonathan laughed and picked her up. He was enjoying himself; he was a family man—a man of property. "Very well, it's the beginning of a fairy-tale, and you are a little goose-girl, coming to a lonely house not knowing a fairy lives in it. Smile, darling!"

The front door opened and Cousin Constance bustled out. "Here you are, then! It's just about ready for you, but the time we've had, the dust, the rubbish; how we've worked!" Talking nineteen to the dozen, she led them through the square, white-panelled hall to the sitting-room.

Lois squealed with delight. "Look at the black screen with gold birds, and this little stool with beads all over it. Look at the pictures—what funny people they are, Mummy!"

Her mother saw thankfully that a blazing fire roared in the fireplace, that the round table with its single thick leg branching into claws was laden with tea-things, and that the square-paned windows had thick curtains to keep out the darkening December day.

"You must have had a fearful time, Constance. I'm sure you didn't find it like this," she said with conviction.

"No, I did not. It's been shut up all this time since poor old Cousin Clara died, and you know what *she* was like." Constance lowered her voice, glancing at the twins; but they were too absorbed to listen, having found an old musical-box.

"It's like you when you haven't shaved, Daddy. Look at all its bristles," said Lalage, peering through the glass inner lid.

"Isn't she silly? Make it play," demanded her sister. A thin, sweet trickle of music came from the brass cylinder, and everyone was silent until the last hesitant notes had trembled into silence.

Then Ruby, in a clean apron, brought the tea in. She was evidently delighted to see them, although it was only a week since she had left them to join Constance in preparing the house for occupation.

"Poor Ruby, you must be tired," said Anne sympathetically.

"Oh, I don't mind, but it's ever such a queer house," said the girl.

"Lucky, *lucky* Ruby, to get here first and discover everything," said Lois through a mouthful of tea-cake.

"I used my own judgment and got rid of some things before you came; they were so *odd*," murmured Constance in Anne's ear. "Some that I was doubtful about I have put away for you to decide about later. Poor Cousin Clara was so fond of children," she added inconsequentially.

Anne shrank a little. She understood. "I know. You were quite right. The house seems very comfortable. You think they'll be happy here?"

Perhaps Constance also understood. She laughed reassuringly. "I'm sure they'll love it."

After tea they all trooped through the house, Jonathan leading and

carrying a large brass lamp. The rooms were warm and clean; the children were enchanted by the old-fashioned furniture and the innumerable cupboards.

Constance paused at a door at the end of the corridor. "This was *her* room; we cleaned it but left it as it was." She hesitated.

"We'll look at it in the morning," said Anne quickly.

"Now, now!" cried Lois, making a dive for the door-handle.

"Oh, let's see the whole place while we're about it," said her father. He followed her in and placed the lamp on the mantelpiece.

After all, it was just an old lady's bedroom, thought Anne. A half-tester bed; mahogany chest-of-drawers topped by a white cloth with a ball fringe; faded pictures and photographs in velvet frames.

The children were quiet, perhaps they were disappointed; they were standing by the window and had raised the seat to look in the space underneath. Anne glanced over their shoulders.

"Dolls, Mummy! Were there children here once?" asked Lalage wonderingly.

Constance and Anne looked at each other. Constance spoke first. "That's what I meant. I put them there to be out of the way; they were all over the place."

They gazed down at a large boy doll with a round, red face and staring painted eyes, dressed in a sailor-suit; a smaller wax doll in old-fashioned long baby clothes, the linen and lace yellow with age; a couple of wooden Dutch dolls; a rag doll with dirty, almost obliterated features—and the fairy doll. She had a wax face and neck. Her blonde hair was piled above regular, unchildlike features. She was dressed in mauve net with spangles and wore a tinsel crown; in her waxen hand she held a wand tipped with a star.

"It's just the thing for our Christmas-tree! We must have it—say we can, Mummy," exclaimed Lois, dragging the doll out.

"No. Not that, it's too old and the wax might melt with the candles." Anne looked with distaste at the composed miniature face staring up.

Lalage slipped her hand into her mother's. "I don't like them. Why are they here?"

"They were Cousin Clara's. When she—when she was a little girl."

Anne shut the seat down and, as they left the room, an impulse made her lock the door.

As they passed along the corridor, soft fingers tapped at the window and, peering out, they could see a flurry of snow; but the darkness and cold and the unaccustomed silence of the countryside that surrounded them only heightened the comfort of the house.

Then began the job of getting the twins to bed, with the extra excitement of candles and lamps instead of electric-light, and a hip-bath in front of the fire, with Ruby bringing up hot water in brown cans with hinged lids.

At last they were settled in the strange bed with its long rod from which depended two curtains; the

pale face and the rosy one just showing above the eiderdown.

"One more day to Christmas Day, darlings," said Anne as she placed the nightlight on the mantelpiece; this was

for reassurance in a strange room.

Lois murmured, "Good fairies" sleepily, but Lalage lay watching the flickering shadows on the walls. As Anne kissed her silently she thought that she would look in again in a short while, and she left the door ajar as she went out.

Constance noticed this. "They'll be quite all right; you mustn't put ideas into their heads, Anne."

"It's only because it's a strange house." Anne tightened her lips, and Constance said no more.

The morning of Christmas Eve had a sky darker than the earth below. Snow blanketed the fields and sparkled on every branch and twig.

"It couldn't be more Christmassy," cried Lois as she dashed about the house. "When are you going to start on the tree, Daddy? I can't wait much longer!"

Lalage was languid; she looked heavy-eyed, but said she had slept. "There was a dream, Mummy," she said vaguely.

Anne would never have acknowledged that she loved one child more than the other, but sometimes a tremor shook her when she looked at Lalage. So she set the child down on the bead-work stool in front of the fire to unwrap the glass and tinsel decorations for the tree; she knew that Lalla's careful fingers would extract the silver and blue and crimson balls from their cotton-wool covering without accident. Lois stayed for a while; then her restless high spirits took her away to the kitchen, the bedrooms, after every grown-up in turn.

Presently she rushed into the sitting-room again and threw something down. Lalage screamed; the fairy doll lay on the carpet, and as the child started back she scratched her wrist on the sparkling star of its wand.

"That is very naughty, Lois. I locked the door—you had no business even to go into that room." Anne was really angry. She slapped Lois, and threw the doll on a chair, where it lay in a tumbled heap. "It's only a tiny scratch, darling; you shall have a scrap of Elastoplast."

Lalage watched the operation gravely. She did not cry, but cuddled up against her mother and said, "She was in my dream."

"She? That silly doll? Funny Lalla! Anyway, we'll get rid of them all after Christmas."

"They're not *like* dolls; to be fond of, I mean."

"You wouldn't want to take them to bed like Betsy-Ann?"

Anne was sorry she had said that; the child's face quivered and her mouth shut in a firm little line.

She turned to Lois, who had been standing silently twisting the fringe of a velvet table-cloth. "You are not to go in there again."

"Yes, Mummy." The child sounded unusually subdued.

Anne wondered whether she was making too much of the incident—putting ideas into their heads as Constance had said; so she went on in a kinder tone, "It's a cold room, and there are much nicer things to play with than those dirty old dolls."

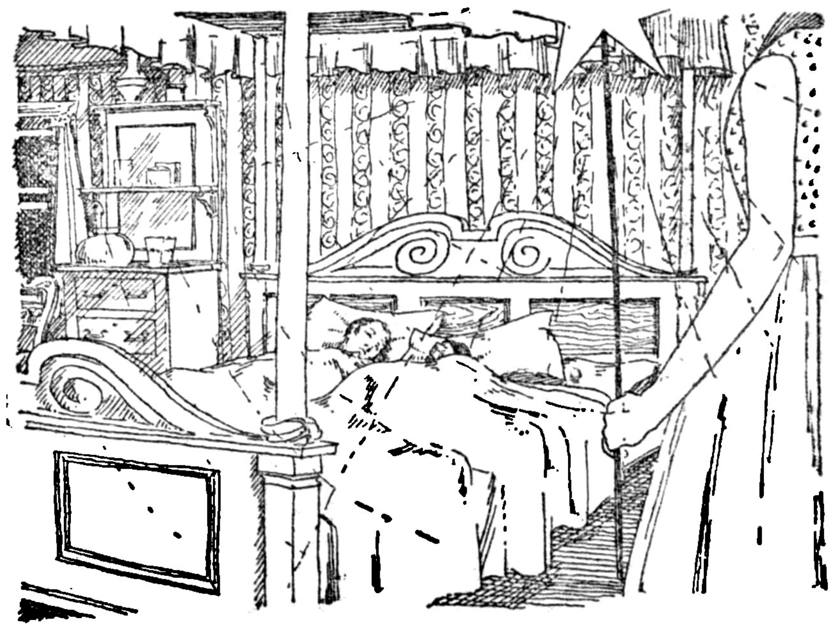
"I don't *want* to play with them."

Lois struggled with tears and, as usual in times of stress, the gentler twin asserted herself, "She couldn't help it."

Anne made an effort to appear understanding. "Well, never mind, darlings; it's a horrid doll, and you shan't see it again."

She picked up the fairy doll and took it upstairs; as she put it in the window-seat, she looked at the collection with pity and revulsion. She remembered how once she had been brought here by her own mother, being warned beforehand to take no notice if anything seemed a little out of the ordinary, as Cousin Clara was rather odd sometimes. The boy doll had sat at the table with a feeder round its neck, and she herself had been given another doll to nurse. When she had surreptitiously laid it down, the old lady had seemed very put out.

"I can see that you don't care for children," she had said, rocking and crooning to the thing, staring over it with cross, hurt eyes at the astonished girl. Her mother had smoothed things over, and Anne had been given another to hold—one of the Dutch dolls. She smiled as she remembered her embarrassed efforts to talk to it in the baby-language that Clara seemed to expect. She did not remember having seen the fairy doll then; it must have joined Clara's dream-children later, to take pride of place. She thought of the crazed old woman mumbling to the set, waxen face. Well, it was an old story now and better forgotten. Clara was dead with her lost children, and the dolls should go, too. She herself had her



children, and they, in turn, would have their own. She shut down the window-seat, and locked the door of the room again as she went out.

After a cold lunch they all began the business of dressing the tree which Jon had brought into the sitting-room. It was about six feet high and stood in a green barrel. While Jon clamped on the candle-holders, Anne and Constance tied on the presents or laid the larger ones round the base, and the twins twined tinsel from branch to branch, and hung glass globes of gold and silver, purple and rose about the tree. At the very apex was placed a glittering star.

As they gazed admiringly at it, they heard the sound of voices. The carol-singers had remembered the new-comers, after all. They crowded to the front door, and Anne's eyes moistened as she heard the tunes, forgotten through the year until Christmas came again. She remembered other years, other faces.

But the twins were entranced as they stared into the patch of light on the gravel, and saw the rosy faces of the children above their mufflers, and the mysterious, snow-laden trees behind them. Better still, when the visitors all trooped in for hot drinks and mince-pies and stood together in the hall singing a valedictory "Good

King Wenceslaus." Jon was like a boy, his usually impassive face full of laughter. Constance peered over the young curate's shoulder at the music-sheet. The twins were excited and out of tune, with Lalage's cheeks as pink as her sister's.

Then the hurry and skurry of a late bedtime, no baths or hair-brushing. Lois whisked in, cuddling her baby, Geraldine; and Lalla's doll—where was Betsy-Ann?

"Can't you sleep without her just once?" asked Constance as she looked behind the bed-curtains.

"No, I can't; let me get out of bed, Mummy."

"Wait, I know, I was going to bring her down for you, and I went into Cousin Clara's room. . . ." Constance hurried away. When she came back, carrying the doll, the fat, good-natured woman looked a figure of tragedy. Betsy-Ann's face had been smashed in.

"I remember now that I put her down on the window-seat because I noticed the window was not quite shut and the snow had drifted in. We've had such a job trying to get the house really dry. I must have knelt on the seat to shut the glass, and I suppose it happened then and I went away without noticing. I can't think why I didn't feel her."

Lalla was curled into a silent, shaking heap in the bed, but Lois, crying herself, said, "Why did you put her *there?*"

"Well, I wish I hadn't, but it was a handy place," answered poor Constance.

"You *know* it's a horrid place—it's where the bad fairy lives," stormed Lois.

Anne intervened, "You mustn't talk like that, darling; it's nonsense."

"She made *me* do something bad, too." Lois curled down with her sister, and the two tear-stained faces, so much alike, stared determinedly at the impercipient grown-ups. Constance bridled slightly at the idea of a fairy making her do something bad. "That's silly, dear. You should think of the angels on Christmas Eve. Anyway, there are no such things as bad fairies; it's only thinking about them that makes them seem real."

In the end Lois, her eyelashes still damp, slept with her father, and Anne held Lalage until she knew the child had dropped off. But her mother lay awake; the security was gone; the cold only waited for the fire to die down, and the darkness lurked like an animal in the corners of the room. Sounds that went unnoticed in the daytime, perhaps, could be heard in the silent house with the miles of hushed, snow-smothered country spreading round it: creaks that must be the old furniture easing itself to lowered temperature; a rustle in a corner where a cushion settled perhaps; a tapping like tiny feet. . . .

"Why should we suppose the house welcomed us?" thought Anne. "For a year, night after night, it has lain dark and silent, the furniture still as a dead hand had placed it. We are interlopers and cannot dispossess these memories in a day." She shook herself and stopped her ears against the crepitations of the night. What was there against the place? The only

phantom could be poor old Clara herself, who had loved children—would never have harmed them—whose failing brain had comforted her loneliness by giving reality to the dolls that filled the place of the children she had wanted so much. The dolls—Georgie, wheeled about in a child's push-chair, his sailor cap at a jaunty angle; Clara beaming and answering the inquiries of kindly neighbours; the rest of them—dressed, put to bed, kissed and talked to like living things—they would miss her. . . . She took a fresh grip of herself; an incident which had been completely explained had frightened her. One was at one's lowest ebb in the night hours; all this talk about dolls loving and hating would be laughed at for the nonsense it was in the morning. Only the accident to poor Betsy-Ann would be remembered. Nevertheless she held Lalage close, and did not sleep herself for a long time.

Christmas morning dawned with everyone a little tired. Jonathan was silent, a slight frown between his eyes. Lois was pale and quiet, and the likeness between the twins was more pronounced than usual. Lalage could hardly be persuaded to eat at all.

"Darling, you don't know what lovely presents are waiting for you; perhaps another Betsy-Ann," said Constance kindly.

But Lalage only said, "There can't be another," and laid down her spoon.

Her father got the car out and, leaving Ruby in sole charge, they drove through the glistening snow to the church in a Christmas-card setting. The twins were entranced by the holly and ivy wreathed round the pillars and pulpit, and most of all by the Christmas-tree with the lights glowing among its green branches. Jon and Anne looked fondly at the two angelic faces, and then over their heads at each other. Anne felt her uneasiness dropping away during the joyful service. Whatever he had thought last night, Jon himself looked happy now, finding the hymns for the children and nudging them when they stared too hard at the choirboys, dazzlingly clean in their collars and surplices.

The house looked comfortable and secure with the smoke streaming straight up from the chimneys in the still air, and a smell of turkey and plum-pudding enveloped them as they entered.

After an afternoon when even Lois was in a satiated coma and a tea that no one wanted, they turned the lamps out and Jon armed himself with a long taper and started to light the candles on the tree. It was very thickly branched, and the flickering points of light stood out splendidly from the dark background and the star at the top glittered like a diamond. Everyone stood round admiringly until Jon started to hand out the presents.

Anne watched Lalage's face as she untied her last parcel and took out the new doll. She stood holding it, and her mother saw the dawn of love in her eyes. Lois, almost as happy, sprang to her side, tripped over the

discarded box and flung her arms round her sister to save herself, and both tumbled together on to the couch as a flaming mass fell from the tree on to the place where Lalage had stood.

Jon made one leap for the shovel, and had scooped up the burning thing and was out of the door before anyone else had moved. Constance exclaimed in horror and turned the lamps up, while Ruby stood with her mouth open.

As Anne sank down by the twins, she saw them exchange a long look, solemn yet relieved. "It's all right," said Lois, taking the words out of her mother's mouth.

"Gone for ever now," added Lalla, pressing the new doll to her.

Gone. . . ? Anne looked at the dark stain on the carpet and the shreds of mauve gauze where a thread of tinsel still clung. "How did it get on the tree?"

"I put it there," said Ruby, twisting her hands in her apron as they all looked at her in surprise. "I was ever so upset about that doll getting broken. Then I remembered the children saying there was dolls in the old lady's room, and I went up, thinking there might be one I could clean up and make a dress for out of my satin blouse. And then I saw that fairy, just like an answer to a prayer, and I just wrapped a bit of paper round it and put it well into the tree so's I could get it out right at the end if there wasn't another doll for Miss Lalage." She paused for breath, looking appealingly at Anne.

"It was a very kind thought," she

answered, pulling herself together and smiling at the girl.

"Very kind," added Lois in a grown-up way. "But the fairy made you——"

Lalage pressed a hand over her sister's mouth, saying hastily. "The satin one is Ruby's *best* blouse."

"Oh, that's all right." Ruby's anxious look melted into a smile.

"Well, however it happened, the thing's finished now and a good job too, although it might have been a nasty accident," said Constance practically, as she bustled about the burnt carpet.

Jon had come back and was standing silently by the door. Anne wondered what he was thinking, but his face showed nothing.

The tree stood stripped of all but its decorations and the candles that were going out one by one; a mat now lay in the centre of the carpet, and was itself becoming covered with the drifts of paper and string lying everywhere. Anne looked anxiously at the children, but they were busily engaged in wrapping up their toys again in order to have a second thrill in reopening them.

As she sat gratefully sipping the hot, spiced drink the smiling Ruby handed her, she found Jon at her side. He said without any preamble, "I've been upstairs and turfed out the rest of those flaming dolls and put them in the kitchen fire. Hope the chimney doesn't catch as a last excitement," he added with a twist of his mouth. He turned to light his pipe with a spill from the fire. "As for the first—casualty—I buried that in the garden, in the hole I had dug for the tree to go into."

"It's there, then," said Anne in a low voice.

"With a stake through it."

"A *stake*?"

"A small iron spike, then." He put his hand on hers and quoted, "*Iron—Cold Iron—is master of them all.*"

DARK CITY

MICHAEL IRWIN

Illustrations by Roy L. Bickerton

I DIDN'T KNOW it was like this. How could I? The films don't show it this way. It's all glamorous and exciting there, with smart parties and flashy cars. You don't see the dirt and cold and fear all mixed up in it. How can you know—when you're sixteen and there's no one to tell you, and you meet someone like Johnnie McGee? He looked wonderful to me that night, and that's how it all started.

I met him first at Tony's, in Hammersmith. Me and a couple of girl friends used to go there dancing every Saturday. It was cheap, we knew most of the boys there, and the pub across the way didn't worry overmuch about your age.

'Course, Ma didn't like me going, but once I was working she couldn't do much about it. In any case, I was fed up with 'em both, what with the old woman always wailing about me and what I was coming to, and young Molly practising on the piano until I could scream. Maybe it would've been different if Pa had come back from the war. He was easy-going like

and always spoke quietly, and yet you always did as he said. You didn't want to do anything else. I can still remember how his hands felt when he stroked my head. Rough, but kind of gentle as well. . . . Anyway, he didn't come back, so it's no use talking about that. Ma took in washing and after school Molly helped her, but none of that for me. I got a job in a factory, and got good money, too.

Johnnie hit me in the eye right away. Not that he's particularly good looking, mind you, altho' he's big. Maybe it's the way he walks. Yes, maybe that's what it was. As if he was sure of himself. Very, very sure of himself.

I went out of my way to get him. I kept catching his eye, and at last he came over. He didn't ask me to dance —at least, if he did I don't remember it. He just took me, but I didn't squeal.

And could he dance? I'll say he could. He held you close, and you felt him strong and lean all over you. His eyes were pale blue, cold somehow; and they sent shudders down me whenever I met them. He didn't say much as we danced, he was casual like and didn't give anything away, but he gave me a hard, tight feeling low down in my stomach. I did everything I could that first dance to keep his mind on me, but he went back after it was over. There was a fluffy blonde with a low neckline in his corner, and he seemed interested. She noticed me watching him and sent some hard looks over. He had a couple of dances with her, and then went out with two of his cronies—to the pub, I guessed. He came back after the interval, however, and he came over to me.

This time I felt sure he would ask to take me home, but all he wanted to know was if I'd be there next week. When I said I would, he just grinned and said he'd be seeing me. I could've bitten him. . . .

Anyway, he didn't take the blonde home. He left about an hour before the end, and altho' she was hanging about, he just gave her a wave before leaving. And as he met my eye on the way out and gave me a wink, I felt things could have turned out worse.

I lost interest in the dance after that, altho' I had to stay on to the end. I couldn't get him out of my mind. And he was interested, too. I knew that. I've got what it takes. . . .

Why did he leave before the dance ended though? I couldn't answer that one, although I was relieved about the blonde. She couldn't mean much to him, although that wasn't through any lack of trying on her part. Yet as she kept on giving me those hard looks across the floor, I got a queer feeling. Like a premonition. As if somehow, somewhere, she was going to be dangerous. . . . Then I took a deep breath. I was thinking like an old woman. Hadn't he said he'd be seeing me, and wasn't it a wonderful world?

An' that was how it started. That was the beginning, and maybe the end, of everything. Things followed on quickly from there. Not that I didn't know what his game was. I knew soon enough. But the movies

don't show it the way it is, and I'd only the movies to go on.

Joan, one of the girl friends, told me what he was on the way home. She was plain and nobody wanted to take her home; and as I didn't feel like being mauled by the usual fellers after meeting him, we went along together. She started telling me about him in the cloak-room.

" 'E's a spiv," she tittered. "You shouldn't get mixed up with 'im. Yer mother wouldn't 'alf go off if she found out."

"He's no spiv," I said. "You wouldn't catch him buying and selling, or whatever they do."

"No, I don't mean that sort," she said. " 'E's a flash-boy, 'e's got a gang. You know th' sort of thing."

That stopped me short. "How d'you know?" I asked. "I suppose he told you."

"No fear." She tittered again. "But 'Arry Jackman did. 'E said they do pretty well out of it, what with bag snatchin' and coshin' people in the parks. You want to be careful, or yer'll be gettin' yerself into trouble."

"Aw, shut up," I told her. "And if you want to know, I'm seeing him next Saturday. . . ."

It was a funny week, that next week. I never stopped thinking about him. How he danced and held you, and how he walked, with long strides with a bit of swagger in his hips. He moved easy, and you could see what a big noise he was beside the others. They flocked around him when he was talking, and moved out of the way quickly when he walked. I kept on thinking about him, and first I was hot and then I was cold.

Then I would think of the other business. His job. That was dangerous. The cops were getting tougher and tougher on the gangs. Maybe that was it, I thought. You had to be someone to get away with it. You had to be like Johnnie, big and hard with cold blue eyes.

I wondered about his life. What sort of jobs he did. Where his gang worked. But mostly I wondered who he came home to. I wondered a lot about that, and it made me restless and kind of hungry. . . . It took a long time for Saturday to come.

He still didn't take me home, but he did take me over for a drink. And on the way back, alongside the dance-hall, he lifted me into a dark passage-way. I felt the rough bricks behind my head, and then he kissed me. His lips were hard, and he ran them along my cheek to my shoulder and then down my neck. I couldn't have moved if I'd wanted to. My legs were shaking and my heart going so I could hardly breathe. Then he brought his lips back to my face again, kissed me and brought his hand up and lifted my chin. His face was faint, but I could see his eyes looking down at me.

"You're all right, Lil," he said. "You're all right. We should do fine together." Then with his hand still on my throat and the other behind me, he kissed me again, pressing me tight. I got that funny pain in my stomach again, and when he let me go I was shivering and couldn't stop.

"O.K., Lil," he said softly. "Let's go in and dance now."

That was all then. But after that I went his way.

It was a long time before I worked with him though. For the first two months he just dated me once or twice a week, and we went to the movies or on fine nights into the park. There were gardens near the lily-pond where you never saw a soul, and we used to go there a lot. I was glad it was summer. But it was October before he took me to where he lived. It took him that long to trust me.

Of course, Ma and Molly never knew about him. I was often back late at nights, but they knew better than to ask why. But once I got going to his flat I had to tell 'em something, and so I said I had a girl friend who liked me to stay with her. It gave 'em something to believe if they wanted it that way. Otherwise I couldn't care.

Johnnie had a room over a small garage which nobody used. He said a friend of his had let him have it cheap. It was a handy little place and convenient, as all the houses around had been blitzed during the war so there was no one about to spy on us. It was safe too: the doors were strong and all the windows barred. There wasn't much furniture in the place, but there were plenty of nudes stuck round the walls. I wanted to take 'em down, but when I told Johnnie all he did was grab hold of me and kiss me hard. I didn't get the nudes down from the walls, but I did get him to talk about his work. And that, I felt, was something. It was the first time. He told me a little about his gang and what they did at the races, and then he stopped and looked at me queerly, as if he was seeing me for the first time.

"What's the matter?" I asked. "What's the look for?"

"Something I just thought of," he said slowly, still staring. "This game interests you, don't it?"

I said it did and waited.

He lit a cigarette and frowned at the floor, as if he wasn't sure he wanted to say more.

"Go on," I said. "What's on your mind? D'you want me to do a job?" I said it half as a joke, but his eyes kind of glowed at me.

"We could make big money if you did," he said softly.

A shiver went down me, and I lit a cigarette to steady myself.

"How?" I asked, keepin' my voice steady.

He didn't answer me straight back. "I hadn't thought of it before," he explained. "But now you've mentioned it, there is a way. You'd do fine, kid. You've got what it takes. It'd be easy."

"What?" I asked again.

He told me, and then he took my wrists and pulled me to him. He stood a few minutes smilin' down at me, and then drew me tight to him. He kissed me until I could hardly breathe, then he lifted my chin and slid his hand down my throat.

"What d'you think, Lil?" he smiled. "Could you do it?"

"Of course I can," I said, and what else could I say. I'd got it bad. But

things began moving fast now. Too fast. I didn't let myself think too much. That seemed the best way. . . .

It didn't seem too bad at first, mind you. Sometimes I enjoyed it. After all, they were mostly the easy boys, lookin' for a good time, so it was hard to feel sorry for them. And I got nice clothes out of it. I had to have these. You couldn't pick 'em up without the clothes. Then it was easy. All I had to do was saunter along the street Johnnie had picked for me while he waited in some place nearby with the boys.

Not that he had ever to wait long. The only trouble I had was picking the right ones. The middle-aged ones were usually the best, they had the boodle. Once I'd got one of 'em to pick me up, the rest was in the bag. I'd steer 'em round to a park or maybe to some bombed-out site, and they'd come panting along with their tongues hanging out. We'd find a nice quiet spot, which would suit the gent fine, and he'd start performing. Only he'd never get the chance to perform long before Johnnie and the boys arrived. Just in case the gent put two and two together afterwards, I'd act as if I was scared stiff, although we never worked the same place twice. And the married ones didn't like telling the cops either. . . .

The money came easy, and Johnnie was pleased with me. So pleased he began buying me things, like the silver compact I'd had my eye on. It was in a shop near Tony's, and I noticed it one night when we were going dancing. It wasn't cheap and Johnnie didn't seem keen, but I talked him into it; and one Saturday morning he gave me the dough. I wanted him to come with me, but he said he had to arrange something about the races that afternoon. I didn't bother him any more, but took the money and beat it, in case he changed his mind. . . .

I knew why he hadn't come along with me the moment I walked into the shop. He knew she worked there. That was why he'd tried to keep me off it, I guessed. I watched her eyes harden as she saw me and her fluffy hair toss back. She came over sullenly.

"Yes," she grunted. "What d'you want?"

"I want to see that silver compact in the window," I told her airily. She looked surprised and then walked slowly away. I caught her eyes running over me as she leaned into the window, and I grinned. Johnnie needn't have worried. I wasn't jealous of this cheap little skirt. Not any more. Why should I be? I knew what he'd been doing these last few months, didn't I?

She came back with the compact and threw it on the counter. I picked it up and it felt good with my hands on it. It was the real thing, heavy and solid, with flowers chased on the lid.

I opened my handbag and felt her eyes on me as I pulled out a fistful of notes. "I'll take it," I told her. "Wrap it up, please."

She put it into a box, parcelled it up, and handed it to me. I gave her the money, and she took it without a word.

"Don't you say 'thank you' to a

customer?" I asked loudly. "Really, I think one is entitled to some civility when one pays out good money. It doesn't cost anything to be polite."

If looks could have killed I would have gone out like a light. Her face went white, and her eyes. . . . They were something. I picked my things up from the counter and stalked out. I felt good then, on top of the world. It was only later, when I remembered how she had looked at me, that I got that queer little shiver down my back. I couldn't think why. She was nobody. There was nothing she could do. . . .

It was me who suggested it. And why not? Why should the gang get half when I was taking all the risks? Just the two of us, I argued. Me to fetch 'em and you to put 'em away. That's all it needs. And we share fifty-fifty. You get the same, but I get the gang's share.

It didn't take me long to talk him round to it, although he warned me to keep my mouth shut. He said he would tell the gang I'd quit after promising him to keep quiet. If they knew we were still working together they might become acid with us. And in the meantime he'd be looking out for something good for the two of us.

A week later he gave me a key to his flat. I didn't use it for a few days, but one Saturday afternoon I went round and let myself in. He was at the races, so I spent a few minutes lookin' round. There wasn't much in

the wardrobe except his clothes, but the tin box under his bed interested me—probably because it was locked. I found a bunch of keys in one of his jacket pockets and tried them on the lock. The third one fitted. . . .

A minute or so later I closed the lid slowly, locked it and returned the keys to the wardrobe. Then I sat back on the bed and thought. I felt cold. It was the first time I'd really felt afraid, and I couldn't think why I was shivering that way. After all, I'd seen a revolver before. Naturally, he'd have one. But I was so scared for a few minutes I wanted to run and run and never see Johnnie again. Maybe that was it. Maybe it was meant to be my last chance; maybe that was why the keys were so handy and everything. I was too scared to even wonder about the photos of the girls that were inside the trunk. That came later. Now I was just scared, but I didn't run and my chance was over. And it never came again because when Johnnie came home he had a job all fixed up for me, and from then on it was just a straight road without any more turnings. . . .

He looked a little surprised to see me.

"You did give me a key, remember?" I told him.

His face cleared and he came over and kissed me. I was still shaking, but he didn't notice it and I could see there was something on by the look in his eyes.

"What is it, Johnnie? What's happened?" I asked.

He put his hands on my shoulders and squeezed hard. "I'm glad to see you, baby," he said. "I've got a job for you."

"For just the two of us?" I said.

"For just the two of us," he told me. "And it's a snip. We can't miss."

I put my arms round him. "Tell me all about it," I said. "But first. . . ."

He looked at me, grinned and then kissed me. His lips were hard and when he let me go I was breathless.

"O.K.," I said shakily. "Now tell me."

He pulled me down into a chair, gave me a cigarette and then leaned back.

"Not far from here there's a jeweller's shop," he said slowly. "And it's owned by a little fat man called Smithers who looks after it himself. The only day he gets help is on a Friday, when his wife gives him a hand, but she leaves at five to go home to get the supper ready. He closes at six, and all the money taken that day goes into a safe in a room behind the shop. Apart from the dough, the insurance people make him keep some of his gold and large diamonds there, too. So it's worth getting into that safe."

"And how do we get in?" I asked. "And where do I come in?"

He laughed. "On the ground floor. I've found out quite a bit about Smithers, and he's easy for the stuff you dish out. You know the line. Go in a few times, get talking to him, make him think you're easy, and fix up a night—a Friday night, because that's his busiest day. He'll try to make the date in the room behind

the shop, but you've got to get out—tell him you have a flat and——"

"Wait a minute," I said. "I see what's coming, but what about the safe? He isn't goin' to tell you the combination number."

He grinned. "It isn't that sort," he said. "It's got a key."

"I get it," I told him. "I lead him to some place where you're waiting, you get the keys to the shop and safe and hop back. Is that it?"

"That's it, baby," he said. "I go back and help myself."

"You'd better take a wheel-barrow," I said. "You can clean the whole place out."

He shook his head. "No, it isn't that easy. He leaves the shop light on as an advertisement, and you can see right into it. And there's a police-box nearly opposite."

"Then someone might see you go in," I said.

"He goes out the back way," he told me patiently. "And that's the way I go in. You'll just have to see the door between the room and shop is closed before you leave. That's all. And if I know old man Smithers, he'll make sure of it himself, when he's got you there."

"There's one thing else," I said. "What am I doing while you're cleaning out the safe? I'm with Smithers, remember."

"You're having a quiet cigarette," he said. "That's all. He'll be tied up."

"He's goin' to be dangerous when he's loose again," I warned. "This isn't quite the same as the other shows. This one's going to lose a lot of dough, and he's going to be able to recognize us again. We'll have to skip the town."

He squeezed my waist. "Don't worry, baby," he said. "He won't talk to anyone. I know all about the old guy. He's well loaded, and a few hundred won't mean that much to him. You'll tell him a few things when you've finished your cigarette. You'll tell him what we've done—he'll find out soon enough, anyway—and you'll tell him that if he goes to the cops you'll deny everything and say he was tryin' to seduce you when it happened. They won't believe you, but his old girl will. That's all you need say. He won't talk."

I frowned. "I'm not so sure. The money and stuff may be more to him than the old woman. Maybe he'd sooner lose her. What then?"

His arm squeezed tighter. "You're losing your nerve, Lil. I tell you—he won't talk. I've checked up on him. Stop worrying. We haven't slipped up yet, have we?" His arm pulled me closer. "Have we? Stop worrying, Lil."

I should have said no. I should have told him to go to hell. But his arms were around me and his lips were on my neck.

"All right," I whispered. "But let's talk about it later. . . ."

He was fat. Fat and small and oily. And his hands were white and smooth. I knew Johnnie was right about him when I first walked into his shop. It was his eyes, they made me feel I wasn't wearing any clothes.

Not that I was wearing many. It

was a warm day for October, and I had on one of my oomph blouses, the type I used to go dancing in. I'd left my bras off and the third button of the blouse undone, and I gave him an eyeful. He brought out watches and I leaned over the counter and looked at them and he looked at me, and I knew straight off I had him. After he'd brought a couple of trays of watches over and I'd leaned over and examined them, he didn't want to sell me a watch. That was fine, because altho' Johnnie had given me the money to buy one as an excuse, I didn't want a watch either.

At last I told him nice and sweetly that he hadn't just what I wanted, but I would come back in a couple of days and try again.

He gave me an oily smile. "I'm getting some more," he said. "Maybe they'll be in to-morrow."

"Shall I come in to-morrow afternoon, then?" I asked, fluttering my eyelashes at him. "I just love looking round jewellers' shops, so I shan't be disappointed if they haven't arrived."

He nearly fell over the counter at me. "Come to-morrow afternoon," he said, wriggling in his eagerness. "I don't get many people in on Wednesdays, and I'll show you round. You can have tea with me, and you can try on some of these bracelets and things."

I opened my eyes wide. "Oh; I'd love to. But you're sure I won't be in the way?"

His eyes went over me again. "You won't be in the way," he said.

I fluttered my hand at him. "Bye-bye, then," I murmured, giving him a look. "See you to-morrow."

"Bye-bye," he said, and he looked like a well-fed cat eyeing a bowl of cream as I left the shop.

After that, it was easy. I went to the shop a couple of times, and to make sure the safe was still in the back room I let him take me in there and paw me a bit. It was there all right, just as Johnnie had said. So I let him fix up a date. He wanted me to come round one evening and have a few drinks with him in the room, and that was the hardest part—getting him to go outdoors with me.

He told me he was married and how careful he had to be; and that was a relief and showed maybe Johnnie was right. But it made it hard to get him outside, and I had to lead him along. But I had what it takes, and I used it. Eventually he promised to come to my "flat," on condition we left in the dark and kept off the lighted streets. He said we could take a taxi, but I talked him out of that, pointing out the risk of being remembered by the driver; and, anyway, I told him my flat was quite close by. He agreed, and I went and told Johnnie and Johnnie was very pleased. He said that after the job we would give up the game and have a long holiday, maybe a sea trip. I said that was O.K. with me. I would brush Ma off with some story or other.

We made our final plans. Smithers closed down at six and I had to be with him then. That was important, in case he gave the safe key to some-

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one. We didn't want to do the job for nothing. Johnnie would know because when I led Smithers across the blitzed site I would have him on my left arm if all was O.K. If he was on the right side it meant we had to try again some other time. I hoped that wouldn't be necessary. I couldn't see how I'd be able to shake him off.

There was one thing I persuaded Johnnie to do beforehand. To get a hiding-place for the boodle. He couldn't always get rid of it straight away, and I didn't think we should keep it in his room. The cops might fall for us one day, and we didn't want to be caught red-handed. I guess that gun was at the back of my mind, too.

So I was relieved when he told me a couple of days later that some friend of his had let him use a cellar

under his place. It wasn't nearby, but I didn't mind. I was glad. The farther the better, I thought—just in case. And when he moved the tin box to the other place I felt better still. The room felt easier to stay in, somehow. I don't know why I felt that way, but there it was. And now I waited for the Friday night.

I got there just before six. Smithers had a customer in when I arrived, so going over to the end of the counter I opened my handbag and started to make up my face, for something to do. He didn't look at me until the customer had gone.

"Hello," I smiled then, dabbing at my face.

"Hello, my dear," he said, his eyes running over me greedily. Then he suddenly looked anxious and his head turned sharply to the open door. He came round the counter in a hurry.

"Please, my dear," he said, taking hold of my arm. "Do go into the other room and wait for me."

I remembered then how scared he was of being seen, and could've kicked myself. If he got too jittery it might spoil the whole thing. As he tugged anxiously at my arm again, I grabbed up my handbag quickly.

"O.K.," I said, nice and sweetly. "I'm sorry. But don't be long, will you?"

I could feel his eyes on me as I went. Although I say it, I was looking good. New nylons I had cadged out of Johnnie, high heels, dress nice and tight with a swagger coat to set it off. Smithers couldn't get the door closed quick enough. Only I was hoping he didn't get so eager he forgot the diamonds and things.

He wasn't that careless. He came from the shop with a tray and a tin box, and closed the door carefully behind him, just as Johnnie had said he would.

"I won't be a minute," he said, pushing the things into the safe. Then he swung the steel door shut with a clang, pulled over a handle and shoved the key in his jacket pocket. Then he turned to me. His eyes wandered down to the knee I was showing before he moved over to a cupboard.

"What'll you have?" he asked.

"Gin and lime, please," I said.

"Say when." He slopped in the water.

"That's fine. Thanks," I said, taking the glass from him.

"Here's to us." He lifted his glass and his double chin flopped as he swallowed.

"Cheerio." I knocked mine down quickly. I needed a drink bad.

"Another?" he asked eagerly.

"Please," I smiled. He poured another and brought it across.

"How about a little kiss?" he winked.

I stood up and squared myself. This was goin' to be the worst part. Oh, well. . . . I let him kiss me a couple of times, and then I reached for my drink and held it between us. His mouth was slobbery—I had a nasty feeling I was going to retch.

"Don't be in such a hurry," I smiled at him. "There's plenty of time. Have another drink."

I didn't like the look of him. He

was panting and the sweat was all over his face. I began thinking I'd better get out quick, if I wanted to get out at all.

"We must go after this," I said nicely to him. "A friend of mine called at my flat to put the dinner on, and we don't want it to spoil."

That brought him round a bit. "She won't be there when we arrive, will she?" he asked anxiously.

I shook my head. "Now don't worry," I told him. "No one's going to know a thing about this except the two of us. You're goin' to have a nice evening without any comebacks. Finish your drink and let's get going."

He gave a sigh, looked longingly around the room, and then gulped down his drink.

"Here's your coat," I said, handing it to him before he could begin that business about staying in the room again. He gave me a squeeze and climbed into it. I opened the back door and waited for him. He followed me out after switching off the light.

"Don't you turn off the shop light, too?" I asked him innocently as he locked the door.

"No," he said, pocketing the key. "It's a good advertisement and a time-switch turns it off at ten-thirty." He looked around uneasily. "I suppose it's dark enough," he muttered.

"It's as dark as it gets," I told him, grabbing his arm. We edged down the narrow lane by the shop, and started down the street.

My heart was going like the devil by the time we got to the blitzed site. It wasn't easy to keep playing up to him with my mind on what was going to happen in a few minutes' time. Anyway, he didn't notice anything. His mind must have been on what he thought was coming, and I guess that kept it pretty occupied, too. I wasn't feeling sorry for him since he kissed me in the shop. You couldn't feel sorry for anyone with lips like that. We reached the place.

"This way," I said, pulling at his arm. "We cut across here."

He hesitated, with eyes on the gloomy ruins ahead. He must have had a premonition, although for that matter it looked bleak enough to send a shudder through me.

"C'mon," I laughed. "That supper'll be gettin' dried up," and I pecked him on the cheek to encourage him. He came then, and I made sure he was on my left side. It was cold and I was shivering a little. There was a damp mist coming down and I heard the far-off hoot of a ship's siren. My heart was hammering so it hurt and there was a tight knot in my stomach. We reached the walls of one of the wrecked buildings and I squeezed his arm.

"Let's go inside," I whispered. "Just for a minute."

He looked at me and then his steps quickened. "All right," he said and his short legs moved faster. We rounded the broken wall and I stopped him before what had once been a doorway. Throwing my arms around him, I pressed myself nice and close. I stayed like that a minute or so, and then stepped back. He

stood still a moment panting and then lurched forward towards me, his arms reaching out. Just as I was beginning to think something had gone wrong, Johnnie came out behind him. He swung something down, there was a thud and a grunt, and Smithers sagged and went down like a dropped doll.

Johnnie stepped forward and leaned over him, a thick piece of piping in his hand. Then he straightened up as if satisfied.

"Nice work, Lil," he said. "Give me a hand with him."

I helped him pull Smithers through the doorway into what had been a room, although there wasn't a roof any more. Then I sat on a stone and tried to get my breath back while Johnnie took his keys and tied him up.

"Was everythin' all right back there?" he asked.

I nodded. "Just as you said it would be," I gasped. "The stuff's in the safe, the shop light's on but the door between is closed."

"Fine," he said, straightening. "I'll get along now. Keep your head and remember what to tell this little guy when he wakes up. He can't shout—I've stuck a piece of wood in his mouth."

"I'll be all right," I said. "Good luck, Johnnie." And then he was gone and I was alone in the darkness.

The minutes passed slowly. And it was funny how dark it seemed now Johnnie had gone. Dark and lonely.

I could hear the faint sound of traffic in the distance, and that made it worse, somehow. I kept finding myself listening . . . holding my breath. It was too quiet, if you know what I mean. Then I heard something moving outside, something that sounded like tiny inquisitive feet. . . . I edged softly to the doorway, took a deep breath and peered out. At first I could see nothing, and then I wanted to laugh hysterically as I noticed the dried leaves scraping against the wall. I went back and sat on the stone again. I began to wish Smithers would wake up. It was cold and dark and still.

I began to think about Smithers. He should be round by this. Johnnie had been gone over fifteen minutes. A chill ran down my back. Of course he should be awake, or at least moving. And he hadn't moved—that is, I hadn't heard him. He was over there by the wall, hunched and still. I began to panic. Suppose Johnnie had hit him too hard or he had a bad heart. Suppose he was badly hurt. . . .

Now I was scared. Clammy sweat began running down my body and I couldn't stop shaking. I lit a cigarette and the darkness was like a wall in front of me when I blew out the match. Each time I sucked on the fag the glow shone on the floor and I could just see his legs. They looked twisted, somehow. . . .

I threw away the cigarette and stepped over to where he lay. Anything was better than sitting and wondering and not knowing. I reached down and suddenly my hand was cold and sticky. . . .

There wasn't any need to feel his pulse, his hand was enough. I staggered over to the wall and started to vomit. When that was over I leaned forward and felt the rough, brick wall cold against my cheek. For a while I couldn't think, my mind was jangling and screaming at me. Smithers's dead! What happens now! Smithers's dead! Dead, d'you hear! Dead, dead, dead, dead. . . . Oh, my God!

I don't know how long passed while I stood against the wall. I'll never know. I didn't move. I just stood. And years and years later I heard someone whispering from the doorway:

"Lil, where are you? Lil."

Johnnie was back.

I began to cry then, deep gulping sobs that came from a long way inside and sent me stumbling over for his arms. But he didn't hold me, he grabbed my shoulders and held me at arm's length.

"For heaven's sake, Lil, stop it. What's th' matter? You want to bring the cops here? Shut up."

"He's dead, Johnnie. Smithers's dead. Dead, d'you hear?"

His fingers bit into my shoulders. "Don't be a fool. How can he be dead? You're crazy." But his voice cracked off and I could see his face now. It was a white smear in the darkness.

"Oh, Johnnie, let's get out of here," I begged. "He's dead, I tell you."

He pushed me aside and went over to Smithers. He reached down, let out a gasp and then dropped his face

into his hands. He didn't move for a minute.

"Let's get out of here," I sobbed. "Oh, Johnnie, hurry up. If the cops catch us. . . ."

"Shut up, you little bitch," he screamed suddenly, leaping up at me. "Shut your trap." And he hit me hard on the mouth.

I stood staring at him in the dark. Then I spoke quietly and I didn't recognize my voice. "Yes, Johnnie," I said, and then we left there. Not that I remember much else about it. It was like one of those nightmares you have as a child, when something is after you and you're running and running away from it in the dark. When ugly faces keep coming up around you, and it's cold and awfully lonely. But even in those, behind it all somehow you knew it wouldn't last, that Mother would come in sometime and chase the things away. That's what I kept thinking as we ran from dark street to dark street—that Mother would come and I would wake up soon. That's all that kept me going. . . . Just a dream, I kept saying. Just a dream. . . .

But it wasn't a dream. I knew that when we were back in the flat and Johnnie was standing with his back to the door with a look in his eyes I'd never seen before. No, it wasn't a dream. . . .

"Johnnie, sit down," I whispered.

He walked over to the window and then back to the door and then to the window again.

"Sit down, Johnnie," I said again. "You didn't mean to kill him." It didn't seem like me speaking. I wondered where I got the strength from.

He stopped walking and looked at me. "It wasn't your fault, Johnnie," I said. "And they can't find out. . . ."

"Shut up," he screamed. "Shut up, damn you. Keep your trap shut, d'you hear?"

I stared at him. His cheeks had sort of fallen in and his eyes looked like dark holes. He looked wolfish. But that wasn't what frightened me; the thing that did I wouldn't admit to myself. He was still mine, you see. My Johnnie. We were in trouble together. Johnnie was in trouble. Somehow that pulled me together.

I opened my handbag and took out a packet of fags. I gave him one, took one myself and lighted up. Then I looked at my watch. Nine forty-five. And it seemed as if a week had gone by. I pulled deeply at my cigarette and then looked at him.

"Did you get the stuff all right, Johnnie?" I asked him.

He nodded and pointed to his overcoat.

"I put the diamonds and things over to the other place," he muttered. "That's why I was a long time. I've kept some of the dough."

"So we've got money if we want it?" I said.

He nodded again and then turned suddenly on me. "What d'you mean? What d'you want the dough for?"

I stared at him. "Why, we may need it. If the cops catch on and we have to run. . . ."

He moved so fast I couldn't even duck. His hands grabbed my throat, and he bent me back so I couldn't move or speak.

"How can they catch on?" he snarled. "No one saw me, did they? No one knows about me. No one can know—unless you tell them."

He let go my throat, and the breath sobbed back into my lungs again. It hurt, but something else hurt much more. I was seeing Johnnie for the first time—as he was—and it hurt so I wanted to die. I knew him now, just as I knew how much he cared for me. Johnnie was yellow. Something inside me seemed shrivelled up and dead. . . .

I forced myself not to cry. I wouldn't cry. I picked up my handbag and fished inside for my compact.

Then I went cold. I groped frantically around inside the bag. My mind went to pieces again.

"What's the matter?" He grabbed my arm and his fingers dug into the flesh. "What you starin' like that for?"

"My compact," I muttered. "It's gone."

"Gone." He swung me around. "Gone where? Where'd you have it last?"

"I don't know." I was crying now. "I don't remember."

His fingers tore into me. "You've got to remember, you fool. Where was it?"

At the back of my mind something was trying to warn me—but I couldn't make out what it said. . . .

"It wasn't out there with him," I muttered. "I didn't use it then."

I tried to think back. Maybe I hadn't brought it with me. Maybe it was still at . . . Then I remembered and I stiffened in agony. The noises grew worse in my head—all mixed up. And yet, at the back of it all there was that something trying to warn me.

"Where is it?" he whispered, his eyes glaring at me.

"In the shop," I breathed. "On the counter."

"In the . . . shop. God." He threw me away from him and I fell over a chair to the floor. He stood over me and his eyes didn't look human.

"You fool," he said softly. "You stupid fool."

"You can get it," I sobbed. "You can go back with the keys and get it. All you have to do is turn out the light and go into the shop. No one's goin' to see you then. No one's goin' to notice the light being out for a couple of minutes."

His eyes hated me. He shook his head, and his teeth showed in a sort of grin, like a cat makes before it uses its claws.

"I can't," he said softly, so that I could hardly hear his voice. "I can't, because I haven't the keys. They're down a drain somewhere. You didn't think I kept them afterwards, did you? Did you, you . . .?"

"Maybe it's not there," I sobbed. "I'm not sure. I can't remember for certain."

He gave me a last look and then went over for his coat.

"Where're you goin'?" I asked, still crying. "You're not leavin' me here, are you?"

He went over to the door and stopped there. "I'm goin' back to the shop," he said. "The light's still on,

remember? I can see if the thing's still there. You stay here and keep quiet."

He closed the door, and as he did so I knew what that something in my mind had been trying to tell me. Only now it was too late.

The light, the light that went out at ten-thirty. If I hadn't told him where I thought the compact was, if I'd said some other place to stall him off, then maybe I could have kept him away from the shop until the light had gone out. Then he couldn't have been sure. And if he wasn't sure he wouldn't become as desperate as he was going to become when he saw it lying on the counter. That had been my chance, my one chance, and I hadn't known it until too late. Because now it was too late. . . .

Even before I tried the door I knew he had locked it. And I knew why. He was thinking the same thing as me—things about a fluffy blonde shop girl who would just love to tell the cops who bought that silver compact. . . .

So that's where she comes in I think, as I stare out through the barred window. She comes into the nightmare that's all locked up in this room. If I get through to-night, maybe I'll meet her in the flesh, telling a judge and jury who bought the compact that the police found all nice and convenient on the shop counter. But even if I do she'll be no more real than she is to-night, leering at me from every corner of the room. Somehow I don't think I'm going to see her that other way. . . .

Because Johnnie has been gone over an hour now, and I think I know why he's late. He went to the shop first and he saw the compact lying on the counter. That meant there was nothing he could do, except save Johnnie. And he'll do that all right. That's why he has made the other call.

He'd have to go there. He wouldn't dare bump me off with his bare hands. Not Johnnie, he wouldn't have the guts. And in any case it's quicker and easier the other way, and less dangerous, because no one but me knows he's got a gun. And no one will hear. It's as lonely as the grave here at nights. There's one thing he'll have to do, though. He'll have to borrow the car from his friend. The one they use when they go to the races. That's how I'll know. He'll have to have the car if he's going to do it, so as to get me away afterwards. . . .

Oh God, I'm scared. It's cold in here and there'll be a fire at home, and Mum'll be sewing and Molly'll be practising on the piano. But they won't expect me back, at least not until after twelve. Only I won't be back. . . .

I didn't know it was like this. I didn't know anyone could be so frightened and live. If I could only breathe properly. . . .

That's a car now. It's hard to hear, with my heart racing and making so much noise. But it is one, I can see the lights, they're coming nearer and nearer. . . . I'm hanging . . . on to the window-sill to keep my legs steady. . . . But it's all right. It's gone by. . . .

That's my last cigarette. Everything seems to be ending to-night. And yet it can't end. I'm young. I'm good looking. How can it end? I'm crazy. Johnnie won't do it, of course he won't. He'll come back without the car, and we'll run out of town together. He won't worry about my giving him away if I'm caught. He was just scared when he acted that way. He'll stick by me. We've got the dough . . . we can jump a boat and get out. That's how it'll be. I can't die. How can I die?

What's that. There's another car coming. Yes, I can see its lights, coming round the corner. . . . But it's nothing, there're thousands of cars in town, aren't there? And some'll go by here, the road leads somewhere. . . .

But why does its engine sound different . . . ? It's slowing down . . . that's why. Oh God, it is. It's slowing down . . . and stopping outside. . . .

Then I was right. He's going to do it. He's going to do it, just as I said. That's the door down below creaking, and those are footsteps . . . and they're coming up the stairs. . . .

I'm trying to scream, but my throat's tight and something's tearing in my chest. I know it's him. I'd know his footsteps anywhere. It's quiet, for a moment it's very quiet and my heart sounds like thunder. But now there's a rasping noise as the lock turns, and the door's starting to open, slowly, slowly. . . .

Oh, Mother. . . . Oh, God. . . . I didn't know. . . .

COLONEL CHINSTRAP'S GHOST STORY

BRIAN STUART

EVIL SPIRITS, SIR? Yes, sir, I've come across that kind of spirit too, at different times. There's an old house near Saffron Walden where I once stayed a night with Bulgy Bulstrode. We sat up all night with our hands resting on a Bible, while some horrible, unclean Thing whined and slobbered and padded from room to room. And I remember a West African witch doctor—a ju-ju man—when I was serving in Benin in eighteen ninety-eight. Freddy Fanshawe was my C.O. at the time, and he sent me off into the bush to bring the ju-ju man back, dead or alive. His village showed fight, and in the end we had to put a dozen bullets into him. He was as dead as mutton when we went to pick him up, but that did not stop him from whistling like some damned Pied Piper and calling up every puff-adder for miles round. That, sir, was the only time in my life that I ever disobeyed orders. I took my men back without him.

But I digress, sir, I digress.

It was this way. I was quite a youngster at the time. India, sir, India. We were out on column, chasing some dacoits up in the Mohmand Valley. Quite a long story, sir, really. Thank you, my boy, I don't mind if I do.

I'd just got my captaincy and been posted to the 1st Flint and Merioneth Light Infantry—the "F. and M." Great days they were too, in the old Foot-and-Mouth! I was second-in-command to dear old Munday, who commanded Number 1 Double Company.

You never knew, in those days, when the Mohmand Valley might not flare up into a first-class war that might drag on for months, and then take a division from 'Pindi or Peshawar to stop it. Up near the Frontier, we'd be under arms more often than not. I know you boys think I'm just a crushing old bore—an old codger who spends all his time propping up a bar and joining in on a drink whenever he can. That may be true, sir; that may be true. But it's the loneliness of it all—the loneliness of it all. London's not a good place for an old, retired-pay colonel, with little but his memories to live on. . . . But when I was a young man, my generation of soldiers in India had to *soldier*. Look at the clasps on the medals with the old Queen's head. . . . The Queen's Head! That reminds me . . . there's a haunted room in the Queen's Head at Hempton Parva in Warwickshire. . . .

But still, sir . . . the old Foot-and-Mouth did a good job of work with those dacoits. Rounded them all up, except for one village which rallied

round a kind of Holy Man—an awful old ruffian named Ahfuz Khan. Ahfuz Khan and about two hundred of his followers kept us at bay for a week. Then old Dillington-Dallin, the Brigadier—dear old Dilly-Dally! What a boy!—called up the colonel, who ordered Munday to move Number 1 Double Company forward and take the place at the point of the bayonet. Those were the days, sir. Gad, yes! No gas; no smoke-screen; no automatic weapons. Hand to hand, sir; steel to steel, and we killed one another like gentlemen!

Well, sir, if the Foot-and-Mouth went in with the bayonet, you can take it from me that they got what they went after. By gad, sir, that was a fight! That was where Munday got his V.C. He was lean and wiry and fit as a fiddle in those days. Muscles like steel hawsers and a grip like a python.

And I tell you, sir, I thank God he had!

Munday went in at the head of the company, and I saw him go sword-in-hand into a bunch of dacoits. . . . After that I was rather busy myself.

In about twenty minutes it was all over. I was trying to re-form the company and collect the wounded when I saw Munday coming towards me. All of a sudden, Ahfuz Khan himself leapt from behind a wall, his tulwar whirling above his head for a terrific slash at Munday. He missed, and Munday got him round the waist with both arms. Strong as he was, sir, Munday wasn't having things all his own way. Ahfuz Khan had one hand on Munday's throat and was squeezing the life out of him when I got up to them and took a cut at Ahfuz with my sword. What happened then I don't quite know. I should have got him right across the throat with my sword and taken his head half off. But I caught him across the hand instead, paralysing his arm and shearing off his forefinger as clean as a whistle. Then a sergeant and a dozen men came up, and Ahfuz Khan went back to Peshawar as a prisoner. He was sentenced to be hanged. They'd stopped blowing men from the guns by then, more's the pity.

I was in court when he was sentenced. Just before the escort led him away, Ahfuz Khan held up the hand with the missing finger, and cursed me up-hill and down-dale.

His finger—the one I had lopped off with the sword—he said would follow me and would choke me, even as he would be choked. . . . It's over fifty years ago now, but I still sweat with horror when I think about it. I would suddenly see that finger floating in my finger-bowl in Mess. . . . It wasn't really there, of course. At least, *other* people could not see it. At other times it would flick me behind the ear, or I would find it in my tobacco-pouch. But nobody could see or feel it, except me. Not then, that is.

One day I went snipe-shooting before breakfast with a couple of fellas. My right barrel misfired and a beautiful shot got away from me. When I broke my gun to reload . . . Well, you can guess what I found stuck in the chamber where I had put

a cartridge. At the end of a week I thought I was going mad. So did most other people, except Munday, the regimental padre and the M.O. *They* persuaded the C.O. to send me down to Madras for a long leave in Ooty. Dear old Munday came with me.

For a week or so I was free of that haunting horror—that loathsome brown thing, like a short piece of stick with a crimson, squashy end.

Then Munday and I went off for a few days' shooting, and put up at a government rest-house. We turned in soon after nine, ready for an early start in the morning, but I was so restless I began to wonder if I had a dose of fever coming on. I thought I'd sit up a bit, and have a stiff toddy and a smoke.

I poured myself out a good three fingers and helped myself to one of Munday's cheroots. Then I could not find my matches, so I got another box out of my haversack and sat down again. I took another pull at my whisky and listened to a panther coughing in the distance.

All of a sudden, I remembered that Ahfuz Khan's execution had been fixed for daybreak—in about four hours' time. The recollection made me feel all nervy again, and I know my hands were trembling—a great deal more, sir, I may say, than they do to-day. I struck a match. Ugh, sir! I can't bear to think about it.

No sooner had I touched the end of my cheroot with the flame than it writhed like a thing in agony, twisted itself out of my teeth and clamped itself across my throat . . . squeezing, pressing, gripping, like a garrotter's rope. But it was cold, sir, cold! Like a dead man's hand. Just one end of it, I could feel, was warm and wet . . . and something seemed to be dribbling down my bare chest.

I fought and struggled to break that ghastly vice-like grip that was choking the life out of me. By the grace of Providence, sir, I knocked the whisky bottle down as I was forced back, half-conscious, and then I sent the water chatti flying. The crash awakened Munday. I've mentioned already, haven't I, that he had the strength of a python? He got that Thing off my windpipe. This time, thank God, it was something tangible. Tiny as it was, it fought him back. Being so short—and, being what it was, so slippery—he could scarcely hold it. But at last he got his iron grip on it, and with his bare hands he squeezed it almost to pulp. I heard the bone crack inside as he crushed it.

He sat up with me for the rest of the night. There did not seem any great point in staying on in the Nilghiris after that, so the next day we began the journey back to Peshawar.

Ahfuz Khan wasn't hanged. Four hours before his execution they found him in his cell, with his head nearly twisted off . . . strangled.

My throat goes dry even now when I think of it. . . . Thank you, sir, I don't mind if I do. . . .

MURDER BY MOUTH

BARBARA CARTLAND

Illustrations by Francis Butterfield

Henry Flood watched his wife eating pâté de gibier en aspic *and* baba au rum, *and, raising his glass of champagne, drank a secret toast to her. "To your future, my dear. May it be very short." Barbara Cartland describes this meal to end all meals with succulent relish. Although a newcomer to these pages, Miss Cartland will see her fiftieth novel published this autumn. Her most important work is a biography of her brother, Major Ronald Cartland, M.P., who was killed in the War.*

MR. HENRY FLOOD dug his celery-trench and wondered how he could murder his wife.

It was a problem which he had been turning over in his mind for some time, but what had been originally a vague inclination had now become an urgent necessity for action.

As long as Lucy remained alive, he was almost certain to lose Maria. And to prevent Maria leaving, Mr. Flood was prepared to commit any crime—even murder!

Mr. Flood was a small, insignificant-looking man of fifty-five. He was grey at the temples, and his hair was lamentably thin on top. He had a small, indeterminate moustache, and his eyes were slightly magnified by the lenses of his horn-rimmed spectacles.

When Mr. Flood left for the City every morning in his black coat, striped trousers and bowler hat, he looked indistinguishable from several dozen other gentlemen, similarly dressed, leaving on the 8.15.

But in one respect Mr. Flood was different from his fellow-travellers. He was an epicure. He was also chief wine taster to Simpkins, Watson & Dulray, wine-merchants and importers. Mr. Flood had worked for this same firm since he was fifteen, and his father had worked there before him.

It was of course his work with Simpkins, Watson & Dulray which had made him interested in food.

"Flood, your palate is impeccable," old Mr. Simpkins had once said to him, and had added ponderously, "Be sure you take damn good care of it."

Mr. Simpkins had been dead these last twenty-five years, but Henry Flood had never forgotten his advice. He had considered and cosseted his palate as another man might have considered and cosseted his mistress, and had soon discovered that if he ate the wrong things his palate suffered. His interest in food made him study it as closely as he studied the

wines which were brought to him for his selection and grading.

Mr. Flood had not married until he was over forty, and that, he knew now, had been the greatest mistake of his life. But Lucy, thirteen years ago, had been flatteringly in love with him, and had an income of five hundred a year of her own.

Henry Flood had been tempted both by Lucy's persistence and the thought of how useful her five hundred pounds a year would be. He longed for a garden of his own in which he could grow the special herbs and vegetables he found unobtainable in the shops, but which cookery books told him were indispensable in certain dishes.

With Lucy's money Henry Flood bought a most desirable residence, with a nice garden, which was only ten minutes' walk from a station, and therefore only thirty minutes' distance from Simpkins, Watson & Dulray.

All had gone well at first. Lucy had accepted her husband's suggestion that they employ a cook and that she should do the housework. But Henry Flood's ideas on cooking grew more and more particular year by year.

From the first, although he was not really unaware of it himself, he was looking for the perfect cook. Then at last, only two months ago, Henry Flood had found Maria. She was the realization of his dreams, his ideal woman incarnate.

She was over forty, small, neat and not unattractive, except for a hairy upper lip. But if she had worn a heavy beard it would not have mattered to Henry Flood.

It was her hands he adored, her small, short-fingered hands, powdered with freckles, which could make a soufflé as light as swansdown and pastry as crisp and feathery as a snowflake. Maria was the widow of a chef who had caught pneumonia after leaving a hot kitchen on a cold night.

Henry Flood had heard about Maria from a business acquaintance to whom he had occasionally been able to give a useful tip about the wine shipments.

"Heard something to-day which might interest you, Flood," he said. "It's a cook looking for a job—and what a cook! She's a genius—an artist. I've eaten her food, and I know what I'm talking about! Ambrosia isn't the word for it. She wants to be in a private house. Only one gentleman is her idea, of course, but your wife doesn't interfere. You might persuade her to take you on."

Henry Flood felt himself tingle with excitement. He was like a collector who sees unexpectedly in a shop window the one piece he wants to add to his collection. But—he went cold at the thought—Lucy did interfere! That had been the trouble with Rose, with Mignon, with Agnes. Lucy would not let them alone.

It was jealousy, it was sheer cussedness, it was her time of life! Henry put it down to all three; but whatever it was, she interfered. Not with the cooking of course, but with them. Two women in a small house, bickering and nattering at each other until

one of them was forced to leave. Henry Flood stood by helplessly while Lucy drove away one cook after another.

"Please take no notice," he had pleaded with Agnes, whose *potage chasseur* had been a sheer joy.

"It's been a pleasure to work for you, sir," Agnes had replied; "but there's no pleasing some people, not if one was an angel from Heaven itself!"

And Maria was an angel—or rather an archangel—in Henry Flood's particular culinary heaven. Never, never had he known such dishes, such subtle delicacy in the flavouring, such succulent sauces, such choice variety.

At first all went well, Lucy liked Maria, but Lucy usually liked their cooks for the first month or so. Then it started.

"I can't think why Maria talks to the butcher for so long—it is quite unnecessary!"

"I wonder why Maria must leave the milk-bottles in just that particular place?"

"If I've told her once, I've told her twenty times that . . ."

Lucy's voice going on and on like a gramophone record, nagging, nattering, complaining, everything wrong, nothing right.

And that was not all. In the last five years she had reached a time of life when she had begun to alter and to coarsen. She had always been a big eater, but now she consumed mountains of food. What was so galling to her husband was that it was quantity she wanted, not quality.

Any food, whatever it was like, however it was cooked, was edible as far as Lucy was concerned. She had no discrimination, no taste and certainly no palate.

Henry would wince as, sitting down at the table, she cut herself a huge hunk of new bread, buttered it thickly and buried her teeth into it. At every meal a pot of strong Indian tea stood at her side, and she drank cupful after cupful.

She grew fatter and fatter. She had been a well-built woman when he married her and on the stout side, but now she was monstrous. Her clothes stretched grotesquely round her ever-expanding waist, her chins multiplied themselves month by month.

One night she woke Henry up, moaning in pain and gasping for her breath. The doctor was sent for. He prescribed rest and a rigid diet. He talked to Henry alone.

"Your wife is very much overweight, and it is a dangerous strain on her heart."

Henry spoke to Maria, and everything possible that Maria could do was done to make Lucy's diet attractive. But, deprived of the large quantities of food and tea that she enjoyed, she was insupportable.

With a sense of panic, Henry could see Maria cracking under the strain. It was like watching an express train rushing headlong down a precipice and being unable to do anything to stop it.

Digging his celery-trench, Henry Flood wished it was Lucy's grave. 'Maria will go! Maria will go! Maria will go!'—the words were beating

against his brain, repeating and repeating themselves.

'Maria will go!' Somehow he had to prevent it. He had heard Lucy nagging at her that very morning as he came downstairs to his breakfast; complaining about the way her toast-rack was sent in to Maria, whose golden-brown crisp pieces of toast were a poem in themselves.

Lucy must die—but how? Despairingly, Henry Flood threw down his spade. He could not work to-day in his beloved garden. He wanted only to get away by himself and think. He put on his coat, set his hat on his head, and went through the garden gate into the common which lay at the back of their neat row of desirable residences.

He strode along, blind and deaf to everything but his own misery—Maria would go! Never again would he eat *pâté de gibier en aspic*, which Maria made so beautifully, or her *cervelles de veau à la vinagrette*, which melted in the mouth. Never again!

He thought of Lucy with her mean little eyes peering through mountains of flabby flesh, of her swollen legs and fat, useless hands. Lucy scrunching mouthfuls of buttered bread with *filets de sole bonne femme*; Lucy lapping down gallons of sugary sweet tea with *escargots au raifort*.

Yes, Lucy must die—but how? Henry Flood had read a great number of crime stories. He knew that on the last pages the murderer was revealed in all his villainy. He did not wish to be hanged for murdering Lucy—but Lucy must die!

He ran over the more obvious methods. He could not shoot Lucy—he hadn't got a gun; he couldn't push her over a cliff—there weren't any cliffs round this neighbourhood. He could poison her; but how was he to get the poison? Weed-killer was so obvious.

Henry Flood was trying to remember if suffocation left any traces when, out of the darkness of his thoughts, a face loomed in front of him—the face of Maria.

For a moment he could only stare at her guiltily, half-believing that he had been speaking aloud.

"Good morning, Signor," Maria smiled.

"Good morning, Maria."

"It is a lovely day, Signor."

"Is it, Maria? Yes . . . yes . . . of course, I see it is!"

"I have a little surprise, Signor, for Madame."

"A surprise, Maria?"

"Si, si, Signor. To-day it is an anniversary. Had the Signor forgotten?"

"By Jove, so it is—our wedding anniversary. I had indeed forgotten all about it."

"I thought the Signor must have done so—but it is not too late. I am going to the shops—I will bring back some flowers, yes?"

"Yes, please, Maria—that is very good of you."

"And I thought, if the Signor will agree to a leetle celebration to-night, I will cook a special dinner for Signor and Madame."

"That would be very nice!"

It would be perhaps for the last time, Henry thought desperately. Next year—perhaps next week—Maria would have left.

"I came this way, Signor," Maria went on, "because there are mushrooms on this common. The gipsies camp here, and it is said that where horses have been there are often mushrooms."

"That sounds good, Maria." Henry's voice had a note of enthusiasm in it which had not been there before.

"To-night I will make a special dish which will please both the Signor—and Madame." There was a perceptible pause before the last two words.

Henry found himself shivering. If Madame was not pleased, he thought, Maria would give in her notice tomorrow. It was a last effort on her part.

He watched Maria in her neat, black dress hurrying across the common, stopping every now and then to add to the little pile of mushrooms in her basket. Then he walked slowly home.

He sat in the greenhouse with his head in his hands until it was luncheon time; then he went into the house to be greeted by Maria with a large and expensive bunch of flowers. She was smiling, but Henry could not force himself to respond. He felt dried up with fear, and he could think of nothing save that this was his last chance of keeping Maria.

Lucy accepted the flowers, but when Maria brought her a vase to put them in, she sent her back to fetch another.

"I wish Maria would have the sense to remember which vases I use in the sitting-room," she said pettishly.

She grumbled all the way through lunch, alleging that the knives were dirty and that Maria had cracked her best vegetable dish.

Maria kept smiling. Henry was nearly in tears. He spent the afternoon in the greenhouse; also the early part of the evening. When he came in to change his coat and shoes before dinner, Maria handed him the cellar key.

"The wine, Signor, for dinner. You have not given it to me to cool."

"Wine?" Henry repeated dully. "My wife never drinks anything, you know that."

"To-night, Madame must have a small glass of champagne to drink your health, Signor. I also want sherry for the soup, a cupful of brandy, another of rum and one of port for the dishes I have prepared."

Henry was too numb to argue. He was even past speculating on what was being prepared for dinner. He brought for Maria all she asked, and she sent him back for more brandy.

The dinner-table was decorated with flowers, the candles were lit; even Lucy looked pleased when she saw a loaf of crisp, warm bread and a large pat of golden butter.

"To-night there must be no tiresome diet for Madame," Maria whispered.

"No, indeed, not on our thirteenth anniversary," Lucy said, reaching out greedily for the loaf.

"I have Madame's tea ready for her," Maria went on, "but first Madame must drink a glass of wine —a toast to the future."

"I hate the stuff, but we must certainly drink a toast," Lucy agreed affably.

Maria poured out the champagne.

"To your future, my dear," Henry said solemnly, and added under his breath, "May it be very short!"

Lucy drank off the champagne.

"Beastly stuff," she ejaculated. "Bring me my tea."

"It is here, Madame."

Lucy started to munch her bread.

There was turtle soup to start with, laced with sherry. It was perfectly prepared, and Lucy had a second helping. After that there was hot lobster, rich, delicious, and with a sauce which made Henry want to cry, it was so perfectly blended.

A roast of pork followed, a strange choice which made Henry raise his eyebrows for a moment. Apple sauce and a fragrant chestnut stuffing—the crackling was done to a turn—Lucy asked for more.

"Are you wise, dear?" Henry remonstrated, only to be hushed into silence by both women simultaneously.

"Can't I have a little pleasure for once?" Lucy demanded pettishly.

"To-night is an anniversary, Signor," Maria rebuked him; "Madame shall enjoy herself."

Henry said no more, Lucy's plate was piled for the second time, and he sipped his wine and waited for her to shovel it down.

The *baba au rum* was a triumph. The whipped cream in the centre was white as snow, and as an alternative dish there were hot cherries soaked in brandy, and lit at the last moment before being brought to the table.

Henry chose the cherries—Lucy ate both dishes.

"And now, Signor, *la pièce de resistance*," Maria murmured, setting down the mushrooms.

"I love mushrooms," Lucy said. "I can't think why we don't have them more often."

She helped herself liberally.

Maria fetched another pot of tea.

"More sugar this time," Lucy snapped at her.

Henry shuddered at the tone of her voice. It was obvious that Maria could do nothing right. The anniversary dinner as a peace offering had failed.

"And get some more cream," Lucy continued. "Why should I be stinted and deprived of everything I like?"

"A little more mushroom savoury for Madame?" Maria suggested soothingly.

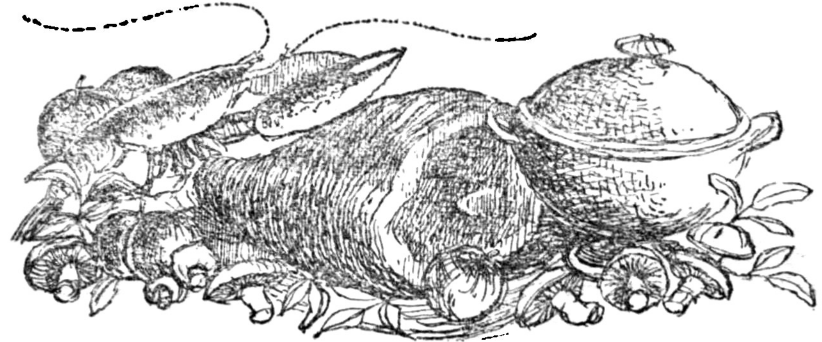
Henry could have expostulated then, yet what was the use? The mushrooms were cooked with cream and port, and many other ingredients he did not recognize. They were ambrosial, but rich and indigestible. But if he said anything, Lucy would only be angry with him and with Maria.

It was then it happened—a startled gasp, a strangled grunt. Lucy's face went from crimson to purple, her mouth was open, her eyes protruding. Henry sat paralysed, and then at last he realized what was happening. Lucy's heart couldn't stand the strain of over-eating.

Still with his eyes on Lucy, Henry automatically got to his feet. This was what the doctor had warned him might happen. As he moved towards the other end of the table, Lucy suddenly subsided in her chair and her head toppled forward. She was a grotesque, revolting figure which seemed to have lost its last vestige of humanity.

Henry turned, frightened and at a loss, to Maria. What should he do? The expression on her face staggered him; for a moment he thought he was mistaken—and then he understood.

There was no need for him to murder Lucy . . . Maria had done it for him!



LAURELS FOR A BARONET

HUMPHRY BULLOCK

Illustrations by Barry Webb

Brigadier Bullock here retells the intriguing and mystifying case of Rex v. Donellan in 1781. The murder, if murder it was, is extremely interesting to all amateurs of crime and murder trials. This case exposes the dangers of circumstantial evidence and shows how far we have progressed in criminal trials and in toxicology in a century and a half.

I

SIR THEODOSIUS EDWARD Allesley Boughton, seventh baronet, of Lawford Hall in the county of Warwickshire, suffered from a disorder, the result of profligacy, which he had contracted while still at school at Eton. Recently it had hardly troubled him and he had needed no medical attention for a fortnight; but owing to a slight recurrence of the complaint he sent for the apothecary from Rugby, a Mr. Powell, on August 29th, 1780. Powell saw his patient, thought little of his indisposition, and prescribed two different mixtures, both mild purgatives. One—which was to assume importance—was a composition of rhubarb, jalap and lavender water; the other a mixture of manna and salts.

That afternoon a footman went the three miles into Rugby and collected the two bottles, which were labelled *Purging Draughts for Sir Theodosius Boughton*; and on his return to the Hall gave them into the hands of the young baronet, who took them upstairs and put them in his bedroom. This was about 5 or 6 p.m. Shortly afterwards Sir Theodosius went fishing, accompanied by the gardener, and, from 7 p.m., by the footman. They stayed out till about 9, and the baronet went to bed as soon as he came home.

At 6 o'clock the next morning, August 30th, the footman entered his master's bedroom to enquire about some fishing tackle. Apparently in normal health, Sir Theodosius got up and fetched it from an adjoining room; then he went back to bed. At 7 a.m. his mother, the widowed Lady Boughton, came to give him his medicine as had been arranged overnight. She enquired where the bottle was and he told her that it was on the shelf, at the same time desiring her to get him a piece of cheese to eat afterwards to take the taste of the medicine away. She fetched the cheese and then poured out the contents of the bottle of rhubarb and jalap into a teacup. As she forgot to shake the bottle, her son asked her to pour the dose back again and shake it. In doing so, she spilt some on the table.

When she gave him the dose, he said that it smelt and tasted "very nauseously." She agreed, though presumably she could only speak to its smell, which she remarked was "very strongly like bitter almonds." He took the cheese, chewed it and spat it out; grumbled about the medicine and said that he did not think he would be able to keep it on his stomach; but after rinsing his mouth with water he lay down to compose himself.

In about two minutes he began to struggle violently, "made a prodigious rattling in his stomach and gurgling (*sic*)," which lasted about ten minutes. Then, as he was inclined to doze, his mother left him. When she returned ten minutes later she found her son with eyes fixed upwards, teeth clenched and frothing at the corners of the mouth. He shortly died. It was just after 8 a.m., and the day was his twentieth birthday. Lady Boughton called out for Captain Donellan.

II

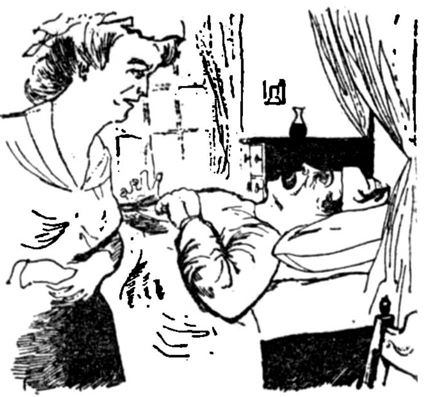
John Donellan was born in Ireland in 1737, the illegitimate son of a colonel. After a good education at Westminster School and the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich, he was appointed cadet in the Royal Artillery at the age of 16. Posted to India, he there transferred as an ensign to the 39th Foot, now the Dorsetshire Regiment. When at the end of 1757 his corps returned to England, Donellan was one of many in it who remained behind, exchanging with a step in rank to the Honourable East India Company's army. He thus became a captain in the Bengal European Regiment before he came of age.

Donellan first smelt powder at the end of 1759, when he was wounded at the battle of Condore. By the spring he was back on duty and took part in the siege of Masulipatam. On the capture of that seaport he was nominated as one of the Prize Agents, whose task it was to collect and appraise the captured booty, sell it to the best advantage, and build up a fund of money to be shared by the victors in proportion to each man's rank. In this rôle he had to act as a trustee for his comrades in arms, not only with energy and judgment but complete reliability. His integrity collapsed under test. The military career which had been so full of promise came to a sudden, disgraceful end, for he was detected in fraudulent practices while handling prize property, court martialled and cashiered.

After a vain attempt to retrieve his reputation as a soldier by volunteering for further active service—an offer which was declined without thanks—John Donellan returned to England and tried to induce his employers, the East India Company directors in London, to pardon and reinstate him. A printed statement of his case (1772) is in the British Museum. He met with no success. Then he proposed to purchase a commission in the British cavalry, but his misconduct in India was too notorious for the authorities, who declined to take him without a clear-

ance from the East India Company. All that he achieved by twelve years of striving was a certificate from the Company that while he was in their service he had behaved as a gallant officer. Rather pointedly, they paid no tribute to other aspects of his character. On the strength of this he did eventually succeed in getting his name replaced as a half-pay officer on the rolls of his old regiment, the 39th, many years after his court martial.

Apparently this move was sufficient to qualify him to take the next step towards rehabilitation—the acquisition of a commission in the cavalry, carrying restoration to the active list of the army. But his circumstances had changed. For some time past he had held the colourful post as Master of the Ceremonies and Director of Entertainments at the Pantheon, the highly fashionable amusement resort in Oxford Street, London. Here the gay and polite world, the flower of society, thronged the balls, masquerades and routs, gaming-tables and wine-parties, all organized by and presided over by "Ring" or "Diamond" Donellan, for so they called him from a splendid diamond ring which he always wore. The stone, brought from the East Indies, was whispered to be ill-gotten from the booty of Masulipatam. "So familiar had this favourite bauble become to its possessor," noted a gossip of the day, "that when he was obliged to part with it, a counterfeit one was made to resemble the original, and Captain 'Ring' Donellan still preserved all the



credit which he derived from the possession of this much-beloved and envied mark of distinction."

In London his fame neared the heights attained at Bath by Beau Nash as autocrat and arbiter of taste and fashion. Indeed, when Wade, Master of Ceremonies at Bath, resigned in 1777, Donellan was a candidate for the post. But he did not long retain his place at the head of metropolitan gaiety, for within five years of the opening of the Pantheon in 1772 he had ceased to rule over its activities and was forced to part with his financial interest in its management.

He swiftly restored his fortunes, though—by marrying an heiress. She was Theodosia Boughton, only daughter of one Warwickshire baronet and sister of another, Sir Theodosius. To the couple, married in 1777, a son and a daughter were born.

Just a year after the wedding Captain and Mrs. Donellan went on a

visit to the seat of the Boughton family, Lawford Hall, where his mother-in-law, Lady Boughton, lived with her unmarried son, Sir Theodosius. At 19 the baronet was not attractive. "Of a dissipated and irregular character, quarrelsome and petulant, and by means of a bad and neglected education giving no promise of becoming any ornament to his rank in life"—so they summed him up. It is not surprising that "Ring" Donellan, a man of the world and experienced organizer, shortly began to run the Hall estate, where his visit developed into permanent residence. Displacing the old lady and her spineless son, he quickly acquired an ascendancy and influence over the whole of the Boughton family. No arrangement was made without his advice, all business was conducted according to his ideas, and he was obeyed as if he were the owner of the mansion, says a contemporary writer.

III

As the alleged conduct of Captain Donellan after the death of Sir Theodosius was to tell heavily against him when it came to a reckoning, it will be convenient to narrate in some detail the events of the next fortnight as they were described by witnesses at the trial.

At the moment the baronet died, Donellan was waiting in another part of the house to go driving with Lady Boughton to take the waters at the Wells nearby. When she told him what had happened, he went into the dead man's chamber with her. She showed him the medicine bottle and observed that "she believed that the contents would have poisoned a dog." He immediately seized it, rinsed it out and poured what was left in it into a basin of dirty water. Taking no notice of her protest that it was wrong to touch the bottles until the apothecary came—the coachman had been sent to Rugby to bring him with all speed—Donellan then washed out the second bottle likewise. When she enquired in more peremptory tones why he acted thus, he said that it was only to taste the contents, and he put his finger to the bottle and then to his mouth. Two maidservants now entered, and he ordered one to remove the bottles and clean the room. Lady Boughton intervened and took the bottles from the maid's hands, but Donellan insisted on the room being cleaned, "on which the bottles and all belonging to them were removed." The captain handed a pair of the dead man's stockings to a maid—"Here, take these, they are wet in the feet"—but Lady Boughton inspected them and could find no signs of damp. And one of the maids stated that when she entered the room Donellan at once informed her that Sir Theodosius had caught cold by staying "so late out a-fishing, it was very silly of him after having been taking physic for some time."

Shortly afterwards Lady Boughton and the captain met his wife in the parlour, and he said to Mrs. Donellan that her mother had been pleased to take notice of his washing the

bottles, and if it had not come into his head to say that he only did it to taste the contents, he did not know what might have been done to him. Lady Boughton failed to rise to this remark, but remained silent. He repeated it, but still she did not speak, so he called the coachman in. "William," he said, "don't you remember my going out this morning through the iron gate? I have not been on the other side of the house to-day." "Yes, sir," replied William, "I do remember it." "Then you, William, are my evidence."

When Powell the apothecary arrived at about 9 o'clock, he was taken into the baronet's room by Donellan. Without entering into details, the captain told him that convulsions caused death: Sir Theodosius was an imprudent man and Donellan believed he had caught cold. The body showed no signs of distortion, and the medicine bottles were not in the room.

Then Donellan gave directions for the funeral, and wrote to Sir William Wheeler, the dead youth's guardian:

Dear Sir,

I am very sorry to be the communicator of Sir Theodosius's death to you, which happened this morning; he has been for some time past under the care of Mr. Powell, of Rugby, for a similar complaint to that which he had at Eton. Lady Boughton and my wife are inconsolable. They join me in best respects to Lady Wheeler, yourself and Mr. and Mrs. Sitwell. We are much concerned to hear of their loss. I am, dear Sir, with the greatest esteem, Your most obedient Servant,

JOHN DONELLAN.

LAWFORD HALL, August 30th, 1780.

Nothing of significance seems to have occurred on August 31st, but on September 1st a rumour reached Sir William Wheeler that his ward had been poisoned. He dismissed it as a mere "flying report." Either on

this day or on September 2nd the gardener at the Hall was brought a still by Donellan. It was full of wet lime, and the captain said he used the lime to kill fleas. Donellan shortly had the still cleaned again, by one of the maidservants.

Rumours now began to circulate freely in the countryside, and a local magnate, Lord Denbigh, took them seriously enough to write on September 3rd to Wheeler, who accordingly sent a letter to Donellan asking him to have a post-mortem made. The reply came that Lady Boughton, Mrs. Donellan and the captain himself "most cheerfully wish to have the body opened, and the sooner it was done the better." Sir William therefore nominated four medical men to carry out the examination, and in due course heard from Donellan: "The four gentlemen proceeded accordingly, and I am happy to inform you that they fully satisfied us, and I wish you would hear from them the state they found the body in, as it would be an additional satisfaction to me that you should hear the account from themselves." This completely assured Sir William that the post-mortem had been made, and he was not undeceived until September 6th.

What had really taken place was this. On September 4th Dr. Rattray, a Coventry physician, received an anonymous letter requesting him to go to Lawford Hall with Mr. Wilmer, a surgeon, to open the body of Sir Theodosius Boughton. No reason was assigned for the request. On arrival Donellan met them at the entrance of the Hall and, they said, told them that he had had a letter from Sir William Wheeler asking that the post-mortem be performed. He showed them this letter, which, "however, left them entirely in the dark as to the true motive." As soon as they saw the body they realized that owing to the warm, sultry weather it was "in a high state of putrefaction." They therefore advised Donellan that it would be improper, even dangerous, to open it merely to satisfy the curiosity of the family, and were obviously unwilling to proceed unless special reasons existed for their doing so. Donellan assured them that it was for no other reason in the world but to satisfy the family—in fact, he had already received a letter from Wheeler "explaining the true cause." But at his trial Donellan gave a different version of the incident. From the moment he had learnt from Wheeler that there was reason for having the body opened he had been anxious to get it done, he said. Rattray and Wilmer had come to the Hall at 9 o'clock at night and on seeing the state of the body pronounced it dangerous to proceed further. They undertook to allay Sir William's apprehensions, and he let them depart.

It was apparently on the following day, September 5th, that a student of anatomy, one Bucknill, who had heard that the two doctors had declined to open the body, called at the Hall and offered to do it himself. He saw Donellan, who told him that as the doctors had been perfectly satis-

fied "he did not think it proper for anyone else to interfere." On September 6th Sir William Wheeler, as has been seen, realized that his belief that a post-mortem had been carried out was quite mistaken; and he then wrote to Donellan that it should "by all means be done, for the satisfaction of the world." But the funeral was held just before or just after the captain received his letter, and nothing came of it; for on this day the coffined corpse of the unfortunate youth was placed in the family vault in the parish church at Newbold. And when Bucknill, instructed by Wheeler, paid another call at Lawford Hall on that day, Donellan dismissed him with polite regrets that he had given himself so much unnecessary trouble.

All the county was now buzzing with rumours, and when it was learnt that the body had been interred without examination, the Coroner was moved to act by pressure from local magnates. On September 9th he summoned a jury and had the corpse, now eleven days dead, brought up from the tomb into the churchyard. In full view of five hundred persons whom curiosity had attracted to the village, Bucknill opened the body while four colleagues stood and watched. The whole corpse was a spectacle of horror scarcely to be endured, says a writer of the day, adding grisly details. Clad in a waggoner's frock and with a vinegar-soaked napkin tied around mouth and nose, he made his examination in the midst of the gaping crowd. Among the onlookers was Lady Boughton, "who viewed the melancholy operation performing upon the corpse of her son without displaying the least appearance of feeling or affection"—so Donellan was to affirm. The lower part of the body was "fair and spotless," but the head and abdomen were, the doctors said, "blacker than the blackest negro." The viscera were examined; the Coroner recorded evidence on the spot; and the professional witnesses concurred in the opinion that Sir Theodosius "was poisoned, or otherwise, that his death was occasioned by a draught given him on the 30th of August."

As the evidence of Lady Boughton and the Hall servants had also been taken, there seemed nothing to prevent the inquest being brought to a verdict when, to the general amazement, at 5 p.m. the Coroner suddenly dismissed the jury, ordering them to reassemble at three o'clock the next afternoon, Sunday. The crowd broke up, muttering. When many of them returned, with the jury, at the appointed hour on September 10th, the Coroner was absent, but sent a message naming September 14th for the resumption of the enquiry.

Rumours now reached a feverish height. Partiality and foul play were freely spoken of. Lord Denbigh and other big-wigs came forward as protectors of the public interest, and made a point of attending the adjourned inquest. The Coroner seems to have taken the previous evidence over again. When Lady Boughton's turn came to tell of how Donellan had washed out the bottles, he

plucked at her sleeve—so she swore at the trial later, and a member of the Coroner's jury corroborated her; and when they returned to the Hall Donellan remarked to his wife that "her Ladyship was very forward in telling things which she had no occasion to do, for all that she had to do was to answer the questions which were put to her." And Donellan sent a letter to the Coroner that day. Contending that Sir Theodosius had poisoned himself, he continued, "I think it my duty to give the jury what light I can into the affair they are upon. Ever since Sir Theodosius had been at home his time had been employed in procuring things to kill rats. He used arsenic by the pound, and laid it in divers parts of the house. I had expostulated with him about the extremely careless manner in which he acted, respecting himself and the family in general. For many months past they had not knowingly eaten anything which they perceived he touched, well knowing his extreme inattention to the bad effects of the various things he used to send for. Since his death the gardener had collected several fish which Sir Theodosius laid by. He used to split them and rub the stuff upon them. The gardener was ordered to bury the fish."

The captain's theory was not

accepted. That day the Coroner and his jury reached a verdict—Murder, against John Donellan.

IV

A warrant was issued for Donellan's arrest, and on September 16th he was lodged in Warwick gaol to stand his trial at the spring assizes. As the time drew near, he expressed confidence of acquittal. The case attracted nation-wide interest, even displacing from the news columns the State trial of the crazy Lord George Gordon.

It came up before Mr. Justice Buller on March 30th, 1781. Most of the prosecution evidence has already been summarized, but a few points remain to supplement, illuminate or confuse the story. When Lady Boughton was in the witness-box she was handed two bottles to smell and say which smell resembled that of the medicine she had poured out. She indicated one which contained "a decoction of laurel." Dr. Rattray also was shown the two bottles. One he said was "perfectly innocent," the contents of the other had as their chief ingredient laurel-water, "highly noxious, of all poisons the most fatal and the most expeditious." (Evidently he regarded laurel-water as synonymous with prussic acid.)

He described experiments he had made on horses and dogs with this preparation, but admitted that he had never seen the dissection of a human body alleged to have been so poisoned. Nevertheless, he considered that Sir Theodosius had been poisoned with laurel-water. In cross-examination the doctor had to admit that originally he had believed that the baronet died from arsenical poisoning, a view which he changed "on more mature consideration and better information." Defence counsel naturally suggested that the witness's second opinion might be as wrong as his first, but Rattray said that could not be, as he had convinced himself by tasting some water that remained in the stomach, during the dissection. Nor did he think that apoplexy could produce the signs observed. The professor of anatomy at Oxford, and a Birmingham physician who had listened to the evidence, also swore that in their opinion death was caused by poison.

Evidence about Donellan's still was given by servants from the Hall. He used to keep it in his room, which was always locked except when he slept there during his wife's confinement; then anyone could go in and see the still. He used it to distil roses only, so far as they knew. Lady Boughton told how it had been the custom to keep the physic locked up, but one day when her son forgot to take his dose Donellan told him it would be better to put it somewhere where he could not help seeing it. Thereafter it was always kept on an open shelf.

The prosecution led evidence about Donellan's conduct on the afternoon before the fatality, with a view to showing that he could have had access to the medicine bottles and had tried to cover up his movements. Lady Boughton said that on August

29th the captain disappeared after dinner and later joined her and her daughter when they were walking in the garden. On enquiry, he told them he had been watching her son fish and had tried to persuade him to stop lest he should catch cold. The gardener, however, deposed that he had been in company with Sir Theodosius throughout the fishing expedition and had seen nothing of Donellan. The footman said he had joined the fishing party an hour after it set out. The captain was not there, and Sir Theodosius could not have wetted his feet as he fished from horseback.

As to the relations between the accused and the deceased, Lady Boughton said they were always "haggling" and seldom agreed, though she conceded that Donellan had twice extricated her son from scrapes. The prosecution also tried to show that Donellan had made his brother-in-law's illness out to be much worse than it was. Though the doctors made light of her son's disorder, said Lady Boughton, Donellan had represented him as being in a bad way. A clergyman gave evidence of a talk with the accused on August 26th: Donellan averred that Theodosius had not got rid of the complaint he had brought with him from Eton, he was nothing but physic and corruption and his life was not worth a year's purchase. But, added the parson, so far as appearances went the young man was in very good health. A surgeon who had attended the deceased for some time after leaving school said that what remained of his disorder was so very light that he could hardly be said to be ill at all; he had only prescribed a gentle lotion.

Finally, curious evidence came from a witness who, imprisoned for debt, had shared a cell in Warwick gaol with the accused for some weeks. He related conversations which he said had taken place there. "Do you think Sir Theodosius was poisoned, or not?" he had asked. "There is no doubt of it," was Donellan's reply. "For God's sake, Captain, who could do it?" "It was done among themselves, I had nothing to do with it." "What do you mean by *themselves*?" "Sir Theodosius, Lady Boughton, the footman and the apothecary." When the witness remarked that this seemed improbable, Donellan elaborated: "Lady Boughton was covetous. She received an anonymous letter the day after Sir Theodosius's death, charging her plump with poisoning him. She called me, and read it to me and trembled. She desired I would not let my wife know of that letter, and asked me if I would give up my right to the personal estate and some estates of about two hundred pounds a year belonging to the family." But later, according to the witness, Donellan had informed him that the baronet was not poisoned.

In those days, and for long afterwards, the law did not allow an accused person to give evidence in his own defence. Donellan handed in a written statement, which was read to the court by the clerk. After complaining of the many false, male-

volent and cruel reports circulated against him, tending not only to prejudice his honour but to endanger his life, he described his position in the Boughton family in order to show that he had no motive to encompass the death of its head. At the time of his marriage in 1777 he had settled his whole fortune on his wife and her children and deprived himself even of the possibility of enjoying a life estate should she die before him. This settlement did not merely cover her existing fortune, it extended to all future expectations, so that he could reap no benefit from the death of her brother. With his brother-in-law Donellan affirmed that he had lived in the most perfect friendship, and had frequently stepped in between him and danger. Was it likely that he would have designs on a life that he had so often endeavoured to save?

After calling witnesses to show that he had got Sir Theodosius out of several quarrels, he put in the witness-box Dr. John Hunter, the greatest British surgeon of all time, then at the height of his career. In none of the circumstances related by the prosecution doctors, taken together or separately, could Hunter discern any sign that Sir Theodosius died from poison. "It does not give the least suspicion," he affirmed: the symptoms were merely those incidental to sudden death, as from apoplexy for example. That closed the case for the defence.

With the judge's summing-up it will be more convenient to deal hereafter. The jury took only nine minutes to bring in a verdict of *Guilty*; and the prisoner heard the sentence of death without displaying the least emotion. As the law then provided that a capital sentence should be carried out on the next day but one after it was passed, Donellan had but a short time to live, though it was prolonged by twenty-four hours because a Sunday intervened and was excluded from the reckoning.

That Sunday night he wrote a letter to his wife:

My once-esteemed wife,

Do not think I am about to reproach you for declining your visits to me in my present ignominious situation—I am better satisfied that you did not even attempt it. Brought together by the hand of indifference, it would be a mockery of feeling to affect a concern for our separation, disgraceful as it is about to prove.

To argue with you on the score of those dark arts which have undone me would be fruitless, because I know your conjugal has ever been subservient to your filial affection. As to your mother—but I will suppress my indignation; if, however, you should wish to know my dying sentiments of her, ask our friend W——son, the mournful bearer of this, and he will not hesitate to impart them to you, because I shall charge him with my last breath not to refuse you such a request.

Were I to advise your immediate separation from her, it would have no weight, for my little influence over you has long been at an end; Mrs.

H——, you well know, has for a series of years treated me with a tender and disinterested regard, let it not surprise you then to learn that I have bequeathed her my gold watch and miniature picture as the last and strongest token I can give her of my gratitude. As to our two poor children, if you deem them pledges of our love, cherish them as such, but try to conceal from them their father's unhappy fate. I have been long combating unnumbered wishes that pressed me to clasp them in my fond arms, and bid them a last adieu! Thank God, however, I have at length subdued them. The whole world, except my own offspring, are welcome to become the spectators of my ignominious though unmerited exit!

If I have omitted any thing that I should have said to you, your own heart, I trust, will urge it for me, when I shall be no more. Farewell!

JOHN DONELLAN.

WARWICK GAOL,
Sunday night, April 1st, 1781.

That day, too, he wrote on a copy of his *Case* prepared by his solicitor a note to the effect that it had been read to him on the last day of his life and contained nothing but "real facts" so far as his knowledge went. The endorsement concluded, "I solemnly request and firmly desire that it may be published as a firm vindication of my honour and character to the world."

At 7 the next morning, April 2nd, the sheriff's officers in deepest black carried him to the place of execution in a mourning coach. The doomed man repeatedly put his head out of the windows and asked the onlookers to pray for him. Half-way up the ladder of the scaffold he stopped to speak to the crowd. Before God, he was innocent. Time would reveal the solution of many mysteries that had arisen in his trial and prove that he fell a sacrifice to the malice and black designs of his mother-in-law. After praying awhile, he dropped a handkerchief as a signal to the hangman, and the end came.

V

From that day to this, lawyers, doctors and laymen have doubted whether Donellan was rightly convicted. Legal text-books use his case to illustrate the pitfalls of circumstantial evidence. Works on medical jurisprudence employ it to exemplify the rudimentary state of toxicology less than two centuries ago. Among laymen the mystery, though never quite forgotten, has gradually dropped out of sight as fresh crimes have caught public attention.

Was he guilty? Was it proved beyond reasonable doubt that he killed Sir Theodosius by poison, of malice aforethought?

There were two questions for the jury to decide. First, was the baronet killed by poison deliberately administered? Second, if so, did Donellan administer it? The jury answered Yes to both questions. To-day if we return Yes to the first and No to the second, we may add a third question, Who else can have poisoned Sir Theodosius?

Mr. Justice Buller directed the jury first to consider whether the deceased died of poison. There was, he said, the decided opinion of four or five "very able men in the physical line who speak positively that he did. On the other hand, they had only the doubt of another." Here the judge unquestionably erred, for he forgot the ancient maxim, *ponderantur non numerantur testes*—witnesses are weighed, not counted. There was no reason why the jury should not accept the solitary opinion of Hunter and reject the views of the team of prosecution medicos if they considered that Hunter carried more weight.

Perhaps one should first consider whether there is any evidence that poison existed at Lawford Hall. Neither bottle of medicine, if correctly dispensed and not afterwards tampered with, contained any poison. There was no evidence that Donellan's distillation went beyond limewater and rosewater, two mild and harmless astringents. Lady Boughton declared she perceived a smell like bitter almonds: unless she was lying or mistaken, that could mean that the bottle held either a harmless concoction of laurel-water or a deadly dose of prussic acid, or something midway in strength. The only other suggestion of the presence of poison at the Hall came from Donellan's statement that his brother-in-law bought arsenic to kill rats and preserve fish, and used to leave it carelessly about; but arsenical poisoning was not seriously put forward as a solution by either side at the trial and need hardly trouble us.

The prosecution had it that laurel-water was the fatal agent. The term is used to-day for a preparation of cherry-laurel leaves which is legitimately used as an internal or external sedative, or in eye-lotions. The leaves contain 1 per cent. of hydrocyanic (prussic) acid on the average, but young leaves may yield up to 2·4 per cent. In modern medicine, laurel-water should contain 0·1 per cent. of prussic acid: if below that content, more acid is added to bring it up to the standard proportion; and a dose

falls far short of danger, up to half a fluid ounce being usual. With prussic acid the case is different, for it is one of the swiftest known killers, paralysing the respiratory organs and heart and causing death in a minute or two.

Both innocuous laurel-water and lethal prussic acid smell of bitter almonds. If Lady Boughton gave her son the former, it could not have killed him; if the latter, it would have brought death in far less than a quarter of an hour. There remains the possibility of the draught having been either abnormally strong laurel-water or unusually diluted prussic acid, either of which suggests the concoction of an amateur chemist—a sinister thought—perhaps prepared *ad hoc*. But it was never proved that Donellan distilled laurel-water or that either he or Lady Boughton possessed either it or prussic acid; and the sole suggestion that there was one of these substances at the Hall rests on that smell of bitter almonds. Can she have been mistaken? Or was she lying?

If she did in truth smell bitter almonds, there is still no proof whatever that Donellan possessed any prussic acid or that he doctored the medicine bottle. However suspicious his actions before the death, and even more after it, they do not and cannot supply that deficiency in the evidence. Even if it is conceded that Sir Theodosius was poisoned — and Hunter's evidence makes it far from certain that he did not die a natural death—there is no proof that Donellan was the poisoner. It was Lady Boughton who had unrestricted access to her son and his medicines, not Donellan.

Hence the prosecution's attempt to show that Donellan paved the way for news of a fatality by making out the youth's health was far worse than it really was, and had tried to set up a false alibi for the period after dinner on August 29th. But if he did try to concoct this alibi it was clumsily, even dangerously, done, for the footman and gardener could destroy it; and the doctors may have tended to make light of the baronet's illness when discussing it with his mother.

Before leaving the subject of poison, two things should be mentioned for what they are worth. They did not come out in evidence. In Donellan's posthumous *Case* he goes out of his way to admit that he used to distil laurel-water, though why the prosecution could not prove this and immensely strengthen their case is not apparent. And there is a story that Lady Boughton confessed on her death-bed that she murdered her son. Believe it or not!

The jury in convicting Donellan probably believed that he alone of the possible poisoners had a strong motive for wishing the baronet dead. It was not and is not to-day legally necessary for the prosecution to prove a motive, and many crimes are committed for no known motive; but on a murder charge especially, the Crown almost always feels obliged to call evidence wherefrom a motive can be inferred, in order to prevent the jury from reasoning that no one

would commit such a fearful deed without overwhelming cause and, in the absence of such cause disclosed, acquitting the accused in the teeth of the evidence. It is not clear exactly how far Donellan stood to gain by the death of Sir Theodosius, but it looks as if the greater part of the dead man's estates—and they were large—passed by his will to Mrs. Donellan, though Donellan claimed that the marriage settlements debarred him from touching any property she might inherit. Anyhow, the prosecution put their case as one of murder for gain.

Lawyers have always been interested in the case of *R. v. Donellan* because it illustrates the merits and weaknesses of circumstantial evidence. Briefly the position is this. Circumstantial evidence is no worse—in fact, it is often better—than the direct testimony of eye-witnesses, provided certain qualifications of this axiom are borne in mind. For while facts cannot lie, they can and often do deceive us. We may put the wrong interpretation on them, and be misled. So before convicting a person upon circumstantial evidence alone, a court must be satisfied not only that it points to the accused as the criminal, but also that it is inconsistent with the conclusion that anyone else committed the crime.

This test, now generally accepted, had not been fully formulated in 1781. The judge directed the jury that circumstantial evidence was not inferior to direct testimony, but not that they must be sure that such evidence did not point to anyone else as the criminal. And as the evidence regarding the opportunity to administer poison and as to access to the victim pointed much more strongly to Lady Boughton than to Donellan, it is virtually certain that were the trial to be repeated to-day he would be acquitted.

His actions after the death of his brother-in-law were clearly very foolish, at their best, and darkly conspiratorial at the worst. It was asserted that he had endeavoured to suppress all traces of the "poisoning" and had interfered to prevent the holding of a post-mortem until the body was in too bad a state for an examination to reveal the cause of death. It is impossible not to accept the broad lines of this part of the prosecution case, built up from the evidence of the servants, doctors, Wheeler and others—that Donellan had worked energetically and insidiously to burke enquiry. One does not have to believe Lady Boughton—sole witness to so many other features of the tragedy—to accept this.

But suspicious as Donellan's actions after the death were, they do not and cannot prove that he was the murderer, in the absence of evidence that he caused the poison to be administered and that no one else could reasonably have administered it without his complicity.

If he did not poison Sir Theodosius, who did?—assuming that the youth *was* poisoned. No one has suggested that it was the apothecary or the servants, apart from the passage in the alleged conversation with the cell-mate which may not carry

much weight. There remain his wife and his mother-in-law. Though Mrs. Donellan stood to benefit by her brother's death, no one has ever accused her of the crime, nor did she have the necessary access to the baronet's room and person. There remains Lady Boughton as the alternative suspect. Donellan said she did it; and it would have been easy for her to do it; but no motive is apparent. Relations between the captain and the two women seem to have been bad, if we attach importance to Donellan's farewell messages. There may have been some conjugal or family quarrel, as bitter as it was secret, known only to the three of them. But this is mere speculation, and no court would convict Lady Boughton on the known evidence.

Can it be that the baronet died suddenly but naturally, from apoplexy perhaps, and that in their grief and shock the women were swept into a belief that the cause was sinister? (I have known this happen, twice.) It would be a short and fatally easy step to attribute his death to the draught which he had just swallowed. *Post hoc, ergo propter hoc*. Knowing that neither of them had poisoned him wittingly, they would look no farther than Donellan for a culprit. Then they would find themselves committed to support a story until and after it was taken out of their hands by a Crown prosecution and they had no power to avert the consequences of the belief they had engendered and fostered.

There may have been no poison, no murder, no criminal: just an innocently conceived mistake. The ladies may have continued in good faith to believe that Donellan was a poisoner, or they may have lacked the moral courage to withdraw from support of their own story. The first of these suppositions is the more charitable, the second more probable *if* one attaches weight to Donellan's statements at and after his trial.

The truth will never emerge now; but it is safe to say that whether or not Captain John Donellan was a murderer, he was convicted of the crime on evidence that fell far short of proving that he committed it.

VI

It would be pleasant to record that the survivors lived happily ever after, though it would be even more satisfactory to clear up the mystery. But all that has come down to us about Lady Boughton, who held the key to it if anyone did, is the alleged confession on her death-bed.

Soon afterwards, in 1784, the Boughtons sold their estates in Warwickshire and the Hall was pulled down. The captain's widow soon remarried. Her second husband was another baronet, Sir Egerton Leigh. After his death she took a third consort, in 1823, the notorious Barry O'Meara, sometime Napoleon's surgeon in exile at St. Helena, who was probably unique in having been dismissed from both the army and the navy. Surviving Donellan by half a century, she died in 1830. What an autobiography she could have written! But all that has come down

about her later days is that the facetious dubbed her three consorts the Pendent, the Independent and the Dependent.

Nor do we know what happened to the two young children.

To Donellan's father another mystery attaches, for at the time of his son's execution the Irish colonel was reported to be confined in a private madhouse "in consequence of an attempt upon a State officer." So it may be supposed that he remained in merciful ignorance of the way in which a career once full of promise had ended.

Circumstantial evidence is occasionally very convincing, as when you find a trout in the milk, to quote Thoreau's example.

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE (1859–1930): *The Noble Bachelor.*

OCTOBER THE NINETEENTH

BETTY CARTER

Hatred can be sudden and violent, like a thunderstorm. Or it can grow slowly and in secret, with the furtive deadliness of cancer. Such hatred is a disease that may lead its sufferers into strange places, as it led the hunchback to Cornwall one wild night in autumn in this, Miss Carter's first published story.

ORNWALL IN THE AUTUMN can be immensely depressing. Encouraged by the fickle sunshine, we had gone down to snatch a week's holiday before the winter closed in on us, and it had rained every day. On the last evening of our stay, October 19th, the little hotel at Salt Cove was half empty. There were five of us in the bar parlour, all mutually bored with each other and, I suspect, all heartily longing for our return to the civilization of city life.

Bridge was out of the question, the local library had nothing readable to offer, and there was a general air of boredom. Then someone—I think it was Oscar—suggested table turning. The idea caught on. The hearty young lady who walked all day in the pouring rain said she was "no good at that sort of thing," but would take down whatever happened just to keep her shorthand up to form. The rest of us got busy cutting out letters and putting them round the polished table. Then with an upturned glass we got to work.

At first it seemed that the shorthand practice was not going to be forthcoming. After a quarter of an hour the glass was still static, and then, I suspect, someone got bored and pushed it. It was all very silly and abortive.

Suddenly something very peculiar happened. The glass seemed to be gripped with immense power, circled the table wildly, and then spelt out a torrent of words.

I will try to write down the story as it was told to us that night. There were, of course, hesitations; there were times when we had to question and wait for an answer; and other times when the words came so fast that the glass could not follow, as if the dictator was so impatient to tell the story that he could not wait to put it into words.

Anyway, to the best of my ability, here is the story that the glass spelt out to us on that rainy night in October:

I had always known that eventually I should kill Shawcross. He was everything that I was not. Throughout the whole of his life he attained, without any effort on his part, the very things that I coveted most. He took them without question, almost as if they were his by divine right,

used them, spoiled them, and tossed them to me with a sneer.

Not that I believe Shawcross ever knew up to the last five minutes of his life how much I hated him. If he had ever bothered to think of me at all he probably regarded me as a poor fool who worshipped the ground he trod on. He had charm and good looks, which he used ruthlessly, and he was universally popular. It was only when you knew him really well, as I did, that you saw him as he was —cruel, arrogant and vain, with a strong underlying streak of cowardice.

We went to the same prep. school, and because our parents were friends it was always presumed that we were inseparables. Shawcross was a tall, fair boy with superb health; I was stunted and dark, and owing to a spinal disease I was never really well and was not allowed to play games.

It was then that I learned to hate. Shawcross was never physically cruel to me, although that would have been easier to bear than the mental torture to which he subjected me. I was good at lessons, and if I didn't let him crib my work he would ridicule me in public. He knew all my sensitive points, especially about my stature and the way my head poked forward because my spine wasn't quite straight. He always had an admiring audience round him ready to laugh at his jokes.

We went up to Cambridge together, and there his cruelty became more subtle. He used me as a foil, and made me the butt of various unfunny undergrad. "rags," which gave him the name for being a wit. All the time my hatred grew like a canker.

We went down in 1942. Shawcross went straight to an O.C.T.U., but I was unfit for military service. I remember his remark at the time. "Honestly, old boy, I envy you. I shall probably be killed gloriously, and you'll live to a ripe old age. Better join the A.R.P. They don't mind hunchbacks there."

He had a brilliant army career, and came out without a scratch but with a row of medals and a colourful repertoire of stories. I went through the London Blitz, and came out maimed in mind as well as body, for a roof had fallen on me as we dug for some trapped people and I had a crushed pelvis which never left me free from pain.

Then came the events which led up to my murdering Shawcross.

I received a typical letter:

Meet me at my club 12.30. *Tuesday. I have news for you.—R.S.*

I wished desperately to refuse, and yet as always I had to come when summoned.

Shawcross met me in the lounge. He looked wonderfully handsome, bronzed, and confident of receiving my usual admiring friendship.

"Listen," he said over a drink. "I'm marrying Stella. I always thought she had a soft spot for you, but of course it was rather unlikely that there should ever be anything between you. Anyway, she jumped at me when I asked her, and I felt you ought to be one of the first to know. So lift your glass to the happy couple, and I'll get you a good stall in the front row for the wedding."

I could not force myself to reply. My world had collapsed, for in my stupid, plodding way I had been waiting until my salary was big enough to give me an assured position before asking Stella to marry me. You see, she knew that I loved her, and we had a tacit understanding that she would wait for me.

The wedding was the social success of the season. I hung about in the crowd outside the church amongst the press photographers. The couple looked radiantly happy, and I went away and got very drunk.

Two years later I received the second and last letter that Shawcross ever wrote to me.

Meet me in the club 12.30. *Friday. I have a proposition to make.—R.S.*

Shawcross, standing in the lounge, looked older. There were lines round his mouth that had never been there before.

We sat over a drink, and he came to the point.

"Stella and I don't hit it off together, you know? She's not a bit what I thought she was. She's either damned dull or in a stinking temper about something. No sense of humour. Between you and me, old son, I think she's always been fond of you. You ought to have married her, not me, and now—well, now there's someone else I've fallen for. She's the daughter of a foreign ambassador, and could help me no end with my career at the F.O., but—well, there mustn't be any question of my being divorced as the sinful party, if you get what I mean?"

"Just exactly what are you suggesting?"

"I'm suggesting that we sort out this mess in the only sane adult way we can. In short, that you go off with Stella and give me grounds for a divorce."

"As simple as that? And what about Stella? Do you think that this 'sane solution' would please her?"

"Of course. She's always nattering about you. Throwing you up at me as the only decent man she's ever loved."

I could hardly hold my temper back. I wanted to seize him by the throat and kill him there and then. I knew that I was going to murder this man, exterminate him as one would a beetle, but I must plan it so that nothing should prevent me from doing so.

"I will write to you," I said and, leaving my drink unfinished, slammed out of the club.

Killing a man is not easy. I toyed with all sorts of melodramatic ways, but I had no desire to swing for a rat like that. Finally I made my plan. I took a room here in this remote hotel on the Cornish coast under an assumed name, and I wrote to Shawcross.

"If you wish to discuss the matter you spoke of, meet me in the bar parlour of the Red Lion, Salt Cove, on October 19th, at 8.30 p.m. I am known here as Mr. Brown of Richmond. You understand our meeting must be a closely guarded secret or the question of connivance might be brought up.

"Unless you do exactly as I say, I will make no move to help you. If you come I promise I will do everything in my power to get you out of your difficulties.

"J. B."

It was a cold autumn night on October 19th, and the moon was full, as I had anticipated.

My teeth were chattering and my hands unsteady as I sat in the bar and waited for him. I was drinking double whiskies, and I saw the girl behind the counter looking at me curiously. I had been in the hotel for three days, and had never taken more than a pint of beer at a time. I tried to appear calm and sober, but my nerves were twitching and I had to steel myself for the meeting.

It was a quarter to nine when Shawcross walked into the room. I had almost given up hope. He was very angry, and inclined to bluster, which was unusual for him.

"Look here," he said when I had got him a drink, "what the devil does all this mean? You drag me down to the ends of the earth with your damned secrecy. Why can't we meet in London in the civilized way? Your letter was little short of blackmail."

"It's a big question. I want to be sure that I'm doing what is best for you."

Now that the big moment had come, I was intensely excited. The pulses behind my ears were hammering and my scalp felt tight.

"Are you all right, old boy?" he asked. "You look deuced odd to me. Have you been drinking?"

I told him I felt ill and wanted to get out into the air. He followed me into the garden, grumbling.

I had to get him on to the cliff path, and before we reached the end of the garden he turned suspicious.

"What the devil is your game? I didn't come racing down to Cornwall to go for moonlight rambles. Are you going to let me cite you as co-respondent or not? It's as simple as that, so cut out the palaver."

It is only a hundred yards through the wicket-gate to the edge of the cliffs. I had to act quickly or my whole scheme would fail. I yelled out something about someone in the bushes, and ran through the gate as though giving chase. At first he hesitated, half turned back to the hotel, then he changed his mind and followed. I stood and waited for him, listening to the sea crashing on the rocks below.

"You bloody hunchback, what's your game?"

The old taunt was just what I needed.

"That, for calling me a hunchback," I yelled against the wind, and I hit him straight between the eyes. "That, for school; that, for Cambridge, and that—for Stella." Each time I hit him with increasing savagery.

He was on his knees blubbering, and I saw him for the coward that he was. All the hatred of the years rushed into my mind. I shouted obscenities. Then I had him by the throat and he was fighting for his life.

We reeled and fought nearer the edge and nearer. He saw the danger

and released his grip of me for one moment, looking down at the cruel rocks. I stood back. "Stella!" I shouted and smashed at his face with my full weight. I saw him spin through the air, grabbing at my knees in a final effort to save himself.

Everything seemed to black out round me. There was only an intense silence. The wind had dropped and I was alone. Everything took on a dreamlike quality. I was ice cold and felt as if I was standing in an immense vacuum.

I stumbled back to the hotel in a trance. The lights were out in the bar, but the moonlight shone strongly through the windows. At first I thought I was alone. I threw myself into the corner where we had been sitting; our drinks were still there, half finished.

As my eyes became used to the darkness, I saw that there was someone sitting where Shawcross had been. His face was in the shadows and I could barely see his form.

The silence became appalling. It closed in on me so that my very brain seemed to be frozen. I tried to scream to break the terrifying emptiness, but no sound would come. I tried to stamp my feet or thump the table, but I was petrified and could not move.

Then came the most normal sound in the world, but one which froze my blood. From the darkness came the booming voice of a B.B.C. announcer —"And here is a police message. On the night of the 19th October the bodies of two men were found at the foot of a cliff at Salt Cove, Cornwall. Both were so mutilated as to be unrecognizable."

The man on the other side of the table had leant forward, his face clearly illuminated in the moonlight.

I looked straight into the eyes of Shawcross.

SEA CHANGE

JAN EAGLES

Illustrated by Jenifer Paterson

SHE SAT VERY still, her dark eyes staring through the streaming window at the sea. It was gathering its autumnal strength, and surged in massive grey-green waves across the bay. Long white flecks were appearing beyond the headland, and the sheets of rain which swept across the front of the cottage seemed but a continuation of the spray from the breakers on the beach. But her eyes were staring through, rather than at, the sea, and her ears heard but were hardly conscious of the continuous howling of the wind.

On the bed beside her chair her husband lay dying. His long, thin body barely humped the bedclothes, his gaunt old face, its deep tan faded now to the shade of old parchment, lay back on the pillows with closed eyes. Between each shrieking gust of wind his quick, shallow breathing could be heard. Occasionally the woman turned her head and stared at him with opaque eyes which revealed neither sorrow nor anxiety, but only a cold, bitter hatred.

She clasped her cold hands tightly on her lap and again fixed her eyes on the turbulent horizon. Three months too late, she thought with a bitterness that had grown stale, only three months. Why, why could not this have happened in July—before Anton had appeared upon the mundane scene of her life?

The wind whined its eternal regret

past the bare stone walls of the cottage and died among the cowering trees on the hillside.

Superimposed upon the grey square of the window, she saw again that bright summer afternoon when she had first seen Anton. She had been sitting on the bench outside the cottage in the shade. . . . Before her the rough grass sloped to the cliff edge; on the sapphire sea white sails bobbed in the gentle wind. Playfully it lifted her hair from her forehead, and with it came a tang, a magic which seemed to pervade the moment. With strange expectancy she watched the cliff edge where the path to the beach began. Donald, her husband, was down on the beach painting a boat, but it was not he she expected or wanted to see.

After ten years of marriage to a man thirty years her senior, a man she had married solely because of his reputation for being a wealthy smuggler and the owner of hidden treasure, she felt nothing but disgust and irritation in his presence. She waited now for someone else. The breeze rippled across the sea and waved the grass along the cliff edge, and he came, his dark head appearing against the blue of the sea, followed by the gleam of a white shirt. The next moment he was standing on the cliff edge staring up at her. He had bold dark eyes as wild as her own. He came with a swinging stride towards her, and asked in an alien accent if she could direct him to the Crown and Anchor Inn. That had been the beginning. He was darkly handsome in a Latin way, young and vivacious. The French ship on which he served as second mate was anchored in the bay for a week, and during that brief time they met constantly on the beach every evening while Donald was at the Crown and Anchor with his friends, and they fell in love.

There were no half-measures about Anton's love. When he heard from her red, untruthful lips how cruel Donald was to her, how he ill-treated her, Anton decided at once that they must run away together. It would mean losing his position, but with his experience he could easily find a similar one, and they would make for some large port, such as Southampton, where they could lose themselves in the crowds. He was dashing and romantic, and she found that for the first time in her narrow, selfish life she knew something of the meaning of love. She felt no pity for her husband. Had he not married her under false pretences? It had been common knowledge that he had a mint of money stored away somewhere, smuggler's spoil, but in the ten years since their wedding she had never set eyes on so much as a single gold coin.

One day when he had placed on the table the usual meagre housekeeping money, she had asked him directly about his treasure. He had stared at her strangely for some seconds before he had replied:

"I'll tell you all about it one day, lass . . . and where to find it, too."

The fact that he had admitted the existence of his wealth increased her resentment, but not another word could she get out of him; and as the

years passed and her once lovely hands grew rough with hard work, she grew more and more bitter.

And as she gazed into Anton's eyes that summer evening while the translucent waves lapped the rock on which they sat, she had already left the old dreary life and was launching herself eagerly upon the new. They had made all their plans. She was to meet him at two in the morning outside the inn, where he would be waiting with two hired horses. Then they would ride through the night towards Southampton. It was as simple as that.

"You cannot take much baggage," Anton warned her. "One bundle only. I will buy you new clothes later —ones that will suit better that ravishing figure of yours."

Several times that evening she stared at herself in the tiny mirror over the fireplace, and it seemed to her that her glowing cheeks and bright, excited eyes would give away her secret. However, when Donald returned from the Crown he seemed to notice nothing unusual. He went up to bed early, and she was more thankful than she had ever been that she no longer shared his room but had slept for over a year on a bed in the parlour.

She did not attempt to sleep, but sat stiffly on the edge of her bed staring at the clock. When the time came for her to go, she thought she heard a slight sound overhead and stood motionless by the door, a cold hand clutching her baggage. But no further sound followed. Probably it was a window banging in the rising wind. Silently she crept for what she believed was the last time out of the cottage and through the tiny garden to the gate.

A full moon was shining between thin, swiftly moving clouds. A good omen, she thought; my love has reached the time of fulfilment. And she made her way rapidly up the winding dark lane towards the Crown. When three minutes later she emerged from the heavy trees which hung over the lane into the open space in front of the inn and saw it was empty, the shock was like a blow.

She halted suddenly in the shadow and peered carefully about. The inn lay in the faint moonlight, silent, aloof, nothing moving in its shadow. Perhaps she had mistaken the time. But she had been sure it was five to two when she left the cottage. Something must have delayed him. She sat shivering on the low wall, her heart beating fast, more from fear than excitement now, and tried to think of a reason for his delay, but without success. Ten minutes she sat there, then she got off the cold wall and walked down the lane and up again.

Make him be there this time, she prayed as she passed under the heavy trees, to a power who seemed infinitely far away. But he was not there. She lingered for another endless hour, but still he did not come.

Sobs choked her as she dragged herself back down the lane. If only she knew where he lodged since he had been granted shore leave, she could go and find out what had happened to him. But he had never told

her, and the only course left to her was to return to the cottage. She could not think clearly yet, but already at the back of her mind was the ugly realization that at the last minute Anton had regretted his decision and had returned to his ship.

Through the remainder of the night she lay tortured on her bed. At dawn she thought she heard a sound upstairs. Yes, this time there were footsteps crossing her husband's room. He was getting up very early. He must not find her in this state. She rushed into the kitchen, calling upstairs as she went,

"I heard you getting up—I couldn't sleep last night. I'll make a pot of tea."

Anything, she must put her hand to anything to deflect her mind from its fever of thought.

The bright dawn sky shining through the kitchen window brought her, despite her anguish, a ray of hope. To-day would be like any other day. Anton would come to her and explain why he had failed her last night. There must be some very simple reason.

She splashed cold water over her flushed face and went upstairs with a cup of tea for her husband. She found him standing shivering by the window, a dark colour on his thin cheeks.

"She's gone," he said hoarsely. "She's gone."

When she looked out of the window, she saw the bay sparkling in the first sunbeams, placid, empty. The French ship had sailed.

That had been the beginning of her husband's illness. The doctor told her that it must have been brought on by exposure of some sort, but this, she knew, did not fit the facts. He had seemed quite well after returning from the Crown on that terrible evening.

"Your husband is not a young man, you know," the doctor had warned her after Donald had been in bed a month. "He should have picked up by now. I'm afraid the pneumonia has left him very weak."

As she nursed him and attended to the house and garden, she felt her dead, empty body had been inhabited by another being, a being in whom dislike for her husband grew rapidly to hatred. Looking back on that dreadful morning when she had seen the empty waters of the bay, she felt with a strange certainty that there was some connection between her lover's desertion and her husband's illness. Watching Donald's lynx-like eyes, she felt sure that he had some-

how contrived to bring about Anton's disappearance, and as he grew weaker so her hatred increased. Only one thought kept her from showing her feelings. Somewhere Donald had hidden wealth, enough, according to some rumours, to make her rich for the rest of her life. If she were kind to him, perhaps she could persuade him to reveal its hiding-place. She smiled at him now when she brought him his meals, and sat meekly beside the bed while he meandered on about his youthful adventures.

The autumn wore on and with the rising wind and the grey wild seas her husband seemed to sink deeper into the bed, and he grew more and more silent. As she sat now staring through the wet pane she could feel his eyes on her; they were the only vital part of him, still bright and piercing. In a lull of the wind the sudden cracked tones of his voice startled her.

"I know what you've been wanting so bad all these past weeks," he said slowly. "You want to know where I keep my money . . . that's right, now, isn't it, my girl? That's the only interest you have in me, or ever have had, for that matter."

She did not answer. Now the time had come she was shaking all over. She felt her cheeks grow pale.

"Scared I'm not going to tell you before I pop off, aren't you?" the voice went on, mocking and stronger now. There was an unendurable pause, during which the light faded and the wind whined with impatient fury round the cottage. With unsteady fingers she lighted the candle. The new flame flickered with a dæmonic glow over Donald's cadaverous features, and lit his eyes with pin-points of fire as he turned his head slowly towards her and said:

"Don't fret now . . . I'm going to tell you . . . exactly . . . where I keep my treasure. Aye, lass, you and those gossiping bodies in the village were quite right. . . . I have a lot of money, a rare lot of money. . . . Sit you down, lass, and I'll tell you just how to find it . . ."

She sat down stiffly on the edge of his bed. His eyes looked queer. She licked her dry lips. What if he should die without telling her, after all?

"Where?" she whispered.

His awful eyes did not move from her face. It seemed as though they did not blink.

"You take the path over the headland," he began. "When you reach the cromlech you'll find a secret passage—its entrance is hidden by nettles and brambles. Take a lamp and follow it down into the cliff. It'll lead you into a cave, open on one side to the sea which reaches it at high tide only. It was there we used to row in the contraband . . . and there you'll find a chest . . . a great iron chest . . . the key is hanging round my neck . . . its contents are yours. . . ."

Suddenly he jerked himself to an elbow and stared closely into her face.

"No one alive knows about it," he croaked. "Those who shared my secret died long years ago . . . the treasure is all yours, my beauty . . . all yours. . . ."

He gave a gasping choke and fell

back stiffly among his pillows. He was dead.

Before she went for the doctor she removed the key on its cord from her husband's neck and hung it round her own. She felt safer now than she had ever felt. At last the years of sordid misery were rewarded. The wealth about which she had heard so many rumours was to be hers alone.

She paused at the window and stared over the empty wind-swept bay. If only, the thought came again most bitterly to her mind, Donald had died before Anton had sailed away. Perhaps, she thought, measuring him against herself, the colour of Donald's gold would have kept him ashore with her. She stared at the place where his ship had lain at anchor through those enchanted summer days until the last softness in her heart vanished.

She turned from the window, passed the still form on the bed, and throwing a cloak round her shoulders, went out into the storm to fetch the doctor.

That night she took the lantern and made her way to the path which lead over the headland. She had waited until after midnight, so that she could be sure that all the villagers were indoors. The wind still tore in from the sea, and her full skirt clung uncomfortably round her legs as she made slow progress along the muddy path. But the rain had stopped and the full moon peering boldly between the flying clouds shone across the bay, splashing the crests of the heaving waves with silver.

The path climbed to the crest of the headland and dwindled out across the short turf. She saw before her now the looming shape of the cromlech silhouetted blackly against the gleaming sea. She crossed the bare headland towards it, the wind tearing at her hair, the lantern swinging wildly in her hand. In the shelter of the cromlech rocks she lit the lantern, and peered through the nettles round their foot for the hidden opening of which Donald had told her. She was so intent on her purpose that she did not feel the savage stings of the nettles as she pushed her way through them towards a black crack in the rock just wide enough for a man to enter. Once inside the narrow passage the lamp burned steadily, revealing a downward sloping path winding through a tunnel of rock. She did not hesitate, but walked on towards her goal, the object of her desire, the thing she had waited for all these years.

As the path dropped more steeply downward, the sides of the tunnel grew damp and the gravel underfoot changed to smooth wet rock. She glimpsed out of the corner of her eye a rusty iron ring from which hung a piece of frayed green rope, then suddenly her feet shot from under her and she began to slip.

She slid helplessly for perhaps twenty yards, then beneath her feet was slippery but level rock again. To her surprise she found she still clutched the lantern and it was still alight. She stood up on shaking legs

and held the light high. She was in a great cave smelling of seaweed and filled with the roar of the rising tide. The rays of the lantern were faint and inadequate, barely reaching the lofty jagged roof of the cavern and probing with futile beams the surrounding darkness. Water dripped into unseen pools with a thin, echoing sound. Opposite her a roughly semicircular opening admitted a beam of moonlight and a glimpse of heaving, gleaming sea.

This, then, was the cave into which Donald and his friends had rowed at high tide and unloaded their contraband. Here, then, would be his chest, his treasure chest. Shaking with cold and excitement, she swung the lantern round. Nothing could be seen but shining wet rock and ridges and piles of damp seaweed.

She took a few careful steps towards the back of the cave, away from the silver gleam of the moon and the glancing sea. Here her lantern seemed stronger, its beams penetrated farther into the blackness, and suddenly they revealed the long shape of a great chest, covered with barnacles. Nothing now separated her from the treasure. All the years of doubting and waiting were now over; she had to take only a few steps and place the well-oiled key in the rusty lock. But now she hesitated. What form would the treasure take, she wondered for the hundredth time. Jewels perhaps, or gold coins, the harvest from the sale of smuggled goods during the years?

A stale smell of dried seaweed drifted towards her from the recesses

of the cavern, and glancing behind she saw that the thin clouds had flown from the face of the moon, which now shone full across the floor, gleaming from the pools left by the ebb tide and from the waves which were roaring hungrily at the cave's mouth. In contrast to the dazzling silver light when she turned again towards the lamp-light, it looked strangely weak and pallid. Surely it was not going out!

In sudden fear she knelt before the chest and, dragging the cord over her head, inserted the key into the rusty lock. She drew the lamp nearer and prepared to exert all her strength to turn the key. It turned so easily that she nearly fell on her face. Shaken and surprised, she gripped the edge of the heavy lid and with some difficulty raised it a few inches. A stench dreadful and strange to her rose from the inside of the chest. Wildly, with sudden strength, she flung open the lid and lifted the lantern. In its pale light she saw a huddled form filling the chest, and a face, Anton's face, still recognizable, staring up at her.

She screamed, and let the lid fall back with a crash from her limp hand. She dropped the lantern and ran, still screaming, back through the moon-drenched cave. On the edge of the frothing silver-white of the rising waves she paused, her face in her shaking hands, her fingers clutching at her hair. The silver-lit sea, the dark cave, Anton's livid face, the same and yet so dreadfully changed, swung round her giddily. She fell forward across the salty pools, groaning. The cold water on her face stung her back to some measure of consciousness, and her shocked brain seemed suddenly to comprehend exactly what must have happened.

She heard again the sounds she had heard that night before she had set out to meet Anton at the Crown, and recalled the inexplicable fever which had so suddenly attacked her husband, and it seemed as though she were actually watching what had happened. Somehow Donald must have discovered the secret of their rendezvous, climbed out of his window, waylaid Anton, killed him and brought him here. But how had he killed him? It could not have been in a fight, because Anton was so much younger and stronger. The question, filling her mind, momentarily overcame her horror. How had her husband killed Anton? And on the heels of that came another. What had he done with his treasure?

She dragged herself to her feet and staggered across the uneven floor back towards the chest, driven by a double desire. She flung back the lid of the chest once more and, holding the lantern close, examined the body that had been Anton's. It was clad in a rotten and mildewed shirt and trousers. There seemed to be no signs of injury. Her eyes glinted strangely as she caught the body under the arms and began to drag it from its tomb. When, with unnatural strength, she had managed to turn it on its face on the floor of the cave and saw a patch that had been blood on the back of the shirt, and the knife slit in the flesh, she knew how Anton had died.

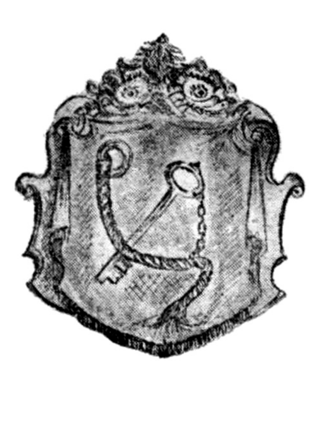
Gasping, she turned again to the chest and peered inside. Would Donald have left any gold coins under the body? But no, the chest was now quite empty except for a small packet, dirty and limp, which she lifted out and held up to the lamp. It was a parchment envelope, and in barely discernible ink it was addressed to her. She tore it open with her wet, unclean fingers. There was a small piece of parchment inside, and on it her husband had written:

"I knew that sooner or later you would come for the treasure, and, knowing you, I knew too that even the shock of finding the body of your Frenchman instead would not stop you from searching for it still. You would think that you might find some part of it under him. You gold-digger, there is not so much as a penny here. I tipped my treasure into the sea—that night. And now, wife, here are my last words to you:

"You cannot leave this place, except by the sea—and I know you cannot swim. I am taking the rope

which is needed to climb up to the passage back with me when I go. Riches, even if there were any, would not help you now."

The great cave echoed her screams for a long time after her body had disappeared into the waves which nibbled gently up the walls of the cave.



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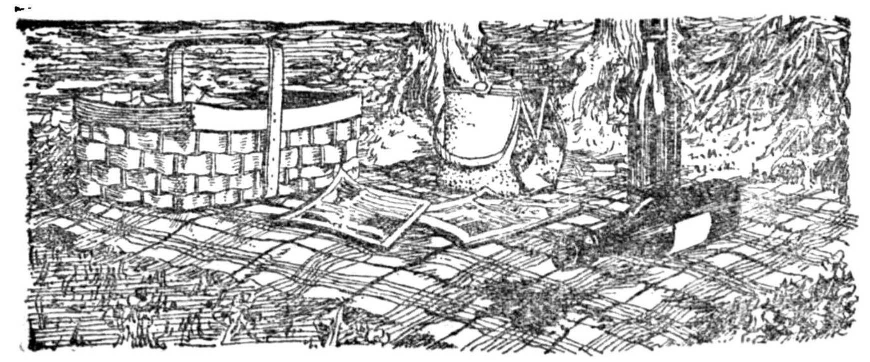
Still to be neat, still to be drest,
As you were going to a feast;
Still to be powder'd, still perfum'd,
Lady, it is to be presumed,
Though art's hid causes are not found,
All is not sweet, all is not sound.

BEN JONSON (1573–1637): *Epicoene.*



THE WEIR

DANIEL PETTIWARD

Illustrated by Dennis Duyt

MR. AND MRS. BOBBIN were driving home from the sea one evening in their very old Austin, Candida. They had just passed some large wrought-iron gates when Mrs. Bobbin grabbed Mr. Bobbin's arm, a thing she knew she must never do, and exclaimed, "Look, there's a woman waving."

"I know," said Mr. Bobbin, "I've been watching her for at least five minutes."

"She's hopping about as if she'd been stung by something."

"Too pretty to want a lift, I'm afraid," said Mr. Bobbin, pulling up.

The woman, wearing dark glasses and a sketchy pink-and-white sunbathing outfit, put her fashionably arranged head through Mr. Bobbin's open window.

"Can you please come at once," she said, panting. "I'm afraid it may be too late; my husband's fallen into the river."

"Better stay here, dear," said Mr. Bobbin firmly to Mrs. Bobbin, who took no notice. They followed the woman through a gap in the hedge; at least it was hardly a gap and the hawthorn branches clawed at them fiercely, though the woman was in too much of a state to notice. Her brown arms and her hands on which were three costly looking rings were all white scratches. Only her back was smooth except for some scars between the shoulder-blades—two little sixpenny-sized circles, then a red mark and another circle. Mr. Bobbin pictured her being branded long ago and far away by bandits.

On the other side of the hedge was a field of standing hay. "It's the weir," called the woman, stumbling ahead. "He can't swim properly; neither can I. I don't know if anyone can get to him. The current's terribly strong."

They could hear the roar of the water ahead. In front was a footpath leading from the weir to the gate on the road some distance in front of the Bobbins' car. Mr. Bobbin followed the path through some bushes to the flimsy wooden bridge which spanned the river at the point where the water crashed down to the lower level. There was a balustrade on the downstream side which had given way in the middle. The broken ends were trailing in the water.

For a few seconds Mr. Bobbin, keeping well away from the edge, stood on the bridge and scanned the heaving water. It had been raining for a night and a day, and the river was at full spate—nearly forty feet wide—hurling itself down and then whipping back on itself. For about twenty feet it seethed and plunged. No swimmer on earth could have stood a chance against it.

Suddenly Mr. Bobbin saw a bare arm shoot out of the water and a few seconds later a head and shoulders were flung momentarily above the surface and then dragged violently back again. As the other two came up he looked round frantically for something that might be of help, although it was plain even from that brief glimpse that there was no life left in the body.

On the far side of the bridge, running along the bank in both directions, there was a grass path backed by high weeds and rushes growing out of marshy ground. On the downstream side of the weir, a yard or so along the path, a plaid rug was spread. On it was a cherry-coloured jumper, a big basket, an open white handbag, two *Tatlers*, some cigarettes and two bottles of pale ale, one unstoppered and spilling over the rug. Some little way farther down, where the river was quieter and shallower and began to curl to the left, there was a rod resting on the bank, its line tugging in the water. Behind it on the grass were a canvas bag, a tweed hat and a box of flies.

Mr. Bobbin had to shout above the noise of the falling water. "Look, if I got that rod and hung on to one end while you two clung to the other, perhaps I might be able to wade into the river and catch hold of him when he next bobbed up. I'm afraid there's no chance at all of his being alive, though."

"No, we don't want another tragedy," the two women said almost together, the one in the sunbathing outfit adding, "It's terribly deep right up to the bank. I can't think what on earth made him go on to the bridge; he knew perfectly well it wasn't safe to lean on the rail."

"I wonder," said Mr. Bobbin, "how long he'll go on coming up for."

"He might for an awful long time," said the woman; "we used to throw logs and quite heavy things in and watch them coming up again for ages before they went downstream."

"Can we get a boat?"

"At the mill," said the woman, "there's an old punt. Blick, the waterman, would help you get it out. I was coming back from there when I saw him struggling in the water. Blick's scything just opposite the little island. He's nearly half a mile along the bank, otherwise I'd have gone to him instead of coming to the road." Although she was still breathless she had begun to speak with a sort of unnatural calm.

"You go for the punt, Beverley," said Mrs. Bobbin, and to the woman, "Come back to the car with me, my dear, and I'll give you some tea from the thermos. I'm afraid we've nothing stronger."

"I'd like a cigarette more than anything. I'll get mine." She walked over and picked up her cigarettes and her bag, shaking some of the spilt beer off the rug as she did so.

Mr. Bobbin trotted off down the tow-path between banks of willow-herb and purple loosestrife, just the sort of place he would have liked to linger in if it hadn't been for this body. Where the bushes came to an end and the roar of the weir, now hidden, subsided, there was a fence and a stile into a meadow. On the stile was a notice-board with "Private" on it. Mr. Bobbin could see the roof of the mill above a group of sycamores.

Between the mill and the stile was the island, and between the island and Mr. Bobbin a dark man in dark trousers and waistcoat was scything the nettles that were beginning to pour over the path.

"Been an accident," puffed Mr. Bobbin. "Fellow's drowned himself in the weir. Came for the punt. You the waterman Blick?"

"Drowned hisself!" said the man, flinging down his scythe. "Yes, I'm Blick; punt's yonder."

"Have to try to fish him out," said Mr. Bobbin as they approached the mill, half running, half walking.

It was a pretty little mill, now only used for housing the waterman and his family. There were beehives and fruit trees, and a clothes-line with huge pairs of combinations at one end and diminutive pairs of knickers at the other.

Three children were catching tiddlers in one of the three streams which converged at the mill, while an oldish man with a blue felt hat covering his face was apparently asleep in a green plush chair under a pear tree. A woman, obviously Mrs. Blick, hobbled out of the house and hurled a bucketful of something into the nettles. As Mr. Bobbin and Blick came up, the others, sensing drama, crowded round them.

"Gentleman here says chap's been drownded," said Blick.

"Who is it, sir, do you know?" asked the old man, Mrs. Blick's father, who had come to life and trundled over from his chair.

"Don't know," said Mr. Bobbin, "ginger-headed, I think. His wife found him in the water and came to the road to raise the alarm."

"Oh dear," said Mrs. Blick, sitting down heavily on the green chair and fanning herself with her apron, "that'll be poor Mr. Gringell."

Blick was scratching the back of his leathery neck.

"It'll take a devil of a time to get the old punt up there agin the stream," he said. "She leaks like a bleeding sieve, too. Quicker to carry her. Look here, you kids, nip up to the gardens and see if Mr. Heathcote's still there. Tell him we wants him quick."

"I'll give you a hand with the punt," said Mrs. Blick's father, Mr. Hopping; "would one of the landing-nets be any use do you reckon, sir?"

"Might be," said Mr. Bobbin.

It was an arduous business getting the big square punt out of the mud and tipping out the water that she'd shipped.

"They don't only use her for cutting weeds like," said Hopping, coming back with the landing-net and a groundsheet in time to miss the most punishing part of the operation.

They had carried the punt a bare sixty yards, puffing and sweating as they went, when Heathcote the agent, a muscular young man in whipcord trousers and a short-sleeved shirt caught up with them. While he and Mr. Bobbin introduced themselves, the children who were tagging on behind were ordered back peremptorily by their father.

"What's all this about?" Heathcote asked, grabbing hold of a corner of the punt. "The boy said something about someone being drowned."

"Gentleman," said Blick, dashing sweat from his forehead with a lean hand, "says chap's tumbled in weir like. Looks like it must be Mr. Gringell."

"Blast that bloody bridge," Heathcote cried; "the Gringells have been told dozens of times that that handrail isn't safe. That's why we had to make that bit of the path private to stop strangers going on the bridge until we'd got it repaired. Is Pam—is Mrs. Gringell all right? Was she with him when it happened?"

"No, apparently not," said Mr. Bobbin; "she's in a bit of a state naturally. I didn't press her for any details."

"I met her starting off for the river well over an hour ago," Heathcote said. "She had a heavy basket full of beer bottles and stuff that she was taking down to where her husband was fishing so I went with her to help her carry it. I wish to God I'd stayed down there and kept an eye on Gringell."

"Look," said Mr. Bobbin, "let's change ends. My arm's dropping off. You mean you might have prevented him leaning on the rail?"

Heathcote was silent for a moment then he said, "I suppose I ought to be more careful what I'm saying, but Gringell was a very queer customer. Desperately moody. He got very badly knocked about in the war. He had a leg that gave him almost continual pain, I believe."

"Are you suggesting that he might have done himself in deliberately?"

"Well, he was in a perfectly filthy temper when we arrived and didn't seem to want us anywhere near him, which is why, after a few minutes of his company, Pam and I just walked off and left him to simmer down. At

least I had to go up to the gardens, anyway, to go over the accounts, and she parked her belongings and came with me. She was frightfully het up by that time. I think they'd been having a full-dress row about something during most of the day."

"What made her come back to the weir so soon?"

"Well, we were practically at the kitchen gardens—they're about ten minutes' walk past the mill—when she suddenly said she must go back to him. She didn't say so, but I think, you know, she must have had some sort of premonition. Once before, about six months ago, she told me she came into their room and found him half-way out of the window three storeys up. I suppose this time she was just too late."

They had reached the stile and were negotiating it with the punt. Heathcote didn't seem to be in the least exhausted. Mr. Bobbin was very tired.

"Do the Gringells own the place?" Mr. Bobbin managed to get out.

"Oh Lord, no! They're just here for the week-end. They come here a great deal. It's Sir Henry Harcourt's place. Sir Henry had to go into Podbury for a committee meeting and various odd jobs, otherwise he'd probably have been with them. I suppose it will be me who has to break the jolly news to him. Where's Pam?" he asked as they came in sight of the weir. "I thought you said——"

"I hope she's in the car with my wife."

"His rod's still where I last saw him," said Heathcote. "Whereabouts was he when you caught sight of him?"

"Look there, sir," shouted Hopping, pointing. They followed the line of his arm and saw that the body had been carried clear of the turmoil and was lying in shallow water on the other side of the river.

"Well I'm damned," said Mr. Bobbin, "so we needn't have bothered with the punt after all."

It was difficult to get to the drowned man because on the far side of the river brambles came right to the water's edge. Heathcote and Blick, who had dashed over the bridge, had to hack their way through with sticks. It was a good many minutes before they had at last got Gringell up out of the water and over the bridge to where he could be laid out on the grass. He was a little ferret-faced man whose flannel shirt and grey trousers were so torn that they were only just clinging to him.

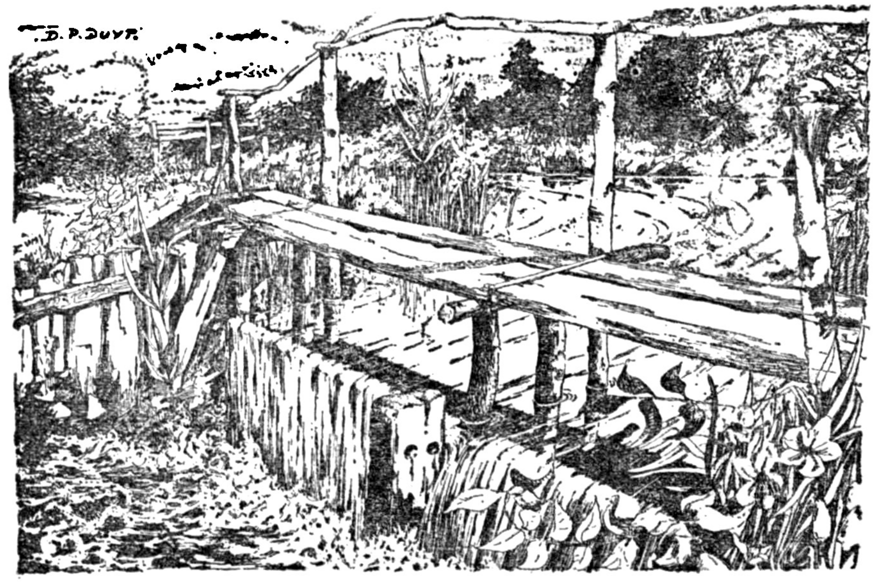
"You can sometimes bring people to life an amazing length of time afterwards by artificial respiration," Heathcote said, bending down.

"Not him you couldn't," said Blick, covering him with the groundsheet. "I seen too many of them in the Dardanelles."

"We'll have to take him up to the house," sad Heathcote. "I think the best thing would be for us to carry him through the wood to the drive, and then for me to nip up to the garage for the shooting-brake."

"My car's at your disposal, if you want it," said Mr. Bobbin.

"That's awfully good of you; tell you what," said Heathcote, "if you



could really spare the time perhaps you wouldn't mind taking Pam up to the house, that would save her having to go in the car with Gringell. Come with us to the drive, and then you can get to your car from there."

Heathcote and Blick went first, carrying the dripping body in the groundsheet, and after them came Mr. Bobbin and Hopping with the effects, which included a very small dace which the rod had apparently caught itself during the interval. They took the path away from the mill which led them first in front of and then (sheering away from the river) into the heart of a wood whose closely knit trees held back the sunlight except for an occasional slender thread. After a while they came to a gate, also with its "Private" notice, and beyond that a grass border on which elms were growing, and then the drive, very unkempt.

"This is where we separate," said Heathcote to Mr. Bobbin. "You go down to the gates and turn left. Blick, you and Hopping wait here. Try to keep out of sight of Mrs. Gringell when she comes past."

A few minutes later the Bobbins and Mrs. Gringell were rattling up the drive in Candida. They crossed three bridges, one brick and two stone, over the three branches of the river and came to where another drive forked off to their left. In the angle between the two drives, with tracks leading to both, was a Dutch barn containing two stacks of hay,

one behind the other, but with its roof so badly ripped open that it afforded hardly any protection. Just opposite the barn they overtook Heathcote and gave him a lift on the running-board as far as the turning off to the garage. Heathcote put his arm through the open window and patted the padding in the shoulder of Mrs. Bobbin's coat which was round Mrs. Gringell. Mrs. Gringell who had been staring into space gave a brief wan smile of gratitude.

They had hardly drawn up at the large portico of the house when another car—an old Daimler—which had been travelling very much faster, pulled up behind them with a great crunching of gravel. "That's Harry," said Mrs. Gringell faintly, "would you tell him, please?"

Mr. Bobbin got out and met the figure coming towards him, a tall, handsome, well-fed man in a dark grey, double-breasted suit. Mr. Bobbin gave him a brief account of what had happened, and Sir Henry thanked him profusely, adding, "I expect you could use a drink, I know I could. I'll get my housekeeper to see to Pam, and then perhaps you and your wife would join me in the library. Or are you in a fearful hurry to get on? I'm afraid all this will have rather eaten into your evening."

"We'd been to the sea," said Mr. Bobbin. "It all seems terribly long ago."

Sir Henry turned to Mrs. Gringell, a pale little figure who was walking slowly towards the house, leaning on Mrs. Bobbin's arm.

"Pamela, I'm most dreadfully sorry . . . horrible, beastly affair. I expect you'd like to go straight to your room. I'll send Mrs. Crowl up with some whisky. These people seem to have been wonderfully kind and helpful."

The party went through the front door, Mr. Bobbin and Sir Henry wiping their shoes. Mr. Bobbin decided that Sir Henry's housekeeper must keep him under her thumb. Bachelors didn't usually bother with such refinements, or maybe, he thought, looking up at a glossy de Lazlo portrait in the front hall of a lovely but determined-looking woman, he was a widower.

In the library Sir Henry produced bottles and glasses from a cupboard. No butler, no decanter, Mrs. Bobbin noticed with regret, and the chairs wanted recovering badly. Stately homes weren't what they were.

"Now tell me the whole thing again, slowly," said Sir Henry.

Mr. Bobbin left off admiring a collection of flint-lock pistols over the chimney-piece and told Sir Henry everything that seemed relevant. He was still answering questions when a noise from the hall told them that the others had arrived. The two men went to the door.

Heathcote had brought Blick with him to help carry. "In the gun-room, I should think for the moment. Shocking business this," said Sir Henry, guiding Blick who was walking backwards. Blick was not used to highly polished floors and was embarrassed by not having a free hand to take off his cap. Just outside the library he trod on a button, and

would have lost his balance if Sir Henry had not caught him.

When Blick had been sent on his way consoled by a ten-shilling note and the doctor had been summoned by telephone, Heathcote joined the others in the library.

"I still don't understand," said Sir Henry, handing Heathcote a drink, "what Cecil was doing on the bridge when you say his rod and stuff were farther down the bank."

Mrs. Bobbin, who had not spoken at all up till then, said, "Of course, people continually do things for reasons that are incomprehensible to others, like Mr. Heathcote here having the tail of a fish sticking out of his pocket. Mr. Gringell might have been chasing a rare butterfly or running about to cure himself of cramp."

Sir Henry, who had gone to sit at his knee-hole desk, looked at Mrs. Bobbin in mild astonishment and said, "I don't think Gringell went in for natural history much, but he was certainly unaccountable in his actions sometimes."

"Mr. Heathcote," said Mr. Bobbin, "has a suicide theory which I didn't want to mention when he wasn't with us." He turned to Heathcote, resting his glass on the corner of the desk. "I've already explained that Mrs. Gringell went with you to the gardens because Mr. Gringell was in such a vile temper."

Heathcote went very red. "I'm afraid I was talking a bit out of turn," he said. "I should have kept my big mouth shut. I think it's better to forget what I said."

"Unfortunately," said Mr. Bobbin, "you mentioned it in front of Blick and his father-in-law. The story is very likely gaining momentum in the Lamb and Flag at this very moment."

"Luckily neither Blick nor old Hopping go to the pub, and also"—Sir Henry looked hard at Heathcote—"Blick is a very loyal and devoted servant. I'm quite sure that he'd keep this matter to himself and see that his family did the same. However, to make quite sure"—he pressed a bell—"I'll send for him. For Pamela's sake we don't want any suggestion of suicide brought up. I think it's best to say simply that he was crossing the bridge and supported himself by the handrail, which gave way—which is no doubt what did in fact happen. With his gammy leg he often needed to hang on to something for support, and he may have gripped hold of the rail to steady himself, forgetting that it wasn't safe. We don't even have to mention that he left his rod on the bank. This suicide story is only a theory on Heathcote's part, and not I think a very good one. After all, people don't usually kill themselves when they're in a towering rage. Don't you agree with me, Bobbin?"

Mr. Bobbin drew a little invisible spiral on the desk with his finger-nail. "You know," he said, "if you'll forgive my saying so, I think it would be very much better if at the inquest no attempt was made by anybody to suppress anything. It's all very well trying to spare people's feelings, but once you start concealing important facts about what happened before someone's death, the next thing you

know you'll be suspected of having done the fellow in. Oh Lord!" Mr. Bobbin exclaimed, "I've committed a horrible crime myself by leaving a wet ring on the edge of your lovely walnut desk. I wonder if I might have a sheet of blotting-paper."

"Oh, it doesn't matter a damn! Mrs. Crowl will see to it," said Sir Henry, throwing over the top sheet out of his leather blotter all the same. Mr. Bobbin mopped up the wet and, being a tidy man, folded up the blotting-paper into an exact square wet side inmost.

"Well," he said, "we must be on our way. Here's my card if you should want us." He looked round for a wastepaper-basket and not seeing one put the blotting-paper with his note-case in his breast pocket. As Sir Henry was showing them out, the maid, who gave the appearance of having come several miles at the run, arrived to answer the bell.

Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Bobbin spoke for a while as they chugged down the drive—Candida was getting very hot and tired—but as they reached the Dutch barn Mrs. Bobbin said, "I suppose the right fork takes you to Podbury," and added inconsequently, "You know I wouldn't be a bit surprised if it turned out that somebody pushed old Gringell in."

"How on earth do you make that out?" asked Mr. Bobbin, pulling up

and looking intently at the roof of the Dutch barn.

"Well, of course," said Mrs. Bobbin, "I don't really suppose anybody did for a moment, but it wouldn't be at all hard to make out quite a good case."

"Wouldn't it?"

"No. For one thing," said Mrs. Bobbin, "why go all the way to the bridge and break the rail in order to kill yourself? If you must go to the bridge to die, then why not climb under the rail? But why bother to go that far? Why not jump in from the side where the rug was? And don't suicides always leave notes? If he wasn't committing suicide, then why on earth did he leave his line in the water and go and lean on a rail he knew very well to be rickety?"

"Well, you made some rather ill-timed suggestions on that point yourself in the library."

"Also," said Mrs. Bobbin, "if I may throw off a few maxims for a moment; women who are treated with disrespect look for consolation elsewhere. Attractive women are apt to find it. Superficially attractive women like Mrs. Gringell, who probably deserve all their husbands give them, usually make for undiscriminating youngsters like Heathcote, whose eager solicitude has been so much in evidence. Those two waltzing off together to the gardens and her coming back alone might easily have been done just to make it look as though Grangell had fallen in while they were away. Another thing —a filthy temper, as Sir Henry pointed out, isn't normally a prelude to suicide, but it's quite likely to exasperate a pair of guilty lovers to the point of murder. I should say by the look of his wife's rings that old Gringell was as rich as Crœsus, which would make more of a motive."

"Jolly good," said Mr. Bobbin. "How was it done?"

"Well, not having actually been there I don't know, but I don't see why Heathcote and Mrs. Gringell might not have thought up some scheme for getting Gringell on to the bridge—like calling to him to look at a two-headed eel or something—and then have given him a good old-fashioned shove. Heathcote could have thought up the suicide story so that if anyone produced any powerful reasons why it couldn't have been an accident, then suicide rather than murder would be the next alternative. People with guilty consciences can never let well alone. Of course, if they'd had any sense they'd have brought the rod round on to the bridge to make it look as though he'd been fishing from there."

"Not if they knew anything about dry-fly fishing they wouldn't."

"Oh, wouldn't they? Of course they had to lay stress on the nasty temper, whether Gringell was really in one or not, in order to explain why Mrs. Gringell went off and left him; and they had to go past the mill so that the mill people could see them. I dare say you noticed that Mrs. Gringell appeared to have experimented with other objects to see how they reacted to being thrown into the weir. Very incriminating that."

"Why didn't she get Heathcote to come back with her when she had this premonition, instead of coming back all alone to her husband's watery corpse? That would take a hell of a lot of nerve."

Mrs. Bobbin considered for a moment. "It would have looked suspicious the two of them walking off and then walking straight back again. The premonition story was much better. Anyway, she wouldn't have minded coming back alone, hard little bitch! I had more opportunity than you did of studying her. I wouldn't be surprised if it were she who did most of the shoving."

"How are you going to prove all this?"

"I don't suppose I am," said Mrs. Bobbin, laughing, "but perhaps if we went back to the weir to have a look round we could dig up a clue or two unless the place is already black with sightseers. The cunning thing, you know, is that in a case like this the doctor will never be able to say within an hour when Gringell was drowned, and even supposing he could that wouldn't prove when he was pushed, would it? I don't know how I'm to prove that it all happened before they left for the kitchen garden. Incidentally, why have we stopped here?"

"I want to have a look round this barn."

"I never knew you were interested in barns."

"Didn't you? You know," said Mr. Bobbin reflectively, "you made rather a good point just now when you said that there was no need for Gringell to go as far as the bridge if he wanted to commit suicide, because that applies to his being pushed, too. If someone wanted to give him a push where he would be quite certain to drown, they'd only have to lure him as far as the rug and do it from there. Then they could go along afterwards and break the balustrade in order to make it look like an accident."

"Who's *they*? Have you got a murderer too? Is he the same as mine?"

"Well, he was abetted by Mrs. Gringell like yours, but according to my very latest theory Mrs. Gringell's alleged little affair with Heathcote may have just been part of a plot to remove suspicion from her real lover. My idea is that the murder was planned for Mrs. Gringell's first appearance at the river, but that it had to be postponed because of Heathcote turning up unexpectedly and accompanying her down. She didn't want to make him suspicious by trying to get rid of him so she let him come, very likely knowing he was on his way to the gardens, and in the meantime worked out a way of arriving at the river a second time—something of the sort, anyway."

"Doesn't sound much of a theory so far."

"Once she was back again at the weir," Mr. Bobbin went on undaunted, "she could carry on with her original plan, which I believe was to sit on the rug and lure Gringell to his doom most likely by tantalizing him with an unstoppered pint of pale ale in danger of wasting. She presumably knew where he was going to fish, and also that she'd have to find

a way of enticing him opposite the deeper water. Probably if Heathcote hadn't barged in, she and her accomplice would have pushed Gringell and then tidied up the rug and stuff to make it look as though she had only just arrived. I expect they would have taken the rod out of the water, too, to give the impression that Gringell hadn't yet begun to fish, but had parked his gear and was just hanging about on the bridge waiting for the evening rise or something. Once Heathcote had seen him fishing it wasn't so easy to explain his being on the bridge, especially as there was nowhere to fish from on the far bank."

"I still think it's a rotten theory and nothing like so convincing as mine and, anyway, who are you having as your murderer—the black-browed Blick? Did he have a secret crush on Mrs. Gringell?"

"I expect so. I've got a bit of a one myself. No, not Blick. Blick has a beautiful alibi supplied unintentionally by Mrs. Gringell, who said that he was scything immediately opposite the island. He couldn't have reached the point where I found him unless he'd been scything without stopping and pretty expertly too."

"He could have told Mrs. Gringell to say he was opposite the island. You're no earthly good at this game."

"He couldn't have told her to say that, because he didn't know a thing about what was going on. You're mixing him up with Lady Chatterley's lover, and now I come to think of it the amount of scything he got through pretty well proves that Mrs. Gringell must have lingered by the river for quite a time before she came after us."

"Well, who was this man then and why didn't Heathcote see him?"

"Ah, that's the beauty of it. Nobody but Mrs. Gringell knew he was there, because all the time he was hidden in the bushes behind the rug."

"What makes you think that?"

"I know it. By the trampled look of the reeds and thistles and things, and two great muddy footmarks on the rug you can see exactly which way he came."

"Are you trying to tell me there really *was* a man."

"Certainly there was. I can even show you the crumbled bit of bank where he pushed Gringell over the edge. I expect he wrong-footed the wretched man just as he was reaching out for the beer. Mrs. Gringell presumably dropped it and went rapidly into reverse. Of course the noise of the water would have drowned the murderer's movements."

"How do you know it wasn't Heathcote hiding in the bushes?"

"Well, for one thing, whoever it was had much bigger feet, and for another he was with Mrs. Gringell just before she came for us. When he'd pushed poor Gringell in and made sure there was no chance of his getting out alive, he took Mrs. Gringell in his arms for a full three minutes, smoothing her highly doctored hair with his free hand, the left one, and no doubt making quite sure that she had got her last-minute instructions absolutely pat."

"Now you're being simply silly."

"No, I'm not. Do you see that track leading between the two stacks in the barn to the other drive? Do you notice those tyre marks in the mud curling round this way? Those are the tyre marks of the murderer's car, which he parked out of sight between the stacks. Come with me and I'll show you where he probably stopped. Last night's rain and that hole in the roof have made all this child's play.

"See," said Mr. Bobbin as they picked their way over the muddy ruts, "just as I thought; he got out of his car here and climbed up this ladder. Look at the fresh mud on the rungs. From up here"—he had scuttled up the ladder and was speaking from the top of the stack—"he could look up and down the drive and see that the coast was clear, although I notice that the gate where Blick and Hopping were waiting is quite hidden by those elms. He obviously came up here twice; once when he first arrived back from Podbury by the other drive, and again after the murder, when he must have hidden here to see how things developed. I dare say that when he saw Candida chugging up the drive in Heathcote's wake, he presumed that we had the body on board, and it would be a good moment to arrive back from his committee meeting and his odd jobs. Whether he was already in position by the weir when Mrs. Gringell and Heathcote arrived I wouldn't know, but I should think he probably meant to meet her somewhere and go with her most of the way himself. He must have been a bit nonplussed when he saw Heathcote was there too, unless of course Heathcote and Mrs. Gringell came to the weir the long way round by the mill and Sir Henry didn't see Heathcote until he was already in his hide-out. I ought to have checked up on that. In either case, Sir Henry must have been at rather a loss until Mrs. Gringell reappeared on her own, unless of course they'd managed to exchange signals unknown to Heathcote and Gringell."

"And why pick on poor Sir Henry? A little smug but such a poppet."

"You and your poppets!" said Mr. Bobbin, climbing down the ladder. "Well, for one thing, those are his tyre marks there, though, of course, it wasn't those that put me on the scent because I've only just had a chance to examine them. What made me suspect him almost as soon as his name was mentioned was the fact that he'd been to a committee meeting. I was looking for a man in a Sunday-go-to-meeting suit. Such a suit as would normally have four cuff buttons, but in this case had the second one from the top on the right sleeve apparently dangling by a thread. Someone in a suit of this sort had clasped Mrs. Gringell to him for long enough to leave strong impressions of three firm and one boss-eyed button between her bare shoulder-blades. What's more, he'd done it recently enough for the marks to be still very much in evidence when we arrived.

"Of course," Mr. Bobbin went on, "I had a pull over you through having had more chance to examine the ground. When we were taking the body through the trees to the drive I was able to see how Sir Henry could have got from the drive to the weir without once having to come out into the open. All I had to know after that was where the car was hidden. The moment I saw the barn, I realized that it would be pretty well the only possible place."

"And what did you want the blotting-paper for?"

"Oh, the blotting-paper," said Mr. Bobbin, taking it from his pocket and spreading it out on Candida's bonnet; "now kindly observe how this button which I picked up from the floor of the hall exactly fits into each of these circles which Sir Henry kindly printed for me by leaning heavily on his blotter. Without exhibit 'A,' Mrs. Gringell's back as it was this afternoon, I'm afraid this blotting-paper and this button will only amount to hearsay evidence, but luckily Sir Henry has left other damaging clues. There are these tracks and, better still, the rug with his footprints, which I put in Candida's boot and forgot to take out; and there should still be enough mud on his shoes to keep the laboratory busy. It was all I could do to stop myself saying it must have been a very muddy meeting."

"Well, well. I hope you didn't put Sir Henry on the scent by giving him your professional card. Just the kind of senseless thing you would do."

"I wonder," said Mr. Bobbin, "if he'd be offended if I wrote and asked him to sell me some of those pistols. He can't have much use for them now unless he wants to shoot himself, and I should think the estate could do with all the money it can get. I expect it was partly the clamour of creditors which drove him to do poor Gringell in. I presume that in spite of their differences Gringell had left all to Mrs. G."

"Gosh!" exclaimed Mrs. Bobbin, only half listening as usual, "fancy putting on a two-piece sun-suit to assist at a murder."

COULD THERE?

DEREK HILL

It's all a question of attitude, the voice said in the darkened room. But where was the voice coming from? Too late, the visitor realized that wise people ask no questions because discovery can be dangerous.

HE NOTICE at the gate was discreet. The porter seemed as casual as any other. Through the dark elms I could see the house, silhouetted graciously against the evening sky. As I made my way up the silent drive, I wondered again whether I should have come.

Somehow I had expected everything to look different. The house should have been bent and twisted. The surrounding lawns and trees were too straight, too normal. Where were the thin grey shadows peopling the surrealist setting of my imagination? Could this quiet orderliness be the home of lunacy?

At the door stood a nurse, young, pretty and smiling. I followed her along a dusky corridor, still puzzled at the silence. Suddenly it came. The first crack in the surface was gibbering quietly to itself round the next corner. The nurse trotted ahead swiftly.

"Who opened that door?" I heard her demand as she turned and disappeared. "Go on—back in there!"

I reached the corner in time to see the retreating back of a vague figure. I could just make out its words as it muttered its way back into the room.

"Twenty-seventh dimension, twenty-eighth dimension, twenty-ninth dimension . . ."

The nurse bolted the door, turned and saw me staring. Her smile appeared again, a little too automatically.

"So sorry," she said. "Will you wait in the room at the end for the doctor?"

I nodded briefly, my mind still running on the bizarre counting I had overheard. Twenty-ninth dimension! Dumbly I entered the waiting-room and sank into an armchair. At least, I was alone.

There was no fire, although the evening was chilly. The furnishings were coldly blue. Stuffing was bursting from the upholstery of a dismal sofa facing me. The magazines on the centre table were old and colourless, and in any case it was already too dark to read. I searched for a light switch, but it seemed to be hidden. Glancing upwards, I saw that there was no bulb in the socket. This was ridiculous. Surely other visitors called after dark?

As the room grew steadily gloomier, my impatience increased. I could no longer make out the hands of my watch, and I fumbled in my

coat for a pocket-torch. I always carry one, fortunately, because my cottage is at the end of an ill-lit lane perpetually full of unlikely puddles.

But before I could switch it on a resonant voice spoke suddenly out of the darkness.

"Good evening. Perhaps before we see your friend I can have a few words with you?"

I peered into the blackness. The doctor must have slipped in very quietly. I could still see nothing of him, for total darkness now blanketed the room. His voice, however, was reassuringly firm and deep.

"I must apologize for the lack of any light," he continued, "but then, you see, we usually keep to the strictest visiting hours. Evening callers have never been permitted before."

"I have a torch with me if——" I began.

"No, please," cut in the doctor, almost rudely. "My eyes are rather weak, and I find complete darkness gives them a refreshing rest. I trust you don't find it too disturbing?"

"Not at all," I murmured a little dubiously.

"I'm so glad. It's surprising how frightened of the dark so many adults are. Fear, you know, especially of something a little eerie, is responsible for the condition of most of our patients.

"Have you ever wondered what it is about darkness that can be so terrifying? I think it's the thought of the unknown that might be only an inch away; it's the feeling that something is just about to make an unexpected sound from an unexpected direction; it's the sudden awareness of four other senses now that the fifth is made superfluous.

"Yet most of our patients had daytime experiences. Perhaps that's even worse. After all, in darkness you can talk about illusions. In the light of day, odd things are so difficult to deny—especially if other people experience the same thing."

"But, then, that wouldn't be a sign of mental weakness," I objected. "If two people see the same thing happen at the same time, there must be some other explanation."

"But supposing there isn't?" insisted the doctor. "What are we to say if two or more people have an impossible experience, something which is obviously absurd? Then, I submit, all we can do is treat as insane the victim who is so convinced of his experience that he wants to convince others. We could hardly let anyone who thinks he knows a natural law to be disproved go about disturbing his friends, could we?

"Inexplicable things do occur from time to time. If the person concerned is prepared to look on such a happening as an illusion, a mental lapse or something equally harmless, that is quite acceptable. But if he wants to uproot our whole basis of everyday existence by spreading the story of his experiences, what are we to do?

"If the certifying of one man will prevent a universal upheaval of our logical beliefs, I feel we are justified in imprisoning such a person and in endeavouring to convince him of his own insanity. Once he is prepared to

admit his condition, our work is completed. We can let him return to society, safe in the knowledge that he will not disturb his fellows."

I listened incredulously. What kind of an asylum was this, I asked myself. The first spasm of a doubt shivered its way across my mind as the voice continued.

"Not so long ago I had a simple little case of that sort. I'll call him Mr. A., if you don't mind. Well, it seems that Mr. A., quite a normal, healthy young chap, had the curious habit of counting as he went up and down stairs. Nothing very peculiar about that, you might say, and of course there isn't.

"But unfortunately Mr. A. recently chose to change his lodgings. And before he'd been in his new room for a single day he was nearly frantic. You see, he'd discovered that although there were twelve steps leading up to his room, there were only eleven going down.

"The landlady, of course, had known this for years. She'd probably not worried much, for it hardly interfered with her at all, though I believe she always dusted on the way down to save doing the extra step.

"Mr. A., however, couldn't take things so lightly. He spent most of his first day running up and down the stairs, arguing with the landlady, and generally causing no end of unpleasantness. He talked about calling in reporters, scientists, even the police. Eventually he was brought to us here, and after the usual examination we certified him. He's now just beginning his fourth month of treatment."

"And the stairs?" I whispered.

"Well, they're still the same, of course—twelve up, eleven down. The landlady, poor soul, was quite upset by all the fuss Mr. A. made about it. As she said, it's her staircase, and it was hardly civil of Mr. A. to be so critical.

"There was a girl discharged from here only the other day who's realized at last that the only sensible way to treat these things is by admitting one's own lunacy. Her case was a more personal one, although an observant person might soon notice what was wrong. Still, I think Miss B. is quite competent to tackle all situations arising from her peculiarity quite calmly."

"Her peculiarity?" I asked quietly. By now I was certain that I was conducting this strange conversation with one of the inmates. But I couldn't understand why the real doctor had not yet arrived.

"Yes, she has a lazy shadow. Whatever she does her shadow is always a few seconds late in copying her movements. Sometimes, too, it will sulk for hours, refusing to budge until it's sufficiently rested. There, again, her family had long ago learnt to accept the situation, but as she insisted on trying to get a scientific explanation, we had no choice.

"However, she'd only been with us a year, which is remarkably quick for a case of this kind. She's quieter, naturally, and not so high-spirited as she used to be. But at least her attitude to her problem is more accept-

able now, and I'm sure we can rely on Miss B. to keep up our reputation with the outside world. So far, you know, we've not had a single re-admission."

"Remarkable," I murmured. By now I had decided exactly where the voice was located. The madman must be seated on the sofa opposite me. I was still uncertain whether I could reach the door without arousing his suspicions, or whether it would be better to risk shouting for help.

"Doubtless you're wondering why your friend was brought in here," went on the voice.

Startled, I tried to lower myself gently back into the arm-chair. A spring twanged viciously, but the voice continued as if the speaker had noticed nothing.

"He came here last week, you know, to apply for a vacancy on the staff. He was waiting in this room, sitting on this sofa. As he pulled his handkerchief from his pocket, some coins fell out and slipped down the back, behind the cushions. Naturally he reached down for them. In fact, his arm was almost down to the elbow at the moment when he felt another hand grasp his own.

"Once again, it's a question of attitude. He'll have to stay with us until he becomes reconciled to his own mental deficiency. We can't have him blurting out the oddities of our furniture, even though we know he's right."

"You know he's right," I repeated. I felt for the torch in my pocket. Perhaps I could blind him momentarily, and then dive upon him before he could recover. But weren't maniacs said to have superhuman strength?

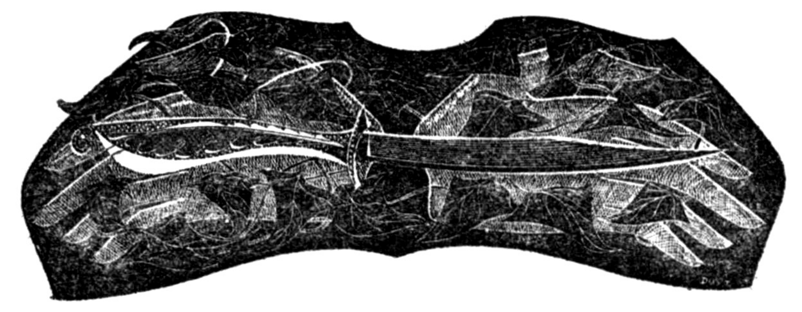
"Of course he's right. The first time we felt the hand in the sofa, we took the whole thing to pieces. There was nothing there, so we had it re-assembled, and we just don't talk about it any more. Why, you can come over and feel for yourself."

This was it. There was no other way. I pointed the torch straight at the sound of the voice and pressed the switch.

The first thing I saw was the pair of thick heavy lips, still inviting me across the room. But, then, that was all there was to see. Just a pair of lips with nothing between them, nothing behind them, nothing all round them. Just a pair of lips talking in the dark.

I should have been listening more attentively. I should have remembered that it's all a question of attitude. They say I'm still dangerous, still convinced, still trying to convince others. If they find this, they'll be furious. You see, you mustn't tell anyone else. You've got to acknowledge the facts. These things can't happen. They mustn't happen. So all you've to do is to recognize your own insanity.

I've been trying now for months. But a year's good for a case of this sort. I remember the lips said so. No, not the lips; it couldn't have been the lips. There weren't any lips. That was just me. Just confusion, delusion, illusion and me. There couldn't have been any lips, could there?



CROOKS IN BOOKS

A review of some recent crime, mystery and detective books.

"DEATH AND THE SKY ABOVE," by Andrew Garve (*Crime Club, 9s. 6d.*).

This is a well-contrived and very readable chase-thriller with murder and not espionage at its centre. It has a good and well-maintained mixture of suspense, pace, interest and characterization. Only the last chapter is substandard, with its sudden, almost dishonest revelation of a new line of action, complete with a brand-new "gimmick." The main setting—of the Medway islands and saltings—is most effective, and the dialogue keeps up the pace and excitement of the narrative. An author who can provide a hero and a murder and have the former sentenced to death, with all the trimmings—black cap and counsel cross-examining—by page 70 is worthy of admiration. For the remaining two-thirds of the novel Andrew Garve displays his very real talent for ingenuity and sustained excitement. To be put on all lists except those of the straight diehard detection-whodunit addicts.

"DEATH AT THE CASCADES," by B. J. Farmer (*Heinemann, 10s. 6d.*).

Here is our own native-born exception to the rule: here is a *roman policier* written by a policeman. Over in America the rule had been broken before; the excellent Dashiell Hammett is an ex-Pinkerton man. In *Death at the Cascades* Mr. Farmer has written a conventionally planned but fairly competent whodunit in which a whole section of helmeted Bobbies are involved and suspected. The book is concerned with a local police force in a provincial town, and the routine of constables on the beat and at the station, together with their discipline, hatreds, rivalries, hopes for promotion, etc., gives an air of reassuring verisimilitude to a somewhat undistinguished plot which seems to take irresponsible turns and loops, including an overly melodramatic finale. Readable certainly, and worthy of note for the realistic details and revelations of a copper's life.

"UNDER THE INFLUENCE," by Geoffrey Kerr (*Michael Joseph*, 10*s*. 6*d*.).

A first novel of some wit, originality and panache. There is a murder, suspicion and suspense, and detection which is more of a job for psychic research than Scotland Yard. Light-hearted and amusing, this is a pleasantly written book which is eminently readable and should be classified as an entertainment. More from Mr. Kerr, please.

"STOP PRESS MURDER," by Guy Ramsey (*Dakers*, 10*s*. 6*d*.).

Another murder with a newspaper background—but this author knows something about Fleet Street and about printing (if that helps). A much-bedded female journalist, who gets top-line stories by graft, sex and theft, is murdered—spiked, like a useless piece of copy, on the editor's desk. Embryonic Press lord with roving hands, usual assortment of alcoholic journalists, marital infidelities, political scandals, motives to the left and motives to the right. . . . Some good ideas, but not very distinguished in the writing or the unravelling.

"THE DOLL MAKER AND OTHER TALES OF THE UNCANNY," by Sarban (*Peter Davies*, 12*s*. 6*d*.).

Despite the blurb and the quotations from distinguished critics on the dust-jacket, I found this book disappointing and almost dull. In spite of

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the period prose and the traditional and commonplace introduction ("The Sangree family always told ghost-stories on Christmas Eve . . .") one searched without success for the power, the evil glory and the terror evoked by the great writers in this genre. The cover suggests that one might be reminded at moments of Le Fanu or M. R. James: would that one were! Here, instead, is flat writing with an embarrassing vein of naughty-naughty covert middle-class sex, which in two of the three stories at least left me with a nauseous taste of delicate and prudish prurience.

"THE BARBER'S WIFE," by C. Phillips (*Arthur Barker, 9s. 6d.*).

The story of a delinquent infant (legal sense) escaping from the law, the consequences of his actions and himself. Realistic underworld in London and provinces. Readable, sincere, lively and exciting.

"TWICE DEAD," by John Bude (*Macdonald, 9s. 6d.*).

A careful, quite sound detective story with the murder of an attractive young wife-artist on the Sussex coast, and investigations among the never-never land of writers' Bohemian Paris. A clever crime, in its way, but the book never rises above the run-of-the-mill dullness of mediocre prose. Riffling the book haphazardly, on one spread of two pages I found the following paragraph headings: "In a flash Meredith visualized the scene"; "Wasting no time on further speculation, Meredith got down to a more detailed examination . . ."; "'Good heavens, sergeant—the bullet!'"; "In the lane another major clue was soon forthcoming"; "'Umph . . . obvious how he got the body away, Strang'"; "'For Pete's sake, Sergeant, use your loaf!'" Unnecessarily slack writing like this almost invalidates the craft of the plot-making.

"RAFFERTY," by Bill S. Ballinger (*Reinhardt, 9s. 6d.*).

A good, gripping, clever American suspense novel, occasionally taking itself a bit too seriously. This is not a whodunit or even a chase-thriller. It is a sort of investigation in reverse to discover how a murder could ever have happened and why. It is an explanation, even a justification, that the narrator finds he has to make. He returns to the States after years abroad in Europe to find that a friend of his, a police-detective lieutenant, is dead and disgraced. In his search for the truth and the motives the narrator, and the reader, learns a fair amount about the real virtues and vices of the characters and about the milieus in which they live and have lived. Interesting, clever and always readable.

"NO MOURNING FOR THE MATADOR," by Delano Ames (*Hodder & Stoughton, 10s. 6d.*).

The detection team here is one of those nice, matey, witty, man-wife combinations, Dagobert and Jane Brown. All very intelligent, tolerably cultured, liberal and sexually-tolerant. An entertaining tale of the death of an English matador, set against authentic tourist's Spain, with most

of the characters appearing out of Freud's or Kraft-Ebbing's case-books, *No Mourning for the Matador* is an ingenious adventure which is slick, lively, humorous and easy to read. But don't expect classic detection.

"DEATH ON A DUDE RANCH," by Francis Bonnamy (*Gryphon*, 8*s*. 6*d*.).

This book lacks almost everything. It is dull, the arch-crime in this type of fiction, the characters are commonplace, the detection dreary, the background uninspired, and there is no excitement in spite of some gaudy and gory technicolor scenes. What has happened to the Bonnamy of yesteryears?

"WANTED AT THE OFFICE," by Leonard Cooper (*Arthur Barker*, 9*s*. 6*d*.).

A straightforward, quiet, solid whodunit set in a prosperous wool centre in the West Riding. Appropriately, this being home-spun, Scotland Yard is not called in. The Yarnton City Police solve the problem in their own very capable, stolid Yorkshire way. This appears to be a first novel, and it is a most competent, sensible piece of work. Mr. Cooper is as sure of his craft as his Yarnton wool merchants are of the skill and knowledge of their trade.

"FEAR TO TREAD," by Michael Gilbert (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 10*s*. 6*d*.).

A rather engaging headmaster of a secondary school off the Old Kent road, "an ordinary man," gets involved in the organized big business of crime amid the black market. Being a little man with principles and

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convictions, he sees it through to its devastating (but logical) conclusion. Witty, refreshing, competently written, this book has much to recommend it.

"DEATH AMONG THE TULIPS," by Anne Hocking (*W. H. Allen*, 9*s*. 6*d*.).

Two murders amongst an elegant household in Hampstead. Perhaps not enough suspects as the ratio of murders to suspects is too high. Although patchily written (I particularly disliked the conversational exchanges between the Chief Detective Inspector and his Sergeant), the book reaches the standard whodunit level of undistinguished and uninspired competence.

"STRANGERS AND AFRAID," by Thomas Sterling (*Boardman*, 10*s*. 6*d*.).

This is a curious book, at times strangely moving, which just scrapes into the crime fiction classification. The plot is revealed by two narrators, one white, one black, who alternate chapters of autobiography. The author points the parallel. The black boy is a criminal not by intention but by reason of environment, heredity, a dubious simplicity of character and circumstance. The white man is a social worker of high ideals and a sense of failure. Interesting, but for all the powerful ingredients not altogether successful. The dénoument is cleverly concealed.

"A KNIFE FOR THE JUGGLER," by Manning Coles (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 10*s*. 6*d*.).

Manning Coles is an acknowledged master of the not very serious and unpretentious spy thriller. Tommy

Hambledon performs again with his customary *élan*. The book is perfectly readable and reasonably entertaining. At times it is amusing. But there should surely be more thrills, more suspense. The thriller here has become as unexciting as a sherry party at Somerville. Good—but mainly for aunts.

"A WOMAN IN THE SEA," by Shelley Smith (*Pan Books*, 2*s*.).

First published in 1948, this is a finely constructed story of a bored, passionate woman who turns from her husband to teach the arts of love to a young eighteen-year-old boy. The boy learns his lessons all too quickly, and what was for a short while an amusing and even idyllic relationship quickly develops into a nightmare. The sky darkens, the dream fades away, to be replaced with an odorous reality. The climax of grim murder trial and final tragedy is strongly conveyed, and, indeed, the level of moral conviction on which the book is written compels a much more serious attention than is perhaps given to more routine murder stories, where as a rule the moral problems are elementary and irrelevant.

"AN AFTERNOON TO KILL," by Shelley Smith (*Crime Club*, 9*s*. 6*d*.).

Forced down by engine trouble in the middle of a blazing hot, shadeless desert, Lancelot Jones, prim, scholarly, aggressively modern, seeks refuge in the home of a curious old Englishwoman. She bathes his tired feet, seats him on low cushions, feeds

Napoleon Bonaparte has been called the Maigret of Australia. The latest 'Bony' thriller by **Arthur Upfield** is *Murder Must Wait.*

A thriller with a Hawaiian background is **Juanita Sheridan's** *While the Coffin Waited.*

"She is perhaps the only white woman capable of handling this peculiarly complex plot."—*New York Times.*

Death at the Cascades. A detective story with a difference—the author, **Bernard Farmer,** was himself a policeman for many years.

Three **Perry Masons:**

★ **The Case of the Fan Dancer's Horse**

★ **The Case of the Vagabond Virgin**

★ **The Case of the Lonely Heiress**

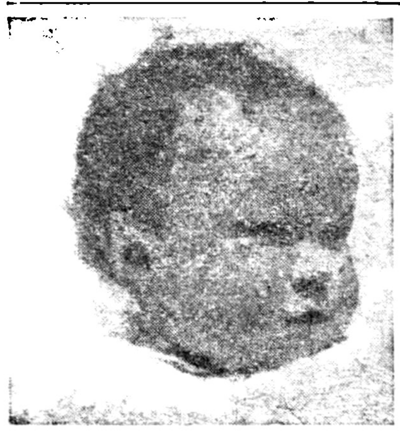
Heinemann

him meat dyed saffron on a bed of rice garnished with guavas and olives, gives him sherbert and sweet mint tea to drink and a hookah to smoke. While he takes his ease the dear old lady recounts to him a terrifying story of love and hate and murder in a respectable middle-class Victorian household that happened years ago.

She tells him the tale in a beautifully sustained neo-Victorian style, which sounds all the more bizarre in the searing desert afternoon. Everyone loved Sophia, Mr. Sheridan's second wife, too much. Her husband, her brother-in-law, her stepson. But who killed her and why? There is a double twist at the end which is original and startling. Shelley Smith has written a brilliant little book, and very enjoyable it is.

"DO EVIL IN RETURN," by Margaret Millar (*Museum Press, 10s. 6d.*).

This is a ripe example of the psychological thriller. It differs from the classical whodunit in that the characters are supposedly more important than the ingenuity of the plot, which springs from the clash of their closely detailed personalities. Very often the identity of the murderer is known to the reader from the outset, or is only perfunctorily disguised. This is not the case here, however, and Miss Millar has devised a neat, if not exceptional, mystery round the body of a murdered girl who was seeking an abortion from a lady doctor, Charlotte Keating. Dr. Keating at first refuses, but subsequently changes her mind and goes to help the girl, only to find she has been



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murdered and that her own lover and herself are in the thick of suspicion.

For those who like the psychological genre, this is an adequate example. Personally I found the constant stresses and strains a shade wearisome.

"THE DOCTOR AND THE CORPSE," by Max Murray (*Michael Joseph*, 10*s.* 6*d.*).

A competent, entirely unremarkable novel dealing with the death of an improbable millionaire on board an unconvincing luxury yacht among an unlikely passenger list. The book is mainly unexciting, not so much on account of its implausibility (that never hurt any detective story), but because of its stock characters and motives of traditional improbability. One can meet the boyish detective, and the sadistic rich demigod who humiliates and destroys people because "at heart he is really a lonely man," once too often. This is it.

"MURDER MOST FAMILIAR," by Marjorie Bremner (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 10*s.* 6*d.*).

This is a taut, well-written book of the overbearing-tycoon-murdered-in-country-house-by-one-of-large-and-sinister-family type. The problem—who slipped the Hexamethonium Bromide (or something) into Uncle Hugh's water carafe is worked out in a style of tireless orthodoxy which should please the *aficionados* by its sustained tension, though the

clues themselves are weak and the dénouement disappointingly uncomplicated.

The characters are well worn, and the writing is what might be described as Feminine American Classical—that is to say, the tale is told through the eyes of a personable young female who, nineteenth-century fashion, goes through a couple of nights of mild terror, and winds up in love and glowingly marital.

"MURDER MUST WAIT," by Arthur Upfield (*Heinemann*, 10*s*. 6*d*.).

This new Detective-Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte novel is ingeniously and, oddly enough for a detective story, charmingly motivated. The background is New South Wales among the primal aborigines—a race "remarkable for its morality, its justice, its freedom from greed"; noble, savage and changeless. The world of the medicine-man—"The Being of Magic Who Knows All, Who Can Kill With Painted Bones and Who Can Heal By Removing the Stones of Pain." The world of the legend of Altjerra, the Creator of All Things, who carries on his shoulder a huge sack filled with spirit babies with which to people the world.

The plot, which has to do with five abducted babies and a murder, is always intriguing if only moderately exciting. However, there is always Detective-Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte, with his sea-blue eyes, immaculate turn out and chronic inability to roll a cigarette, to charm the reader not already captivated by the background.

"CALLING MR. CALLAGHAN," by Peter Cheyney (*Todd*, 9*s*. 6*d*.).

In this posthumously published collection of twelve Peter Cheyney short stories, it is regrettable that the worst features of the old maestro are displayed. In fact, the book as a whole presents a rather slapdash air, as if the publishers have made a too hurried attempt to produce the first posthumous Cheyney.

In many of the stories, "A Spot of Murder" and "Double Alibi" in particular, the plots are not only tediously obvious, but the writing is surprisingly naïve, stale and wearily prefabricated. In addition, the editors of this selection have made the rather foolish mistake of choosing to place in one volume about half a dozen stories in which the murderer who is to be unmasked occupies the same status *vis-à-vis* the detective Slim Callaghan. This tends to take the element of surprise out of things.

On the credit side, it must be said that at least half the tales are very much better than most short detective stories one reads to-day. (It seems that no author can tell a good detective story under 75,000 words these days.) In particular, "Vengeance with a Twist," "In the Hall" and "The Man with Two Wives" are very ingenious and in the best Cheyney gimmick tradition. But on the whole one can only hope that the publishers have better unpublished stuff in the locker, and which display the minimum of the moronic assistant Windy Nikolls.