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FALL 1954



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## THE LONDON MYSTERY MAGAZINE

WITH EVIL NOTHING CHANGES. Passions, hates, lusts remain the same. Crimes are covered up with the same skill or lack of it. People are haunted, possessed, terrified by the same dark powers.

The season of fogs and fires, chestnuts and gaslight, gives place to the traditional benison of summer and fall—but the clear light, the balmy days and bleating lambs are but superficial and deceiving. As always among the full foliage and blowing blossoms there lurks the smiler with the knife.

The smile varies. Where "The Green Tiger" waits for its alcoholic victim in the alley it is more dreadful than whimsical; while Annie Ames debates her broom-stick flight from her tower it is macabre and pitying. The grin is frankly horrible as "Cardillo's Shadow" tries to pull him into his grave, and changes yet again to a broad laugh on board ship with "The Case of the China Dogs." Sometimes, as in the dread "House Down the Lane," and in the primeval darkness outside the circle of the firelight in "The Cave," it is barely recognizable as a smile, it has become demoniac.

The stronger the daylight, the blacker the shadow. With every new birth there must be a new death. Whilst not wishing to depress our readers we would remind them that LONDON MYSTERY MAGAZINE is still the only magazine where their regrettable thirst for the macabre and horrible will be as always fully assuaged.

EDITOR.

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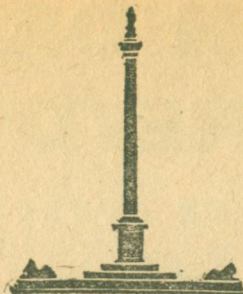
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1954



# THE LONDON MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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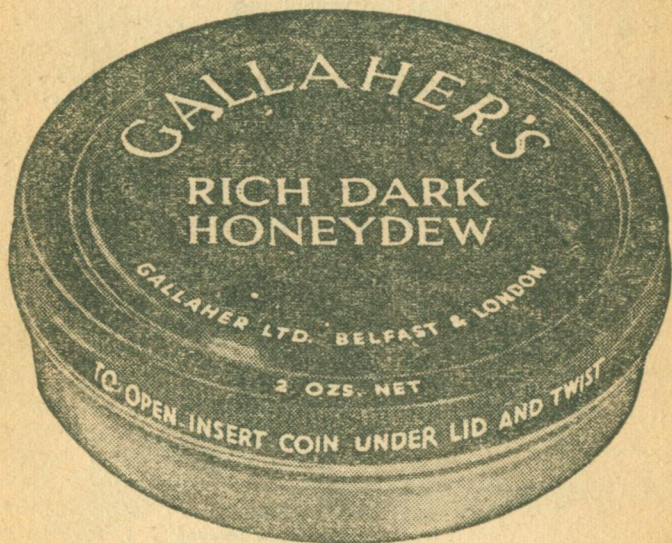
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## THE HOUSE DOWN THE LANE

JOAN PEPPER

*Illustrated by Anthony Pugh*

*Did they hear the baying of a Great Dane, or the yapping of a small Pekinese? Did they see a Children's Nursery, or a room from Madame Tussaud's? Each saw something different, but either way there was something very horrible about the house down the lane.*

**“W**HO WAS that woman you were talking to?” I asked my husband, snuggling comfortably into the front seat of the car. We had just been to a cock-tail party, and I had noticed my hus-

band having a long and animated conversation with a woman in a yellow dress. She was the first person to catch my eye as I walked into the room, both the yellow of her dress and the way her dark hair was looped over her ears had been conspicuous. The hair style had given her an old-fashioned look, which was belied by the vividness of her make-up.



"Her name is Mrs. Pilgrim, darling. She and her husband live about three miles from us along the Dorchester road. She has asked us to cocktails on Saturday. She seemed a nice little thing."

"Little?" I said, genuinely surprised. Mrs. Pilgrim must have been five feet eleven in her stockinged feet.

"You know what I mean," said my husband smoothly. "That was her husband in the odd green suit. I thought he spoke to you. He stood near you for some time."

"I saw no man in a green suit," I replied, yawning and stretching with the afterglow of just the right amount of gin. "But there was such a crush. I got landed with old Mrs. Brutton for hours. What a bore that woman is, darling."

"I tried to rescue you. I wanted to bring Mrs. Pilgrim across, but her dog wouldn't budge."

"Dog?" I said between yawns. "Did she have a dog?"

"Darling," said my husband, smiling at me in the darkness, "you must keep off the gin, you know. You must have seen her dog, it was a magnificent Great Dane."

"No," I said firmly, "I saw no Great Dane."

"Well, never mind," said Robert, "you'll see them all on Saturday."

The Pilgrims lived in a house down a lane so overhanging with trees and wild brambles that even Robert and I, who were keen walkers, had never ventured down. We were new to the neighbourhood, but decided that the Pilgrims were even newer, as we had

never heard of them nor seen them before. On the Saturday as we drove there we wondered that they had asked guests to the house before they had had time to clear the lane. It seemed impossible that they themselves had passed many times backwards and forwards without making more impression on the brambles which scratched and scraped at our paintwork and flicked dangerously across our wind-screen. It was a windy night, and the moon riding high in the skies was one moment white and full and the next disappearing behind tortured, tossed clouds. The pines and elms which bordered the lane and which towered above the flotsam and jetsam of the undergrowth bent and swayed over us like mystical dancers. We seemed to be nosing our way for hours before we suddenly turned a corner, and there was the house, low and squat, and not a lighted window to be seen.

"They are not expecting us," I said, peering into the darkness.

"It's like darkest Africa," said Robert, opening the car door. "I wonder whether it's the place." He put his head out and looked around. "It must be the place, darling; I can hear the Great Dane barking."

"Can you?" I asked, letting down my window. "I can't, but then the wind is making such a noise. Let's go and try, anyway."

Strange shadows chased each other across the lawn; the flagged path in front of the house was buried and tangled with weeds. Creepers tapped with long persistent fingers at the windows. An owl winged its way silently

round the corner of the house, then hooted eerily.

"I shouldn't like to live here," I said, drawing my fur coat round me and keeping close to Robert.

"I expect it's all right inside," said Robert hopefully, and pulled the iron bell-pull which hung by the heavy oak door. I could hear the bell echoing in the hall and then down passages. It seemed to gather momentum as it travelled, touching off other bells until the whole house reverberated with sound.

"What a noisy bell," I said lightly, and at that moment the door opened. An old butler stood there, sudden and surprising against the dark paneling behind him. His shock of white hair encircled his head like a halo, and there seemed no contrast between the colour of his hair and the deadly pallor of his skin. His lips, too, were pale, and the impression of bloodlessness was confirmed when he held out a skeleton-like claw to take my coat.

"The poor thing has anæmia," I thought. Aloud I said, "Is Mrs. Pilgrim expecting us?"

"This way, Madame," the butler replied, and I was surprised because his voice was warm and smooth, not cracked as I had expected.

Robert and I followed him across the hall. It was a taxidermist's paradise. There were stuffed animals everywhere. Lions snarled savagely from sinister corners. Rhinos glared ferociously. Stags, startled in death, reared their heads, their antlers casting forest shadows on the ceiling above.

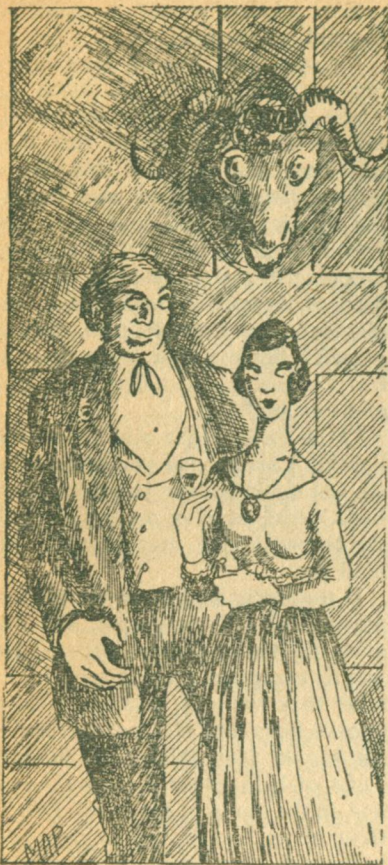
"I'm glad I'm not a child," I thought, shuddering.

Mr. and Mrs. Pilgrim were standing expectant when we came in. There was a fleeting moment when I felt as the door opened that they had been poised quite still like a tableau for some time, and that at the opening of the door they had been brought to life as if by a penny dropping in a slot machine. It was a flash of immobility, and then it was dispelled and Mrs. Pilgrim, with a graceful, flowing walk, came towards me. She had a cocktail in her hand, and was smiling.

"Mrs. Payne," she said. "How delightful. I am so glad you came, after all. Let me introduce you to my husband." And handing me the cocktail, she turned to the man standing behind her.

If the butler had given me the impression of a living corpse, Mr. Pilgrim did the complete opposite. He was an enormous man, at least a foot taller than his wife, and life seemed to ooze from him. His face was florid, his brown hair thick and shining. Tufts of hair sprouted from his ears and on the backs of his hands. Everything about him seemed to grow and to flourish, even his blood must have flowed faster than the ordinary person's. When he shook hands with me I was startled by the feeling like an electric shock which ran up my arm. He didn't shake it vigorously but only touched my fingers, and yet my arm felt as though it had been wrenched out of its socket.

Mr. Pilgrim and my husband smiled at each other, and the con-



versation began to flow. There was a huge fire in the grate; flowers everywhere, and the room had an air of being well cared for. The cocktails, dry and delicious, warmed me, and I found myself closely studying Mrs. Pilgrim. She was an amazing-looking woman. Her body had the lithe movements of a lioness, her teeth were white and strong, and each fea-

ture was perfect on its own and yet missed perfection as a whole. I couldn't think why this should be, and blamed the thick coil of hair which unbecomingly covered each ear, leaving a white parting down the back of her head. Add a scarf and a few bangles and she would have been the perfect fortune-teller. She was wearing the same yellow dress which I had seen her in before. It had an ornate belt, with gold keys hanging at intervals from it, and her fingers, strong and white, plucked at them unceasingly.

We talked trivialities for some time, like fencers finding out the form. I was quite happy; I was comfortable and my feet were thawing out. My husband was talking big-game hunting with Mr. Pilgrim, who was listening politely, an enigmatical smile on his face.

"What a terrible drive," I said brightly. "It will put off the tradespeople terribly, won't it?"

"We do without tradespeople," replied Mrs. Pilgrim, laughing a little sardonically, I thought, and bending down to stroke a small Pekinese curled on a cushion at her feet.

"How very clever of you," I said. "Have you got a frig?"

"Would you like to see the house?" asked Mrs. Pilgrim, not bothering to answer my question.

"Very much indeed," I said, getting to my feet.

"Peter, we are just going to look round the house," said Mrs. Pilgrim, going over to a table and picking up a lamp; until then I had not realized that there was no electric light.

"I expect you are very wise to keep a Great Dane," I said conversationally as we went into the hall. "You seem very isolated here."

"I have no Great Dane," answered Mrs. Pilgrim, looking at me strangely, her eyes bright and luminous in the beam of the lamp.

"Oh, I thought my husband said you had one at the party the other night."

"No," she said, shrugging her shoulders slightly, "I expect he meant my Pekinese."

I thought of the barking my husband had heard, and wondered where it had come from since there seemed to be no neighbours for miles around.

Mrs. Pilgrim led me up the stairs. They were wide and uncarpeted. Tapestries hung on the walls.

"These must be priceless," I said, gazing at them and turning a corner to see the stitching. They were faded and patchy where the sun had reached them.

"I made them myself years ago," said Mrs. Pilgrim, touching them delicately with her finger-tips.

"How did you get them to look so old," I cried, amazed and delighted, and thinking of all the pictures which had been faked in the past, and wondering if Mrs. Pilgrim was an expert counterfeiter.

"They are old," she said briefly, and thinking I had offended her I followed her up the stairs. I couldn't believe her, naturally. There was not a grey hair in her head, and the tapestries, with all the faking in the world, were old in any sense of the word.

The bedrooms were all on one landing, and as we looked into each one I saw that they were furnished more or less alike, only the colours in each were different. Each had a four-poster bed with draperies, a rocking chair, a Regency sofa, and a stool worked in petit-point in front of the dressing-table. The colours were from saffron yellow to the muted tones of old rose. Surprisingly, Mrs. Pilgrim's room was purple. I was so thunderstruck when I saw this startling and passionate colour from the floor to the ceiling that I gasped.

"Do you like it?" she asked, as though it wasn't really important whether I did or not.

"Yes, very much," I said, slowly looking round at the deep plain purple carpet, at the rich velvet hangings at the windows, at the old faded satin round the bed. "Yes, it's very spectacular."

Mrs. Pilgrim handed me the lamp. "I expect you would like to powder your nose," she said. "The powder closet is over there through that little door. I'll be back in a minute." And she glided from the room. It was long afterwards that I thought that she had no light until she went downstairs.

I went over to the powder-closet and opened the door. Inside was an old-fashioned bath with deep wooden edges, there were brown stain marks where the taps dripped. I began to comb my hair slowly in front of a tiny gilt mirror. As I drew the comb through I suddenly felt Mr. Pilgrim in the next room. I couldn't see him,

nor could I hear him, but I knew for a certainty that he was there. The same electric current which had affected me downstairs seemed now to run through my whole body. My scalp tingled and pins and needles rendered my hands quite useless. I was drawn as though by force to-

could move quite naturally, as though the current had been cut off, and as I opened the door wide I saw the bedroom door handle turn and a strip of light round the edges disappear.

I finished my toilet in front of Mrs. Pilgrim's dressing-table, wondering



wards the door of the closet, and as I put out my hand to try to open it, I could hear him breathing quite distinctly in short gasps as though he had been running. A dressing-gown fell with a gentle thud from behind the closet door, and I felt an immediate releasing of all my limbs. I

what had made Mr. Pilgrim leave my husband, and whether he had known that I had been in the powder-closet. The mirror on the dressing-table played sad tricks with me. It reminded me of Madame Tussaud's, as it changed my face beyond all recognition, and very funny it would have

been had I been in the mood. As it was, I amused myself trying to powder now a blob, now something which resembled an ant-eater. In desperation I fluffed powder all over my face, and turning, found Mrs. Pilgrim at my side. She had come silently in, and was watching my antics in front of the mirror.

"What a strange mirror," I said. "I suppose you always use the powder-closet." I turned to the mirror again, laughing, and stopped, thunder-struck. Mrs. Pilgrim was standing close to me, and yet only I was reflected, moving like a nightmare after an anæsthetic. No yellow dress, no dark head were reflected there. I turned to Mrs. Pilgrim, dismayed, but she was already at the door.

"Mrs. Pilgrim," I began, and stopped. Something about her expression discouraged my curiosity.

I was glad to return to the men in the drawing-room. They were both standing by the fire.

"We have inspected all the heads," said Mrs. Pilgrim, laughing.

"What a lovely house, Jane!" said my husband.

"Lovely, darling," I replied, dissembling. "Did you go all over it?"

"Yes, we gave it a thorough inspection, and now we must be on our way."

They waved to us from the doorway. I avoided shaking hands with Mr. Pilgrim. I couldn't bear that tingling feeling for the third time. As we climbed into the car, they shut the door, and we were left with the wind and the moonlight. White pools of moon everywhere, on the roof, on the

lawn, and on our laps as we tucked the rug round our knees.

We were silent for a while. Robert was too busy negotiating the lane, and I was deep in thought. At last, as we bumped out of the lane, I said:

"Darling, do you feel that you have just been with very negative people?"

"I was just thinking that, Jane. You know, Pilgrim never stopped talking, and yet I cannot remember a damned thing he said."

"I suppose," I said thoughtfully, "they are people without much character. They seem to have left no impression at all."

"The only thing I felt was that dog. What on earth do they have a great beast like that in the house for? It sat on my feet most of the evening."

"Do you mean the Pekinese, darling?"

"No," said Robert, turning the car into our drive, "I mean the Great Dane."

"But, sweet, they have no Great Dane."

"Nonsense, it's been sitting on my best shoes for hours."

"How funny," I murmured. "Mrs. Pilgrim told me that they had never had one. Perhaps it's his, and she ignores it."

As we climbed out of the car, I said, "Robert, what did you do when Mr. Pilgrim left you this evening?"

"When he left me?" said Robert. "He didn't leave me. I liked the house, darling. Extraordinary, though, having one room all fixed up as a nursery. They have never mentioned their children."

"Nursery?" I said weakly. "Chil-

dren? Of course there are no children. Mrs. Pilgrim said how sad it was that they hadn't any. She never showed me that room, and yet I thought I saw them all. Which was it, darling?"

"Down the steps through the baize door on the landing," said Robert.

"But those led into Mrs. Pilgrim's room? I'm sure of it. Did you see her room? Strange and purple. What peculiar taste for a woman!"

"I never saw it. There must be more rooms in the house than I thought."

It was when we were going to bed that evening we quarrelled. It was memorable because we seldom, if ever, did, and this one seemed to be manufactured out of the air. The evening had unnerved me, and I was ready to flare up at the slightest thing. Robert was in bed, and I was combing my hair in front of my dressing-table and thinking of the other mirror I had looked into that evening.

"Robert," I asked, "do you think Mrs. Pilgrim is attractive?"

"Very," answered Robert, comfortably doubling up his pillow and opening his book. "If you like little fair women."

"No, seriously, sweet. Don't you think she is rather like a gypsy?"

"Not one bit, darling. More like a little wax doll."

"Robert, don't tease me. Did you like her yellow dress?"

"I didn't see it, darling."

"Robert," I said sharply, thinking my husband must have found Mrs. Pilgrim very attractive indeed, "I really want to know what you thought of her."

"I'm telling you, darling. I never saw the yellow dress. Only the blue suit she had on, which I thought very pretty indeed. I didn't go through her wardrobe, you know," he added facetiously.

"But, Robert, she had a yellow dress on, and she is tall and dark. Do stop being a tease."

"I am not teasing you," said Robert, putting down his book resignedly. "Mrs. Pilgrim, as far as I'm concerned, is small, fair, a little fragile-looking, but very pretty, and she wore a blue suit."

"And the Pekinese was a Great Dane," I flashed at him.

"What Pekinese?" Robert raised his eyebrows.

"Robert, you are impossible," I cried. "You have been there only this evening, and as usual have noticed nothing."

"I don't think Mr. Pilgrim is good enough for her," said Robert dreamily; "an old man like that should never be allowed to marry a young girl."

"Old?" I said, exasperated. "Mr. Pilgrim isn't old. He is about your age. Robert, what is the matter with you?" By this time I was beginning to feel worried. Robert was being funny for too long at my expense.

"Nothing, my sweet, we seem to see people differently, that's all."

"But we never have done so before," I cried dismayed. "Robert, you are trying to be different."

"Do you think that woman was wearing real diamonds?" asked Robert irrelevantly.

"Diamonds," I retorted; "I didn't

see any diamonds. You are impossible." I turned and looked at him. He was looking at the ceiling in deep thought.

"Robert, what diamonds?"

"The ones on her lapel and in her ears."

"But, darling, she was wearing a cameo. I noticed it especially, because it was rather fine."

"Cameo," laughed Robert shortly, "nonsense."

I jumped into bed and turned my back on Robert, switching out my light. I was inexplicably angry, or was I jealous? Robert was either still joking or, worse still, he really had seen things differently. I lay and tossed in the darkness. Robert, unconcerned, was soon breathing regularly, asleep. The fingers of dawn were sneaking under the curtains when I at last dropped off.

It seemed a matter of minutes before I was awoken by Robert kissing me.

"Who is naughty? Who forgot to say 'good night' last night?"

"Who was teasing?" I said sleepily.

"Jane was teasing her Robert," said Robert, kissing my ear.

I jumped out of bed. I was suddenly serious.

"Robert, will you do something for me?"

"Anything to take that worried expression off your face," said Robert, coming and smoothing my brow.

"Go to the Pilgrims later in the morning, and try to bring them back for a drink before lunch. I would like to return their hospitality right away."

"Anything to please, my darling."

He went off in the car in the middle of the morning. I watched him go from the drawing-room window, and then busied myself getting the cocktail tray ready.

"Don't be long," I said as he went, "or I'll think you've eloped."

He had looked at me tenderly and a little strangely. "He thinks I'm mad," I thought, not knowing whether to be angry or amused.

The cocktails ready, I sat down to wait.

I was alone in the house, and my aloneness oppressed me. I began to feel restless. Everywhere I looked I saw the house down the lane. It was beckoning to me. I could feel its pull. I imagined I was worried about Robert. Had he really seen everything so differently?

I went to the window and fiddled with the sash. The house was calling. I could ignore it no longer. I found myself climbing through the window, dropping on to the flower-bed and fetching my bicycle from the garage. I began to pedal frantically down the drive. "What's the hurry?" I thought, and increased my speed. By the time I reached the lane I was exhausted, and the brambles tore at my clothes, pulling me from the seat. My hands began to bleed and my stockings to ladder, but I scarcely noticed. I felt Robert needed me, and wild horses wouldn't stop me. I could see the fresh wheel marks of our car. Rabbits scurried away into the undergrowth, a blackbird flew shrilly along the top of the hedgerow. "Dear Robert," I thought, "I must never



quarrel with him again if it gets me into this state."

Perspiration was pouring from my brow as I rounded the corner to the house.

Through swimming eyes I saw Robert standing by the car in the middle of the drive. He was quite still, as though in a trance.

"Robert," I called.

He started and turned a blind face towards me.

"Robert," I called anxiously, fearing the worst.

He made a vague gesture towards the house, and as I got off my bicycle I looked. I stood quite still, stiff with shock. Where the house had stood there was rubble. Only a line of foundation-stones lay to show where the house had been. It was a ruin.

"Robert," I whispered, awestruck and terrified. "What has happened? It has been destroyed in the night."

Robert looked at me blankly, and

then, raising his arm, he pointed emphatically to the house.

"Look," he said hoarsely. "Look."

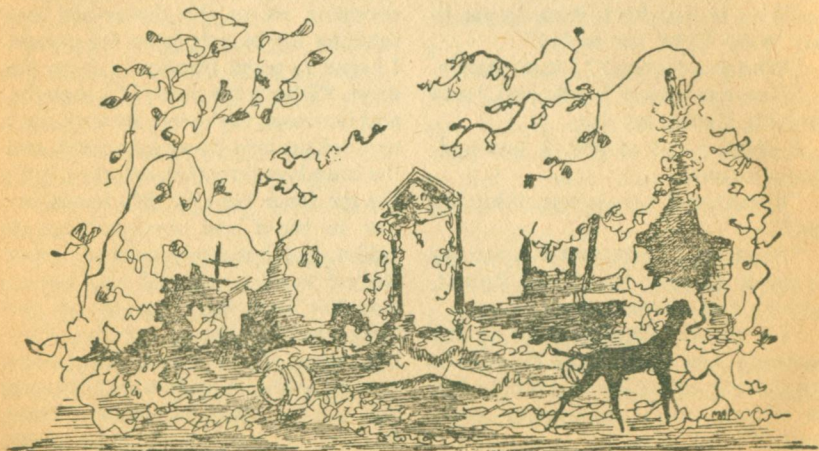
I looked again, and then gasped, clutching at Robert with both hands. Ragwort, that flagrantly virile weed, was growing from every crevice of the ruin. Luxuriant and vulgar, it nodded its myriad heads, flamboyantly yellow. It had taken possession, not now but many seasons ago. At the sound of our voices a cat rose and streaked away like a grey shadow. An ash grew from a mound in the middle, and scentless Mayweed formed a white carpet at its feet. Overhead a sparrow-hawk circled the sky and hovered.

Robert held my hands.

"There's nothing," he said, "nothing to see."

"There never was," I whispered in fear. "Not in a hundred years."

And then we both heard it. The mournful baying of a Great Dane.



# CONSCIENCE

BURGESS DRAKE

*It has been said that conscience makes cowards of us all. There may well be room for doubt on the point, but in this instance it would have been much better if it had.*



FLORIAN GROOM was large and successful. He carried his wealth with a casual ease which suggested both honesty and magnanimity. His manner was amusingly dismissive.

"I'm not one of your creative benefactors," he would say. "I've never produced anything in my life. I happen to understand finance; that's all. Finance is the art of making something out of nothing. It's a particular kind of book-keeping in which figures on paper somehow turn to cash in the bank." When free of his office he had a bluff and candid humour which made him sought after at dinner-parties where wit was the ticket of admission and shop was taboo. Yet he pretended to no wit himself. "There must be one pretty face," he would insist, when invited out for the evening, "just one! I don't ask for a roomful of dolls, but you people are so clever, and I must have something to rest my eyes on when I get dizzied by your fireworks." Hostesses who prided themselves on their select choice of guests would say, "We must have Florian; he gives just that touch of humanity, you know. He doesn't glitter, but he does glow." Perhaps it was symbolic that he was allowed to

smoke his pipe while others smoked cigars.

He was frequently a guest at the house of Tupton Somers, the editor of an important financial weekly. Somers was a little grey-haired man. His face was shrunken, not so much into lines of age as into lines of whimsicality. Girls in their twenties delighted in him because he could embarrass them so enchantingly with his genial yet penetrating banter. Yet sometimes folk found him frightening. That was when they suddenly became aware of his grey eyes, benignly puckered, fixed upon them with a searching intentness. He was a man who understood; and that may be warming, but it may also be alarming.

As a rule, he didn't concede to Florian's demand of "one pretty face." His parties were mostly bachelor parties. Five or six men gathered about the fire in his library after dinner, engaged in shrewd yet easy talk, set him upon the peak of enjoyment.

One evening the talk turned on conscience, a subject which men of wit and experience can twist into innumerable patterns.

"It is a relic of superstition," someone said.

"It's a handicap for the godly," another declared.

"And a justifiable handicap, because the godly run for a higher stake than we acknowledged infidels."

"It's simply an artificial product of the law," was a third comment. "If there were no law there would be no conscience, because in its essence it's no more than the fear of being found out."

"For myself, I don't know what it is," Florian confessed. "I don't think it bothers a man much if he's comfortable and healthy."

So for a time the theme was tossed this way and that.

"It's curious that the subject should have been mentioned at all," Somers said at length. "That is, at this particular moment." He leant forward, his face wrinkled as though in amused speculation. "You see, I happen to be trying out a little experiment."

"You always were a sly old devil!" someone remarked.

"Interested, that's all, in the behaviour of my fellow-men," Somers said.

"And what's the experiment?"

"Well, you may have heard the story. I believe it's told of Conan Doyle, but that doesn't really matter. Some 'sly old devil,' probably! But whoever he was, he sent out anonymous telegrams to twelve of his friends—all very eminent and respectable people, mind you—saying, 'Everything is discovered. Flee at once.' Or words to that effect. And the same day the whole dozen were across the Channel. So whatever conscience may or may not be, it's something pretty powerful, and it functions."

"And I suppose you're trying the same experiment?" he was asked.

He looked up, smiling like a happy boy caught out in some innocent trick.

"As a matter of fact, I am!" he admitted. "I sent the wires out this evening. They may arrive to-night, or to-morrow at breakfast. That's a little cruel on sleep and appetite, of course; but I am genuinely intrigued to know what will happen."

"Am I one of the victims?" Florian asked.

"Ah, that's telling! But, mind you, I've altered the experiment a little. My telegrams aren't necessarily anonymous. And I've varied the phrasing, too, according to circumstances. But the idea's the same. And," he added, his eyes suddenly brightening to their expression of alarming intentness, "I'm prepared to bet that the result will be the same as well!"

"Whew!" someone exclaimed, wiping his brow. "You quite frighten a fellow! I don't mind confessing I should feel a trifle perturbed if a wire like that came my way. I mean, there are things in a man's life. . . . Still, thanks for the warning!"

Florian took out his note-case and fingered casually through his money.

"Well," he said, "I can't let a bet like that pass unchallenged. What's the stake?"

"Shall we say—a hundred?" Somers suggested.

"Very gladly! But where's the list of names? I can't just take your word for it, you know. There's nothing to prevent you from running down to

the boat to-morrow and jotting down a dozen names of passengers. You see, I'm not too sure of the functioning of your conscience!"

"Here are the names," Somers told him, taking an envelope from his pocket. "But I'm not opening it just now. In fact, we'd better seal it, and you can stamp it with your ring. Then we'll meet here again to-morrow evening, and open it. But I claim till ten o'clock. That will give time for people to have left for the night boat. One or two mayn't be able to slip off in the morning."

So the matter was agreed. The envelope was sealed and stamped with Florian's ring, and set on the mantelpiece under the clock. A little bantering speculation followed and the talk passed to other things.

As the guests were leaving, Somers asked Florian if he wished to reconsider the bet.

"But why should I?" Florian countered. "I reckon that hundred pounds already in my pocket."

"I was afraid that perhaps I'd taken you unawares," Somers told him. "And I shouldn't like to feel I was pressing an unfair advantage. Besides, I thought you'd been looking somewhat meditative, shall we say, as though——"

"That's how I digest my dinner!" Florian broke in genially. "You ought to know me by now!"

"Very well! Then we meet to-morrow!"

\* \* \*

When Florian arrived home, he glanced as usual through the phone

messages that had come in his absence. There was nothing of importance, though Bateman, a broker with whom he did business, had rung him up; that might have been important, but the man had left no message. There was nothing important in the post either. He went to bed.

The next morning the butler brought him a telegram as he was having his breakfast. He slit it open with his knife, and read:

"Meet me in Paris. Urgent. Bateman."

His heart gave a thump and his temples hammered. Then he remembered Somers, and laughed softly to himself with an uneasy self-consciousness.

"No answer!" he said.

So Somers was trying out his trick on him! Yet that was unlikely. He would know it wouldn't succeed. But if Bateman had really sent that wire—and Bateman had phoned him up the evening before, but had left no message. That was strange!

He pushed away his breakfast unfinished, and drew his coffee closer, stirring it meditatively. That wire was certainly cruel on appetite.

Then again he laughed; this time more openly. Of course, Somers had sent a telegram to Bateman, and Bateman had been taken in. That would account for the phone call of the evening. Bateman wouldn't want to leave a message for anyone to read. Yet it might be as well to join him in Paris, just in case. . . .

But his mind drew up suddenly with another jolt. If the wire had really come from Somers, he would

look a fine fool playing straight into his hands.

He phoned up Bateman's home. Bateman had left for Paris by the night boat, he was told. So that much at least was true.

For a time he was divided in doubt. But he couldn't let Somers have the laugh on him like that. He went to his office as usual.

That evening the same party was gathered in Somers's library as on the evening before. There was plenty of chaff on the outcome of the experiment, but Somers insisted on holding his counsel until the prescribed hour of ten.

"I'm sorry," he said, his eyes puckering whimsically, "but I must claim my rights! Of course, I know it's a great strain on Florian with a hundred pounds at stake, but——"

"A hundred pounds!" Florian repeated disdainfully. "A hundred pounds won't break me!"

"Yet you seem remarkably agitated!" Somers said.

"Good Lord, man!" Florian puffed himself out with a somewhat assumed nonchalance. "Naturally I like to win my bets. It's a matter of pride. But——agitated! I don't know what you mean by agitated! Besides, why should I be agitated?"

"That's what's puzzling me too!" Somers told him.

\* \* \*

At length the clock struck ten.

Somers rose, and took the envelope from the mantelpiece.

"And now we shall see!" he said.

"Well, if I was one of the victims,

you didn't catch me!" Florian announced, as Somers had his fingers ready to break the seal.

"Why, did you receive a telegram too?" Somers asked him as though in surprise, his action arrested. "Because I assure you it wasn't from me."

"No, I didn't really suppose it was. But I couldn't take the risk. You're such a——"

"Such a sly old devil?"

"Absolutely! But it was from one of your victims, nevertheless. And I imagine he thought he'd better give me the tip as well."

"Give you the tip?" Somers asked in innocent perplexity. "But why ever should he need to?"

Florian started in his seat, and in an instant the atmosphere changed from amused expectancy to alert suspicion.

"Suppose you open the envelope!" Florian said hoarsely.

Somers broke the seal, opened the envelope, and drew out a paper.

"What would you say if the first name on the list was Bateman?" he asked.

Florian shrugged and held a match to his pipe.

"I think it very probably is," he said.

Somers unfolded the paper and held it out before the company.

It was completely blank.

There was a gasp of questioning. Florian, with the match in his fingers, sat staring with eyes both of anger and alarm; till the match burnt him and he threw it from him with a curse.

"What the devil's the game?" he asked.

"Just that I didn't send any telegrams at all," Somers told him. "I imagine that means that you win the hundred quid; but I don't grudge it——"

"Then Bateman!" Florian cried in genuine panic. "That wire from Bateman!" And he started forward, with hands gripping the arms of his chair. But Somers held him in his place by the spell of his penetrating eyes.

"Bateman knew the game was up!" he said, speaking with a cold distinctness. "And I knew that he knew! Forged bills, you understand! That's why Bateman is in Paris! That's why he wired you to follow him! It didn't need a very acute knowledge of humanity to foresee that move! But Bateman isn't the real culprit, so I let him go! But I didn't want the real culprit to escape, and the police are so slow! You see, they have to

make sure before they strike, and yesterday they hadn't made sure! They needed time, so I planned a little device which would give them time! Because if you'd run away last night, or even this morning——"

Florian sprang from his chair and leapt for the door. But it was locked against him.

"Let me out of here!" he exclaimed, turning savagely about, his casual geniality transformed to an enraged terror.

There was a prolonged ringing at the front-door bell.

"If you'll let me pass, I will," Somers said, speaking again in his light and whimsical manner. He produced a key from his pocket and opened the door, while Florian shrank aside like a cornered animal. "I shouldn't wonder if that's the police. I asked them to call at ten. And I'll let you have the hundred when you come out. You'll probably find it useful. . . ."



What stronger breastplate than a heart untainted!  
Thrice is he armed that has his quarrel just,  
And he but naked, though lock'd up in steel,  
Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564-1616): *King Henry VI.*

# THE CASE OF THE CHINA DOGS

GUTHRAM WALSH

*Mr. Walsh, a scientist approaching 40 who finds relaxation in painting and writing, gives us a diverting little tale in this, his first mystery.*

**T**ELL THE COURT your story from the beginning," said the judge; "the whole story, and in your own words."

The accused, a huge, red-bearded giant of a man, drew himself erect and, with hands firmly grasping the corduroy lapels of his jacket, surveyed the court with a challenging eye.

We of the jury, somewhat surprised by this unusual gesture on the judge's part, prepared ourselves to listen attentively, for the defence, so far, had been anything but convincing.

In a rich, sonorous voice he thanked his lordship and began.

"We were nine days out of Boston, your honour, bound for Rio with a cargo of china dogs. . . ."

"From the beginning, please," the judge interrupted. "Suppose you start from Boston."

"To be sure, your lordship," the man replied, and without more ado began his story.

"I had been in Boston for about three years, during which time I had established myself as a painter of landscapes and abstracts. Occasionally I did a portrait or so, if the subject took my fancy and was willing to pay for the job.

"I rented a small studio from an art and curio dealer, who carried on his business in the shop below. He used to sell my paintings for me and, occasionally, he used to get me to do some copies for him.

"One morning when I was feeling rather fed-up with life, a letter came for me from an old friend of mine who lived in Rio. She was a charming girl and a first-class painter, and she wanted me to join her in Rio, where, so she said, the prospects were marvellous. She and I were old friends who got on well together. We had, at one time, shared a studio in Paris, but at the end of our student days we had parted and each gone our separate ways. I was looking forward to seeing her again and, in my enthusiasm at the idea, even thought of asking her to marry me.

"There was, however, one great difficulty. I had no money.

"All that day I wandered about the streets of Boston thinking; thinking hard and wondering how I could raise the passage money. Ideas of the most fantastic kind came into my mind, only to be dismissed as impossible. I was beginning to feel that it was hopeless when, suddenly, I was struck by a bright idea. I would get Jorgensen, the dealer, to lend me the money. After all, he had several of my paintings as security.

"I returned to the studio and, as I had eaten nothing all day, I fortified myself with a meal of sardines and tea before going down to see Jorgensen. I found him at once, half hidden behind his heaps of junk, counting the day's takings. He greeted me with a toothless grin, and pointed a skinny finger towards a china spaniel dog which was serving as a paper-weight.

"'Mr. Kelly,' said he, rubbing his hands together as he shuffled towards me, 'do you see this little dog? Vell, I haf yoost sold a whole ship-load of them.'

"He patted the dog's head affectionately and, chuckling to himself like a child, he invited me to join him in a glass of brandy. I accepted this unexpected offer and, as soon as the opportunity arose, I told him of my wishes, and asked him outright if he would lend me the passage money on the security of my paintings.

"'My friend,' said he, 'I neffer lend money to my friends. No, but you haf come to the right vun, yes. Tomorrow I vill introduce you to Captain Fogg, who is an old friend of mine. He is sailing to Rio next veek wit' the china dogs. Now, Captain Fogg, who iss my very good friend, wishes to haf painted his portrait. Vell, there you are. You paint his portrait on the voyage for the price of your passage to Rio.'

"Naturally, I was delighted with the idea, and could barely contain my impatience and excitement. I pressed him with eager questions about Captain Fogg and his ship, but he would tell me no more. I drank

another glass of brandy with him, expressed my thanks and bade him good night. But before going upstairs to the studio, I, too, paused to pat the smooth white head of the little china dog.

"I met Captain Fogg the next morning.

"A typical old sea-dog he was; tough as nails, with a beard of tangled wire and a voice like a fog-horn. But he seemed friendly enough, in a gruff sort of way, once you got to know him.

"'Mr. Kelly,' said he, seizing my hand in a vice-like grip when Jorgensen introduced us, 'we sail on Friday with the morning tide. Ye'll be the only passenger aboard. Ye'll share quarters with me and my mate, Simpson. Now, me and Mr. Jorgensen are going to talk business. Good day to yer.'

"Well, m'lord, I sailed with Fogg on the Friday, and all went well until the ninth day.

"We ran into heavy seas during the night. Something—we never knew what it was—hit us astern in the darkness and fouled the steering. We lay by, with engines stopped, until daylight, but when it came to repair the damage we found the screws had gone.

"All day we drifted about while the steering was put right; then, with the engines useless, we took to sail.

"We were a good way off course by then, but the skipper seemed quite happy. I believe he enjoyed sailing, and he certainly knew how to sail.

"The old ship seemed more at ease under a spread of canvas than she



had ever been under steam. As the skipper himself put it:

"The old girl's found her youth again."

"We were together on the quarter-deck at the time.

"There's laughter in them sails,' he said, pointing the stem of his pipe aloft. 'That's when there's life in a ship, m'boy. When she's wild and free of the wind and waves, with the joy of life in her timbers.'

"I had never heard him speak like that before.

"Meanwhile, the weather was perfect and getting warmer every day. We were, of course, heading south and approaching tropical waters. I was enjoying the voyage and was never happier in my life. Even Simpson, the mate, was happy.

"He, Simpson, was a queer sort of chap. Not a bit like a sailor to look at. He was bald as an egg, with green eyes and a slight squint which gave him a sinister look. He prowled about the ship like a restless cat. The crew hated him. But I knew nothing against him.

"Then, one day, the wind dropped suddenly.

"We were becalmed in mid-Atlantic, miles away from the usual shipping routes and somewhere east of the Caribbean.

"The old ship, which had been racing the wind like a swallow, lay helpless with limp rigging and drooping sails, like a dying thing in a stagnant pond. The sky, which had been such a joyous blue, became a leaden haze through which the sun, like a huge bloodshot eye, glared infernal

malevolence upon us. The heat became unbearable and the sea was like molten glass. We were alone, suddenly; a handful of men in a dead world.

"There was nothing to do but wait. We were optimistic enough at first, and for the first few days I made good progress with the captain's portrait. But the silence got on our nerves. Our voices and footsteps sounded harsh and unnatural. We began to creep about and to talk in whispers. The heat sapped away our strength, and we lost all appetite for food. The water we drank tasted foul, so we took to lacing it with rum.

"Things began to happen at night.

"We heard strange sounds which we had not noticed before; queer little noises and shufflings from below where the cargo was.

"One night when the three of us were playing cards, an unearthly howling sound brought us all to our feet. It was followed by a terrified shriek. We reached the deck in a body as Mitzie, the ship's cat, streaked past with wild eyes and hair bristling. She shot across the foredeck and up the mizzen like a rocket.

"'If one o' them filthy dagoes has laid a hand on Mitzie, I'll tear out his guts,' roared the skipper.

"It was good to hear his normal voice again. Simpson, as usual, said nothing. But it was Simpson who, next morning, went up the mast himself and brought the frightened animal down again.

"Then we began to find dead rats. Every morning there would be two or three lying about the decks with

their backs broken. If Mitzie had killed them, she had certainly changed her technique. They were as big as she was, for one thing. Simpson was sure that only a dog could have killed them thus.

"We came to the conclusion that some stray dog must have come aboard and remained hidden, trapped in a hold perhaps until now; that the animal, half wild as the result of its captivity, was keeping itself hidden by day and coming out to forage at night. A thorough search was made accordingly, but not a trace of a living dog could we find. But we still came across dead rats.

"We began to imagine things; fearful, gruesome things.

"The crew became sullen and restless like ourselves. They quarrelled among themselves over trivial things. Fogg and Simpson took to carrying guns.

"We began to dread the onset of darkness and the sense of evil which spread through the ship with the mist. It was a warm, foul-smelling mist that arose nightly from the slimy, green, phosphorescent scum which surrounded us.

"Three weeks went by and still not a breath of wind.

"Our faces were hollowed and drawn; our eyes stared widely at one another and at the silent desolation around us; our clothes, few though they were, hung loosely about our limbs. We each of us began to think that the others were going mad. We took less water with our rum, for, after all, it would never do to run short of water.

"To pass the time we played cards and endless games of chess. We played for fantastic stakes which I, for one, did not take seriously at the time. It took our minds off things. And when we heard the dogs barking we pretended not to notice, lest the others should think we were imagining things.

"The captain and I were playing one night while Simpson was messing about in the cabin trying to get the wireless to work. It had been out of action for weeks, like everything else aboard that accursed ship, including the electric light. It seemed darker than usual, and the dim, flickering light of the lantern threw grotesque shadows of the chessmen across the board. They were weird figures at the best of times. Simpson said they were carved from human bones and refused to play with them, but the skipper, who had bought them with rum and tobacco from some Indian tribe up the Amazon, refused to be put off.

"'Half of 'em's niggers' bones, as you can see for yourself,' he would say, and laugh diabolically, just for the fun of seeing Simpson cross himself.

"Well, we had just finished a game when the noises started. We heard the usual growling, scuffling noises from below; noises to which we had grown accustomed and, by mutual consent, were in the habit of pretending to ignore. But this time the noise grew louder and more persistent. For a moment we stared at one another in silence, as a sound like the howl of a wolf set the hair bristling on my

neck and sent cold shivers of fear down my spine.

"Captain Fogg leapt suddenly to his feet, and brought his fist down on to the table with a crash that sent the chessmen flying.

"'It's them blasted dogs,' he said, and swore a frightful oath.

"Neither Simpson nor I said a word.

"The three of us stood for a moment, with tense faces, listening. Then, with another oath, Fogg stormed out of the cabin, gun in hand. We heard his angry footsteps thump across the deck. There was the sound of a shot, the shrill, sudden bark of a dog and then another shot.

"Simpson handed me some rum in a glass.

"'You stay here,' he commanded and, slipping the safety catch of his gun, he followed his captain out into the mist and darkness.

"I swallowed the rum, then went down on my knees to retrieve the fallen chessmen from the floor. Something cold and moist touched my cheek as I stretched out my hand for a piece which had rolled under one of the lockers. I jumped back suddenly, trembling in every limb. But there was nothing to be afraid of.

"There, in the shadows, cowering timidly against the bulkhead, was a little china spaniel dog.

"It was watching me with its large, gentle brown eyes.

"'It's all right, little fellow,' said I, and stretched out my hand to touch its head.

"It cowered back at first, fright-

ened. Then it sniffed my hand and, with its tail wagging, pushed its trembling muzzle into my palm. The little fellow was obviously hungry, for, when it saw the chessman in my other hand, it sat up and begged.

"Calling on the blessed saints to forgive me, I offered it the piece. A knight, I think it was. It took it hungrily and asked for more. When it had devoured a queen, two bishops and several pawns, it appeared to be satisfied and curled itself up on my foot. It was then that I realized that something would have to be done before Simpson and the captain came back.

"I collected the remaining chessmen hurriedly and put them back in their box. Some explanations about the missing pieces would be needed later. Meanwhile, I had to hide the dog. I could think of nowhere better than my bunk; so, without more ado I picked up the dog and, hiding it in my shirt, carried it along to my cabin, where it settled down contentedly under the blankets. I left a dish of water for it under the bunk and, closing the door carefully behind me, went back to await the return of the ship's officers, my companions, who, I regret to say, were undoubtedly out of their minds. For, after all, what men in their right senses would go out in the middle of the night to shoot china dogs?

"I am not a nervous man, your honour, but I must admit that I was getting rather worried. I helped myself to some rum, and sat down to think. There was only one course of action possible, I decided. If they

were both mad, as I thought they were, then I should have to humour them. My only hope was that they would not discover that I was sheltering one of the dogs; for there was no knowing what their reactions to that might be.

"Simpson was back within the hour.

"He had followed the captain aft, where he had found him standing before a broken crate, out of which some of the china dogs had fallen. Those which had escaped from the crate had been shot by the angry captain, and their broken fragments lay littered about among the scattered packing straw. Not until the broken crate had been hoisted aloft and slung overboard had the captain quietened down.

"Then what do you think?" said Simpson, helping himself to some rum.

"I don't know," said I, "but there seems to be an uncommon lot of noise aft."

"That there is," was the reply. "The skipper has ordered the whole cargo overboard, and he means it too. They are getting the derricks rigged above the hatches now. Between you and me," he went on, his voice dropping to a confidential whisper, "the poor old skipper's gone balmy, as you've probably noticed yourself."

"I admitted that I had suspected as much.

"After all," said he, "there was no need to jettison the whole cargo at all. Just because one crateload mutinied. If we had just picked a few out at random and shot them as an example

to the others, that would have been sufficient."

"I agreed with him and drew my own conclusions.

"There was no sleep or rest for anyone that night. I lay on my bunk, sweltering in the heat with the little dog beside me—listening to the shouts of the crew, the thumps and thuds of their activity about the deck. There were ominous splashes as crate after crate plunged into the water. It was a terrible thing, my lord, lying there listening while the poor helpless creatures were being flung to their deaths. And myself powerless to interfere at all. I was afraid for the little fellow beside me, and I dared not sleep lest he should be discovered while I slept.

"All next day and all the next night the massacre went on.

"Then came the wind.

"Not just an ordinary wind, your honour, but a raging, tearing, furious wind which came in the shape of a huge, writhing black snake-like thing. It hung from the sky and dashed screaming about the sea like a living monster, the like of which I have never seen before or since. Although, so I am told, such typhoons and the like are not uncommon in the waters about the West Indies.

"Well, we stood not the ghost of a chance.

"With but half the cargo gone and that which was left more on one side of the boat than the other, and with both the skipper and the mate as mad as two hatters, we were in a sorry plight indeed.

"The sea boiled like water in a kettle and, as the first waves struck, the old ship reared on end like a frightened horse. The cargo slithered from one end of the ship to the other, smashing the bulkheads with a noise like thunder.

"The howling of the terrified dogs, trapped in their crates, was pitiful to hear. The skipper went below to shoot a few more of them, and that's the last we ever saw of him, God rest his soul, for he was crushed to pieces at once.

"Simpson took command and ordered 'Abandon ship.'

"From a little open boat, Simpson, a couple of half-breeds and I watched the old ship rear and plunge her last. We saw two other boats, more heavily laden than ours, crash together and smash like matchboxes. One minute they were poised, each on the crest of a wave, the next minute and they were together in the trough. We could do nothing.

"We four and the little dog, which was hidden beneath my shirt, were the sole survivors.

"The storm was as short as it was violent.

"By nightfall the sea had calmed to a gentle swell, and there was a fresh breeze from the south. It dried our clothes and cooled our bodies, for it was still hot.

"We had a cask of water and ample provisions for the four of us. A sail was hoisted, and we made good speed. We were thankful for the shade of it during the next few days, for the heat of the sun was cruel in spite of the breeze.

"On the fifth day we sighted the smoke of a ship, just below the northern horizon, but we were too far off for hope of rescue by it.

"'It's a good sign,' said Simpson. 'We'll be in the Gulf Stream in a day or so and back on the trade routes. Then it won't be long.'

"And rescued we might have been, all four of us, had not a most unfortunate incident happened.

"We had just arranged the order of watch, and were eating our evening ration of biscuits when Simpson saw me slip a piece of biscuit inside the blouse of my shirt.

"'What have you got there?' says he.

"'Nothing at all,' says I.

"'You're a liar,' says he and, stretching forward, tore my shirt across.

"'It's a dog, by all the saints,' he shouts. 'Throw it overboard, or I'll shoot the pair of ye.'

"'I'll do nothing of the sort,' says I, thrusting the dog behind me.

"'Mr. Kelly,' says he, 'ye'll do as I say or, by Heaven, I'll shoot you both. For that dog's accursed,' says he, 'and I'll not have it aboard this boat.'

"Then, seeing that I was prepared to fight for the dog, he pulled out his gun and fired.

"I ducked as he pulled the trigger and, fortunately for me, the boat gave a lurch as he fired. The bullet went clean through the head of the half-breed who was sitting beside me.

"There was a horrible silence for one tense moment.

"Then, suddenly, Simpson threw

back his head with a gasp of pain and blood foamed bright red from his mouth. The other half-breed had plunged a knife deep into his back. In one terrible, last, contorted effort Simpson turned and shot the fellow as he fell. They died together.

"For hours I lay there in the bottom of the boat, dazed and bewildered, for I'm a man of peace, your honour, and not accustomed to the sight of blood and violence.

"At last I came to my senses. With some effort, for I was weak from the lack of sleep and wholesome food, I managed to tip the bodies overboard.

"I remember no more, my lord, until I was picked up delirious, with the little dog clasped in my arms.

"It was a British ship which rescued me, bound for Ireland. They treated me well, so that, by the time we made port, my health was back to normal.

"As you know, my lord, I was arrested by the Customs. But I swear on oath before you and before this court, your lordship, that the story I have told is the truth. Never did I know or even suspect that tubes of

heroin were hidden inside my little dog. And may it please your lordship that whatever the decision of this court may be, my little dog will be returned to me."

When counsels had finished their questions, the judge summed up, briefly and concisely.

He pointed out that we were not concerned with the truth or probability of the details of the accused's story. There was no doubt that the accused had suffered a severe mental and physical strain, and he, the judge, was of the opinion that the accused had given a faithful account of his experiences, real or imagined. All we had to decide was whether the accused knew or did not know that a drug within the meaning of the Dangerous Drugs Act was concealed within the dog.

Our retirement was brief.

"Not guilty, m'lord," announced the foreman.

It must have been imagination I know, but I could swear that when the verdict was given, the little china spaniel dog which sat on counsel's table wagged its tail.

# SUSAN AND THE ELDER

JEFFREY JONES

*Illustrated by Anthony Pugh*



THE ORCHARD DOOR did not open at her first tug. It was old and uncared-for, like the gnarled apple-trees and the mass of loganberries beyond.

"Susan! Susan darling!" she heard Mrs. Forbes-Wates calling her from the rose-walk. In panic she tugged at the door again.

It gave an inch or so. Some mortar fell from the wall, sprinkling her shoulders. She put her foot against the brickwork and jerked at the handle. More mortar fell, but the gap was large enough for her to squeeze through.

She did not try to shut the door behind her. Already she could hear Mrs. Forbes-Wates' heavy breathing along the orchard path.

Dodging between the larches and rhododendrons, she raced for the meadow gate.

It was all very well if you spent half your life in an office, or a vestry, or even under the grey dead masonry of the hall; to these people a garden-party was a pleasant way of spending a sunny afternoon. But when you were alive, *really* alive, to be cooped up between high wistaria-hung walls, to be crowded together, to make social noises to the most unlikely people . . .

"You'd better put in an appear-

ance, dear," her mother had said. Well, she'd put in an appearance. She'd been looked over by Lady Bantry and approved as good breeding material. She'd had her hand squeezed by fat old Eldridge. She'd even managed a giggle when Tommy Walsend grinned at her and tried to look down the top of her cotton dress.

She had put in an appearance; she had done her duty; now she had escaped at last.

She threw herself down between the bank and the hay, and flung her arms above her head. Just in case Mrs. Forbes-Wates looked through the orchard door, she would be safe here for the moment.

Her hand brushed a clump of meadowsweet. She plucked a flower, and gazed at it in admiration, breathing its fragrance.

A cabbage-white fluttered along the hedge. It settled on a cluster of foxgloves and lady's mantle. Then it was off again, unchained by social engagements, free to wander as it chose.

She stood up and began to make her way along the hedge. She shrank back in alarm as a rabbit got up almost at her feet; but when she saw what it was, she laughed and continued her walk.

At the end of the field a gate let her into the lane by the beech-wood.

She ran down it full tilt, enjoying the cool air on her face and arms. Where the lane ended she ran along the dry-stone wall, and dropped down into grazing land sloping to the brook, where ferns and lichen and scale-moss fought a prolonged battle for living-space on the damp stones and protruding roots.

To-day she did not follow the course of the stream. The afternoon was too far advanced for that. She crossed where a cattle-track led into a ford, skirted a farm-topped rise, and so down again towards the river.

Here she had her own place, where the river, rushing round an escarpment, had dug a deep backwater in the opposite bank. This was her own secluded world, where she could forget the conventions of stuffy society, where she could think thoughts entirely her own, indulge her own emotions, live her own life without restraint.

It had formed a clear pool overhung by trees and garrisoned by rocks. It was hedged and wired where two fields, following the contour of the ground, met at an angle.

It would have been inaccessible had not a dying oak tilted in the bank, raising the earth and leaving a narrow tunnel under the hedge. Through this she squirmed, heedless of the red smears of the clay under-soil.

It was cool under the trees, so she moved along the bank where the reeds and young willows did not shut out the sunlight. She sat among the reeds, savouring hungrily, as she always did, the first thrill of entry into her kingdom.

She ruffled her hair and undid the buttons of her frock, pulling it down so that when she lay on her back the sun's rays showered on her bare shoulders and breasts.

For a while she watched the glint of the water between the saplings. As the warmth seeped into her body, the river drew her to it. She undressed among the reeds, then she ran round them to a grassy slope and let herself down into the water. It rose clear and cool up her limbs, with gentle caresses as she moved out along the rocks to where they canted into a deep pool.

On the last rock she let her foot slip and splashed down, sending up a glittering shower of sundrops. She turned and floated on her back, kicking her legs, enjoying the sparkle of the sunlight as she sprayed the water round her.

Out of breath with her exertions, she took great gulps of air, feeling its freshness deep in her throat and lungs.

A kingfisher flew out from the bank. It passed almost over her, a bright blue and red dart flashing across the sky. She followed its flight with excited eyes.

High above, a lark carolled. In a nearby thicket a blackbird put its happiness into song. A sheep bleated on the hill, and in the valley a cow lowed contentedly.

These, she told herself, were *real* voices. These said something worth saying. They were a far cry from old Mrs. Highlee's inane chatter or Lady Bantry's polite murmurings. These were full and careless and joyful, and,





above all, alive. Their chorus filled her with ecstasy.

Then, as a cloud passed across the sun, she saw the old man.

Her hands flew to her breasts. Her body became cold and rigid as stone.

He was sitting in a group of young larches, propped against one of them. In the brilliant sunshine their shadow had obscured him. Only when the

cloud toned down the contrast of light had he become visible. His tattered sun-bleached clothes were an effective camouflage. His scraggy beard merged face and coat into each other. Only his eyes glinted in the light. His grinning mouth displayed uneven rows of yellow teeth.

She flushed deeply. He must have been there all the time. He had watched her sun-bathing, had seen her enter the water, had sat there grinning in enjoyment at the sight of her body.

Open-eyed she stared at him; open-eyed he stared back. He neither moved nor spoke.

She sank down in the water, and sought the rocks with trembling fingers. The shadow of the cloud engulfed her whole being. She was too frightened to speak. She was afraid that any conversation might bring him nearer.

The cloud that had disclosed his presence was the forerunner of many. With them came a cool breeze, ruffling the water and making her shiver, partly with fear and partly with genuine cold.

For nearly half an hour she waited while the sky grew dark and the air chilled. When the first raindrops fell, her teeth were chattering and her skin was rough with gooseflesh.

In desperation she considered making a dash for her clothes. But the reeds were deep in mud, and the only way out was up the grass bank within a few feet of the seated figure. She knew it was for just such a moment that he waited. Sooner or later she would have to move, and then . . .

She had heard of young girls being attacked by tramps. A small moan escaped her lips at the thought of his grotesque face, his rough hands.

"No," she whimpered. "God in heaven, no."

She cringed as heavy raindrops stung her shoulders.

Suddenly she realized that she could never go back the way she had come. Even if he left her, he might wait beyond the tunnel under the oak-tree. It was the only way through the hedge, and he could easily hide there ready to pounce on her as she emerged.

The current of the river was strong, but it was her only chance. She must try to reach the opposite bank. She could plait reeds into a dress of sorts. Anything was better than the fate awaiting her in the backwater.

She was on the point of starting her swim when the sun burst through a break in the clouds and a strong

breeze shook the foliage. Thinking she saw the old man move, she drew in her breath sharply, her limbs paralysed.

A gust of wind swept the water. This time she was sure he moved. His body leaned forward and sideways.

As the wind shook the sapling against which he rested, he moved again. Terrified, she watched him on the bank above her.

Another gust, stronger than the last, tilted him forward. He fell stiffly to a kneeling position, and slowly heeled over on to his back. As he did so, his sightless eyes stared unblinking into the sun.

His knees met the bank again. His grey face, eyes wide and sunken, looked straight into hers. For a moment he hovered while reason drained from her mind. Then his lifeless body swayed forward, and, teeth bared in a mirthless grin, he toppled rigidly down the bank towards her.



Susanna sighed, and said: I am straitened on every side: for if I do this thing, it is death unto me: and if I do it not, I cannot escape your hands.

THE HISTORY OF SUSANNA, 22.



## MURDER IN HIGH PLACES

ALISTER KERSHAW

*Illustrations by Verner Witting*

**T**HOSE ENCHANTED years — from nineteen-hundred, say, to nineteen-fourteen — appear to have been uniquely serene.

Murder was not (as now) pleasingly *less* horrific than the everyday world, but excitingly *more*! True, the period was distinguished by a disproportionately large number of killings, but somehow their effect was milder, lacking the hideous frigidity or mindless frenzy of contemporary homicides, elegantly improbable like incidents in a novel by Le Fanu or Wilkie Collins.

It is artistically fitting that the murder most characteristic, most richly expressive of that admirable era should have reached its climax just a week before the outbreak of the First World War. That the *Affaire Caillaux* took place when it did was a singularly happy chance: a month's delay would have deprived us forever of its dusty fascination.

This affair, redolent of the forgotten names of vanished politicians and reeking nostalgically of antique scandals and gossipy dramas, may be said to have begun on January 2nd, 1914. On that day M. Gaston Calmette, Director of *Figaro* and perhaps the most notable of all French journalists at the time, devoted a half-column on his front page to apostrophize the then Finance Minister, M. Joseph Caillaux, "who is preparing a positive arsenal of new laws," and adjuring him to "ask himself whether he is not, with his hate-inspired persecutions, going to dry up the sources of that solidarity, of that fraternity, of that spontaneity whereby good works increase in beauty."

The public-spirited zeal so inherent in professional journalists had not fully expressed itself in this testy admonition. *Figaro* for January 3rd carried another of Calmette's attacks on M. Caillaux, and yet another the day after; and they were to go on

appearing until the very day of the journalist's death. Just why Calmette had selected the Finance Minister (against whom he seems to have had no personal antipathy) from the lavish collection of political wrongdoers available remains unexplained. As these things go, M. Caillaux had followed an unexceptional course. He was born (in 1863) the son of the estimable Eugène-Alexandre Caillaux, himself a Deputy and, at a later stage, Senator. Joseph, at the early age of twenty-five, and for no more suspect reason than that he was the son of a wealthy and influential father, was appointed Inspector of Finances, marched sedately through the different gradings, and, ten years later, succeeded to his father's position as Deputy for Sarthe. Duly his qualities were further rewarded by promotion to cabinet rank with the office of Finance Minister under Waldeck-Rousseau.

Yet, between January 2nd and March 16th of that last gracious year, hardly a day passed without some splenetic denunciation of the man issuing from the *Figaro* office. Was it that Calmette was too lethargic to bother with a fresh victim every day? Or did the business of needling Caillaux imperceptibly develop, after the first joyous indulgence, into a little private hobby? Neither is persuasive; and it is more probable that Calmette, suffering from that occupational disease of the journalist, *folie de grandeur*, was outraged by his subject's failure to retire from office immediately after the first reproof was administered, and felt it

a point of honour to obtain that admission of defeat. Implacably, maddeningly, day after day, Joseph Caillaux was execrated, anathematized, derided. In 95 days 138 articles or cartoons directly aimed at the wretched Finance Minister appeared in *Figaro*, quite aside from incidental references to his shortcomings in the context of over-all political surveys.

Surprisingly, to those brought up in the conviction that the British Empire alone enjoys a free press, the newspapers of France have a degree of liberty which is unique; moreover, in 1914, French journalists were ever less disposed to apply self-censorship than now. Accordingly, as Calmette became more and more piqued by the Minister's failure to take a hint, his articles became more and more envenomed. By March they had reached a crescendo of ferocity which could not fail to penetrate the professional thick-skin of the most arrogant politician, even had he not been already made vulnerable by the long softening-up process which had gone before.

And even if he had nothing else on his mind; whereas, well before Calmette had initiated his campaign, both M. Caillaux and his (second) wife were all too sadly conscious of public ill-will. The latter has provided a lugubrious account of the ungrateful behaviour of those whom the Minister had so stoutly served.

"Abominable stories about [Caillaux's] evilly-acquired wealth were spread around Paris; it was said that my husband . . . had brought off a deal on the Berlin Stock Exchange at

the time of the Franco-Moroccan talks; that this deal brought him in immense sums of money; above all, it was alleged that he had sold the Congo to the German Emperor; all Paris heard about a crown worth 750,000 francs which had been given to me as a wedding present and which was supposed to have been paid for by the German Emperor. . . . One day I visited a fashionable *couturier's* establishment where there were a great many people. One of two ladies seated nearby . . . leaned over to the other and said, 'You see the lady beside me dressed in black? That's the wife of that thief Caillaux.'

These disagreeable experiences were not the first in Mme Caillaux's forty years of life. As Mlle Rainouard she had been brought up in conditions of such oppressive correctitude that a precipitate and unsuccessful marriage was ensured; and, after divorcing her husband, she had the misfortune to become attached to a man already married, and M. Caillaux's first wife was a lady with definite opinions on her own rights and other people's duties. Even the threatening proximity of this watchful figure, however, could not check the vehement passion which united M. Caillaux and Mlle Rainouard; indeed, the Minister's ardour was so great that, being briefly separated from "Riri" in the summer of 1909, he so far forgot his professional caution as to put it in writing. Under date September 18th, 1909, on paper incongruously headed *Chambre des Députés*, he sent "*Ma Riri bien-aimée*" a touching amalgam of political aspirations and happen-

ings and amorous protestations, asserting that "there is only one consolation" for the stresses of public service—"to think of my little one, to see her in my arms as she was at Ouchy (God! Those delicious moments!). . . ." "A thousand million kisses on every part of your adorable little body," concluded the Finance Minister, evincing a fine familiarity with high figures.

On the following day these sentiments were lengthily recapitulated in another letter; and the day after that M. Caillaux brooded briefly on his indiscretion and wrote cagily to Mlle Rainouard to ask that the documents be returned—a request which, with whatever heart-burnings, was promptly and honourably obeyed. M. Caillaux breathed again.

One's own letters tend to read well, and it is not easy to destroy indubitable masterpieces. M. Caillaux therefore placed these explosive papers in a drawer in his desk, which he locked, and thereafter felt he might relax. It was an extravagantly optimistic notion with the first Mme Caillaux in the house. This lady, who moves through the history with an air of virtuous malevolence, had for a long time known of her husband's extramarital interest, and had been observing his actions with that alert attentiveness which comes almost instinctively to betrayed wives. Moreover, no bourgeois scruples inhibited her domestic espionage. Learning, by chance or skill, that M. Caillaux had locked away some documents, she surrendered to an imperious need to study whatever was being kept from

her. During the night she opened his desk with a duplicate key, read the letters, rejoiced, and retained them.

Discovering the theft, Caillaux had no difficulty in deciding on the culprit. His wife admitted the charge with smiling candour; and, in answer to his miserable enquiries, added that the papers were in a securer place than he had chosen, that it was her intention to show them to Mlle Rainouard's father (who would doubtless disinherit his erring offspring), to Mlle Rainouard's ex-husband (who, on such evidence, could certainly regain the custody of his daughter) and, for good measure, to the daughter herself, at this time a child of fifteen.

Skilfully choosing the moment when poor M. Caillaux was most gapingly at a loss, his wife revealed that there was an alternative to the carrying out of this pretty programme. The Minister had indicated, from time to time, his desire for a divorce: that must stop. There must be a final breach with Mlle Rainouard. He must undertake to strive for stability within his present marriage.

The wretched Caillaux, figuring as that standard clown—the man of public power and domestic impotency—struggled briefly and ineffectually against his lady's ruthless terms and then capitulated. Mlle Rainouard, reversing the conventional role of the sexes in such a crisis, set off for other scenes in search of forgetfulness. Early in November, being then in Florence, she was advised that she had no more to fear

from the vengeful Mme Caillaux, that the compromising letters had been burnt, and that the Caillaux couple were reconciled—or, at any rate, resigned.

But the rickety *ménage* could not endure for long. There were disputes, scenes, tantrums again, and in February of 1911 M. Caillaux, on grounds no longer discoverable, began divorce proceedings. His wife waited until just before the case was to be heard, and then blandly mentioned a letter which she had in her keeping, and suggested that, if it were to be made public, the Finance Minister might find himself a little embarrassed. It had been written her by M. Caillaux in happier times—on July 5th, 1901, to be precise—and it did indeed contain one sentence which might be misconstrued by hostile elements.

M. Caillaux was clearly one of those who, for their own sakes, should be restrained from putting pen to paper. After a few conventional connubialities, came the following:

"I have had a very gratifying success: I have *crushed* the Income Tax Bill while appearing to defend it, thereby pleasing the Centre and the Right without too much upsetting the Left. . . ." It was signed, "*Ton Jo.*"

Such a revelation of political morality might doubtless have been made by any other member of the Government, Right, Left or Centre, and the somewhat cynical avowal could never have exactly *surprised* the adult French electorate. On the

other hand, an ingenious publicist could obviously do a lot of damage to M. Caillaux on the strength of so candid a confirmation of what everyone knew, anyway.

All things considered, Mme Caillaux hinted, was the Minister so set on a divorce as he had thought? The meekest victim of blackmail is likely to revolt in the end; so it was now; in the words of Mlle Rainouard (forgetting an earlier occasion), "M. Caillaux was not a man to give in to a threat of this sort," and he answered stoutly that he intended to proceed with the divorce. He agreed, however, if Mme Caillaux surrendered the letter, to substitute a "*divorce d'accord*" for whatever form had been previously decided on; more exactly, it was agreed by the high contracting powers that all letters written by either party, "*Ton Jo*" of course among them, should be destroyed. Once again, Mme Caillaux gave her word of honour that she had kept neither copies nor photographs. On so amiable a note of mutual confidence, the divorce took place, and in October of the same year, 1911, Mlle Rainouard became the second wife of M. Caillaux, his first being thereafter distinguished from her successor as Mme Gueydan-Caillaux.

From a purely domestic point of view, the Finance Minister's second marriage was altogether harmonious—a formal prolongation, one can imagine, of those delicious moments at Ouchy. Socially, too, the household was a success: such intoxicating names as those of the Princesse

de Monaco and the Princesse Estradère betoken the worldly felicity enjoyed by M. and Mme Caillaux; and politically M. Caillaux, since he now occupied the position of President of the Council, could likewise view himself with approval.

One poisonous fact worked corruptingly in this bland mixture. Within a few weeks of the marriage M. Caillaux had the mortifying experience of hearing from a subordinate that certain letters, allegedly written by himself, were being offered around to selected journalists and politicians. Jocularly and tactlessly his informant quoted one or two phrases, and with horror the Minister recognized them as being indeed of his authorship. The passages cited were variously from the two letters sent to Mile Rainouard and from that addressed in 1901 to the first Mme Caillaux.

From now on M. Caillaux and his lady lived in miserable expectation of the Minister's too great political acumen and too previous attachment to his second wife being made public. In a telephone conversation with his first wife, the latter delicately evaded the problem of how, since she had sworn that she had kept no copies or photographs, these copies were nonetheless in existence; she commiserated with the distraught Minister; and trailed off into light-hearted irrelevancies. . . .

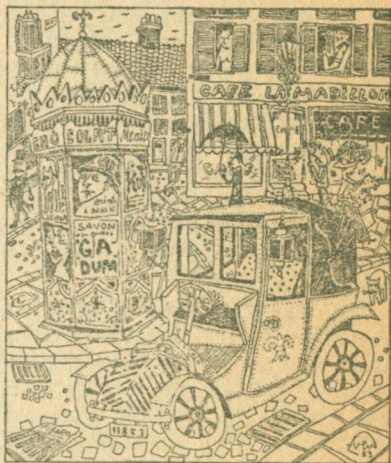
When, at the beginning of 1914, Calmette initiated his ferocious campaign, all the fears which M. Caillaux and his wife had so long known were inflamed. Supposing this unfor-

giving enemy, whose bile visibly increased day by day, suppose he were to obtain possession of these documents—to publish them? It seemed all too probable. Had not the Princesse Estradère told Mme Caillaux that she, the Princess, had been told by “a friend” that Calmette had told him, “the friend,” that he, Calmette, was eager to get hold of the letters? The evidence was conclusive.

On March 13th the apprehensions of M. and Mme Caillaux received horrific confirmation. Calmette’s customary half-column was expanded for the occasion, and the most brutal blow yet levelled at Caillaux was spread over the entire front page. “This is the first time in my thirty years of journalism,” wrote Calmette piously, “that I have published a private letter, an *intime* letter, without regard to the wishes of the recipient, the owner or the writer.” But, he went on, in duty to the high cause to which he was dedicated, he had sunk his scruples. There, in print and in facsimile, was M. Caillaux’s letter to his first wife, with its disastrous admission, “I have *crushed* the Income Tax Bill while appearing to defend it,” and its somehow ludicrous subscription, “*Ton Jo.*” Beside the facsimile reproduction was another scrap of Caillaux’s handwriting for purposes of comparison; enclosing these illustrations was a dissertation in Calmette’s most envenomed and sanctimonious vein; and on page 3 was a cartoon by the merciless Forain—a final and gratuitous crow of triumph. Friday the Thirteenth was a bad day indeed for M. Cail-

laux; it was to prove none too benevolent for M. Calmette.

The next morning, *Figaro*, along with most other papers, carried a dignified reply in the third person from the Minister; but there was no unsaying that regrettable boast: “I have *crushed* the Income Tax Bill while appearing to defend it,” Calmette quoted derisively; it was all he needed to do, no matter what arguments *Jo*—the nickname was irresistible—might put up.



At 22 rue de Tocqueville, the Caillaux “residence,” anguish, fury and foreboding seethed alternately in the wretched couple. What had already happened was bad enough; but worse could be expected. Having printed this letter, what was more likely than that the dreadful Calmette would proceed to publish those others, those imprudent communications which, in his ardour, the amor-



ous Minister had written to Mlle Rainouard five years before? Besides, what exactly had he said in them? Neither he nor his lady could quite recall. He had been in an exalted frame of mind—he might have made God knew what unwise observations on the political happenings of the time—and “a thousand million kisses on your adorable little body”—that, at least, he could remember.

M. and Mme Caillaux's friends were, understandably, no less intrigued by the business than were the victims; and at a luncheon party given by the Princesse de Monaco and attended by Mme Caillaux two days after Calmette's publication of the letter, discussion centred on the one topic. It was here that Mme Caillaux was counselled to seek legal advice as to the possibility of restraining the journalist from further injuring so estimable a couple.

The suggestion was, at worst, an alternative to the impotent fretting which had so far been the sole resource of the Minister and his wife, and, accordingly, Caillaux requested an interview with his distinguished friend, the judge M. Monier. There was no time to waste, and as President Monier was free only at an hour when M. Caillaux was obliged to be about the business of the Republic, it was Mme Caillaux who received the judge, and to her that he explained how there was no way in which she could prevent Calmette from continuing his campaign. Mme Caillaux conveyed Monier's advice to her husband, and his despair

was complete. After a moment's desperate reflection he burst out with, “Very well then! If there's no solution, at least I won't let him attack you with impunity—I'll let him have it!”—employing the vulgar and ambiguous phrase, “*Je lui casserai la gueule.*”

“My God, when?” asked Mme Caillaux agitatedly, “To-day?”; receiving the dark reply, “In my own good time; it's not your concern.”

The French language is popularly supposed to be one of infinite precision, as misleading a legend as any; thus, M. Caillaux's maddened “*Je lui casserai la gueule*” could mean anything from assassination to a black eye. Mme Caillaux opted for the former translation. It was the morning of March 16th, and the indefatigable Calmette had headed his column for that day “Comic Interlude.” The use of the word “interlude” seemed to the distraught Caillaux to carry a menacing hint that the publication of those other letters was imminent and his wife shared the apprehension. Clearly then—so Mme Caillaux must have reasoned—her husband could only have meant that he intended to *kill* Calmette. Appalling thought! She even meditated on committing suicide, she later attested, although just how this would have solved anyone's problem is not apparent.

In certain *milieux* the tradition of duty dies hard; so, at this fateful moment, M. Caillaux was mindful of his obligations to the government of the country, and Mme Caillaux, in the midst of her agonized specula-

tions, bore in mind that she was to be hostess at a dinner party the next night, and that she still had not located a suitable cook (the servant problem links the two epochs). Let Rome in Tiber melt, the cuisine must be impeccable.

Abiding by these deeply ingrained faiths, Mme Caillaux presented herself, towards three o'clock in the afternoon, at an employment agency, interviewed a number of "young persons," settled on one of them and gave her appropriate instructions. And all the time her mind achingly revolved the abominable situation confronting her husband and herself. It was at this agency that "the tragic thought first occurred to me, and I said to myself, 'If I were to go along to *Figaro*?'"

A second thought struck her, unconnected, she insistently protested, with the first:

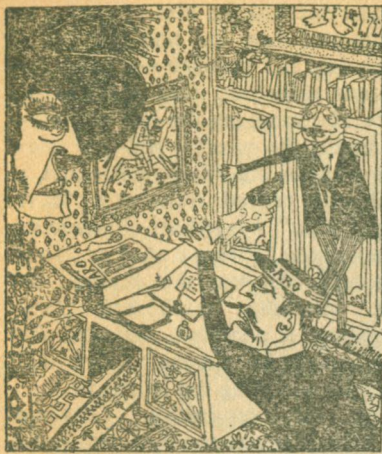
"I ought to explain that I always carried a small revolver; it was a habit inculcated in my sister and myself by our father [*sic*]. . . . I had mislaid my revolver some time before and had been intending to replace it. I had asked my husband, should he be going to the gunsmith" [and what is more likely?] "to get me one, as the electoral campaign was due to begin and I should be travelling about alone. . . ."

The account eventually given by Mme Caillaux of her movements throughout that day was exceedingly subtle, not to say tortuous; that portion relating to the purchase of a revolver, however, may be summarized as follows:

She had had the idea of calling on Calmette; then she had thought of replacing her revolver—a quite fortuitous reflection; *then* she had the idea of combining the two notions—of taking the revolver with her when she went to the *Figaro* office and, if Calmette proved refractory, "causing a fuss" by—what? Flourishing the weapon? Firing a shot or two in the air? She was not explicit; but the carefully established time-sequence, if accepted, indicated that she had not bought the revolver with the idea of killing the journalist.

At the gunsmith's, Gastinne-Renette, she was received with polite rapture befitting her station. A deferential salesman displayed his goods, learnedly contrasted the merits of different makes and finally it was suggested that she try a Browning. This proved admirably suited to whatever requirements the lady had in mind, and she expressed her satisfaction. The revolver was rather pleasingly charged to her husband and Mme Caillaux "took it with her." She had some business at the *Crédit Lyonnais*, and remembered to attend to it; then she returned to the *rue de Tocqueville*.

She was still undecided, according to her subsequent telling of the story, as to whether she would, after all, "go to *Figaro* or [whether] to a tea-party to which I had been invited," and she cited in proof of this exquisite indecision the fact that she went up to her room and changed her gown. Would she have taken the trouble to change into an elegant afternoon frock merely in order to



go and kill a journalist? Absurd! Tea-party or homicide? She was still considering when she came downstairs.

The moment at which she did make up her mind to visit Gaston Calmette remains unrevealed. Before leaving home she wrote a letter to her husband: "My beloved husband, When I told you this morning of my interview with President Monier, from whom I learnt that in France there is no law to protect us against the libels of the Press, you told me that one of these days you would let the ignoble Calmette have it (*tu casserais la gueule à l'ignoble Calmette*). I know your decision is irrevocable. From then on my mind was made up. I will see that justice is done. France and the Republic have need of you. I will perform the task. If you should receive this letter it will mean that I have obtained or tried to obtain justice. Forgive me, but

my patience is at an end. I love you and I embrace you with all my heart. Your Henriette."

It was getting late. Whether filled with solemn resolution or still indecisively wavering, Mme Caillaux drove to 26 rue Drouot, where the *Figaro* offices were then situated, and asked the receptionist, Etienne Nicet, to conduct her forthwith to M. Calmette. The journalist was not at the moment in the building and Nicet invited the caller to wait. She did so, amiably smiling, but declined to give her name. "M. Calmette knows me and will see me," she reiterated whenever Nicet begged for her identity. In the end a compromise was agreed on: an envelope was produced, Mme Calmette placed her card in it and handed it sealed to Nicet.

Somewhat more than an hour passed while Mme Caillaux sat composedly in the hall, and it was towards the end of her vigil that she claimed she had heard a significant conversation between a group of men standing nearby. These men later passionately affirmed that no such conversation had taken place, but it is nonetheless necessary to record Mme Caillaux's assertion that one of them gleefully boasted how "to-morrow we've got a big story on Caillaux." During the *Instruction* Mme Caillaux assured the judge that "the revelation shattered me. Simultaneously my name was loudly called out. 'Show in Mme Caillaux,' ordered M. Calmette. Realizing that my identity was now known, I suddenly understood how indiscreet I had

been. I completely lost my head."

But this aspect of her story, too, found no confirmation. Calmette had entered his office just after six o'clock by another door, accompanied by M. Paul Bourget, the distinguished author and member of the Academy. This Immortal gave evidence that he had chatted casually with Calmette and that they had then both made to leave. Nicet caught up with them at the head of the staircase, and presented the envelope containing Mme Caillaux's card, remarking that the caller had been waiting a long time and seemed to be on urgent business. Calmette shrugged irritably in the fashion of important men tediously importuned by the world, and ripped the envelope open. Presumably he felt some astonishment, but he gave no expression to it and handed the card wordlessly to Bourget.

"But you won't see her?" the Academician said apprehensively, receiving the fateful answer, "Of course. I can't refuse to receive a lady." He nodded to Nicet and returned alone to his room. Mme Caillaux's name was not pronounced once.

An office-boy, Adrien Sirac, led the visitor to Calmette's office and withdrew, closing the door.

"No doubt you are surprised at my visit," Mme Caillaux began, and her thumb pushed over the safety-catch on her Browning just as the affable young man at Gastinne-Renette had taught her.

"Not at all," Calmette replied with civil inaccuracy, and as he walked

around behind his desk added, "Please be seated."

Sirac still had his hand on the door-knob when the first shots were fired. He flung himself into the room, caught a glimpse of the journalist crouched behind the desk and, before he could prevent her, Mme Caillaux fired again.

Calmette had not yet fallen as Sirac grasped Mme Caillaux's arm and wrenched the revolver from her. "I am Mme Caillaux," she is alleged to have remarked magisterially, and then, a mite incongruously, "Don't be afraid." Calmette slumped heavily to the floor.

It seems extraordinary, but shots are not often heard in newspaper offices, and the sound brought a large section of the *Figaro* staff to M. Calmette's office. Four of the shots had struck him, but he remained conscious. He was lifted into a chair, his clothes were loosened, and a director of *Figaro*, who happened also to be a doctor, gave such aid as was possible. "Forgive my causing you so much trouble, my friends," said Calmette with almost Chesterfieldian *politesse*.

On occasions of this sort even those on the spot can be pardoned if they are not unanimous as to happenings and sayings, and there were the usual variants on Mme Caillaux's statements during the hullabaloo. All were agreed that her mien was calm, not to say indifferent, but whereas M. Giraudeau, one of the newspaper's executives, understood her to remark portentously, "It was the only way to put an end to it all,"

an office-boy, Rouleau, asserted that "with a most authoritarian air, with great sang-froid," she had said, "There is no justice—so I gave it." Another office-boy recollected her as having been more explicit: "I am Mme Caillaux. . . . It is infamous! There is no justice in France, I had to obtain it for myself." Most memorable of all the observations ascribed to her was that quoted by another *Figaro* official: "Let me go, I am a lady, I am Mme Caillaux. I have my car waiting downstairs to take me to the police!" She thoughtfully cautioned those present to be careful with the revolver—"It might still have a bullet in it"—and they were possibly not as accustomed to fire-arms as herself.

By this time the police had arrived and Mme Caillaux prepared to utter once more: "There is no justice in . . ." but was coarsely interrupted by one of the *Figaro* staff: "Be quiet, Madame. After what you've done, the least you can do is to remain silent." Mme Caillaux eyed him coldly and remarked with some irritation, "I was not addressing you." She turned and led the assembled police down to the waiting car.

Gaston Calmette had already been removed to the hospital at 26 Boulevard Victor Hugo at Neuilly, where he was operated on. Of the four bullets which had wounded him three had caused relatively minor harm, but the fourth had lodged in the abdomen and caused a severe hæmorrhage. A little after midnight he died.

As a means of keeping herself and

her husband out of the public eye and specifically off the front page of *Figaro*, Mme Caillaux's action must be considered inadequate. On the morning of Tuesday, March 17th, the Caillaux-Calmette feud had become top news, not only throughout France but the world. Even London's *Evening Standard* chronicled its opinion that one could not imagine the wife of a British Cabinet Minister behaving in such a way; while *Figaro* itself, black-bordered, employed nearly three of its pages in covering the incident.

"His excellent rule was to do harm to no one," announced the management of *Figaro* in a lyrical obituary, "and when he was obliged, in defence of his principles, to attack individuals, he suffered bitterly. At such times he sacrificed his admirable forbearance and the gentleness of his nature to the public good. . . ."

"We loved him. We find it impossible to imagine that we shall never see him again, that he has been taken from us—that he is dead.

"We were like his own family; we weep in our grief.

"He was charming and good. . . ."

"We weep, shuddering at the horror of the crime."

At which point the reporters took over, describing the crime and the criminal with suitable revulsion.

If Mme Caillaux's action had been devised to further the Minister's political career; then, in that respect too, it can only be regarded as having failed in its purpose. On March 18th, M. Caillaux handed in his resignation, and the debates in the

*Chambre des Deputés* indicated that the stability of the Government itself could hardly be considered a safe bet. Calmette had got his own way at last.

Meantime, in the columns of the bereft newspaper, the list of those who had signalized their horror and sympathy continued to grow: S.A.R. le Duc de Madrid, M. Saint-Saëns, La Duchesse de Rohan, S.A.I. le Prince Bonaparte, Le Marquis de Castellane, Mme Sarah Bernhardt, M. Edmond Rostand—what deliciously involved social and political hatreds must have been betokened by the epic catalogue.

Mme Caillaux made her first appearance before the *juge d'instruction*, M. Boucard, on March 21st. The four-month period of the *Instruction* did not reveal any vital facts apart from those already noted, and it is unnecessary to record the course of M. Boucard's conscientious toil in any detail; but it is perhaps important to mention another of the circumstances surrounding the killing which was now remembered by Mme Caillaux. Calmette's office, she attested, had been very dimly lit when she entered it, and this had aggravated her hysterical condition still further. The assertion was added to M. Boucard's massive dossier.

It would be possible, for one unacquainted with the Caillaux case, to read an entire day's stenographic report on the proceedings without ever guessing that homicide was an issue at all. During its eight days the trial was variously transmogrified into an action for slander, the hearing of a

divorce suit, an enquiry into the Freedom of the Press and something resembling a debate in the *Chambre des Deputés*. There is reason to think that had this not been so, had the *Partie Civile* been less concerned to discredit Caillaux politically and personally, then the jury, undistracted from the naked fact of a killing having taken place, might have returned a different verdict.

As it was, from the second day onwards, the jurymen were smothered with such stupefying histories of political machinations and marital disputes (between the Minister and his first wife) that the second Mme Caillaux's contretemps tended to be forgotten.

The trial opened on Monday, July 20th, at 12 noon, with M. Jean-Marie Albanel presiding, Maître Labori as Counsel for the Defence, Maître Chenu representing the *Partie Civile*, and M. Herbaux as *Procureur-Général*, before the Assizes Court of the Seine. And it opened in a conventional enough manner, with the accused, dressed in the obligatory black, confessing to being Mme Caillaux, née Geneviève-Joséphine-Henriette Rainouard, born December 6th, 1874, at Rueil (Seine-et-Oise). Then, in response to President Albanel's questioning (the considerate tone of which provoked unfavourable comment in *Figaro* next day), she began one of the most skilful self-justifications on record: tenderly she spoke of her childhood, discreet, guarded, rhapsodically of her marriage to M. Caillaux; then, with lowered voice and faltering accent,

she recounted the history of that persecution which she and her husband had undergone at the hands, first of Mme Gueydan-Caillaux, and, secondly, of M. Calmette. Precisely punctuating her statement with catches of her breath, gestures of anguish, and a recurrent unsteadiness of stance, she led her rapt audience towards the climax: the Princesse de Monaco's luncheon party and her subsequent interview with M. Monier. It was in connection with this latter event that she was able to incorporate a brief exchange which cannot have failed to captivate every virtuous person among her hearers:

"I told my husband of the conversation which I had had with M. *le Président* Monier. He exclaimed, 'Very well, then; if there's nothing to be done, at least I won't let him attack you with impunity; if it's like that, *je casserai la . . . à M. Calmette,*' employing a somewhat stronger expression than '*je lui casserai la figure.*'"

This extreme delicacy on the part of a murderess seems particularly to have irked Counsel for the *Partie Civile*: "There's nothing to stop you saying it: *la gueule*: it appears all through the dossier."

Even the affable President Albanel joined in the general effort to persuade Mme Caillaux out of her un-French prudency: "He said, '*je lui casserai la gueule,*' yes?"

Mme Caillaux winced. "It embarrasses me to use such a phrase in public."

"She wrote it without any trouble," snapped Maître Chenu, recalling the

accused's last note to her husband before setting off to see Calmette.

The lady in the dock eyed him coldly. "There are things which one writes to one's husband," she pointed out, "which one does not wish to say in public." A murmur of sympathetic assent rose from her hearers.

This vital point having been expertly won by Mme Caillaux, she proceeded with her story, finding herself too flustered (perhaps by the public nature of her utterances again) to give any clear account of the actual killing. She recovered sufficiently, however, to speak out ringingly when she reached her peroration:

"Try and think how I shall be conscious all my life of having, even though I never wished it, caused a man's death. How can anyone imagine that I ever intended to commit such an action? But, moreover, apart from the problem of conscience, which is terrible enough, there is a question of logic." (The Court readied itself gratefully.)

"That a woman who has been deprived of everything through a man, who feels herself to be ruined should have the idea of killing in order to revenge herself—that is conceivable. But I, I had everything I desired, leaving aside the outrageous slanders and the threatened publication of the letters. . . . Why should I have wanted to kill? To kill a man—that," explained Mme Caillaux, "is a frightful thing, appalling. I never said that death should be the punishment." She swayed slightly and sat down, while the *agents de police*, MM.

Cadestin, Gabriel and Boulai, successively reported on their capture.

Stripped of its effective rhodomontade, Mme Caillaux's defence may be summed up as follows:

She had acted without premeditation and under great provocation; the murder was accidental, anyway; the loud pronouncement of her name, the malevolent discussion of her husband which she had overheard while waiting for Calmette, the dim and sinister light of the journalist's room had all contributed to upset her; the gun went off by accident—"the bullets seemed to follow each other automatically"—due to her too brief acquaintance with that particular make.

The sustaining of so profuse—and even contradictory—an array of explanations was inevitably difficult, and on the second day this became rapidly apparent. Adrien Sirac deposed that Calmette's office had been well-lit as normally, and Etienne Nicet was emphatic that at no point had Mme Caillaux's name been called out. Additionally, Louis Voisin, who had been among those in the foyer who were supposed to have discussed "to-morrow's big story on Caillaux," was in the court to proclaim that no such conversation had ever taken place.

"M. Voisin's friend asked him a question," Mme Caillaux explained carefully, "which attracted my attention because he used a term which was unfamiliar to me; he said, 'Is the sheet [feuille] ready yet?' M. Voisin replied, 'No, it's only six o'clock. Anyway, we've got a big



story on Caillaux for to-morrow.'"

"False, arch-false!" yelled M. Voisin, if one may be permitted so to translate the admirable term "archi-faux." And his companions were in accord.

The most awesome evidence produced on this second day was, of course, the signed statement of "Poincaré (Raymond), cinquante-trois ans, Président de la République Française, demeurant à l'Elysée," who revealed that he had made successful (but too long delayed) efforts to establish that Calmette had no intention whatever of publishing further letters written by Caillaux; and this was wholly confirmed by other representatives of the newspaper.

The trial proceeded ponderously on its way. M. Caillaux's letters were read and proved a sad let-down; the combined wisdom of Doctors Paul, Socquet, Pozzi, Delbet, Hartmann,



Cuneo triumphantly established that Calmette had indeed died, and undoubtedly from "a wound which had been inflicted slightly above the left-hand outer surface of the pelvic arch, above the hip-joint," the bullet "then penetrating the ilium and traversing the whole abdominal cavity, thus causing a lesion in the right-hand iliac artery which had resulted in a severe hæmorrhage." This scientific confirmation that they hadn't buried a living man or arrested Mme Caillaux without reason must have greatly eased the minds of all concerned.

On July 29th, 1914, *Figaro* headlined "The Shameful Verdict," noting it as follows:

"First Question: Is Mme Caillaux guilty of having, at Paris on March 16th, deliberately murdered Gaston Calmette?"

"And the Foreman of the Jury replied: On my honour and conscience, before God and man, the jury's decision in NO.

"Second Question: Was the alleged murder committed with premeditation?"

"And the jury replied: NO."

Let us take the case for the Defence point by point, together with the counter-arguments of the Prosecution, in the hope of discovering how it was that Mme Caillaux walked freely from the court-room to a champagne party celebrating her acquittal.

1. Her motive had been to prevent *Figaro* from publishing the two letters addressed to her by M. Caillaux in 1909; *BUT* Calmette did not in fact possess these letters, and no effort seems to have been made to check on this essential fact; on the other hand, there was reason to think that he *might* possess the "Document Fabre," a report implicating Caillaux in a serious political scandal, publication of which would have been disastrous as the appearance of Caillaux's rather pathetic love letters could never have been.



# SUFFER A WITCH

PETER SHAFFER

*Illustrated by Peter Kneebone*

*Peter Shaffer is an Englishman at present working in New York. He has written plays, scripts for the BBC, an opera and detective novels, in collaboration with his brother. Here he tells a grisly little story about a crazed old woman who believed there was witches' blood in her family and acted accordingly.*

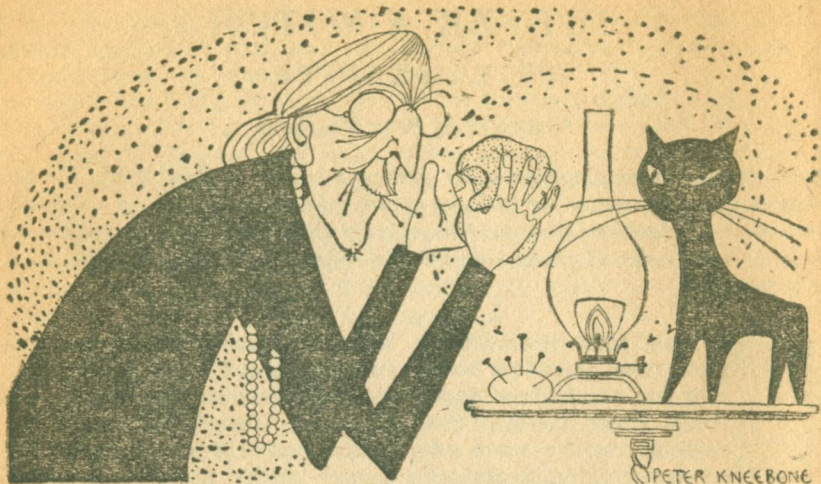
**I**T WAS MRS. FROBISHER'S fault: she shouldn't have said that word about Miss Ames. Annie, you see, was sensitive on the score of witches, both on account of her appearance and her ancestry. After all, they had burnt a Judith Ames back in 1608 for doing something unmentionable to babies; you can find it set down in the Assize reports of the county, as easily as Annie did to touch off her tragedy. And if only Mrs. Frobisher had kept quiet each morning as they met in the village shops—or just confined herself to her usual crude mimicry—the poor creature would never have given even a thought to family history.

Perhaps you'll say this is being too hard on Mrs. Frobisher; that Annie deserved what she got, when all is said; and perhaps you'll be right. After all, when you live right away from everybody in a little conical house on a hill, with only a tomcat for company, and have a grandmother, at fifteen removes, who had been burned to cinders in a marketplace not a league away, well there is certainly bound to be some specu-

lation. And yet, after all, what was Annie's offence?

Merely because her family had owned the manor-house until foreclosure had sent her to the conical cottage; merely because she herself was elderly and still genteel, still smoothing her long sad dress with swollen fingers; and merely, too, because she was indifferent to gossip, wore pebble spectacles and greyish down upon her upper lip. Defencelessness, and a remoteness which once would have been admired—these were the sum total of her offences. And these? Oh, surely it will not do! The supernatural has better auguries than these.

Even Mrs. Frobisher, damnable as she was, should have known as much. But so should Annie herself. For there's no denying that as she walked up the hill to her cottage on that winter's afternoon, out of the whispering and the mimicry, she had long since made herself ignore (so encouraging it with her indifference), the silly old thing was flushed with a strange excitement. Those dread reports were square beneath her arm. Into the twilight she read of quaint



old shrewish Judith and the murdered babies.

There had been three of them, and an older boy of five: new inwards for her subtle preparations; new liquor for her poor parched throat. The trial had lasted six days. Patiently, with trembling exactitude the Clerk of the Court had transcribed her clear replies; all her recipes, her remedies and rites. She confessed quite cheerfully everything she could remember: the images of wax, the amulets and the curses, and even how she'd flown a dozen times over Ambley Common on a shilling broomstick. The parson had been in Ambley to see her die. He noted that she screamed three times with a great man's voice, and then fell singing on the lighted faggots.

It flamed the blood to think about descent. Three hundred and twenty-eight years! She'd been an Ames. An

Ames! She had lived in the big house, and women had curtsied low as her carriage passed—sunk into puddles wherever she turned her face. Mrs. Frobisher, too, would have curtsied (Annie closed her eyes to gloat upon the sight)—she, the whole row of haughty old women, squat on the kerbstone, kneeling as in church. Annie knew, too, how much was just respect that put them there—five fine white bonnets splashed by the horses' mud—and how much fear. The way they lowered their narrow eyes was fear.

Fear! Of her—fear!! Annie laughed and turned to stir the fire. In the dusk Jonah chirruped for his milk, one green electric eye above the settle. "Shall we make them afraid?" She giggled happily. "Jonah darling, shall we make them afraid?"

Jonah winked, and soon there was a bargain.

She started with Mrs. Frobisher, and it took her a whole day to get it right. Even to make a rough resemblance in wax is not easy the very first time. Jonah, as often, was unimpressed.

"You shouldn't be so censorious," she told him, laughing. "I'm sure it's more than you could do at any time." Gently she tied a new ribbon round his neck and set about hunting for her list of spells. She'd noted them down in the reading-room of the County Library when the girl was looking elsewhere—it was always trying the way assistants would stare at her—and slipped them between the pages of her ration-book. Now she uttered them.

"Let this be Mrs. Frobisher!" she said, and stuck the little figure with a pin, once through each cheek and once through its yellow brow.

But Mrs. Frobisher's "Good morning, My Lady!" stung as usual next day. All as usual.

Annie winced with shame and fled up home under a bitter sky. "And I an Ames!" she thought in horror, glancing wild-eyed at the things around her, the arid hedge that railed her upward path, the ranks of mid-day trees so thin and cold, the shaggy donkey scuffed by itinerant wind; witnesses all, and manifold, to her shame. She an Ames—to stoop as low as that! She saw herself again the night before, huddled across the table in the firelight, squeezing the wax with clumsy, swollen fingers. She remembered the silly spells, the little lunges with her pin, and the eagerness of her descent this early morn-

ing. Oh, the childishness! And the *demeaning* of it! She, an Ames, to pierce a Frobisher!

At home the little doll was waiting for her, leaning against the teapot on the table, staring at Jonah with its sightless eyes. Jonah stared back. Neither acknowledged Annie; she cried unnoticed on her narrow bed. Then she rose and tidied her hair, and made two plates of fish in a little milk; after supper she lifted the doll by its shrunk, misshapen head and dropped it, hissing, into the fire. Jonah hissed, too, and sprang up from the settle. "Now behave," said his mistress, wagging her finger crossly. "Mother's going to behave too now, just wait and see."

But such vows, as our cats often know, come too late. Next day in the fishmonger's shop she met Mrs. Frobisher again. The dear lady was as kind as ever, her mimicry as gentle and sparing, but her head was kept averted all the while. It was only by accident, and then for the merest second, that poor Annie saw the face of her tormentor, ugly in the mirror above the weighing scales. Ugly, and made more ugly by angry spots on her face; one on each cheek, and one on her yellow brow.

For an instant Annie stood stunned, jubilation scalding her like tears, then she turned and half-ran, half-hobbled up the cobbled street. Once home she grabbed out her store of wax, and feverishly began making little images of all the people in the village who had ever tormented or made fun of her. "Let this be Mr. Marsh the greengrocer! Let this be

Bessie Trip. And Gertrude Farrell. Let this be that wretched vicar!"

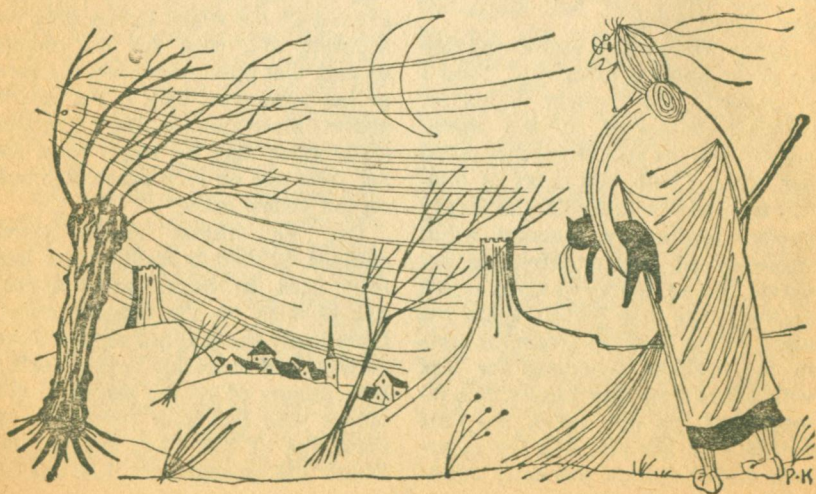
She worked with terrible haste and squealed as she worked, shaping the little dolls with her swollen fingers—five, six, seven—until she got so muddled she forgot which was which, and had to re-christen them and tie labels on them saying who they were. But in the middle—just as she was modelling the choirmaster's skull—suddenly she stopped. Suddenly she saw that even this would not be enough; even this would not *prove* beyond shadow of doubt what she had to know. After all, even if all the villagers came out with a scarlet rash on their faces and arms—well, there might (it was just possible) be some sort of an epidemic. A sudden disease, or something in the water.

"Jonah," she said, "I can never be finally *sure*." And Jonah, extending a

leisurely paw to cuff the choirmaster, blinked his assent.

So next morning, a little shamefacedly because of her reputation, Annie Ames appeared in the village to buy a broomstick. The rest of that day was spent in conjuration. She laid the stick down on the carpet; she stroked it and frowned on it; she lowered her old face to the ground and kissed it, bidding it as she did so to carry her, and only her, wherever she desired to go. If any other woman sought to ride it, it was to buck her off.

In days gone by the Normans had built two huge towers at either end of the village, some five hundred yards apart; the North Tower and the South Tower. She could see them quite plainly from her window, two fingers of stone against the sky, with the petty village in between. Towards evening she took Jonah in her arms



and showed them to him. "I'll do it," she whispered, cuddling. "I'll do it to-night, when they're sleeping." Her eyes were wild. "To-night." She giggled. "This very night in the moonlight."

In the moonlight! Like a lust, it took possession of her till she shuddered. Like a lust, it precluded her supper.

She left the house at eleven. The streets were blank under the moon. Once she had to hide from a policeman, and the glare of a motor-bike shrank her into a doorway, but she kept walking firmly towards the north. She had decided on the North Tower for her departure; the South Tower as her place to alight. "From the north to the south," she told Jonah, "like birds in the winter-time. Birds you'll never catch. Nor you! Nor you!" she added to the sleeping shopfronts as she passed out of the village. "Never, never, never!"

She hushed herself suddenly and looked into the sky. A ride of five hundred yards was not, after all, unadventurous—not for a first try.

The North Tower stood high before her, pale in the clouded light. Out here on the common the wind was stronger. It swept out her hair in a fan; it moaned as she groped up the stairway; she met it suddenly at turnings, coming through tiny windows, cold and bitterly singing. Out on top it was fiercer still; she could hear the trees rattling below and pebbles falling from the rampart. She began to wonder what part this would play in her flight, what charm she might have said at home to reduce

it. With a sudden wriggle, Jonah leapt free and bounded to the other side—his cries shrilled in the cries of the wind. She was scared. Fumblingly she opened her coat and placed the stick between her legs. Then she hoisted herself on to the parapet.

"Now!" she whispered, closing her eyes from the height. "Now. Now—to the south!"

Then the wind pulled her off the ledge and cut off her scream into silence.

\* \* \*

"Well," said the Inspector, "I suppose there was nothing we could have done." He stared at the body, smashed at the bottom of the tower. The ambulance men were waiting.

The doctor stared, too, and shrugged. "When you toss yourself from a tower," he said at last, "seventy feet in the air, the result is apt to be predictable. Broomstick or no broomstick. Especially if you're over sixty when you do it."

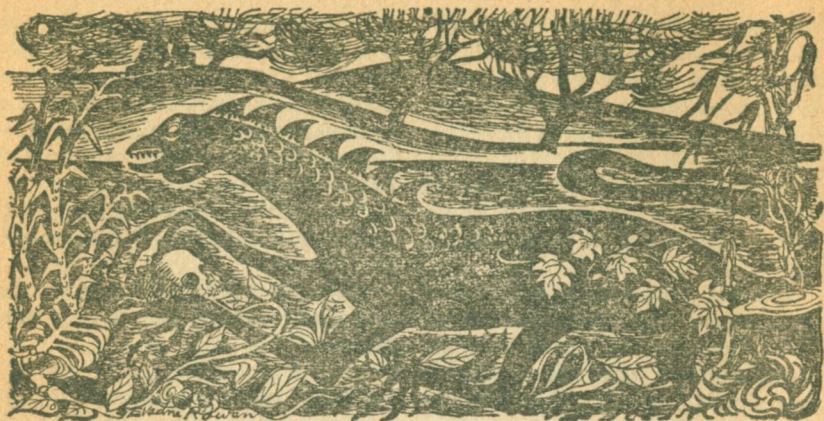
"Poor woman. Poor crazy old woman."

"All right, gentlemen, please."

The ambulance men picked her up, dead Annie Ames, thin like an untidy bolster, and they drove her away to the morgue.

Which is really all about her.

Except, of course, for the curious fact of her cat. They found poor Annie at the bottom of the South Tower, smashed almost beyond recognition; and people wondered for a while what her beloved Jonah was doing on top of the north one, a clear five hundred yards away, howling in an agony of fear.



## THE WATER BEAST

E. G. ASHTON

*Illustrated by Evadne Rowan*

**T**HE BOY CROUCHING among the rocks drew his jacket closer around him. The fingers of breeze poking off the sea were tipped with cold—yet it was not the cold alone that made him shiver.

He had chosen his hiding-place carefully. Behind him was the beach and the sea, the great ocean that stretched thousands of miles to America. Before him was the stream, a dark-brown ribbon of peat water, silent and in its stillness menacing. This was the place assuredly where he would discover the truth about *each uisge*.

*Each uisge*, the water-horse, the

great wet beast that lived in the bog pools, and came out by night searching for belated travellers. Some folk said it was black all over and with a long tail; and some said it had a single gleaming red eye; and some said its cloven hooves left strange marks it were better not to see. But none could describe it accurately—for none had seen it, and lived. There was one old man who said . . .

What was that splash?

The boy's heart thudded, and he giggled foolishly and overloud. An otter probably, catching an early supper. Or, maybe, just a fish jumping at the evening rise. Certainly it had not been the—the Beast.

But was there really such a thing as the Beast? Did it actually exist?

Sergeant Hamish Mackay, the policeman, he merely smiled and said, "Och, now now now, laddie," and whittled you a boat if you asked him about *each uisge*. And Mr. Farquhar, the schoolmaster, he said there was no such thing in the world. In fact, he became angry and snapped "superstition" and "mumbo jumbo for children" if you mentioned the Beast. But Grandfather Donald and Uncle Iain and Uncle Robert, they were not children, and they knew about *each uisge*. If you told them what Mr. Farquhar said, they licked their lips quickly and looked uneasily over their shoulders, and would not let you go out in the dark-time—and somehow that was more frightening than Mr. Farquhar's anger.

But to-night, maybe, he would find out. He would stay here by the rock, watching the pool to see if the Beast came forth, and then he would have a tale to tell when the nights were cold and black and the old men drew closer to the fire.

The tide was coming in now—the boy could hear it nuzzling and lapping the beach, eating up the land. One day he would ask Grandfather Donald what would happen if the sea kept eating and eating until it had swallowed up the whole earth. Perhaps they would all be drowned—or, perhaps, before then they would all be caught by *each uisge*, who would be king of the world. Grandfather Donald would know. He knew everything. He was out there—the boy's eyes turned and stared out across the sea, a smooth pearl in the darkening light—out there with the others on

the Island of the Sheep; but he would be back to-morrow. Time then to ask the question.

The sea-birds were feeding now, great flocks of them filling the sky—gulls, kittiwakes, gannets—mewing, screaming, diving like stones to seize a fish and swallow it before a greedy neighbour could snatch it away. Theirs was a wild, fierce music that made the boy want to shout aloud in joyous kinship with them. But he did not dare. Not there, not so close to the Beast.

He was not frightened, of course. Not he. But *each uisge* was not far away—and it could climb rocks. It would be wiser perhaps to be still, and watch.

But the din of the birds, it was enough to frighten away the *glaitig* himself. It would be too bad if their yelling kept the Beast away, and him disobeying Grandfather Donald by coming here to see it. Could the birds not be quiet?

And, now he thought of it, were they not too far inshore for the herding shoals? The fish could not come so near to the beach as the birds were flocking. Had they found something better than fish to feed on—the carcass of a beast, it might be, fallen from a pinnacle on the Island of the Sheep? He should go and find out. The village did not possess so many sheep that it could have one become food for the birds. And besides, it might not be a sheep, but maybe something even more valuable, a cask perhaps washed from some wrecked ship. He rose and clumped in his rubber boots across the beach, his body



stiff and erect, a gallant, pathetic defiance to whatever danger he had turned his back on.

Yes, there was something there in the shallows, but the endless flapping and soaring of the great white wings prevented him seeing it clearly. He hurled a handful of pebbles at the birds, laughing as they yelled their anger.

"I'll teach you to eat——" Then he saw what was tossing gently in the tiny waves.

There are things to see more dreadful than *each uisge*.

\* \* \*

It was late before word of what the boy had seen reached my Uncle Hamish in his cottage, which is the police-station for the district. The messenger, a lad in his teens, sank on to the stool by the fire and gulped the hot tea and whisky I had prepared.

"Thank you," he said in his gentle West Highland voice. "It is a long cold way across the hills."

"It is that," nodded my uncle. "There should be a telephone in Brucha."

"A telephone?" The youngster shook his head. "Oh, sir, no. The grandfather would not be permitting such a thing. He has a liking for the old ways, the grandfather."

"Maybe so, but the people of Brucha should not scorn the good of the new ways."

As he spoke Hamish was checking the contents of what he calls his Thorndyke case, although its only resemblance to the one carried by the

immortal doctor is that it is green. A policeman in this remote part of Scotland has to do more than see that the law is obeyed. He has to be doctor, nurse, veterinary, lawyer, minister, and sometimes letter-writer. As well, of course, he must be skilled in the social graces, such as singing, story-telling, whisky drinking and salmon poaching. He must be pastor and master, and able to take tea with the laird or bath the crofter's bairn, without embarrassing either himself or his host. Above all, he must know his people better than a father knows his children. My Uncle Hamish, I may say, is a very splendid policeman.

"There now." He snapped the case shut, having satisfied himself that he was equipped to deal with anything. "Did Donald send you to me, lad?"

"The grandfather? Oh no, sir. The grandfather is on the Island of the Sheep. He and Niall and Torquil and——and——"

"Angus? The dead man, he was with them?"

"Yes, sir. He went in the boat with them. I saw them rowing away."

"Very good. Now about Angus."

"I don't know, sir." Quickly. Too quickly.

"You don't know what I am going to ask yet."

"I don't know about Angus, sir." There was an iron firmness behind the lad's unshakeable courtesy.

"I see." Hamish eyed him thoughtfully for a moment, then sighed. "I was afraid of something like this. Oh well, we had best get on our road."

Tearlach, will you bring out the motor-bike, please?"

I sat perched on the Thorndyke case on the pillion, clutching Hamish round the waist as we bumped and chugged along the sorry dirt road in the darkness. Brucha, our destination, lies at the very tip of Hamish's territory, a crescent of ancient cottages by the shore, cut off from the world by the hills. There, behind the barrier of upheaved tortured granite, the old way of life goes on, wrung by endless pain and toil from a grudging Nature. For food, they look to their thin starved soil and their rich cruel sea. For guidance, they look to their stern wrathful God and their seamed-rock patriarch, the grandfather. For pleasure, they look not at all.

A primitive clannish folk, suspicious of strangers and loyal to their own. I did not envy Hamish the task that lay before him. The messenger had already shown that information would not readily come from the lips of Brucha.

Above the beating of the engine, I yelled, "This Angus who is dead. Who was he? Did you know him?"

"He is no loss to the place. You met him yourself last year. The one who went on the ships."

Now I placed him. Of course. "I remember. The misfit."

"Just so. Poor laddie, he and his kind, they are the tragedy of Brucha. Of all the Bruchas."

The tragedy of Brucha? Yes, I supposed he was, because all misfits are social tragedies, and Angus had been a misfit in Brucha. He had been a rebel, hating the squalor, the bitter-

ness, the wretched backwardness of Brucha; but hating even more the curious perverted pride that persisted in maintaining and continuing that life. Rumours had drifted across the hills of defiance and disciplinings, and in the end Angus had brought shame upon his people by running away. He roamed for a year or more—it is known that he visited America twice; then in a Clyde dockside pub one night he learned from a trawler-hand that his father was dead and that he, as the elder son, had inherited the croft. So Angus had come home.

His return was of course foolish, because he knew well to what unhappiness he was coming. Yet in a way it was wise, because he had discovered that the great world beyond could be just as cold and bitter and heartless as Brucha to those who did not possess what it demanded. Indeed and indeed, he was a misfit—too modern for Brucha, too primitively simple for the world.

And because his heart was sick, his words were sour as he swaggered and boasted and lied before the people he despised. Again the rumours whispered through the glens—of trouble-making, of too much whisky and too little work, of other men's wives.

Now he was dead, dumped by the sea—Nature's last taunt at him—on the shore he had tried to escape from.

Even the road, poor as it was, petered out before we reached the village, and the last mile or so Hamish and I had to scramble by a heathery track.

One of the elders met us, and after the Gaelic courtesies had passed, he

said, "We have taken him to his house, sergeant. It was thought more respectful to the dead. There is someone there with him. Oh no, not his brother. Torquil is at the Island of the Sheep with the others. They will be back to-morrow—to-day, rather, it is now. Will you step to the house, sergeant?" He went before us, ineffectively lighting the way with a sheep-fat candle in a lantern.

I turned hastily to Hamish. "I'm getting confused here with all this. What is the significance of the Island of the Sheep? Half the village seems to be over there."

"Tuts and tuts, man. I keep forgetting that you are no better than an Englishman now. These people have sheep—but there is not enough fodder to spare for them here, so the beasts are summered out there on one of the islands. They're taken over in boats, and simply left, to live or die as best they may. Every so often some men go over to see that all is well. They have a rota system they've evolved; don't ask me how it's worked, but they all do it in turn."

"Not all, surely. What about those who don't own any sheep?"

"Man dear, the answer to that is that by Brucha reckoning they all own all the sheep. This is a primitive community, don't forget, where possessions are regarded as tribal rather than individual. For their own purposes, they have changed the law of mine and thine to the law of ours. It seems to work quite well."

"It certainly must be good for the have-nots."

"It's not all one-sided." He smiled

gently. "The have-nots gain by being credited with part-ownership. On the other hand, they lose by being saddled with some of the responsibility of ownership. You get nothing for nothing, particularly in Brucha. But here's the house. You'd better wait here while I have a look at Angus." His shoes gritted on the sandy stone slabs that were the steps of the house; then the light within grew stronger as he switched on his electric lamp.

I remained on the beach with our guide. Though there was no sound save the murmurous beat of the sea, I knew there were people around us in the darkness, watching patiently.

I tried to make conversation with the old man. I had spoken to him once or twice in our village, and once I had been able to do him a small service; but we might have been total strangers for all the effects of my words. Oh, he was polite and courteous—but with the blank impenetrable smoothness of his own polished granite.

Oh yes, he had known Angus, and he knew his younger brother, Torquil. They had gone to the island, yes. With the grandfather, Donald, and the young man, Niall. Yes, four of them had gone. And now three would come back, he supposed so, when the grandfather had seen to the sheep. Yes, it was sad about Angus, very sad; but we must all be called home one day, must we not? Indeed and indeed we must. Oh yes, he had known Angus, had he not just said so? Oh, in what way? Oh, he would not care to be saying about that.

Could any man claim to understand the workings of another man's heart? Would such a thing not be claiming something of the divinity of the Higher One?

Always that courteous evasion; always the hidden reminder that the death of Angus concerned the men of Brucha, and that I was a stranger and foreigner. I knew that I would never get through that screen, so I lit a cigarette and hunkered down in the lee of the house to wait for Hamish.

Dawn was paling the sky before he came. He stood, fists on hips, staring sightlessly down at the sand. "The back of his head's smashed in. He was dead before he touched the water."

"Murder?"

"It could have been an accident," he said carefully. "He could have fallen from one of the cliffs on the island."

"But you don't like it?"

He rubbed his face wearily. "It's possible. The accident, I mean. But why won't they talk?" He gestured at the houses behind us. "Oh, they are still-tongued enough at any time, but they have never been so silent with me before. It is their silence which disturbs me."

"Haven't you picked up anything?"

"There is one point that may mean something. Or it may not. One of the village women seems to be more than normally upset by the death."

"Why not? The man could not have been all bad. Perhaps she was fond of him."

"Perhaps she was," he said

sombrely. "She is the wife of Niall."

There was a short aching silence. "And Niall," I said slowly, "is one of those on the island."

"We're going over there ourselves," said Hamish harshly. "I have arranged for a boat. Come."

It was cold out on the water. Hamish, slumped in the stern-sheets, his case at his feet, swore mildly as the cross-chop flickered spray.

Hauling mechanically at the oars, I found myself answering the question I had been asking—why Brucha had raised the screen of silence. I remembered the rumours about Angus's womanizing. I thought of the lover and the deceived husband set together on a tiny sea-girt rock. I remembered Angus's vauntings and the icy bitterness of his gibes—and I knew why Brucha had kept silent. They were protecting their loved son, Niall, who had murdered their renegade son, Angus.

A shelving lip of rock was the landing-place of the island. Hamish stepped forward to the bows and, as we scraped bottom, he leapt lightly ashore. While we secured the boat, three men stood watching us gravely from half a dozen yards away. They did not speak or offer to help, but simply stood there, motionless and unspeaking, yet somehow, on the defensive.

Hamish took his case and started up the slope of rock towards them, but he was halted suddenly by something he saw at his feet. He squatted to examine it, and without knowing exactly what I was looking for, I did the same. It was a spray or two of

wild garlic, which had been kicked about and crushed.

"I don't even like tame garlic," I grunted disgustedly and straightened up. Hamish rose and walked forward again.

The middle man of the three waited until we were almost to them, then said, "In the name of the Father!"

"Amen to that," answered Hamish. "And in the name of the Queen, for

Hamish murmured, "I thank you"; but before he could move, I was plucking his sleeve and pointing. A yard away I had seen a small lump of jagged stone, one side of its grey-ness now a rusty brown.

"Look at that, Hamish. That rock, that's what killed him."

My uncle gave it a quick, impatient look and nodded.

The three were watching me, unmoved, aloof, unhearing you would



I bring the Queen's law to this place. You know me, Donald, old friend."

"I know you, Hamish." But there was no smile lighting the old bearded face.

"I have seen the body of Angus."

One of them, impossible to say which, gave a faint hiss of surprise.

Donald, the grandfather, said, "So? Perhaps you will honour our poor hut." He waved us forward with the imperious courtesy of a man who does not know what it is to be disobeyed.

have said. On one side of Donald stood Angus's young brother, Torquil, his face already made old by the endless harshness of Brucha. On the other was Niall, the betrayed husband; Niall with the great thick shoulders of a bull and with a bull's deceptive heavy placidity which can explode without warning into a mad blood-lusting ferocity.

Although I spoke to Hamish, I looked at them. "One of these three killed Angus with that stone, then threw his body into the sea." I heard

my voice grow shrill and I struggled to bring it under control. "It was murder, Hamish, cold murder. By one of them. By Niall." I stabbed my finger at him.

The only sound was the fret of the waves on the rocks. By their stillness, their unspoken but patent contempt, they ridiculed my outburst into crude raw melodrama. A seabird screamed, and it might have been a cruel imitation of my shrillness.

At last Donald turned to Hamish. "Perhaps"—he conveyed perfectly that he was being a Highland host smoothing over a guest's grievous lapse of manners—"perhaps we should go to the hut. Come, Niall, Torquil."

Without a look at me they walked away.

Hamish regarded me dully. "No doubt you meant it for the best. But, Tearlach, lad, leave this to me, I beg. These are Brucha men we are dealing with, and you will not shout them into making a confession. Man"—he scrubbed at his jaw angrily—"I dislike the feel of this."

"I don't see why. It was murder all right. There's the weapon, and the killer is over yonder."

"Niall?"

"Of course."

"Maybe. Maybe not."

"But——"

"There are no buts, Tearlach. Listen you to me now and try to understand. You heard me tell them that I brought the Queen's law here. That really means something to these men. It means absolute, unerring justice. That is what they expect, and it is

what they must receive, because it is the basis of their whole life. If their Queen, through me her servant, fails them, if I am fallible and make a mistake, no matter how small, then the foundations of their philosophy will be weakened. Now do you see?"

"Yes, yes, I appreciate all that, although I think you're taking too much care of their sensitive feelings. They're only a bunch of primitive murderers——"

"They are subjects of the Queen, Tearlach," he said in a great voice, "and I bring them the law."

"I beg your pardon. Yes, of course you're right. It was stupid of me. But, see here, if they're so keen on an unerring justice, why doesn't Niall prevent any possibility of error by simply confessing right away that he's guilty?"

"Because they are not fools, Tearlach. No one, not even a Brucha man, is going to admit his guilt while he thinks there is a chance of getting away with the crime. Besides, they are testing me. They will not tell me lies, but at the same time, they will not help me."

He looked out across the glittering sea to the pale strip that was the Brucha shore and to the massy hills behind before he spoke again.

"They will deny nothing, except what is plainly false. They did not even try to hide or get rid of the rock that killed Angus. They will not pretend or conceal. They will answer all the questions that I ask, and they will speak truth. But they know, as I do, that there are some questions that I must not, dare not ask. If I do, I be-

tray weakness—and though I arrest a murderer, I lose the respect of Brucha.”

“And the unforgivable question, I take it, is a straight-out demand who killed Angus?”

“Just so. That I must find out for myself, and without any doubts or hesitations or maybes. There can be trial—but no error. And I must find out soon.” He stopped short. “Soon,” he repeated slowly. “Ye-es. The matter of delay may be important. Come.”

The hut Donald spoke of was a ramshackle affair of turves and stones which gave but the sorriest protection from even the lightest gale. Beside it, the Brucha men awaited us, and Hamish sat down facing them. “I tell you again that I have seen the body of Angus.”

“Indeed?” The old man, Donald, was politely interested.

“He came here with you three to see to the sheep. Here he was killed and his body thrown into the sea. A village boy found it on the beach. Angus was your brother, Torquil?”

“He was my brother, Hamish.” The clear blue eyes in that lined, tired face seemed to turn inwards. “I had little cause to be proud of him. He was a liar, a cheat, and a thief.”

“A thief, lad?”

The boy—he was little more in years—nodded angrily. “He ran away and left the work of the croft to the father and me. Then when the father died, and I was working hard on the croft because I loved the land, you understand, then he came back and took it all for himself. He was the

elder, and by our law it was his. But he took it all, though he was not willing to work as I had done. He found other things”—his eyes, now anger-ablaze, flickered towards Niall—“shameful things to do. The work was mine—but the croft was his. Any decent man would have gone away again—but not Angus.”

“Hush, my son,” said Donald gently, “your brother is dead.”

“And I am happy. The croft is mine and the sheep are saved.”

“The sheep?”

Torquil nodded. “You would not know of that. This brother of mine was not content with the many bad things he had done; he must do yet more. He was going to take his sheep from the island here and sell them in the town. He said it was a good time to be selling, there was money in it.”

“But he couldn’t do that, could he?” protested Hamish. “He could not sell like that.”

“They were his sheep,” murmured Donald.

“Yes, I know. Strictly speaking, they were his. But—but they belong to Brucha, to the whole village. Everybody knows that.”

“They belonged to Angus,” retorted Torquil bitterly. “He made that plain enough when he told me of his plans. I argued and pleaded with him—almost we came to blows—but I could not change him.”

For God’s sake, Torquil, say no more. Stop talking, you are only making things worse for yourself. I found myself praying that Hamish would stop the young fool before he talked his neck into the noose. With

every word he was adding to his motive—the dispossessed young brother, shamed and disgusted by the vile debauchery of the interloper—the violent quarrels between them—the opportunity, welcome to a young romantic, of making himself a martyr to save his beloved village—it all wove into a pattern for murder that I knew Hamish would recognize.

But whatever thoughts were in my uncle's brain, there was no reflection of them in his face. He turned his eyes on Niall.

"You too had a quarrel with Angus?"

Niall moved his great shoulders un- easily inside his jacket. "Aye. I threw him out of my house, and told him that if he ever crossed the threshold again I would kill him."

"When was that, Niall?"

"A week ago. More maybe. I do not remember."

"Did you know about his plans for the sheep?"

"Aye, Torquil told me. That would be one, no, two days before he came here."

Niall had known, too, then. That meant that he shared with Torquil the motive for striking to defend the people of Brucha. As well, of course, he was the betrayed husband. To come to the Island with two men who had such cause to hate him showed that Angus was either a very brave man or a very stupid one.

"And you, Donald, when did you hear about this plot of Angus?"

"When we were rowing here to the island." The old man's face was calm as a child's. "He would talk of

nothing else, but the money he would make and the things he would buy with it. It was all very foolish, like most of his talk."

"And what happened?"

"We came ashore at the landing-place. I was first and then Angus, because the two boys here were busy with the boat."

"So." Hamish nodded heavily and fell silent. Still they sat, guarding their shared secret, waiting.

Suddenly Hamish rose. "Wait here, all of you," and he strode off back to the landing-place.

To the men of Brucha, I simply did not exist. They knew that their contest was with Hamish, and that there was no place in it for me. But even with my uncle gone, they did not relax their wariness. They were like the wild stags on the hill, every instinct, every nerve alert to respond when the unseen danger came close.

Slowly and heavily Hamish came back to us after many minutes, and from his fingers there hung one of the pieces of wild garlic that had been on the landing-place. I wondered if he was even aware that he had picked it up. Silently and in turn he looked at each one of them, a sad, searching gaze as if he were seeing them for the first time—or perhaps for the last. Then reluctantly he said, "I know now."

"Do you, Hamish?"

"Yes, Donald, old friend. I know that you killed Angus."

Niall's knuckles went white and Torquil muttered something beneath his breath. For a moment I thought they were going to spring at Hamish,



but Donald's twisted brown hands touched their shoulders and they relaxed.

Hamish seemed not to see them. His eyes on Donald, he went on, "I know you killed him, old friend, because of the garlic and——"

"What need for your reasons?" cried the grandfather suddenly, and he looked like some proud eagle, splendid even in defeat. "I killed him because he was what he was. He mocked us and the way we live. He hated Brucha, and he hated me, because I am Brucha. I represent the old ways, of honour and decency and humbleness before the unseen things. He jeered at these things, and would have led my people into the mire of sin and evil. He sought to smash our village life, and he defiled what I did at the landing, sneering that it was superstition, and so"—a gentle explaining smile—"I killed him. I shall wait for you in the boat." Erect as a soldier, and without a backward glance, he strode away.

"Go with him, lads." Hamish nodded his head. "Go with him. We shall join you in a minute." Wearily he sank down beside me.

"Congratulations, Hamish."

"On what?" he cried bitterly. "On catching an old friend? On finding a murderer who did not try to hide? Congratulations!"

"Well, I certainly never suspected him. I was certain it was one of the others."

"Because, as I said, you think like a foreigner now. You have forgotten how the Highland mind works. You would not have made that mistake if

you had remembered that the Highlander is a man of quick blood, quick to strike and quick to forgive. This was a murder done in hot blood—the sudden outburst of fury, the rock snatched up, the swift crushing, killing blow.

"But why should either Niall or Torquil have struck that blow? They had both quarrelled with Angus, yes, but days ago. There had been no fresh quarrel with him. Donald himself told us that on the way here Angus would speak of nothing but selling the sheep—and that was not news to them. Without fresh provocation, they would not kill, I was fairly certain of that. Which left Donald." He shook his head sorrowfully.

"No, no," I protested, "that won't do. You must have been more than fairly certain it wasn't Torquil or Niall. You said yourself that you had to be absolutely sure—and picking on Donald because you had fairly well eliminated the other two isn't what I call being absolutely sure. Besides, you were saying something about you knew because of the garlic when Donald cut you off. What had the garlic to do with the murder?"

"Everything, man, everything. The sprig was the key to why Angus was killed. See you here now.

"You know that Brucha is out of our world. Its people are different from you and me. They believe implicitly in the supernatural—demons, witches, the evil eye, everything like that. They're a compound of superstitious paganism and the narrowest Christianity. They'll pray for a bless-

ing on their fishing and then turn back if someone whistles in the boat. As children, they're brought up in fear of monsters, of *each uisge* and the rest—and they're taught how to protect themselves from all these things.

"And the supreme specific against evil is garlic. The unseen powers are helpless against it. When Donald landed on the island here, he quite naturally laid down garlic as a protection—and I make no doubt that he also said 'In the name of the Father.' He said that, you remember, when we landed. To do that is second nature to him, like—like closing his eyes when he prays.

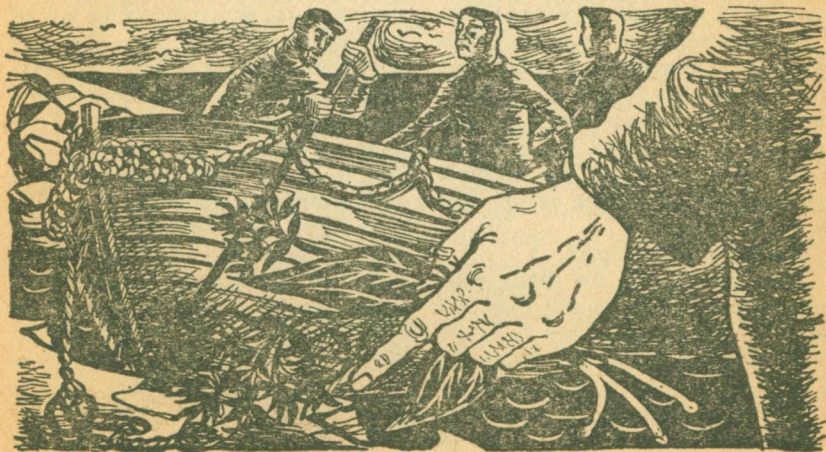
"But someone had kicked and stamped the garlic—and that was the equal of blasphemy in Donald's eyes. Only Angus could have done it, only Angus would have done it, for both Niall and Torquil are good Brucha men. At the same time, though, they

are young and not such stern believers as Donald. The mocking of the garlic offering would have made them uneasy—but it would not have made them kill.

"So we come back to Donald. He was the one with the fresh hot quarrel with Angus—he had just heard of the plan to sell the sheep—he knew what a blow that would be to the life of his people—and he saw Angus defile and mock at the garlic. And so——"

"Yes, I see. You know, Hamish, I don't think I like this place very much. But, you know, people like Donald cannot hide Brucha from the world for ever. The old ways must give in to the new. How will it end, Hamish?"

But he did not answer. He rose and in the full blaze of the morning sun walked to the boat, and in his hand there was the sprig of garlic.



# ESCAPE TO FEAR

CLAIRE POLLEXFEN

*Illustrated by Francis Butterfield*



HE SUNLIT stillness of late afternoon spread in sweet beneficence about Christina as she stared apprehensively towards the lonely

bungalow.

With the autumn-seared woodland for background, its neglected garden and unkempt hedges gave it a dejected, forsaken look. No wisp of smoke drifted from the squat chimney. The closed windows were thinly filmed. Across the rustic porch an overgrown honeysuckle sprawled, dangling withered tendrils and dead, brown blossoms in front of the shabby door.

No sign of life disturbed the solitude of this secluded place, and Christina, exhausted by the morning's emotional crisis, the terror-haunted train journey and the long trek (in high-heeled shoes) through rough, country lanes, sighed her relief. She had been afraid Lena might have lent the place to someone; that she might find strangers installed.

But there was no one.

She pushed open the flimsy gate, and limped wearily up the path that grass and weeds had taken for their own. She bent down and lifted the flat stone that the honeysuckle-bush concealed—glistening beetles and leprous-pallid wood-lice scurried

away in haste from the sudden revelation of their dank hiding-place. But for once Christina forgot to be nauseated by the sight of them.

The key was still there, where she and Alfred had left it six months ago. She picked it up and began mechanically to clean off the corroding damp.

She remembered Alfred asking if they were supposed to send it back to Mrs. Tray? And she remembered his snort of derision when she'd replied, "Goodness, no! We leave it where we found it—under this stone. Lena always keeps it there."

Alfred had exclaimed, "But she's in Malaya or Timbuctoo or some place like that, isn't she? Do you mean to say that while she's over on the other side of the world the key of her door just stays here for any marauder or tramp to find? You certainly have some queer friends, my Christina! And this damned Tray woman is the pick of the whole outlandish bunch." His laugh had been a contemptuous mockery.

Christina had protested, indignantly, "Anyway, she lent us the bungalow for our honeymoon. And who'd bother about a key if he meant to break in? People hardly ever come up here, except villagers to gather firewood. It's safe because it's so isolated."

She had, she recalled, been un-

pleasantly jarred by her husband's reply. He'd said:

"And because it's so isolated someone will come along one of these days and crack your precious Mrs. Tray on the head—or stick a knife in her—or blow her silly brains out. It'd be so safe. Wouldn't it, eh?"

Thinking back, Christina wondered why she'd laughed. She hadn't found her husband's prophecy in the least funny. To say the least, it had been in bad taste. Alfred had meant it to sound—and it had sounded—pretty nasty. Perhaps it was because it was the first time she had ever seen that particular expression on his face; the expression that turned him suddenly into someone she didn't know and couldn't recognize. The familiar turned unfamiliar, like a boy with a paper mask on. Had she laughed then in order to deny that first disturbing stab of fear?

But that was six months ago. She wouldn't think about six months ago.

Quickly she swept aside the curtain of honeysuckle trailers and jabbed the key into the lock. The door creaked as she pushed it open. From the tiny, dust-veneered hall came the stale, mildewy smell of a place long unoccupied. When she stepped across the threshold, she could feel the silence envelop her. Deep, absorbing silence. She stood listening, but there was nothing to hear. All around her was utterly still.

She drew a long, satisfying breath. At last she was alone—deliciously enchantingly alone.

She went unhurriedly from room to room, her footsteps loud in the

tranquil quiet. The little metal clock on the living-room mantelpiece had stopped at half-past one six months ago. She reset it to the right time and then wound it up. Its ticking seemed to bring the room to life, like a faintly beating pulse.

The drawn window curtains made a weird green twilight. She put her hand out towards them—and then stopped. Let them stay drawn. It was more secret, so. She didn't want to do anything that might attract the attention of the village people; small communities are notoriously curious, she told herself.

She moved about the bungalow, enjoying this new and almost forgotten sense of peace. The fear she had lived with so long was subsiding. Here was sanctuary. Here she felt secure. It was wonderful to savour the thought that not a soul in the world knew where she was. Not a soul.

She glanced down at a dustsheet-covered bed, and there was longing in her gaze. To-night she would be able to sleep; really sleep. For the first time in many weeks she would dare to close her eyes and relax comfortably into oblivion, knowing there was no loaded revolver under the next pillow; knowing she would not struggle out of a light, uneasy doze to hear her husband creeping stealthily about the house, muttering to himself . . . crossing the room to bend over her . . . circling her neck with his hard, strong hands.

Her shoulders twitched as if she were trying to shake off the memory of that frightening, destroying force



that was Alfred. She mustn't let herself think about him. Just concentrate on the pleasure of being here by herself. Out of his reach.

She went into the kitchen. It was rather a dark little kitchen, and its one small window looked out upon the woodland. The westering sun was striking down on the close-clustering trees, drenching them with rich, golden light that turned their yellowing leaves to flame and russet and a bleak, dappled green.

Christina, looking out, thought, "Last time I saw them they were just a frilly mass of opening buds!" Well, a lifetime lay between then and now. In this bungalow her married life had begun, and here she must decide how it was to end. For it was to end.

She turned away and began to prepare a meal for herself. There were the sandwiches she had bought at the station buffet—she hadn't been able

to eat them then; the very thought of food had choked her. But she wanted them now. She was very hungry.

She remembered some biscuits in a tin—half a packet of tea that she had not bothered to take away when she and Alfred packed up their things after the honeymoon. Fortunately, the oil-cooker had been abundantly supplied with paraffin-oil. And the pump in the lean-to wood-shed yielded a bucketful of clear water. There were even a few apples still hanging on the small tree outside the kitchen door.

She ate with the back-door wide open so that she could breathe the woody fragrance of the still autumn air and look out across the tangled wilderness of garden. She could not remember when she had enjoyed a meal so much. The milkless tea was nectar. The stale biscuits delicious. Even the buffet sandwiches, with their smear of mustard that made her tongue smart, tasted good.

Now that she came to think about it, she hadn't really eaten anything since last night's supper. And not much then, because it was during last night's supper that she'd noticed Alfred's eyes slowly assuming the clouded, pebble-like impenetrability she had learned to dread. Eyes with no soul behind them, only a calculating glare boring into her mind . . . terrifying . . . menacing.

She'd stared back at him, shivering and trembling as she always did when her husband looked at her in that strange way. She'd dropped her fork on to her plate with a clatter—

knocked her glass over. And he'd laughed sardonically, as if it satisfied some vicious streak of cruelty in him to know he'd made her nervous; shown him that she was frightened of him.

She'd got up from the table and hurried away out of the room, blinded by her tears, racked by the sobbing she tried to restrain. His loud, raucous laughter followed her as she stumbled upstairs.

She was dismayed to realize that she was becoming less and less able to stand up to his wild moods. Day by day he was breaking down her nerve a little more . . . and a little more . . . until?

She'd crept into bed; shivering and quaking; too frightened to lock herself into the spare room in case he'd get angrier still and beat the door down.

She'd slept hardly at all, but lay there, listening thankfully to the heavy snoring which told her Alfred was no longer awake; afraid to move lest she disturb that untroubled slumber.

\* \* \*

This morning, at breakfast-time, she'd at last dared to admit to herself what she had so long fought against admitting—that she was married to a madman.

It happened when she'd looked up suddenly from a letter she was reading, to find her husband's eyes fixed upon her. Not stony now, but glittering with ferocious hate. His lips were away from his large, strong teeth in a snarl. His hands—big, ugly hands with a crop of coarse, reddish

hair on the back of them—were clenched into murderous fists. . . .

It lasted but a few seconds, that illuminating flash. Then, with stupendous cunning, he assumed his normal expression. He asked, with pretended interest, who her letter was from?

Christina managed to reply in what she hoped was her ordinary voice, "Oh, it's from Ada Ferrers. She's been ill." And pressed her lips hard together so that he would not see them trembling with the nervous dread that shook her. Only the letter in her hand betrayed her by its fluttering.

But Alfred made no comment. He nodded nonchalantly, got up from the table and sauntered out of the room. Whistling, he went along the passage to the kitchen, and she heard him talking pleasantly to the daily woman who was working there.

A few minutes later Christina saw him go down the garden towards an old summer-house he had converted into a workshop for himself.

It was only when Mrs. Snape was coming to the end of her chores that Christina realized she had no change with which to pay the woman—and, unthinkingly, ran off down the flagged path to the summer-house. She meant to ask Alfred if he had two half-crowns.

He had the grindstone going—she could hear the rasp and burr of steel against stone as the wheel spun. She had not bothered to change from her soft-soled slippers, so he didn't hear her approach or know that she had come to stand in the open doorway behind him, waiting nervously for

him to pause in his work before she spoke. He was always so angry if he was suddenly disturbed.

Watching timorously, she saw that he was sharpening a knife. The large carving-knife from the drawer in the kitchen table. He was busy making it into a two-edged blade with a long, narrow point. It didn't look like a domestic tool now; it looked like a weapon. A weapon with a horrible purpose.

As he bent over the revolving stone he muttered unceasingly. And in that confused spate of words she heard the sibilant sound of her own name.

Quickly, silently, she backed away. Slipped through a screen of laurels and returned hurriedly to the house. She fled upstairs and changed into an old tweed suit that she used when she went out to do her household shopping, her nervous fingers fumbling clumsily with the buttons. From a cupboard on the landing she brought out a suitcase—and then put it back. A suitcase would draw comment from the neighbours; advertise that she was going away. She mustn't seem to be going any farther than the High Street—to the grocer or the fishmonger or the dairy. . . .

She substituted a zip-fastened shopping-bag for the suitcase, and crammed clothes into it with frenzied speed. She took her savings bank-book from the place where she had hidden it, and thrust that, too, into the bag. Alfred knew nothing about those few laboriously saved pounds. . . . She wondered, now, if in some subconscious way she had

foreseen this moment? This urgent need. . . .

She was just about to walk out of the bedroom when she caught sight of herself—hatless and in soft house-slippers—reflected in the wardrobe mirror. She burst out laughing . . . and controlled herself with difficulty when the laughter threatened to become hysterical. She was still trying to overcome this hideous hilarity as she pulled on an unobtrusive little beret and changed to outdoor shoes.

On her way down the stairs she managed to call some casual instructions to Mrs. Snape about peeling potatoes and making a custard for lunch.

With forced deliberation she closed the front-door after her and walked unhurriedly to the gate.

It was an unexpected bit of luck that a neighbour, just getting into his car, offered her a lift and put her down a few minutes later in the High Street. It was another bit of luck to find that a bus was on the point of leaving for the near-by market-town. Housewives often went on to the market-town to do any extra shopping. Nobody would think it suspicious if they saw her getting into the Blaydon bus.

And at Blaydon she went, by way of back streets, to the railway station. She bought a ticket for London. A cheap day-return. There was almost an hour to wait for the train—an hour, an eternity. But it steamed ostentatiously in at last, and received Christina into one of its dingy, third-class carriages. It stayed, panting,

alongside the platform until she almost screamed.

Then they were off. Christina was shivering with nervous tension as the train's movement rocked her gently. She looked out at the countryside through which they were speeding, and knew that every moment put more and more distance between her and Alfred.

She wondered if he was still in the summer-house grinding away at the knife . . . and muttering . . .

She didn't know, exactly, when the idea of coming to the bungalow entered her mind. She'd intended to go straight to her sister at Battersea. But then it occurred to her that the first place Alfred would think of looking for her (and he would, she felt certain, look for her) would be London—and at Luella's.

She knew immediately, and quite definitely, that she must not go to London. If she was to escape him at all, she must choose some place safe. The bungalow would be safe.

When the train stopped at the junction, she got out, slipped through the barrier, and into a by-road where lorries were busy loading coal from a siding. She was walking briskly down the ramp towards an ugly little town when a whistle sounded and the train pulled heavily out of the station.

A feeling of exultation possessed her. With a sense of satisfaction she found that she was still clutching her ticket—no one had been at the barrier to collect it. If Alfred did try to make inquiries, no one would be able to tell him that a young woman had surrendered her London ticket while

she was still thirty miles from her destination. There was nothing that she could think of that would suggest Mrs. Tray's bungalow to him. There was no one who could give him any information about her.

She hurried on.

The long walk from the junction had been heavy going; made longer because she'd kept away from the main roads, using by-paths and unfrequented lanes like any escaping criminal. She'd got lost more than once, trying to find her way through the everglades. But at last she'd come to the dew-pond and the little, tangled copse and—wonderful moment—there, before her, was the bungalow.

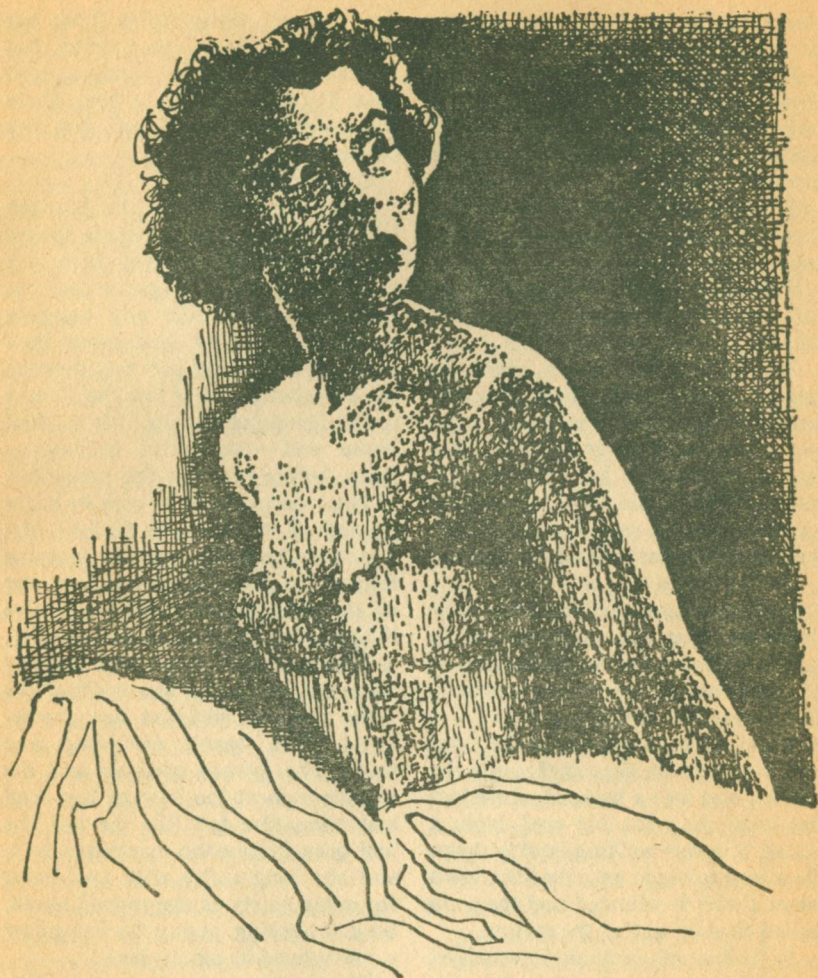
The lonely bungalow with its background of tall trees, its forlorn garden and the drab curtains hanging limp at the closed windows. And over all the rich, golden sunshine to give the place an air of peace and security.

That sense of peace and security were with her now. The walls of the little dwelling enclosed her protectively. She wasn't trembling any more. The inward quaking and the terrible pain at the base of her skull had gone. She felt like the girl she had been before she married Alfred, and she sang softly with an almost forgotten gaiety as she moved about, tidying, dusting, giving the bungalow a more lived-in atmosphere.

The sun was going down now. The glowing colours fading from the sky. Already, a misty darkness was forming among the trees of the woodland. The bungalow was beginning to feel clammy chill.

Christina wondered if she dare





light a fire—but decided against it. She must manage without a lamp too. Those villagers . . . so inquisitive. . .

Was it really the curiosity of the villagers she feared? Had she another fear? A fear she refused to face up

to and consider? Well, she wouldn't think about it. Not just now. Tomorrow, when she was rested, she would think.

She filled an old-fashioned, stone hot-water bottle, and put it in the bed.

What she needed, she told herself, was sleep. Lots and lots of sleep.

The dusk was thickening as she closed the doors and bolted them; the back door and the front. She made herself another cup of tea, and discovered how terribly tired she was. She yawned, stretched her arms, and without completely undressing, lay down on the bed.

It was very tranquil lying there in the silence—the silence that spread through her like a healing balm. She watched, through sleepy, half-closed eyes, the familiar contours of the room dissolve gently into darkness. The profound stillness, settling over the countryside with nightfall, soothed her. She smiled contentedly—and slept.

\* \* \*

A sound that was less than a sound awoke her—brought her sharply out of the depths of sleep so that she leapt up, her senses alert.

The full-moon brightness outside filtered through the curtains and gave the room a dim luminescence.

Christina waited, her heart thumping, for a repetition of whatever it was she'd heard. Something—or someone—was outside the bungalow. She felt sure of that. Carefully she reached for her skirt, slipping it on while she kept her ears alerted and her eyes on the pale square that was the window. She wriggled into her coat. Then stood motionless, scarcely daring to breathe. Muted footsteps, as someone trod with stealthy caution, disturbed the gravel.

Christina felt her spine prickle. The

dull ache at the back of her head began again. She wondered if she had been foolish to come here to this isolated spot—everyone for miles around must know the bungalow was unoccupied, its owner away. What a horrible coincidence if some thief had chosen this night of all nights to break in!

It was something she had not contemplated.

She crept, in bare feet, across the room and opened the bedroom door. The tiny hall was quite dark. There was a faint scrabbling outside as if someone was fumbling about—looking under the stone for the door-key, she wondered.

Her heart gave a sickening lurch at the thought.

After a brief lapse of time the latch was softly lifted . . . and dropped again when the door resisted the pressure. A low-toned, too-familiar muttering followed . . . Alfred!

Cold as ice, trembling so that now she could hardly stand, she strained her ears to catch the sound of every movement. He was back on the gravel path again—less cautious now. He was going round to the back of the bungalow.

She crossed the hall so that she could see the kitchen window, and a moment or two later a man's shadow, huge and dull and frightening, loomed outside the curtained glass. She watched his movements as he tried to find out if it was unlatched.

He passed on to the back door and turned the handle impatiently. He was muttering all the time now. Mut-

tering and whimpering like a thwarted animal. He kicked savagely at the door as a naughty, shut-out child might have done. She heard him call, "Chris!, Chris! Are you in there? Chris. . . ." And when only silence answered him he shouted threats and raged madly about, thumping furiously first on one door and then on the other.

He became suddenly silent and Christina knew that he was foxily listening for some faint sign that would betray that she was there.

She made no movement, and the desperate hope stirred in her that he might not, after all, know she was in there. For he could only be guessing.

He circled the bungalow again and rapped on the windows, calling her. Always calling her. Sometimes his tone was tragically pleading, and immediately after it changed to vituperative anger.

She sank down weakly, crouching in the darkness lest the least sort of shadow give her presence away.

She heard him go round to the back again and into the wood-shed. What was he looking for? An axe to break in with? She tried to recall if she'd spilled any water when she'd drawn it from the pump and carried the bucket into the kitchen. If she had he'd know for a certainty that she was there. Would he see where she'd emptied tea-leaves on to the earth? And the smell of the oil-stove had a way of lingering in the air . . . was it there now, impinging on the sharp, clean scent of the night?

She could hear him plunging about in the wood-shed, knocking things

over as if he'd thrown caution to the winds in his search for some particular object.

Her mouth felt dry and her lips brittle when she touched them with her tongue. If only she knew what he was up to! She remembered the drum of paraffin-oil stored there, and a new dread tormented her. Was he going to set fire to the place? Force her either to get out or face a hideous death within?

The breath rasped painfully in her throat as if, already, she was choking. She crawled into the kitchen and, kneeling, leant against the back door.

She could hear him grumbling and mumbling as she had heard him so many times before. There were dull thuds as he flung aside whatever impeded his search. He sounded as if he was in a more revengeful mood than any she remembered. A killing mood, for there came bursts of maniacal laughter every now and then that chilled her blood. She heard the door of the wood-shed bang-to behind him as he came out. In a paralysis of suspense she crouched on the cold stone flooring, waiting. . . .

Had he found the axe? Would he break in upon her now? How long would it be before his rage-venting blows began to batter down the flimsy door . . . the last poor shield between her and him?

Fear drugged her senses. She felt as if she was in some terrible nightmare where she was unable to move a step to save herself; unable to formulate any sort of plan.

No more sounds came from outside. No footsteps. She could hear no

voice disturbing the night's stillness.

Yet Christina felt sure he hadn't gone. That he was still near, ready to savage her as a mad dog waits to savage the human friend he once had loved.

At last, shaking as if she had the palsy, she got up and tried to stand on feet that had "pins and needles." She hobbled painfully to the window and took a guarded look out. Brilliant moonlight flooded the overgrown garden and silvered the pale boles of the birch trees beyond. Nothing moved out there. The sharp shadow made by the angle where bungalow and wood-shed joined was darkly etched. But it harboured nobody.

She moved the curtain carefully to widen the area of vision . . . and caught her breath. Now she could see him. He was just inside the woodland that bordered the back of the garden. He was almost hidden by the spreading branches of a great tree; its leaves helped to camouflage him. It was a cunning place to choose. He would be able to see anyone who left the bungalow or tried to leave it. No one could approach it, either, without his knowing, for the road must be clearly visible for some distance in either direction.

Fascinated, Christina watched him. He did not seem to be standing still, but turned slowly, a little in one direction, then a little in the other—as if he was making sure that nothing and no one should escape his vigilance.

She stayed there watching him for a long time. But there was no change

in his attitude. He was facing her and away from her in a sort of rhythm. Now towards the bungalow, now along the empty road.

She came away from the window, and wondered what on earth she could do to get herself out of this plight. This waiting to be murdered. . . .

She wasn't shuddering so violently now. A feeling of cold apathy was taking hold of her instead. She couldn't leave this place without coming under the observation of that uneasy figure on the woodland's edge. And the moment he saw her. . . .

No, she couldn't risk it. She hadn't that much courage left. If she tried to run he would catch up with her in no time. If she stayed . . . ?

She went back to the kitchen window. He was still there, in exactly the same position—still turning his face towards the bungalow and then turning towards the road.

Christina moved about restlessly; ever and again going to the window to look out at the man waiting there with the becalmed leaves of the great tree casting their shadows over him.

She felt so tired now that her legs refused to support her any more. She went wearily into the living-room and sank down exhausted into a deep, soft chair. She closed her eyes—just for a minute or two she would sit there quietly and try to think . . . but when she opened them again daylight was edging the curtains and the sound of chirruping birds filled the morning air.

She felt horrified to think she could have slept away the hours like that—

with Alfred out there waiting to kill her. That's why he had come here—to kill her. Or was it possible that he'd given up by now and gone away?

She had to rub some life and feeling into her benumbed feet before she was able to limp as far as the kitchen window. She peered out, hopefully.

He was still there. Still in the same place. Still facing towards the bungalow, then turning towards the road. . . .

Christina knew then that she was broken—that she couldn't bear this a moment longer—couldn't go on cringing in the kitchen, or even try, now, to escape.

She put on her shoes and unlocked the back door. She walked out into the sunlight of early morning. The grass was beaded with dew and felt cold and wet under her feet. Thin strands of spider-web touched her face as she blundered through the bushy undergrowth. Her husband took no notice of her approach. He continued to turn slowly towards the road, towards the bungalow. . . .

Christina pushed her way through a mass of tall nettles. She called, huskily, "I'm here, Alfred!"

It was only then that she saw the rope from which he dangled.



"Marriage is a desperate thing. The frogs in Æsop were extreme wise, they had a great mind to some water, but they would not leap into the well, because they could not get out again."

JOHN SELDEN (1584-1654): *Table Talk*.

# CARDILLO'S SHADOW

SYDNEY J. BOUNDS

*Illustrated by Robin McEwen*



**M**R. CARDILLO WAS afraid of his own shadow. He did not, of course, tell any-one of his fear; that would have

been tantamount to admitting mental instability, and Mr. Cardillo shuddered at the thought of confinement in a psychiatric ward. Nevertheless, his fear remained.

So nervous a man as Mr. Cardillo should not have lived alone in the old brownstone house on Cypress Hills. For one thing, the house had a bad reputation and was avoided by the local inhabitants; for another, it was too close to the cemetery to assuage his morbid fears. In appearance, Mr. Cardillo was thin and pale with a high forehead and watery blue eyes, and he habitually wore tight-fitting clothes of faded black that exuded a faint musty odour.

He did not feel lonely, for he was a man given to solitude; he enjoyed the silent hours spent with his books in the dusty library—enjoyed, too, the feeling of companionship his shadow gave him. At high noon, it was an intense black blob very close to his heels, like a faithful hound; at evening, it stretched to a thin, flat counterpart of himself, faintly grey in the dim light.

Mr. Cardillo was on good terms

with his shadow; it sat when he sat, walked when he walked, slept when he slept. Sometimes, Mr. Cardillo would bunch his fists and wiggle his fingers so that his shadow took on the form of some animal on the wall of his library; then he would talk to it, as solitary people will, first conjuring up a dream-image. Only Mr. Cardillo used his shadow. Like Mary's lamb, everywhere that Mr. Cardillo went his shadow was sure to go—until one day. . . .

Mr. Cardillo was never quite certain when it was he first noticed the discrepancies in his shadow's behaviour. For several days now he had been conscious of some slight irritation, without being able to place his finger on its exact cause. It seemed as if, from the corner of his eye, he caught his shadow indulging in a play of its own; yet when he looked, there was nothing unusual.

He dismissed the idea as fantasy, shrugging his thin shoulders—and was unduly relieved when his shadow shrugged in sympathy. Later, walking up the hill from the village, he noticed his shadow was blacker than normal for the time of day. It was almost as if it had gained in strength.

He stood quite still in the waning sunlight, staring down at the ground and the flat, black form reaching out from his feet. Instantly his shadow was still. Mr. Cardillo raised his free

hand and wiggled his fingers; the shadow copied his movements, but without its usual instantaneous obedience. There was a time-lag, as if it were reluctant to perform his bidding.

Uneasy in his mind, Mr. Cardillo dropped his arm and cried out in astonishment, for the arm of the shadow continued upward till the hand reached its face; there, the shadow placed a thumb to its nose and extended all four fingers in a gesture of ridicule and contempt.

Mr. Cardillo closed his eyes, opened them again to find the shadow copying his posture with meticulous care. He blinked; had he imagined that fantastic happening? He plodded onward up the hill, carefully watching his shadow for further signs of insubordination, but he reached the brownstone house without any recurrence of the abnormal.

That evening Mr. Cardillo became obsessed with the idea that his

shadow played tricks on him when his back was turned. He paced the library carpet, apparently absorbed in thought; then he would whirl about in an attempt to catch his shadow in the act of some disrespectful gesture. He never succeeded, but the idea that his shadow enjoyed a life of its own persisted in his mind.

"Dammit," said Mr. Cardillo aloud to himself, "it's *my* shadow—it *must* do what I do!"

The idea that his shadow might not always faithfully reproduce his own actions irritated Mr. Cardillo; he felt like a man whose wife is unfaithful. But he was not yet afraid—the fear did not begin until the next day. . . .

Mr. Cardillo was in the habit of using a short-cut through the cemetery. The setting sun dropped a bloody shroud across bone-white tombstones, and the dark foliage of cypress trees shivered in a cool evening breeze, patterning the unweeded path with shifting shadows. An owl hooted its melancholy call from high up in the church tower.

Pursuing his course towards the brownstone house and the seclusion of its library, his conscious thoughts absorbed by the abstruse research paper he was engaged upon, Mr. Cardillo was alarmed to notice a slight but persistent tugging at his ankles. He glanced down, thinking to free himself of an entangling brier, and found nothing; he was standing in short grass and his legs were quite free of any encumbrance.

He frowned and walked on. The tugging at his ankles grew stronger



as he approached a newly dug and yet-empty grave, the upturned clay, wet and heavy and glistening. It was then he became aware that his shadow reached from his feet to the empty grave. With mounting horror, he conceived the idea that his shadow was trying to pull him into the pit.

He stood quite still, pale of face and heart beating faster, deliberately resisting the insistent tugging at his ankles. His shadow, long and flat and darker than it should be with some new-found strength, stretched out to merge with the intense blackness dropping away into the empty grave. It seemed, to Mr. Cardillo, there was something peculiarly obscene in the way his shadow strained against the fetters of his ankles, eagerly seeking to join its fellows in the world of darkness.

Terrified, Mr. Cardillo hurried past the open grave, dragging his reluctant shadow after him. His high forehead was damp with a cold sweat and his limbs trembled; he reached the front door of his house and fumbled in his pocket for the key. So badly did his hand shake that it was fully five minutes before he got the door open—and, all the while, there was a frightful tugging at his ankles, urging him back to the newly-dug grave in the cemetery.

Mr. Cardillo slammed the door behind him, bolted and leaned against it, quivering with the weakness of a new-born kitten. When he reached the library, gone was all thought of a pleasant evening's research; he lit the lamp and surreptitiously studied his shadow.

He casually strolled the width of the room, watching the thin dark shape on the carpet; he sat down, crossed his legs; he raised his arm, lowered it. His shadow repeated the performance, this time without obvious reluctance. In fact, it seemed as if the shadow knew his thoughts, so quickly did it respond. It might almost have been burlesquing him, caricaturing his motions with devilish glee. Mr. Cardillo shuddered; there was now no doubt in his mind that his shadow had, in some uncanny way, become imbued with life—and that it was beginning to exert an influence over him.

Sleep was impossible. Mr. Cardillo lay on his bed, quaking with fear at the thought of the black shape beside him, a monstrous Siamese twin. He shuddered his way through the night hours to a tormented dawn.

It occurred to Mr. Cardillo that, perhaps, his was not the only shadow to rebel against its subordinate role in the scheme of things. For one terrible moment he had a vision of a world in which living shadows fought an unceasing battle with the material beings who gave them existence, a battle in which the shadows gained supremacy over the human race. Mr. Cardillo left the seclusion of his brownstone house for the bright sunlight of sanity with more than usual haste.

He spent the morning walking the streets of the village at the foot of the hill, maintaining a careful watch on the shadows of passers-by. Dark shapes danced on the cobble-stones, simulating the actions of their human



counterparts and, though he studied closely the fantasy of shadow-play, Mr. Cardillo was forced to acknowledge he could discern no discrepancies in the behaviour of these other shadows.

It was then, in the warm sunlight, that Mr. Cardillo began to have doubts of his mental balance. He must, he told himself, have imagined it all. He flinched, rejecting the obvious course of visiting a psychiatrist, and plodded back up the hill to the lonely brownstone house.

Mr. Cardillo paused, from time to time, to put his shadow through its paces—and, on every occasion, it obeyed instantly and correctly. There was no hesitation, no hint of rebellion; so deferential to his slightest whim did the shadow appear, that Mr. Cardillo wondered if he had imagined its previous mockery of his actions.

He reached the gate leading through the cemetery, stood hesitating. He felt loath to pass that empty grave, even in daylight, as he remembered the dreadful tugging at his ankles; but he was tired, and the short-cut saved a further twenty minutes' walk. Surely he need fear nothing in the bright afternoon sunlight? Mr. Cardillo opened the gate and entered the cemetery.

Once he had closed the gate behind him, the sun seemed to lose its reassuring warmth; a chill wind whisped through the cypress trees as he hurried along the path. Tombstones took on the ghastly aspect of yellowed molar stumps set in grim jaws, waiting to devour him.

Mr. Cardillo's feet moved with urgent speed, and his shadow danced before him, black and strong and eager. The newly dug grave with its pyramid of heavy clay loomed ahead; the shadow reached out dark arms, avidly seeking the cradle of its evil life.

Mr. Cardillo checked in mid-stride, ice-cold and stiffening with fear. Before his horrified eyes, the shadow writhed and stretched in a way that bore no resemblance to his own still and petrified form. The dark shape lengthened till its hands reached the edge of the grave; groping fingers crawled over the crumbling brink, secured a tenacious hold in the heavy clay soil.

There came a sudden, *vicious* jerking at Mr. Cardillo's ankles, and he felt himself being drawn steadily nearer the open pit. He dug in his heels, resisting his shadow's attempt to pull him towards the grave; he strained against the dark thing on the ground, shuddering at its hideous life. The branch of a tree brushed his face, and he grabbed it, his thin hands clutching the branch so tightly he bruised the skin over his knuckles. He held on grimly, fighting his shadow more desperately than any man ever fought a human enemy.

Whether he could have won that terrible tug-of-war, Mr. Cardillo could not even guess; his shadow was far from exhausted when it released its hold on the edge of the grave. It snapped back at him, like a puppet on elastic, writhing in the cold bright sunlight, clawed hands reaching for his throat.

Stumbling in mad flight, Mr. Cardillo raced for his house, ran before his shadow as thin dark hands sought to choke the life from him. He crashed through brier and tangle of weeds, sobbing in terror, white-faced and trembling; he escaped the grinning tombstones and collapsed against the front door of his house.

The sun began to warm him again and, when he looked, his shadow was close at his heels, copying his gestures with open mockery, as if it knew its power was increasing and need no longer bother with the presence of lifeless subordination. Mr. Cardillo went into his house and locked himself in.

Sunlight flooded through the library windows, and Mr. Cardillo's shadow flickered across the carpet, maliciously intent on its macabre play. It gave up the burlesque of his actions and eagerly explored the room, darting from corner to corner, climbing the walls, scuttling over dusty shelves, burrowing under furniture. Now it appeared more intensely black, more *solid*, than ever before; its vitality was frightening.

Mr. Cardillo shuttered the windows; but the light, filtering through cracks he had never before noticed, revealed the hideous thing as it roved at will. He drew heavy curtains, blocked the crack under the door with newspapers. The room was dark, the air still, the shadow no longer visible.

Mr. Cardillo sat in a chair in utter blackness, unseeing, yet knowing his shadow was ever present, a dark form hovering over him, following his



every movement with uncanny precision. Sweat froze in tiny beads on his pale face; his hands were clammy and trembling.

The hours passed, and Mr. Cardillo sat unmoving in his chair. His body felt weak, his eyes heavy with lack of sleep, his face lined with fear. The room was cold, and he knew the sun had gone down and it was night-black outside. Still he lit no lamp; he was afraid to see that flickering, effervescent thing which had once been his shadow. He knew it was still with him, could feel its aura of power grow stronger as he weakened, as if it were draining the life-force from him, feeding on him in some vampiric way.

He could feel it tugging at his ankles, trying to pull him out of the chair; it wanted to go out into the

moonlight, back to the cemetery and the newly dug grave. The tugging was insistent; Mr. Cardillo could only keep his legs from moving by holding them down with his hands; his feet tapped an odd rhythm on the carpet.

The very darkness became oppressive, seemed to close in about him, stifling him. A dreadful coldness saturated him, numbing his arms; his body stiffened and only his legs moved with restless urgency, forcing him upright, carrying him towards the door.

Mr. Cardillo wrestled with the lock, opened the door and went on to the porch. Silver-pale moonlight glittered on the cypress trees in the cemetery. His shadow ran eagerly forward, black and strong and full-bodied, dancing with wild abandon, revelling in the knowledge of its triumph. With shuddering hands and leaden face, Mr. Cardillo opened the gate of the cemetery and passed inside.

His shadow darted like an arrow for the empty grave—and Mr. Cardillo followed. . . .



Follow a Shadow, it still flies you,  
Seem to fly it, it will pursue. . . .

BEN JONSON (1572-1637): *The Forest*.

# THE ARTIST

JONATHAN SCRIBE

*Illustrated by Francis Butterfield*

*A lonely Christmas Eve—a garrulous man living by himself in a room with his memories. Dante's Inferno on the walls and something much more grisly behind them. . . .*



OCUSTAND MOUNTAIRY]]

The streets contiguous to this section of town have, since the long time of lost opulence, sunk into the same level of dusty, unkempt meanness. Ireland Street! What a congeries of names. I remember the streets vividly, though five or more years have passed since I walked there.

On a Christmas Eve I deliberately left a party of friends. I felt at that stage of the evening that I was not enjoying myself. I felt that by going out alone my own devices might prove more pleasurable.

I said "Merry Christmas," excused myself, and left, to the others' surprise.

I boarded a trolley-bus, which took me downtown. There is nothing lonelier, believe me, than being alone on Christmas Eve, especially if you are in a town and are not very successful in keeping yourself company. I regretted my leaving the party, and was of half a mind to go back. For an hour I walked about the middle of town, wondering what the devil to do. I was nearly driven to taking another

bus to go home—heaven forbid!

From where I was standing a tavern lay across the street. I debated for awhile, and then crossed, swung open the door, and crawled up on to a stool. I dispatched the first whisky-and-soda with gusto; when my second was two-thirds down, my spirits began to rise.

I recall that the booth furniture was covered with an indifferent kind of imitation red leather. Couples were occupying the booths; the people in various stages of drunkenness. The barmen—there were two—looked the absolute in patient disgust. Perhaps they had expected a better turn-out. At any rate, I sympathized with them, for the few people in the place, I observed, did not deal generously in the matter of tipping.

The second was to be enough; I was drinking no more that night. I might as well face it—go home and read a few chapters.

I swung around on the stool to get down; on the one next to mine sat a fellow whom I had not noticed before. He came in, no doubt while I was turned the other way gaping at the occupants of the booths. His glance caught mine; he cackled

mirthlessly—the top of his body moving in quick vertical motions, his shoulders rising and falling as he laughed.

“Are you in the same boat as myself?” He gestured, turning his palm until it was outstretched. “I mean that you seem to be at a loose end—that you have nothing to do on this prenatal day of Christ’s, this Christmas Eve of Anno Domini 1943. Christmas is not the harbinger of joy for everybody.”

“An interesting remark—a lot of people are unhappy, true enough.”

“Look,” he said, as if the thought had suddenly occurred to him, “I live on the corner of Locust and Mount Airy. Would you like to come with me? I have some wine, and it’s not too bad. We might salvage a little of the spirit of Christmas. What do you say?”

I believe that I was unwilling to go, but I did say yes. In some fashion the man appealed to me.

He was of very slender physique. I liked his face: the nose was prominent as the prow of a ship and just as sharply fashioned. His chin brought its leanness far to the front. His face struck me as being one of character. I use the term loosely. In his eyes was a strained, staring look. His hair, which was thick and greyish, was clipped short so that it curled in short tufts about his head. When first he spoke to me he was filling his pipe. He lit it with care, and drew on it with a thoughtful expression. His eyes scanned the depths of nowhere.

“Perhaps,” he continued, “you have not visited this distinguished

part of town where I live. It is really a very choice place, though there are many people who would not agree with me. A little run-down, somewhat ragged.” He shepherded me out on to the street; we pulled up our overcoat collars, for the wind was out of the north and biting. “Fifty or sixty years ago the locality was opulent. The houses are still large; age may wither them, but it cannot shrink them. So what if a few panes are missing here and there? What if a door is twisted on its hinges, out of plumb and hanging? At night, especially at this time, an air of mystery pervades the place. The street lights are placed infrequently (I understand that is a low-tax district). All we lack to give it the best of atmosphere is an English fog—a London pea-souper. Have you been in England?”

“No. . . .”

“I was born there. I remember a little about the fog, of the colour of pea-soup. Well, we must be satisfied with second best. Our fogs don’t match with those of London, but they do their best.”

With nearly every word he spoke he peered down and looked closely at my face; he may have feared that some of his narrative might escape me.

“You have interesting neighbours—they are pleasant?”

“Why shouldn’t they be pleasant? As a matter of fact, they are very agreeable, but poor. I am poor—at least, I am poor now.

“To the side of me, the next door down the hall, lives a man who carts

barrels around in the daytime. Now, don't ask me why he carts barrels about. I have surmised that he does it for money. No doubt, he enjoys an agreement with an employer. . . ."

Long-winded fellow!

"Now, next door from me down the hall, pardon me, I mean up the hall, lives a stout lady (she smokes a good deal) who is retired. I have no idea what she retired from. She must be fifty if she is a day; wears a lot of make-up; she plasters it on, flour barrel, you know. She is a merry soul. She did tell me that she used to be in the business, whatever she meant by that.

"Above and below me my fellow lodgers follow deviating but humble callings. In the evening they come in; in the morning they quietly leave for their scenes of toil. The lives of the people there constitute a pageant of the humble. They do not smile much; for that matter, they do not weep. Their eyes hold a quiet purposefulness."

"And what is their purpose?" My self-respect demanded that I pry in a word here and there.

"Oh, didn't you know? They have no purpose other than that of living." He looked down at my face and he walked rapidly. It took all my breath to keep abreast of him.

The streets were gloomy and old, and to me dispiriting. I thought that it must take a hardy or quite desperate character to keep on living in that dank, cheerless neighbourhood. Broken pavements—yellow light crept from out of the windows through shabby curtains. As we walked on,

the spirits of my new friend seemed to rise while mine were fast descending.

I felt the damp wind on my cheek. A wan moon, its face partially obscured by the veil of cloud, brought a sullen half-light across the worn faces of the old houses.

"Here we are! This is my door, and these," he added as we got inside the hall, "are my stairs; let us ascend them. They creak a little under the tread. This way to that door on our right hand. Let me see, my key. Ah, here it is, lucky! Welcome to our hearth."

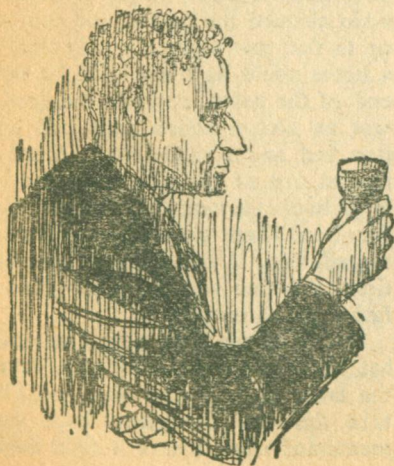
There was a hearth, but it had long suffered disuse. An enamelled brick affair, it had varnished shelves and the inevitable mirror. The shelves were crammed with junk and oddments—papers, old magazines, pipes in indifferent state of repair. The room did not have an uncheerful appearance. It was large and square, painted in a dark green. A round table claimed the centre, and drawn up to that was a great, untidy chair; a horse could have sat in it. At the end of the room, opposite the door, was an alcove which contained an iron bed and a single chair. A sofa against one of the side walls and a large bookcase near it comprised the furniture. There was a carpet of sorts, ragged, thin. If carpets have generations, this one was the great-grandfather of all carpets.

"Here, let me have your coat and hat. Make yourself comfortable. Take the large chair if you like, and I'll take the sofa. Sometime back we mentioned wine. I have it right here

in the bookcase; in plain view, in a place of honour for all to see. We of the Brownson household do not deceive. I think the glasses are clean enough, there is a little dust on them"—he held one up to the light—"not quite crystal clear. What is a little dust? 'For dust thou art. . . .' I think this wine is very new, but the label is very pretty. We must not expect too much. There, to your health, sir, and a Merry Christmas."

He downed his wine with a gulp.

"Look at the pictures on the walls. Not bad, eh. They are mine. Most of them are pen drawings of allegorical work—I mean subjects. Some of the scenes I have imagined from Dante. This is the man who was condemned to carry his head in his hand. Here's a fellow rooted, like a tree, to one spot for all eternity, and this is where Dante 'Found him in a lonely wood astray.'"



The sketches from the *Inferno* were realistic enough. In their way they inspired a certain kind of horror, though I considered them to be first-rate.

"I don't understand——"

"Go on."

"I mean that these pictures are excellent. Hang it all, why is it necessary for you to live in a place like this. Surely such work deserves a decent income."

"Ha! How little you know of art and the struggles of the artist. Those pictures that you see I have done in my idle hours. My working day is spent in commercial drawing. I retouch photographs. I might be called on to do an ad. about soap for some merchant. Again, someone might ask me to design a brochure for some miraculous hair tonic."

He slapped the air with his hand, passing it off as a subject not fit to talk about. "It is a living. When I was very young I dreamed great dreams. Some day (I thought then) the world would contend with my name. I would be a Gainsborough, a Sargent, or a Turner, not to mention Velasquez. I have only achieved Claude Brownson."

"Claude Brownson?"

"I forgot; that is the name. Sorry that I did not introduce myself earlier. What is yours?"

I told him mine; it is not germane to this story.

"As long as we have met and been introduced, one of us might as well do the talking. Now, do you want to talk or shall I?"

"I have never had the question of

conversation so put before. Talk by all means. You will prove more interesting. My life's a dull affair."

"All lives are dull, if it comes to that. But wait a minute, man! We must have more wine! Your glass is quite empty. *'In vino veritas.'* Here, your glass, please. Do you know that this is an eventful Christmas Eve for me? I have a companion! Did you hear what I said? A companion. And, my friend (I like to call you my friend), we shall make the most of it. This old room," he said, waving his full glass and spilling about half on the carpet, "may be dull, but it is an improvement, you must agree, on the place which we have lately left. Are you comfortable?"

"Never more so."

"My father was a weird fellow, a queer duck. . . . He came over here from England when I was just a boy. I don't know why he came.

"I had one sister and she died soon after we arrived, she caught some sudden illness. My mother followed her shortly after. After those two left him, dad felt very sorry for himself. He brooded because he liked to brood. He lived for three more years, and I was left alone; I was sixteen. I had to work. I worked in factories; in the fields—I worked anywhere. I had saved a little money so that I was enabled to take an art course by correspondence. (I drew ever since I can remember.) The course was a short one, but it did give me a groundwork in the fundamentals. I went on from there. . . ."

I cannot possibly remember all the things that he talked about. There

seemed to be wine and more wine. A pleasant dreaminess stole over me. I listened to his narrative with all my attention. His voice was composed of sharp, staccato tones for the most part, and when I felt my head to be drooping, a still sharper tone in his voice would bring me to stricter attention. The spirit rather than the essence of his story remains with me.

He is as plain, I mean that the man is as plain, to my vision now as when he was sitting across from me five years ago, talking and emphasizing his conversation with his wine glass.

I think it most strange.

I remember the beginning and the end of the evening. The middle comes now and then in instalments. I subscribe to a dilatory memory.

He remarked on the lateness of the hour.

"Look," he said, after a bridge of silence, "come to the window and look at the snow. It has been falling for some time. It is deep on the street; so white; so pure. Remember the lines: 'Before rude hands have smutched it'? You may laugh at me," he said more quietly, "but I have often tried to paint a Christmas scene—without success. I've had to tear them all to pieces, they were no good. I cannot do the things I want to do. I've had to stick with car cards, inner tubes, bicycles. I can draw any simple thing which contains a discernible right angle. . . ."

"Those pictures on the walls do not consist of simple angles."

"What's that?" He said this with evident surprise. "Oh, those pictures



on the walls." His eyes looked queerly confused; quizzical. "We'll not talk about them now."

I was a puzzled man. I asked him: "Weren't you very disappointed when you discovered that you could not sell your pictures, and that you found it necessary to do commercial art work to make a living? I mean, such a long-cherished dream, to have it die?"

"Oh yes, I was very disappointed—for the first thirty years. You will not believe me, but I was forty-five before I finally faced the facts which were myself and my limitations. I am fairly happy now. Maybe I am happier than if all those cherished dreams were realized and sent to me by an angel; sent to me in a golden box. Pearl told me something like that."

"Did you mention a pearl or Pearl."

"I have been so busy talking that I forgot about Pearl. She was a pearl without price—she came cheaply enough; she wanted nothing."

"Where is she now?"

"Where are the snows of yesteryear, my friend? It has been many years since I have seen her. Make of it what you will.

"I had known Pearl Langtry for many years. She loved me. Oh, I loved her well enough when there was no one more attractive to be had. At the last she was becoming impatient of my cavalier treatment of her. I remember the finale; the parting with her so well. . . . A chill went through me as I saw the expression on her face, for I knew that she had

forced every speck of feeling for me away. I knew then that she despised me.

"Since then I have concentrated on being cheerful. I guess I have been partially successful, because the friends I did have looked at me in a peculiar way, as if there was something wrong with my head. They expected me to be as I always had been—glum. They didn't understand the reformation. Let it go. On this Christmas Eve I have struck up an acquaintance with a stranger. I bring him to this room, and regale him with my story and wine. Thank you for coming. Have you been bored?"

"You have entertained me."

"I'm glad of that. Be very careful not to see me again. No, please, I can't consider it. We have been entertained, and think, or choose to think, that the other has been excellent company. Let's not tempt the fates of boredom. Leave it at that."

I thought him rude. I didn't know the proper thing to say. I wished that I had been nimble-witted enough to think of a reply which might have repaid him for his lack of manners.

He sat down, the wine flagon still clasped in his hand. I got up and looked moodily out of the window. I turned and saw that his face looked greyish. Before, he seemed to be a well-preserved man in his forties. Now he looked middle-aged and ill.

"I think we could be friends. I am alone most of the time. I could borrow from that store of cheerfulness that you have acquired. Next time I'll tell the story of my life, though I can

think of no reason why you should want to hear it."

No answer. Was he considering what to say? He might be asleep; he had emptied most of that flagon. I turned to the window again; watched the falling snow. I singled out a large flake, and watched its course until it was close to the ground. I asked the question that Villon asked about the snows.

A few moments passed before I reacted to the sound behind me. From the diamonds glinting on the surface of the snow I turned and saw broken glass on the floor. The flagon had fallen from his hand. My hand was nearly to the floor before I stopped and looked at the man's face. His head and upper body had pitched forward, near to the point of falling.

I felt that he had died. I ran down the hall to use the 'phone to call the police. The police-surgeon said afterwards that he was dead of heart failure. I was asked some perfunctory questions and told to go home.

It was a sacrilege, I told myself, that the other occupants of the bus which took me home that morning should be so boisterously gay. I asked myself the question: Why should I leave a party of friends, meet a stranger, go to his rooms and watch him die? Why should I be the one to usher him from a short sleep to an endless one?

Strange are the ways of man; stranger are the ways of the gods.

It was two days later when I came across the notice in the paper for which I had been searching.

### *Christmas-morning Heart Victim*

"On Christmas morning at four o'clock the police were summoned by a Clifford Epperly to a room in a boarding-house at Locust and Mount Airy Streets. The deceased gave his name as Claude Brownson to Mr. Epperly, whom he had met in a tavern on Christmas Eve. No Claude Brownson is listed in the city directory. The police did discover a Social Security card in the dead man's effects bearing the name Oscar Smith. Oscar Smith is listed as a sign painter who occasionally worked for Watson Brothers. Identification was made by Mr. Watson, who could tell nothing of the deceased's private life."

Mrs. Green, the landlady, said that she had rented no room to an Oscar



Smith. When the police summoned her to identify the dead man, she said it was Claude Brownson. She later changed her story and said that the dead man resembled Claude Brownson, but that definitely the corpse was of a different person. She said that Claude Brownson was a shorter man!

A poser! Whom had I accompanied to that room on Christmas Eve? Naturally the events of that evening stirred my curiosity. I went to a room upon the invitation of the purported occupant. He was not the occupant. Who and where was the lodger, Claude Brownson?

The events of the evening finally gave way to current things. The winter disappeared, followed by the formality of other seasons, and through the years the thought of Oscar Smith faded to the dim shadow of recollection. Still a curiosity was mine. It is not unreasonable to ask why. It is a rare occurrence when a man dies in your presence—on the eve of the birth of The Man!

You see, I wondered so often of those scenes from Dante. Could they, by any wild chance, be still hanging on the walls of that room? I mentioned before that the room had a certain shabby comfort which in its way appealed to me. It was the room of mystery to me. I am a dull fellow; my life is dull. Why not romance of a sort?

This time it lacked a few days until Christmas Eve when I went to the room again.

The same landlady was there. She

didn't recognize me; not surprising in that she saw me only for a few minutes at the morgue—five years ago. There is something—not of the mind nor the soul—which sends messages. It fitted in with my hunch—the room was vacant! "Mrs. Green, I'll take this room." I said it quickly, so eager was I to seal the bargain. I paid her a month's rent in advance. That gesture saved me from any questions. When she closed the door, I sat down in the large chair. It wasn't near the table, but I recognized it surely enough. The room had undergone some changes, I believe the colour of the walls was faded. The carpet was changed. While the other carpet was Methuselah, let us say, this one had not outlived Moses.

I hardly dared look, but they were there! The scenes from Dante weren't changed—I suppose this room had undergone the tenancy of many people since five years ago. They were not interested in pictures nor oddities. They wanted a place to sleep—a bed to lie in before the force of circumstance drove them to another ragged district to further pass the weariness of their lives.

As I sat in the large, sacky chair, there was no difficulty for me to recapture the spirit of five years ago. Let me see. . . . He sat on the sofa, opposite me. The sofa was the same. He stood in front of that enamelled brick-façaded fireplace which had known no fire for several decades. I let the physical surroundings go hang while I concentrated on other aspects of the odd occurrence.

What about Claude Brownson? As

far as any news I could glean, he was left out of any police investigation—presuming there was an inquiry. My understanding of the situation had not changed from that Christmas Eve—simply that I had been invited by a stranger to another man's room. I know I saw the one man die before my eyes—he died from failure of his heart. What about this other chap? Where was he? Who was he? Did the authorities inquire about the whereabouts of the missing man. If they did, they appeared satisfied. They wanted him for nothing. Apparently his landlady saw no reason to prosecute a search.

The mystery irked me. I suppose that Claude Brownson was found. I was morally sure that he had not been in this room since Oscar Smith came to die in it.

I made it my business in the next few days to ascertain some facts about the man who met me in the tavern. I went to where he worked. His employer smiled. "I'd almost forgotten him—queer duck!"

"Why do you say that?"

"He was a fellow who never used a short word where a long one would do—used to talk to himself. He was a fairly good sign painter. Not very dependable—came when he felt like it. . . ."

"Where did he live?"

"You're forgetting that the fellow died five years ago. I don't remember." Mr. Watson scratched what was left of his hair, said good day to me and left me standing in his untidy office.

My stubborn spirit was aroused by

that time. I wanted to sift this thing down to the bottom.

His name was in the city directory of five years previously. There it was. "Oscar Smith, Sign Painter—535 Howell Avenue." I went to that address, an old man answered the door.

"Yes?" He raised his snow-white eyebrows in patient inquiry. He was frail; thin. He was stooped. One hand held the door-handle, the other a reeking pipe.

"May I come in a minute? I am not a salesman. Was there ever a Mr. Oscar Smith who lived here?"

"My name is Oscar Smith. What do you want?"

My eyebrows went up! I hadn't bargained on a relative opening the door. However, Smith was a common name.

"I wanted to ask about a man who died five years ago. . . ."

"You mean my son."

"Yes—you are his father? I am sorry—you see I was with him when he died—he invited me up to his room."

"So you're the man! It wasn't his room—it was somebody else's."

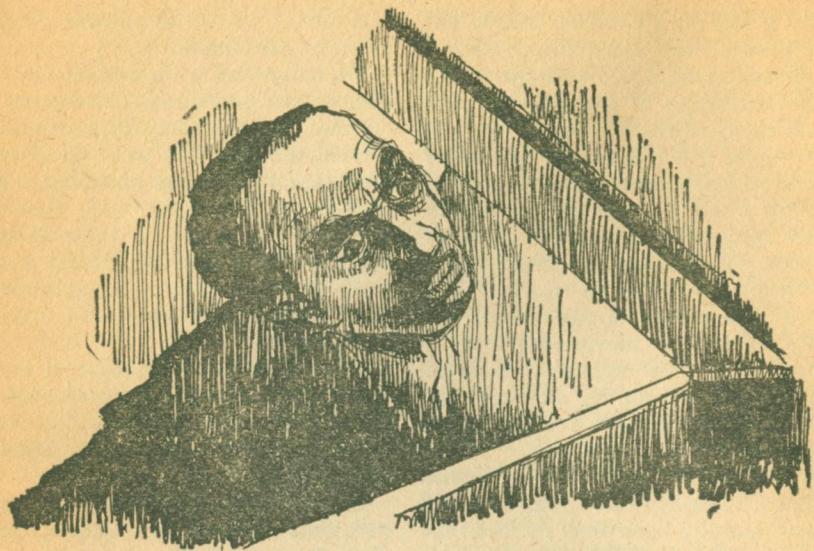
The old man's tone was terse.

"Was your son a sign painter?"

"Yes, he was. When he was young, he wanted to be an artist—always wanted to be an artist. I told him to have sense—stick to his signs. You either have it or you don't."

"What—"

"A man's either an artist or he isn't." Now Mr. Smith said testily, "Is there anything else you want to know?"



"No—there isn't. I'm very sorry that you lost your son."

"We have to die sometimes. Anyway, he was lazy; would never have been any good!"

I thanked him and left. Oscar Smith had a sympathetic father!

Now I shall make a confession. I have harboured a thought, due, I think, to a romantic fancy. I have always conceived a liking for the mysterious, I said that I was a dull fellow and that my life was dull. Well, then, by contrast we like detective stories. We are students of murder; disappearances. We build on where no foundation is evident.

My idea was that Oscar Smith had, somehow, killed Claude Brownson in his room and then bricked him up in some fashion in the tiled fireplace.

Ridiculous? Of course. That was one of the reasons that I rented the room.

There were several reasons why the body of Claude Brownson should not be in the fireplace. There would be the question of odour; no tenant, evidently, had complained of a foul smell. There was another argument against such a preposterous happening. There was no evidence that the fireplace had room for a body; in fact, there was no outward evidence that the bricks had been tampered with.

I bought hammer and chisel—also I took along a screwdriver or two which I had in my car. About nine in the evening I set to work. I knew there would be no callers. I would be disturbed only by tenants or the land-

lady. A remote possibility.

I made sure that all the blinds were drawn tight, and arranged a dim light, which I put on the maple mantel-board. Humph! it was plain to see that the fireplace was a masterpiece of false work. The actual grate, which had been sealed, was in area about two by two feet. The sealing bricks were built up from the base, so that they in no way interfered with the surrounding structure. They were not mortared at the sides nor at the top of the opening. I was not concerned with that. The bricking was done long before Claude Brownson came to the place, I was sure. The boxlike enamelled brick veneering, the façade of the actual grate, extended about two feet from the walls of the room. In short, it appeared to be an ornamental box, done in tile, which was simply slapped against the wall after the grate was set in the chimney. I wedged my chisel in between the edge of the mantel-board—it gave. In my excitement I dropped the chisel on the floor. The noise it made sounded like the dropping of a bucket of bricks. In the best manner of a conspirator, I listened to see if I had raised any interest from tenants below. Nothing. I lifted the board up. Attached to its under parts on three sides were inch rulers to hold it securely in place.

I smiled then, realizing how ridiculous the whole venture was.

Holding up the light to peer within the space, I saw the rough concreting of the chimney. I couldn't see all the way to the bottom of the aperture. I brought over a chair.

I looked down; the lamp fell from my hands as I saw him.

His middle drooped over the arch of the bricking; feet and arms sunk in the aperture on either side. Dust—cobwebs lent a greyish tone to the picture.

I picked up the lamp and looked again. The body, that is to say, the skin on the face and arms, was shrivelled. I had taken a newspaper to flick off the dust. The skin was desiccated; brownish. The outline of the bones was visible. The body was a shrunken mass.

It was plain now—on the back of the head was a dark spot—a hole. Surely this man was murdered!

Having gone this far, I wanted to be sure of the corpse's identity. In some fashion, I wasn't too squeamish about feeling it. I gave a tug to the coat; it was a faint green in colour. My pull rent the garment. One side came off in my hands. The side included the inside pocket. I withdrew some papers from the pocket and threw the coat back. After that I took the mantel-board and replaced it. There was a little tidying up to do. When everything was placed to rights again, I looked at the papers.

On top of the pile was a bus schedule. I put that to one side. There was a receipt and a bill, the kind given at stores when a purchase is completed. They were without name or relevance. They contained merely the amounts of purchase and paying.

I was beginning to feel disappointment. If the rest of the contents were

like these, I would learn nothing. I discarded a few more bits of unmeaning paper. There remained at the bottom, a sheet of paper—folded three ways. I opened it. It was a letter, written in pencil, covering two sheets. The handwriting was large and sprawling. It read.

Mr. Claude Brownson. (There was no date.)

Sir:

*Though I'm only a sign painter, there is no need for you to treat me with such discourtesy.*

*When I spoke to you at the picture exhibition in the library, you promised that you would teach me, at least, the fundamentals of drawing. Do me the credit of admiring your work. In case you have forgotten, I paid you ten dollars which you demanded as a retainer. When I called at your room, you laughed in my face.*

There followed two paragraphs which I could not make out. The last one read:

*But I am going back to your room and force myself in. If you do not pay me back the ten dollars, I shall take two of your pictures. . . .*

*Expect me,  
Oscar Smith.*

There it is.

Now came the important question of this bizarre night—I must tell the police. Oh yes! I shall be questioned. Damn it all, I shall have a lot to explain. Can I convince them of my motives in coming to this room to satisfy a curiosity? It was going to be unpleasant.

I sat until four o'clock in the morning, my imagination running off with my good sense.

I was in a pretty mess and no mistake about it. Wouldn't it be horrible if I had the killing of Claude Brownson pinned on me, five years after the deed was done?

The question, however, solved itself suddenly. Our minds will run on a rail of habit.

I gathered up all the papers I had taken from the rotted coat—I made sure that I took them all.

In rising from the chair I was surprised at the stiffness in my legs. I walked over and again lifted up the wooden mantel. The papers fluttered down and gently touched the corpse. I put the board back on. With my handkerchief I removed all the evidences of dust that I could see.

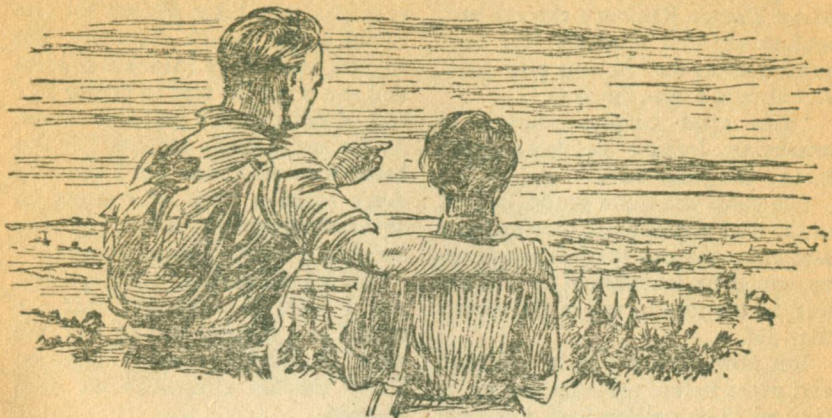
Claude Brownson—I found you!] It is strange that I should have known where to look for you. We have met for the first and the last time. I shall leave you as I found you. Who knows?—perhaps when you are next seen they will be tearing the old house down. I hope that is a good time away.

It's odd, too, how at this time in the morning your presence is so damnably evident. It is not nice having you so near.

Let the police follow their own devices; I shall follow mine.

At least I shall possess the rarity of knowing murder was done and where the corpse reposes.

The pictures on the walls have lost their appeal; they're a little too realistic and apropos.



## THE CAVE

F. McDERMOTT

*Illustrated by L. Hillyard*

*Major McDermott's previous excursion into horror fiction—The Spider—published in this magazine some time ago, has been adapted for television in America and translated into Danish for inclusion in an anthology of outstanding short stories. In The Cave this writer again calls upon the county in which he lives—Cornwall—for the final scenes of a story in which reincarnation and the power of mind over matter build up to such a climax of horror that even The Spider is eclipsed.*

“**G**UILTY, BUT INSANE!” That was the verdict. It would not be very surprising if I were insane. But I know so well that I am not. Why won't they let you tell your own story in your own way in a court? I tried to bring forward the case of that girl in France—I've forgotten her name now—whose feet and hands used to open

up every Friday with holes which bled just as if big nails had been driven through them. Then next day the wounds had disappeared as though they had never been. She was devoutly religious, and used to spend much of her time praying in front of a crucifix. The power of her mind over her body did the rest. At any rate, that's what I've always thought.

Even when I mentioned telepathy, I was stopped. I wanted to tell them



about Doctor Rheiner's experiments, and to say that telepathy had been proved up to the hilt time after time. But always it was the same:

"You must confine yourself to answering learned counsel's questions," the judge said.

His voice was quite gentle. In fact, as the trial proceeded it became more and more obvious that his summing-up would be tantamount to a direction to the jury to return the verdict they did.

But now, with a pen in my hand and paper before me—the warder, if they call them warders here, was quite sympathetic as he gave them to me—there is nobody to prevent me from telling what actually happened.

The whole ghastly business began in such a simple way, and yet I suppose the incident which occurred when I first met Joan should have warned me that we were likely to encounter the unusual.

I was standing on a hill in Surrey, overlooking a glorious sweep of country, and had just decided from my map exactly where I was. A voice behind me said:

"Excuse me, can you tell me the way to Dorking station, please?"

I turned and saw a pleasant-looking girl, dressed in blue jumper and skirt. For a moment I thought I knew her, then decided I didn't. I handed the map to her, pointing out our position. And, as we stood there, looking down upon the setting sun, suddenly, and completely without conscious volition on my part, I placed my arm around her shoulders. Now, in these days there is nothing particularly remark-

able in a man hiker placing his arm round a girl hiker's shoulders. But anyone who knows Joan will confirm that she is not the type to permit that sort of thing from a perfect stranger. As for me, I don't suppose I'm any better than most men, but I certainly don't make a habit of treating an obviously decent girl in that way after less than a minute's acquaintanceship.

I think I did stammer some apology, and I seem to remember that she smiled in a puzzled sort of way. We went to Dorking station together. Three months afterwards we were married.

Though we were quite ridiculously happy, we agreed from the beginning that it would be a good idea for each of us to have an evening away from the other once a week. Joan usually went to see a film, and I, not being the sort that cares much for pubs, generally popped along to the Gambit Club, which started, as its name implies, by being a chess club, and gradually developed into the sort of place where people gather over a cup of coffee and discuss all sorts of unusual subjects—ghosts, space travel, Atlantis—all that sort of thing. Not the sensational stuff, you understand, but the scientific angle.

As always in clubs, little cliques tended to form, and I most often found myself at a table with Doctor Ames, the well-known psychiatrist, and Leslie Fisher, the long, melancholy-looking chemist in our street, who used to gaze at the Doctor through his thick bifocals as if he were in the presence of the Oracle itself. One night Leslie said he'd been

reading an article saying that although our conscious minds forget such a lot, there is an absolute record, somewhere in our brain, of everything we've ever heard or seen. Doctor Ames chipped in and said this was quite true and was perfectly easy to prove.

"When you're in that drowsy state before going to sleep," he said, "concentrate on something you do remember which happened a fairly long time ago. Gradually, you'll find all sorts of attendant circumstances, which you've forgotten, will come back to you."

Well, I tried it that night. I began to think about little Snowball, the boy who used to sit next to me in my prep. school. We called him that because he was fat and round and had almost white hair. Then Hewitt came to my mind. The association was obvious. Snowball was a Surrey fan during the cricket season, Hewitt backed Middlesex, and I was passionately devoted to Essex. Suddenly I felt once again that shame, that real mental agony which nearly caused me to play truant when it was obvious that Essex was going to suffer an innings defeat by Surrey. With that feeling the whole of the classroom returned to me. I could see old Baylis, his gown all dusty with chalk, and the fascinating mole, hanging by a stalk to his cheek, which always distracted my attention from what he was writing on the blackboard. I could have recited the names of all the boys in the class—long since forgotten in my normal state.

I was so thrilled with this result

that as soon as I'd called "Good night" to Joan the next night—we shared the same room but had single beds at opposite ends of it—I began again. And so it went on. Each night the pictures got clearer. Each night I went farther and farther back with my memories.

Then, one night, a startling realization came over me. The memory process was no longer under my own control. I had closed my eyes, and was just wondering on what I should concentrate, when a picture began to form of palm-trees and waves breaking on an Eastern shore. When I was very tiny indeed, my parents had been in Ceylon.

If only I'd done something about it then! But the uncertainty as to what the experiences would be made them all the more interesting, and I let them go on, though what happened a few nights afterwards did make me a little uneasy. As the usual dreaminess came over me, I was conscious of a more than ordinary comfort and warmth. Almost I felt I was floating. Suddenly there was a great disturbance around me, and I felt urgent and recurring pressures. At the same time a feeling of desire and excitement pervaded me. This was followed by movement, discomfort, cold and asphyxia. My buttocks flinched from a sharp stinging pain, and I yelled out so loudly that I woke Joan. *I had just been born!*

While the recalling of the memories had been nothing more than a psychological game I had thoroughly enjoyed it. But now, if I tried to concentrate on some simple recollection

of the past, it was just wiped out as if a wet rag had been passed over a slate, and in its place would come an experience, far more vivid than any dream and without a dream's irrational quality. Generally, the experience merged into ordinary sleep, but there was no escaping it by trying to go to sleep first. Next morning I always remembered clearly. There was no uncertainty or haziness.

It was Joan who got me to go to our doctor—old Doctor Furzebury, who told me to take a couple of aspirins at night, that I was run-down, and that he would give me a tonic!

Then I thought of Doctor Ames. After all, he had practically started the whole business. He was tremendously excited, and I felt an inexplicable uneasiness as his cold grey eyes bored into mine. He said he could cure me by suggestion given while I was under narcosis, and that owing to his interest in the case he would treat me free. How often I have wondered what really happened during those hypnotic sessions. But after he had injected the drug I was never able to remember anything other than the low monotonous drone of his voice. In court he stated he had suggested that I should no longer be troubled by the "vivid dream experiences." But I noticed that not once did he allow his eyes to meet mine.

Anyway, I shall never know now. All I do know is that from that night the waking dreams took such absolute possession of me that the very thought of going to bed became a horror, and I took bigger and bigger doses of sleeping-tablets in an en-

deavour to stupefy my brain before lying down.

Joan was wonderful. But the strain of watching my pitiful state get worse and worse was beginning to tell upon her.

Then came the night I call the Roman night. Oh God, why wasn't I warned then? Why didn't I go away—take my own life—anything. . . .

Joan had given me a glass of hot milk and insisted that I must try to get to sleep without any unnatural aids. As I lay down she put her cool hand over my forehead, and for a glorious moment I thought that this would have the desired effect. Then I felt a cloak around me and the weight of a metal helmet on my head. Strapped to my side was a short broadsword. I was standing in the twilight on a hill looking over a pleasant scene of misty downs. I was wriggling my toes in sandals, because my legs, bare to the knees, felt cold.

Then I saw another figure—a woman—approaching. Her dark hair was plaited and coiled, and she, too, was wearing a cloak, but a more voluminous one than mine. I knew she was my wife. *And I knew that she was Joan!* As she came up, I placed my arm around her shoulders—just as I did that afternoon in Surrey—and we stood together looking down at the setting sun. Then she noticed that my right arm was bleeding from a long but not very deep slash. She tore a strip from one of her undergarments and bound it up. How peaceful and happy I felt. I slept wonderfully that night.

When I got down to breakfast Joan was already seated at the table, and she glanced at me without her usual morning smile.

I kissed her and, looking into her big eyes, said:

"Well, if all my nightmares were like last night's, I shouldn't mind a bit. Want to hear about it?"

"There is no need," she answered softly. "I wonder how you got that wound on your arm?"

I stared at her, then at my arm. There was no mark upon it.

"You know about it? You were there? Has this ever happened before?"

"No," she said, shuddering. Then her arms were about me and she was sobbing on my breast.

"Oh, darling, I don't like it. What does it all mean? One moment I was stroking your forehead, longing for you to get some refreshing sleep; the next I was walking up that hill towards you. It wasn't a dream. It was real—real!"

It was strangely satisfying to me that the roles of comforter and comforted had been reversed.

"Don't worry!" I said. "Such things have happened before. It was just that it was so vivid in my mind, you got it, too—by telepathy, that's all. I don't suppose it will ever occur again."

But I spoke without any inner conviction.

It was that night we first saw the cave. Or, rather, felt it. Around us there was a sensation of damp cold, in spite of the big wood fire which was blazing near us. We were both



wearing skins and lying on other skins. There was a stale, sour smell of human bodies and urine around us. Nearby I could hear drops of water falling intermittently into a pool. Every now and again part of the fire blazed up and I could see other groups silhouetted against the dark background beyond the cave. There was a great fear in me of that background, and at the same time a sense of responsibility. I was on watch.

I got up and placed some more wood from a pile on to the fire. As it crackled upwards in a rush of sparks, I heard a sound from the menacing background. If you can imagine a giant taking in his hand a great sheet of metal and tearing it slowly across, it may give you some slight idea of that harsh, purring reverberation.

Not far away, family life, in its broadest sense, had been taking place,

and as the sound cascaded upon our little encampment, the couple broke away from their embraces and sat up with fear in their eyes. Many of the sleepers, too, were waking. I felt Joan stir beside me and nuzzle piteously into the thick hair on my breast. But I pushed her aside and got to my feet again. I felt my nostrils distending, and was conscious that a curious musk-like smell was now added to the other unpleasant odours around me.

Suddenly the fire blazed up again and I saw a movement where the feeble circle of light merged into the darkness. It was a naked baby crawling away rapidly on hands and knees. Then from the impenetrable blackness above there descended something which I find very difficult to describe. It was just a head and neck. I could see no body. The head was shaped something like that of a crow, but in size was as long as a full-grown man. In the bony, beak-like mouth there were rows of thin curved teeth, and as the head swayed slowly to and fro above the child, leathery eyelids the size of soup-plates blinked over huge, yet beady eyes. I have seen the head and eyes of a domestic hen look much the same as it searched for its food. Then a long neck, armour-plated like a crocodile's, stretched out, and the child, screaming at the top of its lungs, was lifted upwards into the darkness.

I rushed to the fire and pulled from it a burning tree branch. As I swung this round, a piece of white-hot wood, the size of a walnut, fell upon one of Joan's naked legs, just above the

knee. With her scream in my ears I woke up.

I could still hear the scream. It was coming from Joan's bed. Hastily I switched on the bedside lamp.

Joan was sitting up in bed. Her screaming had given place to a low moaning, and she was clasping one of her legs with both hands. In a moment I was beside her and had her in my arms. She was trembling as if with fever. Gently, I disengaged her hands from her leg. There, just above the knee, was a place the size of a walnut, scorched, raw and angry-looking.

I got out the first-aid kit and dressed it as I would any ordinary burn. Then I went downstairs and made a cup of tea. Neither of us mentioned what had taken place, but as I tried to steady the tea-cup in her still-shaking hands, her head fell forward so that her hair brushed my face, and she shuddered so violently that the tea was spilt.

"What are we going to do? What are we going to do?" she kept sobbing.

"One thing *you're* going to do," I said, "is to go away for a little while, and have a holiday as far from me as you can. Then, when Doctor Ames or somebody else has cured these nightmares of mine, you can come back."

She looked up, and her old smile shone through her tears.

"Do you remember how many tins there were in the dustbin that time I came back from looking after mother when she was ill? No, darling—you need me now even more than then.

And if I go away, you're coming, too."

The certificate that Doctor Ames gave me said that I was in imminent danger of a mental breakdown and that rest and change were essential.

We chose Cornwall—the creek district on the south coast. I'd never been there before, but had always wanted to go. We had, to ourselves, a tiny three-roomed cottage owned by a farmer and his wife who lived in a small farm on the other side of the steep, narrow, tree-enshrouded lane. We each slept in a separate room, but with our doors open so that we could call out to each other.

On the first night, after taking my sleeping-tablets, I settled down in fear on the rather hard little bed. I was tired by the journey, and there was an atmosphere of peace about that seemed to wrap my brain as if in scented cotton-wool. I say "scented" because the window was open, and from it came the mingled fragrance of roses and evening primroses and night-scented stocks.

I remember nothing more till the following morning, when I awoke feeling better than I'd felt for weeks. Joan, too, though her face still looked a little drawn, was smiling.

"I want to go fishing to-day," she said.

We hired a little row-boat and nosed in and out of those wonderful creeks. We caught no fish, but we lazed in little backwaters where tiny trees jostled to the water's edge, and the sun blazed down upon us while we lay back and looked up at the blue sky and listened to the lapping

and gurgling of tiny waves on the limpet-encrusted rocks.

A week passed like that. I had none of the nightmares. Though Joan and I had spent many happy hours together, I was happier during that week than ever in my life before. I think she was, too.

Then came June 15th.

*"Can you tell us what happened on the night of June 15th?"*

*"Will you tell the Court, in your own words, exactly what you did on the night of June 15th?"*

Well, I tried to tell them, didn't I? But they wouldn't listen. The judge sat with his head lowered, not looking at me, just tapping with a pencil. When he did glance up, it was merely to make some sign to my counsel. And then they stopped me.

I remember it rained in the morn-



ing and Joan and I got a bit bored sitting staring at the old-fashioned family photographs on the walls of the tiny sitting-room. It cleared a little in the afternoon and we went for a walk, but the trees were dripping and the creeks, which had seemed so lovely up to now, had a low mist hanging over them and looked gloomy and uninviting.

It did not get dark till about ten o'clock, but by half-past nine we'd both decided to go to bed. Joan said she was certain the next day would be glorious, and that we'd take a picnic lunch out and spend the whole day exploring some of the creeks we'd so far been unable to reach.

By now I was convinced the change had completely cured me, and for the last two nights I'd even left off the sleeping-tablets.

I settled down in the little bed with a sigh of contentment.

"Good night, darling!" I heard Joan call, and answered her sleepily. I began thinking about bait for our fishing-lines next day. An old fisherman down in the village had shown me how part of a limpet could be used. I thought about the limpets on the rocks. I had sat on a rock the other day trying, unsuccessfully, to prise one off. The rock was wet and cold . . . *wet and cold!* No, no. . . . I tried to rouse myself, to jump out of bed. It was too late. I could feel the damp cold beneath me . . . sense the warmth of the fire in front. I tried to shout to Joan—to tell her to go across and sleep at the farm. But why should I shout to her when she was here beside me, her body warm

against mine? No harm could surely come to her while I was there. I placed an arm around her and lowered my head till it touched hers. I felt faintly surprised at the mat of hair which I realized was on my own chin. I was very sleepy.

Suddenly I was wide awake. The wind was blowing strongly—the fire glowing and leaping as if fanned by a giant pair of bellows. From the darkness beyond came the laboured creaking of trees. Falling branches thudded. Around me was the frightened murmur of a number of people. But I knew it was not of the wind or the trees that they were frightened. Like me, they were frightened by a smell—a strong smell of musk.

I suppose the human mind's capacity for registering terror, like pain, must be limited to a certain maximum. Yet never did I imagine that terror could rise to such a height as possessed me when I saw that huge head slowly weaving backwards and forwards above me, and smelt, in long rhythmic puffs, the fetid stench of its breath. This time most of its body was illumined by the wavering glare of the fire. In a giant parabola, forty or fifty feet high, it extended upwards into the dark night sky. Its two forelegs, small in comparison with the rest of its body were moving towards me as it balanced on its enormous serrated tail, and I could see three sharp, horny claws on each, glinting in the firelight as they were alternately drawn in or extended.

With a loud shriek I sprang upwards and backwards and simultaneously it struck. But not at me. With

blood streaming from slashes already made by those razor-sharp talons, Joan was lifted high in the air.

I hammered with my fists in puny desperation at the huge scales on the lower part of its body. It probably did not even feel me. As it swung round, one of the rough scales brushed against my cheek and tore it.

At that I woke up. My cheek was sore, and when I put my hand to it I felt sticky moisture. Afterwards, they said Joan had done that with her finger-nails.

"Joan!" I called. "Joan, are you all right?"

There was no answer. With a dreadful hammering at my heart and a choking feeling in my throat, I jumped out of bed and felt for the matches.

I was fairly certain what I was going to find, but even that foreknowledge scarcely prepared me for the dreadful sight that awaited me.

I have no recollection of going

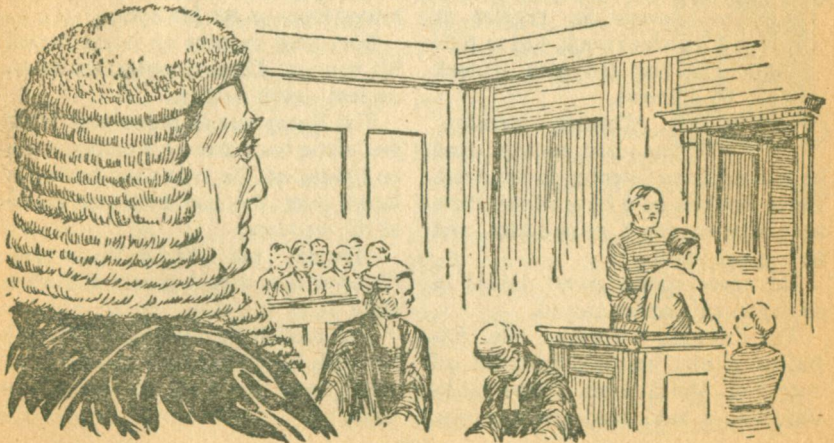
across to the farm in my blood-soaked pyjamas. The next thing I remember at all clearly is standing, wet and shivering, before what had once been Joan, with the farmer beside me.

"I'll run down to the post office and telephone for the doctor," he said. Then he looked at me strangely and added:

"And the police!"

\* \* \*

I am now curiously calm, because out of this dreadful business one wonderful fact has emerged. Joan and I can never be really separated. We have always belonged to each other. We always shall. They tell me I am to remain here "during Her Majesty's pleasure." But I do not think I shall. I have not been to the cave since the night Joan was taken. But I know I shall go—one of these nights. Then I shall steal out—into that darkness beyond the fire. It will not be long before Joan and I are together again.







## THE GREEN TIGER

RETT SINCLAIR

*Illustrated by Dennis Duyt*

**E**VERY NIGHT he used to come in, regular as clockwork, just in time for the nine o'clock news.

"Double whisky," he used to say. And he'd stand there listening to the news. Three doubles he'd have, drink them neat, like so much gripe-water, and then good night.

He never spoke; never joined in an argument; never moved.

The Colonel, we called him. Ex-Indian Army, he was. Stamped all over him. Short, a bit on the tubby side, with a bald head and a brown,

wrinkled face like a walnut. And heavy bags under his eyes.

For three months he never varied his routine. Three doubles, no more, no less—until Friday.

Ted Remy was in the saloon. He'd just come back from his honeymoon, and some of the lads were having a laugh over the fact he'd got blotto at his wedding.

"Drunk," old Charlie Watts said. "I never saw a bridegroom in such a state."

Ted took it in good part. "Garn," he said. "I wasn't half as drunk as Billie here the night his baby was born."

They were getting a bit noisy, and I began to wonder if I should ask them to be quiet while the news was on. But the Colonel stood at the bar looking straight ahead. He didn't seem to mind, and no one else was listening to the wireless, so I stayed where I was.

I heard Sid Freeman say:

"I was only ever drunk once. Really drunk, that is."

They'd got to yarn-spinning by this time, and they all looked at Sid and waited.

"I shall never forget it," Sid said. "I'd won twenty quid at the dogs, and went out to celebrate. Whisky, I was on. I reckon I must have drunk nearly a quart by closing time. And, believe me, I saw pink elephants that night."

The boys laughed. And then, for the first time in three months, the Colonel spoke. He said:

"Popycock."

We were all that surprised we didn't know what to say. Everyone was looking at him. He stood there, stiff and stern, as though he was on parade and glared at the boys.

"Let me tell you, gentlemen," he said. "There is no such thing as a pink elephant."

The boys looked at one another and winked. Billie touched a finger to his head and they grinned.

We were all surprised when the Colonel set up drinks all round. And he had a fourth double, a thing I'd never known him do before.

"Gentlemen," he said, just as if he was addressing a board meeting. "Gentlemen, I consider it my duty to

correct the illusion about pink elephants. I repeat, there is no such thing as a pink elephant. All animals which are induced by the state of extreme alcoholism, with the exception of the lion, are green."

Well, of course, we all laughed. Who wouldn't? But the Colonel was serious—and annoyed.

"Ah!" he said. "You laugh. You doubt my authority in this matter. But, gentlemen, I assure you that I can prove my words."

By this time we were all pretty sure that the Colonel had been in the sun too long. But Sid, who always was one for a laugh, said:

"All right, then. Go ahead and prove it."

The Colonel drew himself up and puffed out his chest. He looked very dignified, except for his nose which was bright red. Then he turned and stalked out of the saloon.

Naturally, we thought he'd gone for the night, so we had a good laugh at his expense and Ted Remy did an impression of him. Billie spoke for us all when he said:

"If you ask me, that chap's crackers."

And then the Colonel came back. He was carrying a leather case, the kind they keep pith-helmets in. He put it on the bar and ordered another double whisky. He looked as if he could do with it too. All pale and sick he looked, in spite of his tan, and I began to wonder if he was all right.

"In here, gentlemen," he said, after he had emptied his glass, "is the head of an animal. The head, in fact, of a

tiger. Another double, please.”

I poured another drop from a fresh bottle and he swallowed it. He laid a hand on the leather case.

“A green tiger,” he said.

By this time we were all listening. Humouring him, kind of. I felt sorry for him, and wondered if I ought to let him have any more whisky. But he didn't appear to be drunk, and he certainly wasn't creating a disturbance. I just shrugged my shoulders and poured.

The Colonel unfastened the straps on the case and lifted the lid. We all crowded round to have a look. Sure enough, there was a head in the case. And it looked like a tiger's head. Only it was green.

The Colonel bought drinks all round again, and the lads waited for him to explain. He drank two more doubles and cleared his throat. He said:

“That animal, gentlemen, attacked me in my tent. It leapt upon me whilst I was in an extreme state of inebriation following a party with some of my brother officers. That was twenty years ago, and I was younger then.” He paused and added, “I killed it with my bare hands.”

He had another double and nobody spoke. He'd given me the creeps, and I wished he'd go home. I think we were all feeling a bit fed up with his tale, to say the least. Then he said:

“Since then, gentlemen, I have never consumed more than a pint of whisky at one sitting.”

Well, that did it. I'd listened to about as much as I could stand.

“A pint,” I said, holding up two empty bottles. “You've had well over a quart to-night, anyway.”

Someone, I think it was Sid, started to laugh. But I realized it was no laughing matter.

The Colonel was leaning over the bar, his eyes wide and staring. His face looked drawn and thin, and his lower lip trembled.

“What did you say?” he asked in a hoarse whisper.

“Now then,” I said soothingly. “You'll feel a lot better in the morning.”

He laughed. A horrible, brittle kind of laugh that made my blood run cold. He picked up his leather case and went out. As he closed the door, I heard him murmur:

“I'm too old. I haven't the strength.”

The lads followed soon after, all very quiet and moody. I was glad when I could lock up and go to bed.

They found the Colonel next day. He was lying in an alley not a hundred yards from the pub. And he'd been mauled to death, they said, by a fierce animal. Funny thing was he had a tuft of green hair clutched in one hand. But they never found the little leather case.



Mothers of large families, who claim to common sense,  
Will find a Tiger well repays the trouble and expense. . . .

HILAIRE BELLOC: *Bad Child's Book of Beasts.*



## THE TANCARROW TREASURE

GEORGE MILNER

*Illustrations by Roy L. Bickerton*

*The probability was that the map had been skilfully forged by the man "who knew an awful lot about history." But how was the detective to prove it, when even lawyers had failed? How to rescue the damsel from economic distress? The history of the map turned out to be very odd indeed.*

**T**HAT WAS Mr. Trelmain," said the landlord of the Goat and Compass, a big swarthy man who wore a dirty, bulging shirt with no tie, like an inn-keeper in a French film.

"Yes?" I said politely. I had come to North Cornwall to meet a Miss Eileen Tancarrow, niece of the local

squire. I'd been tired from the journey and too busy ordering champagne and drinking it to notice much about the only other customer who'd just left the bar. I remembered he'd been blond and young and expansive-looking and had had nicotine-stained fingers, but nothing else.

"He's been living here a couple of months. Interesting chap. Knows a lot about history."

"Oh?"

"Now, he was telling me," the big man leaned casually towards me, elbows on the glass-topped bar, fore-arms crossed, "he was telling me last night some things I suppose I must have been taught once upon a time. I'd forgotten 'em, anyway. About this Bonny Prince Charlie, for instance, and what a fright he caused the big pots like the Tancarrows, who'd dug themselves in pretty cosy with the—Hanovers, was it he said, or Whigs? It seems they were properly frightened, anyway. A terrible thing, it must have been."

"Yes," I agreed, "very unsettling for them."

There came a short, distant rumble, the vibrations from which were perceptible through the floor of the bar and shook the panes slightly.

"You hear that?" The landlord's huge fist engulfed the delicate champagne glass. I nodded, and he went on, "Now, between ourselves, that noise you just heard may join up with what I was saying. It seems some of these gentry who got frightened and who had valuables worth preserving shoved 'em in the ground pretty quick when it looked as though Charlie was a winner. When Charlie was beat they were in no hurry to get 'em up in case he came back again. Mr. Trelmain's rather a one for the bottle; not that I should complain of that," he finished unexpectedly; he appeared to be puzzled by the nature of things.

There was another, rather sharper rumble, an outward sign of the phenomena Eileen Tancarrow had employed me to help her to deal with. What had she said on the telephone?

"Excavations . . . earthworks . . . diggings . . . treasure . . ."—it sounded fantastic, loopy, in 1953, and now the police were getting interested. She had gone on about "Treasure Trove," and then explained why I couldn't stay at Tancarrow House: "Uncle doesn't know you're coming—he mustn't know you're a detective, anyway; he'd be simply furious, it might unhinge him, things are so bad. And only the family are allowed at the House during the diggings. That's part of the secrecy. Not that it's much fun—being at the House, I mean. There are those awful explosions all the time, and pictures keep falling down, and things. It's all so silly, really." Had that nice breathless voice, all that helplessness, been real, or a telephone manner; or all put on for my benefit, I wondered? "Oh, please come," she'd said, "I just can't manage it alone." It sounded pretty deliberate to me.

"I suppose Mr. Trelmain has a theory about the explosions?" I asked.

"He as good as told me Mr. Richard Tancarrow was looking for the treasure. There's some theory the stuff was never dug up and a map was only found recently. Mostly what I hear are complaints about the explosions and the earthworks. Half the village are on about them."

"How does this man Trelmain know so much about it?"

"He's pretty thick with Mr. Richard. Seems to have the run of the House, and the rest of the time salmon fishing on the Torrow. That's Tancarrow water too." He shook his

head, puzzled again, but this time mildly disapproving too. He drained off his champagne as though it had been bitter. I refilled his glass.

"Does he catch many salmon?"

"Not a thing. Says he thinks the explosions are upsetting them." Then, mildly malicious: "But the river must be a mile from the diggings. It's the other side of the House."

"He sounds a poor angler." I watched the heavy face closely to see what reception this comment got.

"Just what I say myself, sir." But he turned tolerantly, persistently to the brighter side. "But it's wonderful what he knows about history."

At this moment the swing-door opened to admit a tall girl of about twenty-two, simply, but not, I thought, expensively dressed, in a tight-fitting, faun, tailored coat which fell low. Eileen Tancarrow's claim to good looks rested on the black heavy hair which flowed freely and in broad curls to her shoulders, the large, soft, brown eyes, and the skin which was smooth and of an almost olive complexion. In the course of our introductions, during which I got the impression I had turned out better than might have been expected, I was thanked very charmingly for having come so soon and for the glass of champagne which was not refused. We withdrew beyond a glass partition at the far end of the bar, where we hoped the landlord would be unable to hear our conversation. We sat on a bench, Eileen with her legs crossed, leaning forward with her forearm on her knee and holding her champagne glass rather stiffly in the

other hand. I couldn't make her out, but she looked somehow pugnacious.

"Do you think money matters?" she asked after a moment's thought. She seemed very interested in my reply.

"Yes," I replied with no thought at all, "enormously."

"I'm glad. I care awfully. I'm the heir to everything here, you know—the House, the estate, the villages, everything, including the money. What's left of it, that is, after the mortgages and the treasure hunt."

"Mortgages?" I couldn't make out what the girl wanted, or where this led. She looked at me, her eyes still soft, but somehow inquiring, purposeful; weighing me up, I thought, calculating my usefulness. She spoke deliberately:

"There's no secret about that. Every single thing's mortgaged—has been for years. We've been living on the mortgage money. Half the place belongs to the Mortgage Company already. But the half that's left is worth an effort." And then, feeling some necessity to explain herself, to depart from her prepared brief, she became suddenly more animated: "Oh, I could talk to you about tenants, and cottages, and responsibilities. And it might not be all lies. But let's keep it simple—just say I want the money. Let's assume I couldn't do worse with it than the State, or Uncle Richard, or the Mortgage Company."

"That's easy," I said, and smiled. I couldn't make out just how tough she really was. "Tell me about the treasure."

"That's Uncle Richard's way of restoring the family finances. This man Trelmain—I usually call him this crook Trelmain"—she was looking deliberately straight ahead of her, over her glass, away from me—"this man Trelmain came from a printers' to look at some old editions in the library. He found the map of the treasure and sold it to Uncle Richard for £5,000. He's to get another £5,000 when the treasure's found." Her face was impassive; she did not intend to suggest any inference.

"I suppose there really isn't a treasure?" I said rashly. "Surely the treasure's been a local legend for a very long time."

She looked at me for a moment, faintly puzzled, as though at an article which had pleased her well enough when she first got it back from the shop, but which on closer acquaintance revealed the possibility of hideous defects. "I hope you're not another romantic. How many legendary treasures have ever been found? Why, one can't even drop a hair-pin on top of the downs without someone finding it and giving it back to one. No, it's just that Uncle Richard thinks he's a sort of man of destiny of the Tancarrows. It's being bad for him too. We've got to *stop* this rubbish about treasure, not encourage it. Think of the damage it's doing."

"Damage?"

"Yes, don't you see? Uncle Richard buying his own map for £5,000. The grounds being ruined by earthworks so the mortgage holders might prosecute. A fortune being spent on machinery and dynamite and earth-

works. The police becoming interested. And what about the law of Treasure Trove? And there's another thing—*why doesn't Trelmain clear off with his £5,000 while the going's good? Oh, what shall we do?*"

More calculated helplessness, I thought, until I saw her eyes. What I saw there I took to be sincerity, plain and unmistakable; the wiles and guiles she used, perhaps inevitably, even half-consciously, couldn't alter that. She was formidable because she enjoyed using them, enjoyed the actual process of getting her own way as much as the outcome. But her need for help was real.

"What about the map?" I asked. "I suppose that's genuine?"

"Oh yes, I was going to suggest about the map. The lawyers say it's genuine, but you'll have the chance to see. Do you know about maps?"

"No."

She leaned back, relaxed against the boards, and smiled frankly and mischievously, almost as though she realized and was glad I'd seen through her methods, as though our relationship would be all the better for it.

"Never mind. I've arranged for you to come to a conference about the treasure this afternoon, with Uncle, and me, and Mr. Trelmain, and our lawyer, a very fat man called Mr. Longsey. I've got you in as an expert on the law of Treasure Trove. You can see the map then."

"I shall need to take it back to London."

She laughed openly. "You certainly won't be able to see it at all before



the conference. It's very precious, I can tell you. You may not even be allowed to handle it then. You won't be able to take it away."

"I am to have one glance at it from two or three feet away, and then prove that it's a forgery, although Mr. Longsey, who has examined it and is an expert, thinks it's genuine?"

She seemed to think my predicament and her own ruthlessness equally funny.

"It sounds difficult, I know. But I was told you're awfully clever."

This was my moment of decision. I realized I had to choose between returning in privacy and comfort to London, or staying under false pretences, which would certainly be un-

masked by Mr. Longsey, to attend a conference, whose principal parties were an unbalanced romantic and a probable criminal, on the off-chance of performing a miracle. I met Eileen's eyes, and we both laughed.

"The important thing to remember about Mr. Trelmain," she said, "is that he knows an awful lot about history."

She went out. I went to telephone the Chief Constable.

\* \* \*

"Delighted, my boy, Anglesea, did you say? Very good of you to come. That makes just the five of us. You must come and meet our other experts." Mr. Richard Tancarrow was



a bustling sort of man, of medium height and slightly stooping, wearing a rather summery dove-grey suit and spectacles. He beamed amiably enough, but I knew the moment I saw him, if I hadn't known it before, that he would only be separated from his romantic illusions most painfully. We walked down the long, panelled gallery. The grey afternoon light was admitted through tall arched windows which alternated with the panelling. The sound of the sharp click of our soles and heels on the seasoned boards rose about us with the detached, timeless quality of sound in tall rooms, as in a cathedral. At the long, narrow oak table which was placed beside and parallel to one of the farther windows, the slacker outlines of human clothes and forms broke the formal rigidity of the ubiquitous oak; from this table rose tobacco smoke, and stray accents of human speech, rising bell-like with the same quality of detachment to the great vacuums above us, and yet unintelligible in the aggregate. As we got nearer I could detect in Eileen Tancarrow's attitude, as she sat and smoked a cigarette at the table, a slight stiffness, an alertness which I had not noticed during our morning interview. One of the two men who rose as we came to the table was immensely fat, though sturdy and barrel-like rather than flabby or paunchy; the other was the rather big, fair young man with the hard eyes and the nicotine stains I had seen in the Goat and Compass that morning.

"Mr. Anglesea, Mr. Longsey." The face of the fat man was like a red

jelly with livery slits for eyes, yet the total effect was not disagreeable.

"So Eileen got you down to teach me my job. Well, good luck to you. I'm not too old to learn new tricks. Should be interesting."

"Thank you," I said. "I expect you'll find you know it all backwards." I might as well accept the graces and honours due to my bogus reputation until I was thrown out.

"Mr. Anglesea, Mr. Trelmain." The young man gave me his expansive smile, of which the supply certainly exceeded the demand, and spoke with doubtful bonhomie from above a necktie gaudily patterned with gold and green diagonal stripes.

"Pleased to meet, old boy."

"This is a real pleasure," I said, with, I hope, heavy sincerity. This was the moment—the only moment—to make my first move, to set the little trap I had laboriously thought up for Mr. Trelmain over lunch. I said easily, "I haven't met another Durham Ranger for years." I must say he looked surprised. And then wary.

"I'm sorry — I didn't quite catch——?"

"I've got a tie like that too. I should have been wearing it."

He fingered his tie uncertainly. I came to the conclusion that if he was a criminal he could never have been a good one; he probably managed well enough when everything was straightforward, but he was all at sea in a situation like this.

"Did you say 'Durham Ranger'?" Playing for time.

"Of course," I said, pretending sor-

row. "You must remember—the forest camps and the gypsy contract. . . I recognized that tie at once." He shook his head firmly. He'd made up his mind and got himself in hand now.

"Just a coincidence, I'm afraid, old boy. Must have bought the tie at the wrong shop. Couldn't make out what you were talking about for a moment. Sorry."

"You've really never heard of the Durham Rangers?" I sounded quite disappointed, anxious.

"Never," he shook his head again, "I never had a lot to do with good works. Leave 'em to those who enjoy 'em. Live and let live."

"The words 'Durham Ranger' really mean nothing to you at all?"

"Not a thing. Sorry, old boy. Wish I could help." He smiled round at the others, presumably hoping to collect some gesture of sympathy and approval for his patience and tolerance in answering a lot of mad questions. Mr. Tancarrow and his niece looked definitely mystified. There was an impression of humorous satisfaction in a little twitching movement at the corners of Longsey's mouth, but it offered no particular consolation to Trelmain. We all sat down. Through the window we could see the silhouette of the earthworks which rose like vast black camel-humps between Tancarrow and the wintry sea. There was a pile of papers on the table in front of Mr. Tancarrow's chair.

"Before we start talking, might I have a look at the map you're working on?" I asked innocently. Mr.

Tancarrow shuffled the papers before him rather unhappily for a moment, drew one out and laid it on top of the pile.

"You won't want it for your talk. Keep it till afterwards. It's a valuable document, y'know. Have to have Eileen's permission, anyway. It's her money as much as mine, y'know."

"I think we should let Mr. Anglesea see it if he wants to." Eileen's voice did not lack decision, but, as she had predicted, the old man was obstinate:

"Better think about it for a bit, girl. Got to protect your interests. Someone's got to. Let's get on. Are you ready to give your talk now, Anglesea?"

"Of course, sir," I said, lying hugely. "There's only one thing. Before I start, perhaps Mr. Longsey wouldn't mind giving a short précis of your estimate of the law of Treasure Trove as it applied to this case, and particulars of any steps you have taken to meet its requirements before the treasure is found. That should save a little time. When he's finished, I'll try to amplify for you."

"A very sound idea," said Longsey, thereby alleviating my personal crisis for another few minutes. "I'll sum the present situation up briefly for you. The important point to be considered by all searchers for and finders of lost or hidden valuables is the correct definition of the words Treasure Trove. I have had constantly to point out to the present company, with regard to the search now in progress, that whereas

property found in the sea or on the earth has at no time been looked on as Treasure Trove, any coin, bullion, gold or silver articles hidden in the earth, for which no owner can be discovered, comes very clearly within this definition. For this reason I have constantly recommended . . .”

I had to keep sufficient attention on what Longsey was saying in the hope that by remembering it and repeating it in a different form later I might avoid the rightful consequences of deception; but I fixed my eyes on the paper in front of Mr. Tancarrow (it was two or three feet away from me) and tried to lean towards it inconspicuously. I could see the lettering of the old parchment right enough, with its scrawled and faded outlines and the word TANCARROW clearly drawn in fine lettering across the top. In this one searching look, which I had to cut short for fear of arousing suspicion, I couldn't spot one detail of any possible interest. The absurdity of the situation struck me. And then I was faced abruptly with the need to listen more closely to Longsey if I was to minimize my impending disgrace.

“ . . . which, in sum, states that it is the duty of the finder, and indeed of anyone who acquires knowledge concerning the find, to report the matter to the Coroner, who must immediately hold an inquest to find whether the discovery be Treasure Trove or no. The effect this clause could have on Mr. Tancarrow's position can hardly be over-emphasized. . . .”

My eyes slid again to the map,

which had magnetic power for them now that the moment was approaching to perform my miracle—the only alternative to embarrassment, recrimination and ignominy. This time I got the date—8th September 1752—drawn in smaller lettering in the top left-hand corner. I supposed that if I asked Trelmain how the map came to be dated seven years after Prince Charlie's raid in '45 I should just be told that the Squire who buried the treasure hadn't dared even to have the map made until all danger had subsided safely. And what reply could I make to that? It sounded just as probable as the rest of the story—that's to say, not very. That was all I could see before I had to bring my attention back to Longsey. I doubted if any amount of effort would reveal more, or even if there was much more to be revealed short of a microscopic examination.

“ . . . And if Mr. Tancarrow will overlook the impertinence, I have read this clause many times at our meetings concerning the treasure, and will now do so again: Concealment is an indictable offence still punishable in practice, and formerly was held akin both to treason and to larceny.” Longsey paused, and then looked at me: “I hope that's what you wanted, Anglesea.”

“Thank you,” I said, realizing that I was now face to face with a very precarious ten minutes which would almost certainly end in my being asked to leave. I turned to the others. “I must congratulate my colleague on his able summary of the position. There are only a few points of im-

portance which I shall be able to add after so comprehensive a statement." My mind, for the purposes of the debate, was almost blank. I cast about for means of procrastination. "Just one other thing before I start." I addressed Longsey: "How long is it since your last meeting? Have there been any developments since?"

"Only the usual negative reports from the diggings." He pulled out a little pocket diary and fumbled the pages with fat, clumsy fingers. "It was Monday the 6th. Eleven days ago."

"Thank you," I replied.

The faces of the company were turned to me in anticipation of that flow of detail, emphasis, comment and specific advice which they had every right to expect. Eleven days. I couldn't get rid of the words; each time I succeeded in assembling in my mind the opening sentences of my paraphrase of Longsey's lecture, the two words suddenly broke in again and upset everything, as though they had some vital message to convey. When I spoke, the words were involuntary and against my will.

"Eleven days," I said quietly but distinctly. A rather awkward pause followed. Unconsciously Mr. Tancarrow began tapping on the table with his spectacles, which were lying in front of him at the "ready." I was at a loss to account for my sudden failure of concentration. And then I saw Longsey's face. There was no mistaking the expression on it; the jelly-like substance registered strongly and beyond doubt emotions of wonder and an unholy joy.

"Eleven days," he said loudly. The tone of his voice and the way he looked at me suggested the uncomprehending awe of the housemaid for *Old Moore's Almanack* when it turns out right.

And then I got it myself—the whole thing, as clear as daylight. The 8th September 1752. What a fool I'd been—what fools they'd all been.

"Give us back our eleven days," I said firmly and clearly.

"Yes. Damn good." Longsey nodded vigorously. "That's it."

"I think you ought to get started, y'know, Anglesea." Mr. Tancarrow looked at me with a friendly but rather mystified air. "It can't be so important when we had the last meeting. No going back on it now, I'm afraid. . . . What on earth——?"

This exclamation was directed to Trelmain, who was standing up with the evident intention of leaving the conference. He wore his mass-produced smile in an effort to carry off his withdrawal as a matter of normal necessity, but his ashen complexion, the quick, wary movements of the hard eyes, and the sudden absence of the expansive manner revealed very plainly that he was acting under a nervous force whose cause was not hard to guess.

"You'd better stay and see it out, Trelmain." There was real power in Longsey's voice. "As his representative, I might submit to Mr. Tancarrow that he comes to some arrangement, on repayment of £5,000."

But Trelmain turned and strode rapidly away down the gallery, his head and shoulders bent forward, his

whole attitude suggesting that he expected a heavy, detaining hand to fall on his arm at any moment. Which was very likely.

Longsey stood up, leaning forward on clenched knuckles on the table, staring angrily after Trelmain. Then he moved to get round the table and after him.

"Come on, Anglesea, let's get after him. I'll provide the force, if you'll provide the speed."

"It isn't necessary," I replied, "the police are waiting for him outside."

\* \* \*

"An extraordinary occurrence," commented Longsey, whose ferocity had abated now that the police had reported the arrest of Trelmain and the party in the gallery had overcome their initial surprise at the turn of events. "Fancy his actually hitting one of those dates. What a coincidence. Fancy your spotting it too."

"It might not have been a coincidence," I said slowly. "As everyone kept on telling me, he knew a lot about history. I think it more likely he used one of those dates on purpose, in case he wished himself to discredit the forgery which he himself had made. He gambled on no one else noticing."

"I must go over it again, just to make sure I've got it right. It's such a lovely story." Eileen, still showing excitement in the quick animation of her big brown eyes, gave me a look in which there was something more flattering. She went on, "In 1752, when the Gregorian Calendar was introduced in England instead of the

Julian Calendar, they found they were eleven days out. So they went straight from the 2nd September 1752 to the 14th September 1752 on consecutive days. So there never was an 8th of September, ever. And lots of people complained that they had been cheated out of eleven days of their lives, and said 'Give us back our eleven days.'"

"That's it," I said. "I always rather sympathized with them myself. But that's not the popular view. It depends which way you look at it."

"Forgive me if I leave you." Mr. Tancarrow had been sadly forgotten in the rejoicing over Trelmain's discomfiture. "This has been rather a blow." He got up, looking older and discouraged. Before he could move away, Eileen ran lightly round the table and put an arm tenderly on his shoulder.

"*I am* sorry about your treasure, Uncle Richard," she said with the sympathy which people extend so readily to those they have got the better of, "I *wish* there had been some."

"I think very likely there is," I said coolly.

"Oh, *please* don't start that again!" Eileen was appealing, but underneath, I thought, almost angry. The two men turned to me with obvious hope and interest.

"The legend of the treasure started long before Mr. Trelmain, didn't it?"

"Legends!" Eileen was scornful.

"This is just guesswork," I began, "but I never did care for that story about Bonny Prince Charlie very much. It didn't ring true. But it's an

old legend. I believe there may well be a treasure. I wonder what this man Trelmain has been doing on the Torrow? He doesn't look like a salmon fisherman. He has yet to catch a salmon. Suppose what Mr. Trelmain really found in the library was a reference in a book to the disposal of the treasure *in the River Torrow*. He wanted that treasure, but to look for it he had to throw up his job. He had to have leisure, which means cash, and an entry to the Tancarrow estate. By forging a map and a story—and who would be better qualified to do so than a printer?—he could hope to sell it to Mr. Tancarrow and at the same time establish an intimate business relationship. He succeeded in both objects. The treasure would be a very much more valuable asset if it was found in the river than if it was found under the ground."

"Yes," agreed Longsey, pleased.

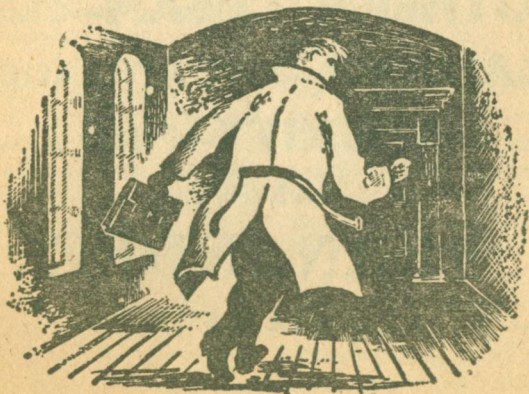
"It all rests on one thing." Eileen was groping towards a decision now instead of defending one ready made. "Whether Mr. Trelmain is a salmon fisherman. He might easily be."

"Yes," I agreed, grinning. "But he isn't. That's where the Durham Ranger comes in." Eileen and her uncle looked equally mystified, but an unmistakable chuckle escaped Mr. Longsey.

"Why not?" asked Eileen suspiciously.

I tried not to sound too smug. "Because the Durham Ranger is the name of one of the very best-known salmon flies. Which was where Mr. Trelmain had been rather less conscientious than he should have been. He didn't seem to recognize the name, did he?"

There is a sort of light in the eye—a stepping-stone to greed—which the possibility of treasure can elicit. It had spread even to Eileen's when I left.



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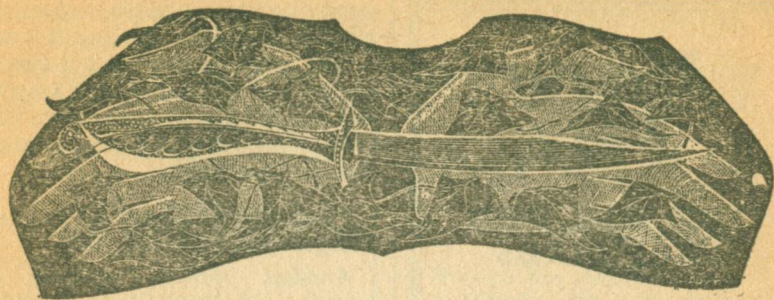
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## CROOKS IN BOOKS

*A review of some recent crime, mystery and detective books.*

"THE SECOND CURTAIN," by Roy Fuller (*Verschoyle*, 10s. 6d.).

Another poet comes to the *demi-monde* of the mystery novel, and the public gains some good, clean, clear and effective prose. The book has style, humour, intelligent characterization, a real rather than phoney literary background, and a good scene in the London Library. The publishers describe it as an "intellectual thriller," and compare it with the early Graham Greene *Entertainments*. One wonders. Fuller's book lacks the sense of evil, the cold shuddering intensity of a persistent thrill, which continues to the last paragraph. The plot is perhaps, with certain misgivings in the description, *too* credible, *too* life-like. The end might well be as Mr. Fuller envisaged it, and in a sense it is inevitable, but the reader, for all the excellencies noted above, may equally well be disappointed. The conventions of the crime book are not those of life nor of straight literature, and here again the critic

is presented with the problem of not quite a novel and not quite a thriller. Still, one is very pleased to applaud Mr. Fuller for his attempt, to welcome his entry to the blood-bespattered ranks, and to be grateful for his sensitive pen.

"THE BIG HEAT," by William P. McGivern (*Hamish Hamilton*, 10s. 6d.).

Perhaps one of the main reasons for the startling difference between the good American crime novel and the good European detective story lies in the political and social ethos of the nations concerned. With crime syndications on a federal state and municipal level in actuality, corruption has inevitably become the largest theme in fiction. McGivern's book is a good, strong and competent story. It is another novel of Big City Corruption, but it is spirited, fast-moving and powerful. It succeeds in the genre which so many mystery writers essay and so few achieve. He creates



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good characters, credible motivation, effective dialogue and scenes. It is not a very pretty picture, but it is deeply etched, and *The Big Heat* is a book, whether you like the style or not, that is memorable even if it lacks some of the Chandler polish.

"EXIT FOR A DAME," by Richard Ellington (*Boardman*, 9s. 6d.).

Another private investigator, I-novel, with Steve Drake in New York. It starts with: "It was one of those windy, screwball days in late March when spring decides to open the door on winter and gets kicked in the teeth for trying. You know the sort of day I mean. . . ." Goes through a few meteorological changes, several complications of plot (including black magic disappearances and a brace of murders), a little rough stuff and courting, a last chapter *dénouement* that almost befogs everyone, and concludes with bright bavardage about not getting married unless drunk. Quite amusing, readable and accurate background of Greenwich Village.

"BOWMAN ON BROADWAY," by Hartley Howard (*Collins*, 9s. 6d.).

Chatty, mock-Chandler (Cheyney variety). Sex (but nothing too immediately carnal), and an involved trio of murders dependent on an ageing Hollywood-bent *matinée* idol. Glenn Bowman, surprisingly enough a private eye, who tells his story in such racy vernacular as: "Here and now I'd like to make it clear that any dame that looks like her could walk into me any hour of the day or night, seven days each week, fifty-two weeks

in the year, and I wouldn't resent it one little bit," thinks he's a hell of a guy. Perhaps he is, although slightly bogus. In this sort of book you never guess whodunnit; and you feel that several loose ends are never tied up, but you are too exhausted to do anything about it. Complexity, vitality and virility, but not very much quality.

"KISS AND KILL," by Adam Knight (*Boardman, 9s. 6d.*).

Once more a New York private detective, Steve Conacher, telling his own story. The opening paragraphs tell the reader that Steve's partner is dead before the book begins, and in later chapters two dead Father Christmases enliven the social life of a departmental store. Sex is well to the fore: "The tight blouse did nothing to enclose her firm frame. She was hell-bent on showing me her intentions. Both of them." Most of the women appear to leap into bed at the drop of a housecoat, negligee or hostess gown. Involved, quite entertaining but quite unrealistic plot. The detection mainly consists in the detective being beaten up (reasonably effectively), and the characters, despite big-store background, are not very credible. *Bouleversement* on the last few pages, and several unexplained, and perhaps inexplicable, incidents.

"THE ROSY PASTOR," by Nigel FitzGerald (*Crime Club, Collins, 9s. 6d.*).

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HUTCHINSON

Mayo. Charming upper middle-class characters, lovely gels and women, a confined bay (cf. country house), and three murders—one being that of the eponymous bird (Pastor Roseus). Pleasing to read, witty and reasonably intelligent, the plot seems a little weak and the detection (not the detective) too whimsy. Not really enough to the book, but it provides a pleasant, uncritical evening's entertainment.

"SPY COUNTER-SPY," by Don Betteridge (*Robert Hale*, 9s. 6d.).

This is good old-fashioned spy stuff, plenty of disguise, invisible ink and coded messages. The background is Berlin, 1952, and what with underground British, ruthless Russians and

resurgent Nazis, the fun bubbles along quite merrily enough along traditional lines, treachery and bravery being rewarded in accordance with the popular espionage code. The book opens with a deaf-mute stripping off her clothes to reveal an invisible-ink message inscribed on her back. It doesn't quite keep this up, but what does one expect for 191 pages and 9s. 6d.?

"BLACKSHIRT PASSES BY," by Roderic Graeme (*Hutchinson*, 9s. 6d.).

Another in the series of this sub-standard Bulldog Drummond character. Richard Verrell, the ace cracksmen, the old dicer with death, and the despair of Scotland Yard to



whom he is known as Blackshirt, limps wearily from one uninspired situation to another in search of a gold-and-ruby horse which has been stolen from the British Museum, narrowly, but alas invariably, escaping the constipated clutches of the law. It is somewhat surprising that, like a previous amateur cracksman, Black-shirt has not been endowed by his creator with a cover drive which is sheer poetry, in order to excuse his trying snobbery, horrendous bonhomie and unjustifiably felonious activities. Let us at least hope that Blackshirt has at last passed by into decent obscurity.

"VANISH IN AN INSTANT," by Margaret Millar (*Museum Press, 9s. 6d.*).

Another American psychological thriller by the authoress of *Do Evil in Return*. The main problem is a simple one—who killed Margolis, the rather stock-type, lecherous nightclub-owning tyrant, and why? The why is perhaps the more interesting, for the reason that Miss Millar appears to consider superficial psychological "situations" more entertaining than whodunnit subtleties. The danger of writing a book like this is that one steers a perilous course between the boring and the ludicrous, and it takes a James M. Cain to win through. Miss Millar does not, however, completely founder, as she is, instinctively rather than by acquisition, a good writer; so good, in fact, that one wonders why she does not enter a field one suspects would interest her more—the straight, romantic novel.



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"HOLMES AND WATSON," by S. C. Roberts (*Oxford*, 10s. 6d.).

For all devotees and initiates into this strange, hardy cult, here is a valuable addition to the storehouse of scholarly and painstaking research. Mr. Roberts, a former Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge, betrays traditional enthusiasm in this miscellany, which brings together not only many learned essays on Holmes and Watson, but also two stories previously only printed for private distribution in very small editions, and therefore not generally known.

"THE LONG GOOD-BYE," by Raymond Chandler (*Hamish Hamilton*, 10s. 6d.).

A new novel by Raymond Chandler is always an event. This has the

expected polish, wit, brilliance, and magic that have made Chandler the doyen of the thriller writers. The mixture is apparently as before: pace, suspense, the decadent wealth of California and Marlowe. However, this book is different: it is less complex, more introspective, and the previously chaste Marlowe finally progresses beyond the convention of the seductive kiss.

The characters are as fascinating and as good (or foul-tasting from the God's-eye point of view) as in his other novels, and the attention to small atmospheric detail is as effective and sustaining. But Philip Marlowe's mystical self-analysis and ironical social comment, which here is stressed in almost every chapter, seems to overload the book and re-

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duce the charge of the thrill. The plot also loses a little in being simpler, but Chandler is far too good a writer to produce anything except a first-class novel. (Incidentally, has Chandler ever written a book which did not contain a murderess?)

Almost as good as before, but with Jaguars, Jowetts and Bentleys, a weight of soul-baring and the bedding of Marlowe. Still the best of the bunch.

"DAMN DESMOND DRAKE," by "Sea-Lion" (*Hutchinson, 10s. 6d.*).

The naval officer who hides behind this pseudonym does well to do so. It would be embarrassing to have to admit publicly to this cloying mixture of slow-pulse adventure, rigid upper lip, cricket-field sex and general Bull-

dog Drummondery. "To hell with Hermann Vogel" (the villainous Hun) is the toast at the end of the book. All I can say is, "To hell with Sea-lion."

"THE COATINE CASE," by A. J. Colton (*Robert Hale, 9s. 6d.*).

The dullness of this murder story is equalled only by the naïveté of the successful confidence trick with which it is inextricably mixed. The background is Australia, and the arid plot might better have been set in the vast deserts of the Western and Northern territories than in the dingy suburbs of Sydney, especially when the "scientific investigation" is entrusted to a hick traffic cop temporarily turned over to the C.I.D.

The inner layers of the "coatine"



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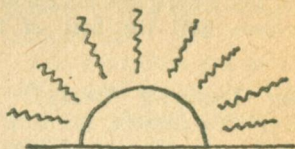


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pill contain poison for the victim, himself a "con" man, but the removal of the coating reveals an insipid core for the reader. This is a light and perhaps not altogether completely unpromising first novel by a retired professor from down under, but he must rise above the level of after-dinner Senior Common Room conversation if the portentous assurance of the dust cover is to be approached in his next book.

"DEATH CHANGES HIS MIND," by Frank King (*Robert Hale, 9s. 6d.*).

The promise of the seduction of rising young film starlet, Elizabeth Orley, into the world of black magic, the new craze of her wealthy guardian and uncle, is not fulfilled, but one's disappointment is salvaged by the uncle's subsequent death; though this end to a singularly self-centred existence has to be attributed to other causes. Queer things, however, happen to Liz before this, and it is the mind of Dr. King, script-writer, which is changed by the death after his visit to Crow How to investigate the scenic propensities of this part of the Lake District and the causes of the queer things.

There are one or two acceptable characters such as the staff at Crow How, Puritanical Bible-lover Maria, who doesn't hold with them film folk ("ne'er-do-wells" and "fly-by-nights" as she calls them), and her subdued but warm-hearted hubby Luke. But the lesser personalities are insubstantial. The unravelling of the plot, though not long, is rather laboured, and the alert reader will quickly

seize the sparse clues offered and wait impatiently for the Doc to catch up.

"THE CRETAN COUNTERFEIT," by Katherine Farrer (*Crime Club, 9s. 6d.*).

Archæology, the Oxford-College-Detective-Inspector, the intelligent young wife, a colourful nymphomaniac, Soho and a crime reconstruction and accusation *dénouement*. Brightly written although unremarkable, obeying the classical rules with some interesting sidelights on Hellenic and pre-Hellenic digging. This novel is a good Crime Club choice.

"SUSPENSE," by Bruce Graeme (*Hutchinson, 9s. 6d.*).

Ronald Barker is an ordinary guy who happens to witness an armed mail-van hold-up and killing, as any of us might. Crime reporter Meredith prints the fact that Ronald can identify the murderer, and thus precipitates the emotional crises that beset the leading characters—the conflict between their duty to assist the police and their private fears.

The criminals involved are a gang of ex-Commandos for whom the art of holding one's tongue is the art of the dead. As the gentle warnings to Ronald, his family and fiancée degenerate into violence and "accidental" death, the hero abandons his duty to society and hides in a ferment of fear. There is an exciting *dénouement* as Meredith atones for his "news item" and, hand-in-hand with Superintendent Cromwell, closes the net. For once a reviewer must agree with a publisher's blurb, for this is a worthy successor to the same author's last thriller, *Mr. Whimset Buys a Gun*.



"THE BLUSHING MONKEY," by Roman McDougald (*Boardman, 9s. 6d.*).

Private-eye Philip Cabot is faced with an intriguing dilemma in this new American thriller: how was millionaire and Casanova Everett Lowell stabbed to death in a room so elaborately safeguarded? The windows can only be opened from the inside and are discovered locked; while the door provides exit only through a system of warning lights and past the watching eyes of the only person Lowell trusted, his faithful servant, the half-witted Letour. The door, which can only be opened from the inside, is found *unlocked*. Why did Lowell not escape? How did the killer get in or out?

The task of detection is not made any easier by the throng of possible suspects; some nine who are actually living in the dead man's house, to say nothing of his niece, asthmatic Alberta Sloane, who discovers the body whilst on a visit; his wife from whom he is separated; her lover and his blackmailer; some dozen past mistresses; one or two of their illegitimate children; and a hideous but sensitive pet baboon, Giva. Each of these had the opportunity—if the room puzzle is solved—and most have unconvincing alibis; each has a motive, ranging from pecuniary interest through jealousy and hatred to moral principles.

In any event the murder is violent, as is the subsequent death of one of the suspects in the house, and this draws the reader subtly away from the real murderer. Despite an occa-

sional pompousness in dialogue, this is an enjoyable and engaging book.

"THE MAN WHO SHOT BIRDS," by Mary Fitt (*Macdonald, 9s. 6d.*).

It is perhaps an invidious task to review a collection of short stories in a magazine wherein the majority of them were first published. Praise would be superfluous, criticism unfortunate. However, it is surely permissible to take the view that a story is sometimes better in the context of a magazine of varying crime stories than it would be in a collection of similar stories; for if there is one fault to be found with this volume, it is the sameness of flavour.

The stories are more or less equally divided between the investigations of Mr. Pitt and his Siamese cat Georgina, and those of Dr. Fitzbrown. On the whole, I like the former better. They have a charm and delicacy which, if one accepts the initial premise of a cat hypersensitive to crime, is wholly convincing. I liked in particular "The Retired Printer" and "The Thursday Phone-Calls."

The Dr. Fitzbrown stories are, with the exception of "The Unstitched Hand," less successful. This is due as much as anything to the fact that the writer is ill-equipped to deal with an exclusively male relationship (Fitzbrown and Mallett). Her fey charm wilts before it. (Even in "The Unstitched Hand" she talks about a pint of bitters.) The delicacy having departed, the plots of the stories are, on the whole, too weak to be worth close scrutiny or commendation.

