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MAGAZINE

31



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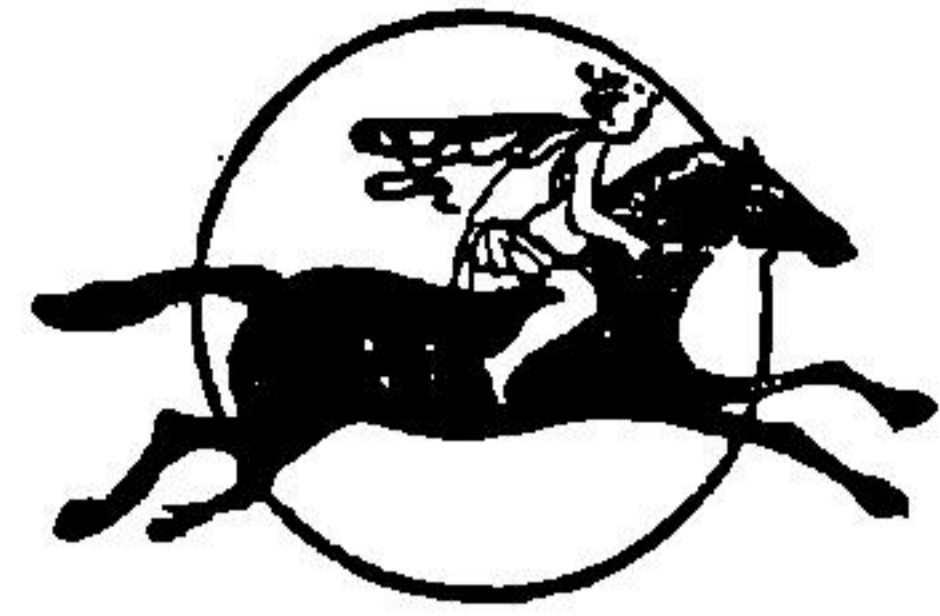


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THE LONDON MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Once again across our dark and bloodstained pages flicker the fires of inhuman passion, of carnage and murder. The LONDON MYSTERY MAGAZINE offers to the less timorous world every variety of horror and obsession that can fall to the unhappy lot of man. We have travelled far and wide over sea and quagmire in search of the genuine locations of these horrors. We have pondered long and deeply before making this unique selection. We have sought to create a many-headed monster that represents every aspect of the ghostly and macabre.

The stories of our choice display with a terrible intensity all the emotions and actions of those unhappy people who are crossed and haunted by visitations and trials that are not given to the mass of men. Ghoulish and extraordinary indeed are the torments of the living, but not all are necessarily by the agency of ghosts or from the spectral world. Some of these horrors are very real indeed, as you will see.

For this Christmas issue there are, of course, some first-class ghost stories. In Muriel Spark's "The Leaf-Sweeper" we find a strangely tender ghost in Johnnie Geddes who sought so passionately to abolish Christmas. Other ghosts appear from time to time, like the pathetic little schoolboy who spends so many years in detention in "Kept In" and all the frightful presences in "House of Evil."

But insubstantial dreams can make even more of a havoc of human beings than the things that glide and go bump in the night. Rosemary Timperley creates the brooding horror of a woman obsessed by a demon lover in "Dreams are More than Shadows." Roswell B. Rhode presents one self-seeking man's frenzied vision of the future in "The Future-seer," while in "The Will to Die," Denys Val Baker brings his practised pen to the predicament of a man who cannot look upon the face of death. "The Chelsea Figure" is yet another terrible example of the tragedies that may proceed from dreams.

Frightening, too, are our insubstantial and transmogrified people: brothers rendered into soggy paper, a proud man enslaved by apes. And do not think for a moment that flesh-and-blood people need be always what they appear to be. You will learn the satanic nature of Farmer du Plooy of Basutoland in "The White Hen," the secret of the curious assortment of golfers in "Morning Foursome" and Edmund H. Burke's grisly observations through "The Open Window."

Taken all in all, we have concocted the foulest mixture and we are proud of our witchcraft. In presenting our distinguished authors to our avid readers, we do not forget the power of our artists in bringing to quivering life so many awesome conceptions. Names like that of Arthur Wragg ensure that these visions will stay with you for ever and send you back to us, screaming for more. Our wisest counsel to you is still on pages 2 and 128, and is joined with the Season's greetings to all our readers everywhere.

EDITOR.

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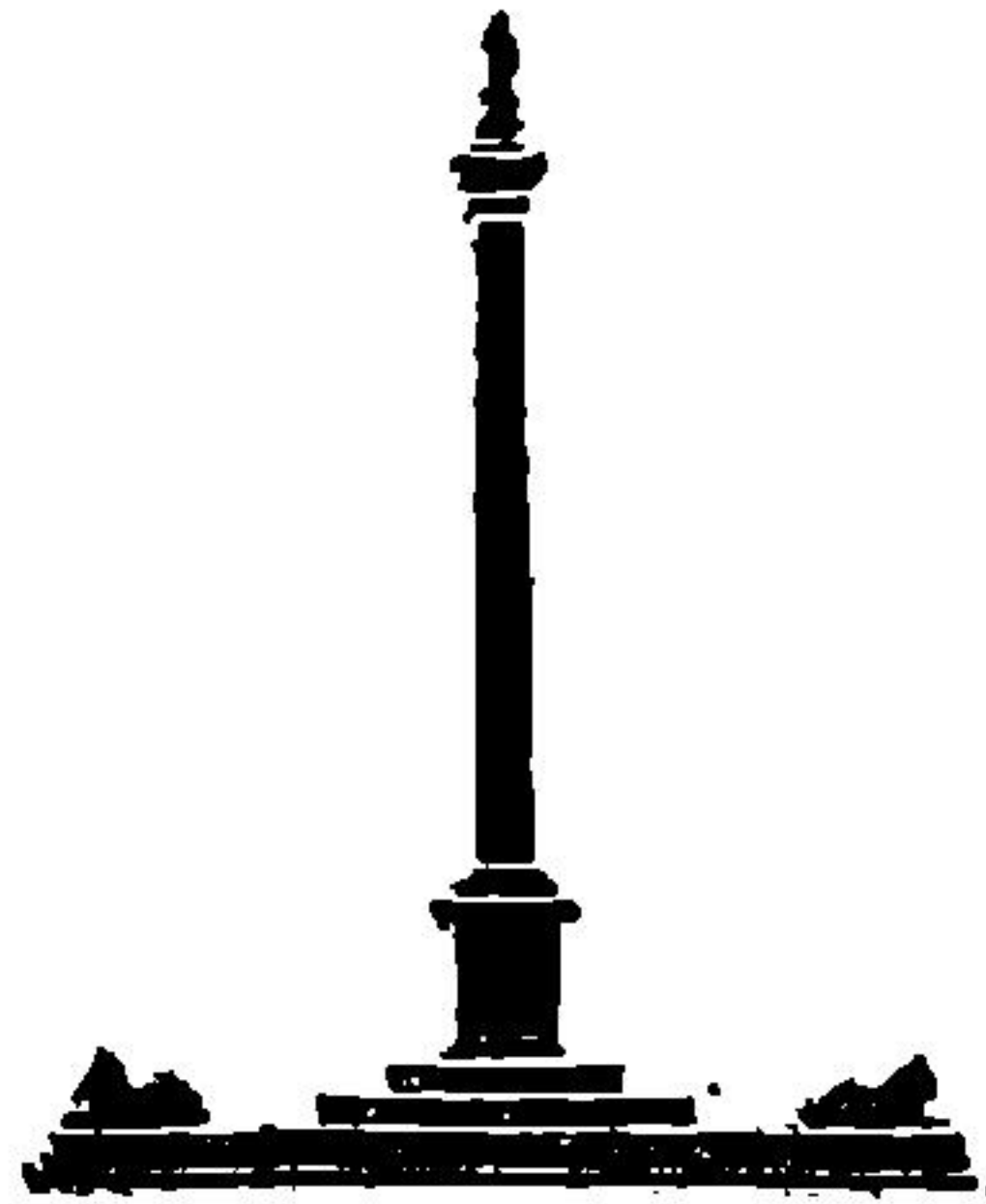
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THE LONDON MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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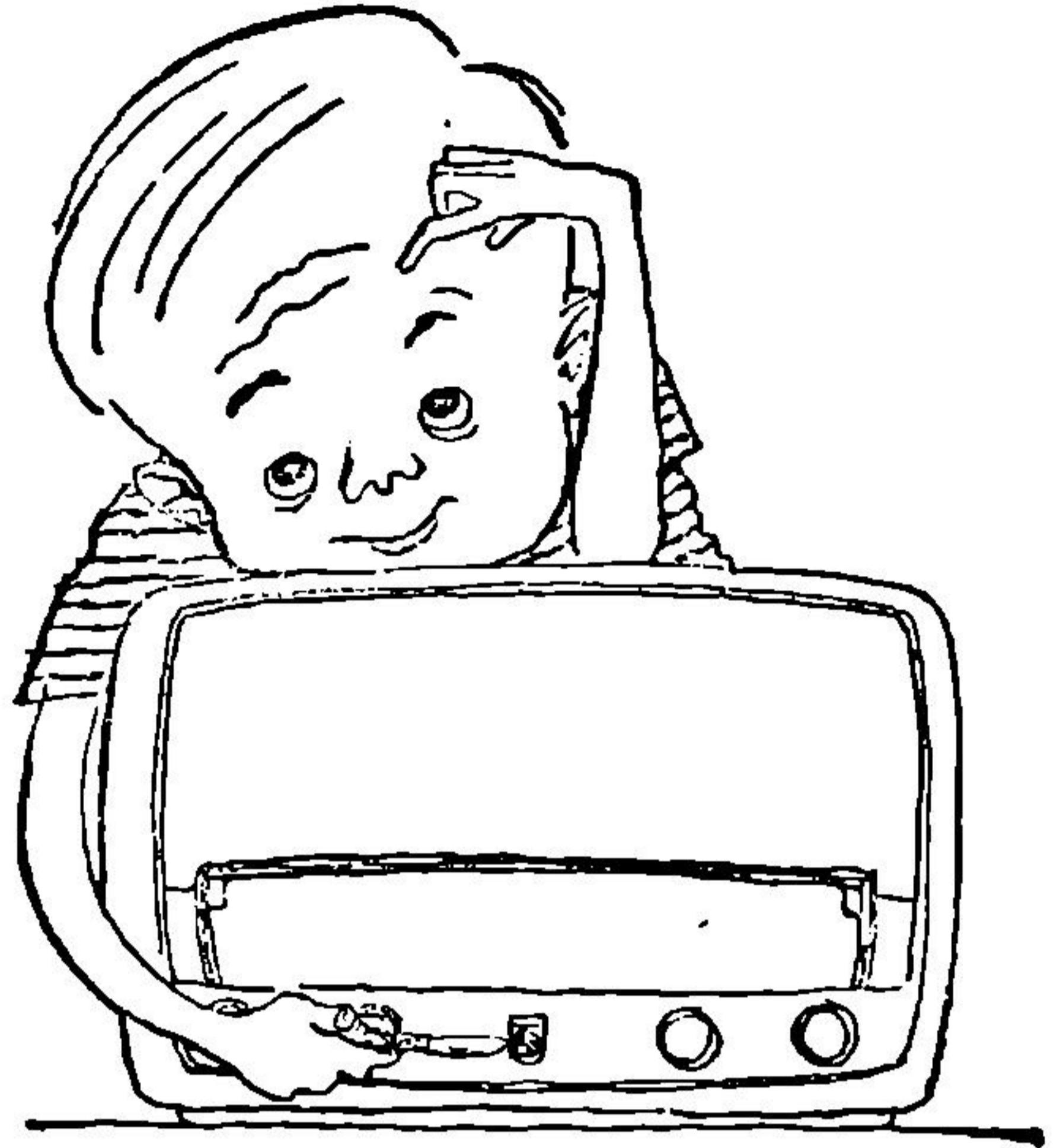
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(P36J)



THE LEAF-SWEEPER

MURIEL SPARK

Illustrated by Moira Vincent-Smith

BEHIND THE TOWN HALL there is a wooded park-land which, towards the end of November, begins to draw a thin blue cloud right into itself; and, as a rule, the park floats in this haze until mid-February. I pass every day, and see Johnnie Geddes in the heart of the mist, sweeping up the leaves. Now and again he stops and, jerking his long head erect, looks indignantly at the pile of leaves, as if it ought not to be there; then he sweeps on. This business of leaf-sweeping he learnt during the years he spent in the asylum; it was the job they always gave him to

do, and when he was discharged the town council gave him the leaves to sweep. But the indignant movement of the head comes naturally to him, for this has been one of his habits since he was the most promising and buoyant and vociferous graduate of his year. He looks much older than he is, for it is not quite twenty years ago that Johnnie founded the Society for the Abolition of Christmas.

Johnnie was living with his aunt then. I was at school, and in the Christmas holidays Miss Geddes gave me her nephew's pamphlet, *How to Grow Rich at Christmas*. It sounded very likely, but it turned out that you grow rich at Christmas by doing away

with Christmas, and so I pondered Johnnie's pamphlet no further.

But it was only his first attempt. He had, within the next three years, founded his society of abolitionists. His new book, *Abolish Christmas Or We Die*, was in great demand at the public library, and my turn for it came at last. Johnnie was really convincing this time, and most people were completely won over until after they had closed the book. I got an old copy for sixpence the other day, and despite the lapse of time it still proves conclusively that Christmas is a national crime. Johnnie demonstrates that every human-unit in the kingdom faces inevitable starvation within a period inversely proportionate to that in which one in every six industrial-productivity units, if you see what he means, stops producing toys wherewith to fill the stockings of the educational-intake-units. He cites appalling statistics to show that 1.024 per cent. of the time squandered each Christmas in reckless shopping and thoughtless churchgoing brings the nation closer to its doom by five years. A few readers protested, but Johnnie was able to demolish their muddled arguments, and meanwhile the Society for the Abolition of Christmas increased. But Johnnie was troubled. Not only did Christmas rage throughout the kingdom as usual that year, but he had private information that many of the society's members had broken the Oath of Abstinence.

He decided then to strike at the very roots of Christmas. Johnnie gave up his job on the Drainage Supply

Board; he gave up all his prospects, and, financed by a few supporters, retreated for two years to study the roots of Christmas. Then, all jubilant, Johnnie produced his next and last book, in which he established, either that Christmas was an invention of the Early Fathers to propitiate the pagans, or it was invented by the pagans to placate the Early Fathers, I forget which. Against the advice of his friends, Johnnie entitled it *Christmas and Christianity*. It sold eighteen copies. Johnnie never really recovered from this; and it happened, about that time, that the girl he was engaged to, an ardent Abolitionist, sent him a pullover she had knitted, for Christmas; he sent it back, enclosing a copy of the Society's rules, and she sent back the ring. But, in any case, during Johnnie's absence the Society had been undermined by a moderate faction. These moderates finally became more moderate, and the whole thing broke up.

Soon after this I left the district, and it was some years before I saw Johnnie again. One Sunday afternoon in summer, I was idling among the crowds who were gathered to hear the speakers in Hyde Park. One little crowd surrounded a man who bore a banner marked "Crusade against Christmas"; his voice was frightening; it carried an unusually long way. This was Johnnie. A man in the crowd told me Johnnie was there every Sunday, very violent about Christmas, and that he would soon be taken up for insulting language. As I saw in the papers, he was soon taken up for insulting language. And a few

months later I heard that poor Johnnie was in a mental home, because he had Christmas on the brain and couldn't stop shouting about it.

After that, I forgot all about him until, three years ago in December, I went to live near the town where Johnnie had spent his youth. On the afternoon of Christmas Eve I was walking with a friend, noticing what had changed in my absence and what hadn't. We passed a long large house, once famous for its armoury, and I saw that the iron gates were wide open.

"They used to be kept shut," I said.

"That's an asylum now," said my friend, "they let the mild cases work in the grounds, and leave the gates open to give them a feeling of freedom.

"But," said my friend, "they lock everything inside. Door after door. The lift as well; they keep it locked."

While my friend was chattering, I stood in the gateway and looked in. Just beyond the gate was a great bare elm-tree. There I saw a man in brown corduroys sweeping up the leaves. Poor soul, he was shouting about Christmas.

"That's Johnnie Geddes," I said. "Has he been there all these years?"

"Yes," said my friend as we walked on. "I believe he gets worse at this time of year."

"Does his aunt see him?"

"Yes. And she sees nobody else."

We were, in fact, approaching the house where Miss Geddes lived. I suggested we called on her. I had known her well.

"No fear," said my friend.

I decided to go in, all the same, and my friend walked on to the town.

Miss Geddes had changed, more than the landscape. She had been a solemn, calm woman, and now she moved about quickly and gave short, agitated smiles. She took me to her sitting-room, and as she opened the door she called to someone inside.

"Johnnie, see who's come to see us!"

A man, dressed in a dark suit, was standing on a chair, fixing holly behind a picture. He jumped down.

"Happy Christmas," he said. "A Happy and A Merry Christmas indeed. I do hope," he said, "you're going to stay for tea, as we've got a delightful Christmas cake, and at this season of goodwill I would be cheered indeed if you could see how charmingly it's decorated; it has 'Happy Christmas' in red icing, and then there's a robin and——"

"Johnnie," said Miss Geddes, "you're forgetting the carols."

"The carols," he said. He lifted a gramophone record from a pile, and put it on. It was "The Holly and the Ivy."

"It's 'The Holly and the Ivy,'" said Miss Geddes. "Can't we have something else? We had that all morning."

"It is sublime," he said, beaming from his chair and holding up his hand for silence.

While Miss Geddes went to fetch the tea and he sat absorbed in his carol, I watched him. He was so like Johnnie that if I hadn't seen poor Johnnie a few moments before, sweeping up the asylum leaves, I would have thought he really was

Johnnie. Miss Geddes returned with the tray, and while he rose to put on another record, he said something that startled me.

"I saw you in the crowd that Sunday when I was speaking at Hyde Park."

"What a memory you have!" said Miss Geddes.

"It must be ten years ago," he said.

"My nephew has altered his opinion of Christmas," she explained. "He always comes home for Christmas now, and don't we have a jolly time, Johnnie?"

"Rather!" he said. "Oh, let me cut the cake."

He was very excited about the cake. With a flourish he dug a large knife into the side. The knife slipped, and I saw it run deep into his finger. Miss Geddes did not move. He wrenched his cut finger away, and went on slicing the cake.



"Isn't it bleeding?" I said.

He held up his hand. I could see the deep cut, but there was no blood.

Deliberately, and perhaps desperately, I turned to Miss Geddes.

"That house up the road," I said, "I see it's a mental home now. I passed it this afternoon."

"Johnnie," said Miss Geddes, as one who knows the game is up, "go and fetch the mince-pies."

He went, whistling a carol.

"You passed the asylum," said Miss Geddes wearily.

"Yes," I said.

"And you saw Johnnie sweeping up the leaves."

"Yes."

We could still hear the whistling of the carol.

"Who is *he*?" I said.

"That's Johnnie's ghost," she said. "He comes home every Christmas."

"But," she said, "I don't like him. I can't bear him any longer, and I'm going away tomorrow. I don't want Johnnie's ghost, I want Johnnie in flesh and blood."

I shuddered, thinking of the cut finger that could not bleed. And I left, before Johnnie's ghost returned with the mince-pies.

Next day, as I had arranged to join a family who lived in the town, I started walking over about noon. Because of the light mist, I didn't see, at first, who it was approaching. It was a man, waving his arm to me. It turned out to be Johnnie's ghost.

"Happy Christmas. What do you think," said Johnnie's ghost, "my aunt has gone to London. Fancy, on Christmas Day, and I thought she was

at church, and here I am without anyone to spend a jolly Christmas with, and of course I forgive her, as it's the season of goodwill, but I'm glad to see you, because now I can come with you, wherever it is you're going, and we can all have a Happy——"

"Go away," I said, and walked on.

It sounds hard. But perhaps you don't know how repulsive and loathsome is the ghost of a living man. The ghosts of the dead may be all right, but the ghost of mad Johnnie gave me the creeps.

"Clear off," I said.

He continued walking beside me. "As it's the time of goodwill, I make allowances for your tone," he said. "But I'm coming."

We had reached the asylum gates, and there, in the grounds, I saw Johnnie sweeping the leaves. I suppose it was his way of going on strike, working on Christmas Day. He was making a noise about Christmas.

On a sudden impulse I said to Johnnie's ghost, "You want company?"

"Certainly," he replied; "it's the season of——"

"Then you shall have it," I said.

I stood in the gateway. "Oh, Johnnie," I called.

He looked up.

"I've brought your ghost to see you, Johnnie."

"Well, well," said Johnnie, advancing to meet his ghost. "Just imagine it!"

"Happy Christmas," said Johnnie's ghost.

"Oh, really?" said Johnnie.

I left them to it. And when I looked back, wondering if they would come to blows, I saw that Johnnie's ghost was sweeping the leaves as well. They seemed to be arguing at the same time. But it was still misty, and really, I can't say whether, when I looked a second time, there were two men or one man sweeping the leaves.

Johnnie began to improve in the New Year. At least, he stopped shouting about Christmas, and then he never mentioned it at all; in a few months, when he had almost stopped saying anything, they discharged him.

The town council gave him the leaves of the park to sweep. He seldom speaks and recognizes nobody. I see him every day at the late end of the year, working in the mist. Sometimes, if there is a sudden gust, he jerks his head up to watch a few leaves falling behind him, as if amazed that they are undeniably there, although, by rights, the falling of leaves should be stopped.



No stir of air was there,
Not so much life as on a summer's day
Robs not one light seed from the feather'd grass,
But where the dead leaf fell, there did it rest.

JOHN KEATS (1795–1821).

THE OPEN WINDOW

EDMUND H. BURKE

SITTING IN THIS window, you see a lot of interesting things. For instance, look there—diagonally across. That woman, coming down the steps with the garbage pail. She comes down about the same time every night, just a little past dusk. See, she dumps the garbage in the communal can and stands with her hands on her hips for a minute, then goes back into the building.

The first time I really noticed that woman was a hot night, maybe two or three months ago. I'd been reading, and suddenly I was aware that the usual street noises had a special sound. Against the constant rumbling of the big trucks on the avenue a man and woman were arguing. I'm just nosy enough so that I turned the light out and went to the window to watch. It was late enough for the neighbourhood radios to be off and I could hear most of what was going on. I don't suppose they'd have noticed me even if I'd left the light on.

There they stood, right across from here—on those steps. That's usually a roost for the neighbourhood young from early morning on, but even they'd gone at that hour. Just the man and woman—he sitting on the steps and she facing him, legs wide apart, fists on hips, giving him "what-for." Anyone would have envied her the ability to spill words out that way. It didn't seem to make any difference to

her what language she used—she went back and forth from Polish to English, without a break. Her cry was that of the discontented wife the world over—he wouldn't work, he borrowed money to drink, he never stayed home and he chased other women.

Feeling somewhat as though I'd been peering through a keyhole that gave on to a pig-pen, I turned away, but an hour later they were still at it and her voice had risen to a fever pitch of querulousness. I went back to the window, almost against my will. They hadn't moved, but just as I got back to the window he stood up and made a half-hearted swipe at her.

"Don' you raise you han' at me, I push you face in." She suited her actions to the words and swung at him with her hand-bag.

He blocked the swing and limped toward the corner. There he leaned against a car and stood smoking. She followed—a middle-aged avenging fury, the words pouring out of her like hot coals, sparking and sputtering.

A truck bellowed its exhaust on the avenue and he limped back to the steps. He sat down, sighed loudly and lit another cigarette. She came and stood in front of him, arms folded now, and kept up the harangue. It wasn't epic, but drearily and obscenely repetitious. The blasphemy was as meaningless as a parrot's.

It wasn't pretty and I wondered why people washed their dirty clothes in public. I wondered, too, what per-

versity made other people stand around to watch the laundering.

Next morning I happened to be at the window again. They were still at it, only this time the play had a larger cast. There were two new characters—a girl, obviously the daughter; and a younger man, who was either son-in-law or son-in-law to be. The scene went from the house down to the steps and back so that I had a good clear view.

The woman, in daylight, is short and stocky with hair that's going from black to grey and her eyes are big and snapping. Her skin is brown, her body shapeless and she wears laced shoes with heels, the sensible sort, with ankle socks. It looked from here as though she had varicose veins.

He was different, cast, on the surface, from a slightly finer mould. A somewhat aquiline face, steel-rimmed glasses, completely grey hair and fair skin. A balding man without the little pot that often comes, tallish, lean—with a stiff knee and a predilection for pink shirts.

The daughter was latinesque. Lush, with signs which pointed to rapidly approaching overweight. A form-tight, black satin dress, good legs, high heels and jet-black hair. Smooth skinned, and yet, somehow, lacking the spark that turns men's heads.

Her husband, or boy friend, was a nonentity, at least in this cast. He could have been anything from a bank clerk to a bookie, but the odds would be on his being a plumber's helper.

He pushed through to the father

and for the first time I could hear the older man clearly.

"Lee' me alone, Nicky. I like you, Nicky. You a good boy, but lee' me alone."

Then they moved down to the corner bar and there the old man sought refuge. No doubt he felt secure in man's last retreat from women and reality, but while mother stood outside, tapping her foot, the daughter went in after him, the black satin twisting high over her rounded rump. She brought him out in a moment or two and the four went back to the house. Limping father paired with daughter, and sheepish suitor with storm-clouded mother bringing up the rear.

Any idea I'd had of comparing this to an ordinary drama was wrong. It bore a much closer resemblance to a Chinese play that goes on for days, with time out to rest both actors and audience. There would be a long matinée and then nothing. Then a special morning performance followed by a repeat in the evening.

The parts weren't really hard. The daughter seldom had lines, the son-in-law almost never. Just the two main roles—with the man's part largely confined to the lighting of innumerable cigarettes and a series of grunts, mixed with the occasional mumbled reply.

The female lead called for more histrionics, blazing eyes and a command of two languages. Her lines featured—liquor, any liquor—women, other women—and money, just plain money. She read the lines,

constantly projecting outraged propriety and decency.

I can't remember when it suddenly dawned on me that this wasn't as funny as I'd grown to think. I guess it must have been one afternoon when the two leads were on this side of the street. They were only about twenty feet from me, straight down, but I might have been twenty miles away, for all they cared.

Sitting on the window-sill, I watched. Listening meant nothing—there wasn't any English in it, just an uninterrupted spate of Polish. I've heard the word "spate" used a lot of times, but it took that woman to show me what it really meant—an angry concourse of words spewing out, like a maddened river rushing to meet a deadline with a dam. And, like a river, every so often she'd meet an obstacle and the spray would fly. She'd lose her tongue for a minute and spit at him while she gathered her words in order. I could see the spittle in a cloud in the afternoon sun, spreading out to blanket his face. He wiped it off with an impatient gesture, every time. As he did, she'd step back out of the reach of his arm.

I think it was then I knew they weren't fooling. At least as far as she was concerned, this was in dead earnest. Which brings me to an interesting point—I haven't seen him since.

That in itself doesn't mean much. After all, he may just have gotten tired of the tirade. None of us wants to be belaboured with words, day in and day out—especially words of that kind. I know I wouldn't have put up

with as much as he had. So if he'd joined the Foreign Legion, I for one wouldn't have blamed him a bit.

On the other hand, that overlong arm of coincidence comes into the picture. I'm pretty sure it was the next night that she began to bring the extra package down at night. See—she puts it down in the gutter, twenty feet away from the house. When the block dogs get their evening walks they all paw and sniff at it happily and by morning it's always gone, paper and all.

Now I don't say that this is even a good guess, but look at it this way. Just suppose that out of a weight of one hundred and fifty pounds, some fifty pounds were hard. Hard to cut, hard to dispose of, bone hard you might say.

On the other hand, when the sanitation trucks come by, the great teeth or blades or what have you, can chew up anything from a tin can to a sofa, I've seen them do it. and the guys who feed the machine aren't curious. Given that and a large ice-box, or a deep-freeze unit, the rest is simple. A hundred pounds, divided into, say, five-pound cuts or joints, is only twenty days, and there are lots of stray dogs, even in this city.

As I say, I see her come down almost every night and if, some night soon—say, in about five days—she comes down with just the pail, I'm going to wonder. Wonder if one night when I wasn't at the window, she and the daughter came down with two pails apiece well wrapped. Wonder—and hope—that there really is a Foreign Legion recruiting centre somewhere in town.



DREAMS ARE MORE THAN SHADOWS

ROSEMARY TIMPERLEY

Illustrated by Beresford Egan

I SAW ONLY HER silhouette as I opened the door, for it was night and the glow of the street lamp burned behind her. There was something a little uncanny about her still silence, and for a second I felt my heartbeats quicken. Then she spoke, and her voice was so ordinary and friendly that my fears were dispelled.

"I believe you have an unfurnished flat to let," she said.

"Yes. Do come in."

She stepped into the narrow hall. She was not, at a glance, a striking woman: about thirty, thin, dark, rather pale, without much make-up, neatly but not smartly dressed.

"It's the whole of the top floor," I said. "There's a nice view up there. I hope you don't mind the stairs."

"If I can find a flat, I don't much mind anything," she said, smiling. When she smiled I saw that she wasn't ordinary at all. She was charming. She had the most beautiful, deep-set dark eyes, and her mouth, although too full for conventional prettiness, was sensitive and emotional. A passionate mouth.

As I showed her the flat, I said: "Is it just for yourself and your husband?" For when she removed her gloves I noticed the wedding-ring.

"And my daughter, Eleanor. She's twelve. My name's Catherine Lake, by the way."

"I'm Mrs. Raglan."

"Well, Mrs. Raglan, I think this would suit us very well. May I come round with my husband tomorrow night?"

"By all means. Now let's have a cup of coffee before you go."

Over that cup of coffee she told me a little of her circumstances. She had married towards the end of the war, when she was eighteen. She stayed at an office until her husband was demobbed, then had her baby. Her husband, fifteen years older than herself and a schoolteacher, had his job kept open for him. "But teachers' salaries are so rotten that we've just lived from hand to mouth for ages," she said. "We could never save money to buy a house or pay a high premium for a flat. We've moved from one set of rooms to another and kept looking for unfurnished premises in a vague sort of way, but rather lost heart. When I saw your advertisement I rushed round straight away."

"I'm very glad you did. I shall look forward to meeting your husband."

Her husband, Gordon Lake, came with her the following night. He was a big, solidly built man with a square, pinkish face, fair hair and small blue eyes. He was slow of speech and movement, even a little pompous, and made a contrast with his wife's quickness of speech and gesture. He struck me as a kind but dull man.

They seemed good friends, however, and when they went upstairs together to look at the flat, I heard them talking and laughing amicably. A contented marriage, I thought. No blazing fire of passion here, but a gentle

glow of custom and intimacy.

They decided to take the flat, and arrived with their daughter a week later. She was a thin, lively bit of a thing, reminding me of her mother. They called her Ellie.

For the first few weeks the routine of the household ran smoothly. Gordon Lake and Ellie went to school shortly after eight each morning, and Catherine did the housework. She was a houseproud woman, and made the humdrum flat look charming. Sometimes at about eleven we shared a cup of tea or coffee in each other's rooms. Mostly we talked flippancies, but one day Catherine said:

"Why is it that when one's young one expects so much of life? *Why* does one? Is it what our parents tell us or what we learn at school? Or is it because we've had some former existence before we were born, some more beautiful, satisfactory existence, and the memory of it stays with us in childhood, even though we don't know it is a memory."

"I think it's just that when we're young we expect a lot, because getting to know the world is exciting and we think the excitement will go on; but it doesn't. You can't expect it to."

"You're so resigned," said Catherine.

That conversation was the first sign I had that Catherine was not as contented with her life as appeared. Her husband and daughter would never guess that she wasn't completely happy. Only to me, almost a stranger, did she confide her nebulous yearnings, her feeling of—"Is this all? Just going on like this till we die?"

As the weeks passed and spring approached, something happened to Catherine. She grew thinner. Her cheeks acquired an unusual flush. She sang as she moved about the house. There was a tense look in her eyes, and her lips seemed always aquiver with emotion. If I hadn't known her movements so well, I'd have said she was having a secret love affair. She looked like a woman in love.

One morning that spring, when I was having coffee with her, she walked to the window and said:

"How beautiful everything is! Beautiful as a dream. Mrs. Raglan, do you believe in dreams?"

"What do you mean?"

"The people one meets in dreams. Who are they? Do they exist anywhere, or do we imagine them?"

"I've wondered that myself," I said. "I meet so many strangers in my dreams, and wonder if they exist somewhere in the flesh. But one will never know, because one forgets their faces."

Catherine said. "I'd know *his* face anywhere."

"Whose face?"

"The face of the man I dream about. I dream of him every night. He says the most wonderful things to me. He kisses me. Makes love to me. I feel guilty about it, as if I were being unfaithful to Gordon. Yet I'm happy about it at the same time. Sometimes I can hardly wait for the day to pass so that I can go to sleep and dream of him."

"How very queer."

"You sound disapproving. Don't be. I can't help my dreams, and they

do make life worth living. Reality doesn't seem quite real any more. Nothing that happens during the day seems important. Perhaps I'm going crazy. If I am, it's a nice sort of craziness."

I looked at her with concern, noticing small things about her—her hair looked as if it needed washing and her finger-nails weren't clean, her clothes looked careless, and the flat was far more untidy than it had been when she first moved in. Reality was no longer real to her. Or, rather, she had found a different sort of reality, and her habits had changed.

"Don't be obsessed by a dream, Catherine. It's dangerous."

"Perhaps he exists on another planet. Or in a former life or a future life. Who's to know? Or perhaps he's somewhere, here and now, in this world, and it's only a matter of time before——"

"What's this man like, Catherine?" I interrupted her.

"It's difficult to describe him. His eyes burn through you. He's very pale. He's like—like a faun, a satyr. But his looks don't matter. It's the feeling he gives me that matters—the excitement, the pleasure. A feeling of love. It's so wonderful to feel it again after all these years. I'm happy."

Catherine's feverish happiness didn't last. As the weeks passed and spring turned to summer, I watched the colour die from her cheeks, the brightness from her eyes. She became even more neglectful about her appearance and the house, and I saw the shadow of unexplained misery reflected in the eyes of her husband and

daughter. Both worried about her: Ellie because she felt she could no longer rely on her mother; Gordon because he had lost touch with her and didn't know how or why. He couldn't make her laugh any more. When she spoke to him, her voice was remote.

Catherine cut herself off from me as well as from her family, until one day she came to my kitchen when I was baking a cake and said:

"Are you very busy? May I come in?"

"Of course, my dear. Sit down. It's nice to see you."

She sat stiffly on a wooden chair and said, after a tense silence: "It's just that I—I can't go on."

"Oh, Catherine, what's the matter?"

"You remember I told you about my dreams."

"Yes. Do you still have them?"

"I do. He comes to me every night, but he's changed."

"Changed?"

"He used to be so tender and loving. Sometimes he still is. But most of the time now he's cruel and twisted. He mocks and tortures me. He says bitter, jeering things. He taunts me for loving him. He says that all women are alike, and if you trample them in the dirt hard enough they'll adore you for evermore. It's mortifying—and true. I can't stop loving him now."

"But he's only a dream—not real!"

"He *is* real. He's the only real thing in my life. Even when he's been most cruel and I long most to escape from him, he has only to brush his lips against mine, touch me, caress me and

the ecstasy comes back. I can never get away from him. Sometimes I lie for hours trying to keep awake, but his influence drives me to sleep, into his arms. When I awake in the morning I'm sick with horror. But deep down I don't want to escape him. He has only to look at me in a certain way, and I—I'm lost. I don't know what to do! Please help me."

I was frightened, as if this creature of nightmare were in the room with us at this very moment.

"Catherine, I can't help you, but a psychiatrist could. Tell your doctor the whole story——"

"No! I couldn't speak of it to anyone."

"You must. For the sake of Gordon and Ellie."

"They seem like shadows now."

"But it's your dreams that are shadows."

"Dreams are more than shadows," she said. "I think there's a whole world of shadows with us all the time, shadows that are more than shadows. This thing we call 'everyday life' is just a cover-up, a pretence, a busyness to keep back the shadows. I pretended so long to be busy and happy. I pretended that all I wanted was to carry on in the same way, day after day, like thousands of other women. My dreams have shown me what I'm really like. They've shown me the evil in myself. Part of me loathes and is terrified by my dreams, the other part enjoys, gloats, wallows."

"Catherine, stop! It's your duty to see a doctor. Look at yourself. You're worn to a shadow. You look ill. You *must* get professional help."

I persuaded her. She went to her doctor the following day, and arranged to see a psychiatrist a week later.

Meantime Ellie was spending almost as much time with me now as she did with her parents.

"I feel safe in your part of the house," she said once.

"Don't you feel safe upstairs, Ellie?"

"No. I get a queer feeling that someone else is there."

"You're being fanciful."

"It's a feeling. I don't have it down here. I think it has something to do with Mother. When she's not in the house, I don't get the feeling. I'm frightened."

"Ellie, don't be frightened. There are many things in the world that can't be explained, but you're too young to worry your head about them. As long as your mother, your father and I are here, you're safe. We love you and wouldn't let anything happen to you."

Ellie was unconvinced, and I was worried about her.

The following week I went up to ask Catherine how she'd got on with the psychiatrist. She said:

"I told him the whole story. He wasn't at all shocked. He said it wasn't unusual for one's repressions to give one disturbing dreams. He said I was bored with my husband and had created a dream man in my mind. He let me talk, then talked for a long time himself. He was very kind indeed."

"And the dreams have stopped?" I said.

"Oh no. He said that now I'd admitted my hidden wishes and so on, I'd have the dreams less often, then they'd stop. It hasn't worked. I shan't go to see him again. The man in my dreams scoffs at everything he said. The man in my dreams says: 'You can't get rid of me as easily as that. But you could get rid of me even more easily—simply by wanting to.'"

"But, Catherine, you do want to."

"Do I? In my dream last night he said he was coming for me. He said that soon I'd meet him in the street, and he'd make me come with him. We're going away together."

"You'll not meet him. He's not real."

"He's real," said Catherine. "Somewhere he exists. I shall meet him. I'm ready to go with him whenever he wants me and wherever he wants me to go."

Her eyes were remote and fanatical now. I couldn't reach her. It was as if already we belonged to two different worlds.

In the days that followed her habits changed again. She still paid scant attention to housework, but she was beginning to pay great attention to her own appearance. She spent money on new clothes, make-up and hair styles. She spent hours painting her face, arranging her hair, trying on her new clothes. Then she'd go out in the afternoon, leaving a waft of strong scent in her wake, and walk slowly down the street, looking about her as she went. Men would turn to stare, whistle or wolfcall. She ignored them. She was looking for *him*.

One afternoon she came to me with a suitcase in her hand.

"I'm going to meet him," she said. "In my dream last night he told me where to go. We're going to be together always. I know he'll torment me, make my life a hell in some ways, but for just a moment of his gentleness, his kindness, his magic, I'd go through a thousand hells. I've come to say good-bye."

"You mustn't go. Catherine, your mind is sick. This man isn't real. He won't meet you."

"He will. You can't stop me from going."

"Yes, I can. You shan't leave this room."

I stood between her and the door. I am a big woman and quite strong. Catherine was a thin slip of a woman. She laughed, gripped my arm and pulled me aside so that I almost fell. I shall never forget the strength in that thin hand, the terrifying feeling that I was being tossed aside by a power far, far greater than my own.

"Good-bye," she said.

I watched her walk down the street in a blaze of sunshine, for the summer was upon us now and the afternoon was sultry. With shock I realized that, in spite of all that paint, she looked recklessly beautiful. She was a woman on her way to meet her lover.

I telephoned Gordon at school, and he came home at once. He rang the police, but of course they could do nothing. Gordon said:

"It's only since we came to this house that Catherine's changed." And he looked at me accusingly.

"It's nothing to do with the house," I told him. "My family has lived here for years, and we've no ghosts or rumours of ghosts."

"Then she must have gone mad," he said. "She won't meet this imaginary person you tell me about. She'll come back."

She didn't come back.

Gordon and Ellie settled down to a new routine, with myself as their housekeeper. Summer passed and winter came. We began almost to forget Catherine. Then one winter night, when Ellie was out with a friend and Gordon had gone to the pictures, I heard a knock at the door. It gave me a slight shock, for it was exactly a year ago tonight that Catherine had first come to my door and inquired about the flat. I had an uncanny sensation as I went to open the door, as if history were repeating itself. When I opened it, my immediate feeling was one of relief, for the person who stood there, silhouetted against the glow of the street lamp, was a bent old woman, a stranger.

Only when she stepped into the hall and I saw the beautiful dark eyes in the lined face did I recognize Catherine Lake.

"I've come back," she said. She swayed towards me. She was so light, so skeleton thin, that I caught her unconscious figure easily in my arms.

I carried her into my room and laid her on the couch by the fire. I covered her with a rug. Luckily I had some brandy, which I brought to her. As I knelt beside her she opened her eyes and tried to smile, but a second

later tears spilled from her eyes and poured down her cheeks.

"Drink this," I said, putting my arm round her, feeling the sharpness of her shoulder-blades through her thin coat—the elegant summer coat she had worn when she left the house that summer day. She was icy cold.

She gulped down the brandy. "Don't look at me in such horror," she said faintly. "I know I look about a hundred. I looked in the mirror this morning and was almost surprised to find that I was there at all."

"Catherine, how did you get into this state?"

"I didn't know I was in a state until today. I never thought about it. We've been happy, sometimes—and other times—other times——"

"Why have you come back?"

"He left me. He said I was too old. When I looked in the mirror this morning I saw that it was true. It's as if I've lived for years and years in the past four months. I've loved him and loathed him. I've worshipped him and been terrified of him. I've thought he was God himself or the Devil himself. If the Devil does come to earth, that is what he's like—charming—charming—a word we use carelessly; yet a creature with charm can make one practise the worst excesses."

"Talk sense, Catherine. Who was he? What was his work? Did he have money?"

"I never knew his name. He told me nothing. As for money, that was up to me. I had the housekeeping money when I left here. We took a very cheap room. When we ran out of

money, I went out into the street and picked up what I could."

"You mean——?"

"Yes. You get to a stage when that sort of thing doesn't matter, doesn't register any more. Now I'm too tired for it. Too old. He's left me. I came here because I have nowhere else to go. Don't turn me away."

"Of course I won't. Try to sleep now."

"I never sleep. Being with him was like living my dreams. I stopped sleeping. I haven't slept since I left here."

"If I could get hold of this unspeakable man I'd——"

"You'd fall under his spell, if he wanted you to. I wonder if he's in someone else's dreams tonight, kissing someone else's lips. Last night he said to me: 'Next time it will be someone very young, someone I can teach to love right from the start.' Teach to love—his sort of love—twisted—terrible; and he wants someone young—someone young. . . ." She muttered for a while, then said in a clear, practical voice:

"I still owe a week's rent for my room, and I have no money at all. I've written the landlady's address here." She brought a scrap of paper from her pocket. "Could Gordon pay it for me?"

"I'll tell him."

"You think I shouldn't have come back. You wish I'd died out there in the street."

"No, Catherine! But I do think you shouldn't see too much of Ellie now. She's so young. Your leaving her was a great shock."

"Ellie." She began to sob, then she



whispered: "Now he's left me, I'm just as I was before he came. I could still look after Ellie, if only Gordon will forgive me."

"It's not a question of forgiveness. Who are we to judge or forgive each

other? The point is that you *are* different now. You're not good company for a little girl."

"Not good company for my own daughter—flesh of my flesh—my degraded flesh." Her voice died away, then she said: "Yes, you're right. I should never have come. I'll go away again. Ellie must never see me again. Oh God, what happened to me in the past twelve months? Why did he choose me? Why? 'At random,' he said when I asked him once. He said: 'I search in the dark, anywhere, everywhere. I find an open mind, an empty heart and I take possession.' Had I an open mind and an empty heart when I came to live here?"

I didn't reply. She answered herself:

"Yes, I had. I was waiting for something to happen, hoping for excitement, wishing for—I didn't know what I wished for. He came to me out of the dark and took possession of me. Horrible! Yet even now I can't truly regret it. If he came back to me, I'd do the same all over again. Now I must go away. . . ." She stopped as the door opened.

Gordon stood there.

"I heard your voice," he said.

"I'm just going, Gordon," said Catherine. "I only came to see Mrs. Raglan."

The man looked at the wreck of the woman who had once been his lovely young wife, smiled and held out his arms. For a second she shrank back, then she stumbled towards him and he held her close. His eyes were closed. His face was a mask of anguish. She gave a queer little chok-

ing sound, followed by a long, sighing, frighteningly familiar exhalation. Her body became limp. It was several seconds before he realized that she was dead.

A week later, after Catherine had been buried and Gordon, Ellie and I were as much back to normal as we'd ever be, I remembered the money Catherine had owed for rent and mentioned it to Gordon, giving him the slip of paper with the address.

"I'll go along there tonight," he said. "She'd want me to pay it. Catherine always hated debts, at least she did before—before——" He left the sentence unfinished. "Fancy the repayment of a little debt being one of the last things she thought about," he said. "That shows that she was already getting free from that evil man's clutches. A man like that has no right to live. If he's still in the room where they lived together, I'll thrash the life out of him!" This was a pathetic threat, for Gordon wasn't the type to "thrash the life" out of anyone.

"I don't expect he'll still be there," I said, "but I'd better come with you to keep you out of trouble, just in case. You won't help anyone by starting a brawl."

"Perhaps you're right," he admitted. "All this is beyond me. I don't understand it."

Poor, bewildered Gordon. He had never even touched the darkness that is steadily closing in on us as the centuries pass, let alone explored it as his wife had done.

We left Ellie doing her homework when we went out that night. She

didn't mind being left alone. She had become very dreamy during the past few days. There was a happy, excited look on her face, as if she had some delicious secret. She was growing more like her mother, as Catherine had been when I first knew her.

As we walked along the grim, poverty-stricken street to the address Catherine had given me, Gordon said:

"I'm glad that Ellie hasn't been more upset by all this business."

"She's very young. She hadn't seen her mother for several months. Death isn't quite real to her."

"I'm wondering what *is* real to her at the moment," he said, half laughing. "When I accused her of absent-mindedness the other day, told her that unless she pulled her socks up at school she'd never get anywhere, she said: 'School doesn't matter any more. You see, I have the most wonderful dreams.' She went on to say that she'd fallen in love with some man in her dreams. Just imagine! A dream-man at thirteen! This is the address. God, what a place!"

But I was too horror-struck by what he had just told me to take in the grim façade of the house with its dirty, cracked windows, crumbling brickwork, filthy steps and littered yard. I stood beside him in a daze of fear as the door opened. I hardly saw the slatternly woman standing there, looking surprised to see such respectable callers. I could only hear Catherine's voice in my ears: "Last night he said: 'Next time it will be someone very young, someone I can teach to love right from the start.'"

And who was this man? Who was he? Who are these people met in dreams with strange, familiar faces? Strange, familiar faces. They come by night and we recognize them, but who are they? Who are they? . . .

"Yes," the woman at the door was saying. "Mrs. Lake was here and she did leave without paying her rent. They do sometimes. I must say I was glad when she left. I don't like to have that sort in my house. I've let the

room to a very respectable lady now."

"So the man has gone," Gordon said.

"What man?"

"The man with whom Mrs. Lake was—er—living."

"She wasn't living with any man," said the woman. "She brought different ones back sometimes. But they were never the same twice running. No, Mrs. Lake lived alone here for four months. She was quite alone."



Oh for a lodge in some vast wilderness,
Some boundless contiguity of shade,
Where rumour of oppression and deceit,
Of unsuccessful or successful war,
Might never reach me more.

WILLIAM COWPER (1731-1800).

THE WILL TO DIE

DENYS VAL BAKER

He had it all planned out, right down to the last little detail. He had nothing left to live for. And yet he could not look into the terrible face of death.



THE MAN IN THE LONG brown overcoat was going to die.

He sat in a corner of the hot, sticky café, finishing a cup of coffee. The cup was held pensively between his two hands, and the steam from the coffee slowly curled upwards, shrouding his face, hiding the tense pallor of his cheeks and the small burning circles of his eyes. A dark felt cap, pulled low over his forehead, added to the appearance of dark inaccessibility so that, sitting there, he seemed isolated not only from the rest of the café but from the entire world.

When the man had drained the last drop of coffee, he picked up a sheet of notepaper and quickly scanned the short sentences he had just written. Then he carefully folded the sheet and wrapped it in a cheap white envelope, already addressed and stamped. He sat for a few more minutes turning the envelope over and over between his fingers and tapping the corners on the table; then he rose abruptly and walked across the café and out into the darkness. He went a little way along the street, his eyes peering about familiarly until he came to a corner pillar-box. He pulled the envelope out of his pocket, absent-mindedly reread-

ing the address before, with a gesture of resignation, he pushed it down the wide letter slot.

Hunching his shoulders and turning up his thick coat collar, the man set off down the street. He walked with quick, nervous steps, and kept his eyes downwards as much as possible. As he walked along, the night mist seemed to thicken and to swirl all around him, and he felt the sensation of endless octopus hands reaching out to touch his shoulders and legs. Now and then he shook himself uneasily, as if to avoid the unseen hands. When a car hooted suddenly in the darkness, he halted and heard his heart pounding unnaturally. Farther on, as he was nearing the town's outskirts, he bumped into a fuddled old woman, leaning against a doorway and singing drunkenly. He shook her aside savagely, and hurried on until he had lost the sound of her singing. He remembered, alone again in the silence, that he had probably heard his last human voice—the ugly grating of a boozy old woman.

Soon he had reached the by-pass skirting the town. A few minutes' walk brought him to the last of the new suburban houses, and the wide pavement ended abruptly before a dark hedge. There was a thin gravel path running on beside the road, and

he set off along this, his feet crunching solidly on the small stones.

The swift, even beat of his steps reminded him irresistibly of the sound of marching soldiers, their steps merging into a single monotonous drum-beat of inevitable doom. His mind, easily occupied, conjured up fantasies, and he began to wonder if he were not a soldier—a soldier without a uniform and without a rifle, with a prisoner's number scrawled over his chest. He was a prisoner marching sullenly between stony-faced ranks of guards, marching without a word and without a look towards some lonely plain and a convenient stone wall. The marching feet stopped suddenly; in a daze he felt himself groping his way towards the wall; there was a vicious roll of drums, and he turned hurriedly, remembering the etiquette of dying face forward: he stared through the darkness and he realized, in surprise, that there were not five or six rifles but tens and hundreds and thousands of rifles, each one with a burning barrel-point, and suddenly a million daggers of flame were hurtling towards him. . . . The man jerked back to reality, and found that he had stopped walking and was standing in the middle of the road. He passed a hand over his forehead and rubbed his eyes slowly. The night shapes and shadows were hovering around like death-winged bats; he trembled, and only an old stubbornness kept him from running ahead wildly with his eyes shut. He began muttering to himself—words, words, words, anything so that his thoughts could not run away again. Talking also prevented

the tensing of his ears, straining to hear the strange noises of night. He narrowed his eyelids to a thin line and walked on.

He left the main road and went down a lane. It wound in and out, under overhanging trees, and he could smell the fresh scents. Now and then a dead leaf fell and startled him, brushing against his cheek. A dark horizon loomed ahead; the lane dipped and swerved away, but the man climbed over a small hedge and crossed a dewy field which sloped slowly upwards. He surmounted a thick wire fence and clambered up the muddy bank of a railway-track, feeling his way in the darkness until he came to the smooth steel railway-lines, their shine slightly deadened by rust. He had reached his destination.

The man stood with one foot on a rail and the other on one of the wooden sleepers and peered at the phosphorescent hands of his watch. One o'clock was a little earlier than he had intended. There was still a quarter of an hour to wait for the screaming night-mail express. But better early than too late, he thought, and a faint, sardonic smile touched his drawn cheeks. He sat down, leaning on the thin surface of the rails, his legs stretched loosely across the sleepers.

Now the night had turned strangely silent. Sitting up on the railway-bank, he felt somewhat removed from the dark shadows that had clustered around him on the road below. There was an air of remoteness about his position there, his only remaining link with other worlds being the two

stretches of railway-lines disappearing in either direction.

He knew from daytime visits that the lines stretched away straight and unending till they were lost among woods or behind hills. In the daylight it was a wistful, beautiful view; the town was hidden behind the woods, and the eyes saw only the wide bright green of field after field and the occasional dark patches of trees—perhaps a few scattered farms. But the night blinded it all, there were only shapes and shadows. He stared around, trying to reconstruct the scene as he had seen it in the daytime. The thought that he would never again see it in light struck him oddly, surprisingly, unreally. He ran a hand along the polished surface of the rail, fingering here and there a small patch of rust. The rail was wet and cold, and the feel of it sent a shiver through him; he let go quickly.

He felt quite calm, though. He was surprised how calm he felt. Probably the coffee had helped. He could still taste the flavour of it in his mouth, running a nerveless tongue around his gums. True, his mouth had gone dry, but everything else seemed under control. He was not crying, he was not trembling, he was not feeling sick; there was only a faint weakness in his stomach. He was able to sit there quite calmly, knowing that he had carried out his plans exactly as he had intended. Last thing of all, he had posted the letter. In the morning it would arrive, but too late, of course. In the morning . . .

He quickly closed his mind, like a book, and started humming a tuneless

refrain. Yes, it was a mistake to think too much; but the fact remained that he was quite calm and he was not afraid. In a few minutes he was going to be cut to pieces under a train; but he was still able to sit there, calm and cool.

He looked at his watch. It was a quarter-past one. The train should be passing about that moment. He looked down the track, wondering if in the distance he would see a glimmer of fire, straining his ears to hear a whistle or the noise of the engine. Everything remained buried in the blankets of darkness.

At first he had thought of the simplest way—of lying on the bed and turning on the gas-fire. He had even tried, one afternoon, but the time and the strain of it had been too much. He had lain there for ten minutes, listening to the hiss of escaping gas, wondering when he was going to become unconscious, and aware only of a slight heaviness. It might have taken an hour or so; he couldn't have stood the tension for an hour. He had switched off the gas and been sick into a bowl.

Or there was the river, flowing under an old stone bridge not far from their house. Often he had stood on top of the bridge looking down at the waters—dirty and unfriendly in the daytime, sullen and evil in the cover of night. Sometimes, when the moon's light glinted on the surface, he had felt that the river was beckoning to him, inviting him into its mysterious depths. He had walked along the towpath and looked into the fathomless darkness of the water. But

he had a horror of water, a terror of feeling the water closing over his head like a trapdoor, of struggling to breathe when it was too late. He thought of himself in the water, splashing and sinking down and down, fighting the black, oily water until it poured into his nostrils and forced open his mouth, and his head burst. . . .

It had to be something quick and ruthless, like the guillotine. That was how he had come to think of the railway. He had heard of men throwing themselves under trains. It was bound to be swift, over in a few seconds. He had it all planned out; he had read of a similar case in a book. It was no good lying down along the sleepers—the train might pass without harming him. He had to lie across the rails, with his head or neck on one rail and his legs across the other rail. For the first time the idea began to seem repulsive; but sitting at home it had sounded simple and clean-cut.

He looked at his watch again. Another five minutes had passed, and there was still no sign of the train.

He bent down and felt the rails. They were about five feet apart. Awkwardly he got down on his hands and knees, laying his leg across one rail. The cold feel of the rail when his neck touched it made him jerk back, but he forced his head down again. His body was now curled up in a U-shape. It was not a very comfortable position. He lay with his neck turned to one side and his eyes staring into the soil and rubble outside the rails. He lay there for a few moments, uneasily, and then rose. He would know

better now, when the moment came. All the same, he felt faintly sick, and was glad of the cold night air to suck into his mouth, blowing away the sickly taste.

He could feel the cold dew gathering on his coat. It was beginning to feel slightly sodden, and the cold was penetrating. He looked at his watch again—the train was now ten minutes late. He frowned, nervously, and began pacing up and down the track. It was unusual for the train to be late. He wondered if anything had happened . . . probably delayed at the junction, he decided. He walked fifty paces in one direction and fifty paces back. At every turn he decided to look at his watch. Each journey took him about a minute. He made several journeys, and the fingers of his watch quivered near the half-past one position.

He was surprised to find he was shivering. The time seemed to drag, even as it sped—a minute was an hour. It weighed on him like an increasingly heavy load. He began to stare into the distance, imagining he saw a faint flame or heard the whistle. Once he could have sworn he heard the noise of the train gathering speed as it came out of the junction, and in a flurry he scrambled down and lay across the rail. He lay there for a minute or two before he realized there was no longer any noise. When he got up, he was bathed in perspiration.

Tired of walking, he sat down again. He felt a strange tenseness in every muscle, so that it was quite an effort to move. Every pin-point of him was on edge; he would have trembled

at the sound of a bird flying past. He had lost interest in the night, in his surroundings, in the weather, in everything except the steel rails and the ominous horizon. He sat there, and drooped his chin into the furry warmth of his coat and closed his eyes. They were sore and bloodshot, and a slight pain shot across them every few moments, so that it was a relief to close them.

In the silence he could even hear the ticking of his watch. It seemed to get louder. Tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick . . . it was not like some of the bigger clocks which went tick-tock-tick-tock-tick-tock. He thought of the one at home, standing in the hall, with its faded mahogany body and its antique face. That one had a slow, laboured movement, a sort of tick-er-tock-er-tick-er-tock. Like most clocks, it was fast; but he knew his wrist-watch was correct, he had set it by the wireless in the café.

He put out a hand to lean on the rail. One thought of the oddest things. . . . He remembered another clock, a wedding present to his mother, with a gold setting. It struck the hour with bells. His thoughts flashed into nothingness—the rail was trembling very faintly. His heart went dead and cold, and a wave of prickling fleshiness went over his body. With a stiff movement he bent down and put his ear to the rail. There was a steady but faint rumbling noise, like far-off thunder. He stood up and scanned the horizon, his eyes swimming slightly. He could see nothing, no flames, no smoke. He bent down again and listened. The sound had grown louder. When he

straightened up the second time, his eyes caught a flicker of brightness shooting into the sky far down the track.

He felt a sudden desire to cry out, to scream. He wished he was a woman, able to shriek in a high-pitched tone; but all sound died in his throat. He only coughed and gulped.

Mechanically he found himself looking at his watch. The train was exactly twenty-five minutes late. I've had twenty-five minutes of extra life, he thought, and it seemed a huge joke. He wanted to laugh, to laugh out loud, to split the night with his laughter. He found he could not even smile.

He began to get down on his knees. Odd, disjointed ideas began running through his mind. "The time has come for all good children to go to Heaven!" He wanted to sing the refrain. It was an old-fashioned refrain; came from the negroes. They lynched negroes in America.

He stretched his legs across the rail and felt the coldness and wetness through his trousers. He wondered what time the letter would arrive. He would like to see their faces when they read it. He wondered how long it would take them to find out what had happened to him. Would a policeman come round and say: "A body has been found on the railway-line, believed to be that of a relative of yours?" Would they have to view the body? Could they identify it? What would the body look like, all red and bleeding and headless?

He retched over the sleepers, great heaving movements, without bringing

anything up. Slowly, like an unwilling snake, he coiled himself round and put his neck across the other railway-line.

Through his legs and into his neck he felt the rumbling of the train. The rumbling was a living thing now, a live and trembling thing. Besides, he could hear it—through the night air he could hear the noise of the engine like the thunder of a hundred olden chariots. It fled through the air towards him on wings, an indescribable, ominous, devilish sound—the steady, solid snorting of the express train. He had seen the train before. It was a long, sleek train, bulging with carriages, led by a curved, shining engine, tapered to the nose. He had never seen the train standing, always it had been rushing madly over the rails like a great burning comet in a black sky.

A wail broke the night air. A slow, quiet wail that suddenly strengthened and rose to a crescendo, to a sharp imperious whistle. He had never in all his life heard such a noise: it was the cry of the wildest, most inhuman jungle animal. He turned his head and looked down the line, while the beating of the rumbling drums now beat into his body steadily. He could see the engine now, he knew where the

train was. A few hundred yards away at the most. He stared down the dark line so far, and then his eyes came up against a shapeless thing of blackness, lit up by occasional fire glows.

His eyes focused on the engine as if mesmerized. He could see nothing else in the world, and slowly, terrifyingly, he felt his eyes being drawn inwards. The rumble rose louder and louder, the glows began to light up the whole sky, and he felt his eyes converging into each other as death loomed larger and nearer, became bigger and more frightening, began to fill up the whole track, blotting out the night itself.

He lay petrified across the lines, his mouth flung open in loose horror, his neck twisted distortedly so that he could look upwards. He looked into the engine's face and it became that of a prehistoric beast. The snub nose became a blood-flecked snout; he saw long, gnashing teeth and flaming eyes and a tapering tongue of fire; there was a dragon's triumphant snorting. . . . Then, in one frenzied movement, he threw himself to the side of the railway-lines.

The long express roared past, shaking the whole earth. He crouched on the railway-bank. He was whimpering and taking huge gulping breaths of life.



Huddled in dirt the reasoning engine lies,
Who was so proud, so witty and so wise.

JOHN WILMOT, EARL OF ROCHESTER (1647–1680).



KEPT IN

J. H. CROOK

Illustrated by Arthur Wragg

PAUL JAMIESON TURNED smoothly into the drive and pulled up to watch the small boys at cricket. The tiny figures struggled with wild excess of energy in the hot afternoon. There was a marked slope to the pitch and the out-field was hummocky. The boys played haphazardly while a master sat on the boundary, smoking and shouting vague instructions from time to time.

Paul frowned; that was not the way to teach boys to play cricket: it had not been like that in his day. He looked round critically. The place was certainly on the down-grade. The

drive was worn into deep ruts and the hedges overgrown. It was just possible to see the house. It also showed too many signs of the passing of the years; the paint was peeling and the stuccoed front was grey. Essentially, however, the façade was as he remembered it: built just a little too late, tall and ill-proportioned, the blank windows gazing down in an ugly stare. Paul followed the stories up, and there, below the gable of the roof-line, winked that top little eye, the detention-room in the attic where so many weary generations of boys had spent idle, pointless afternoons.

Paul grinned with a wry nostalgia as he saw it. He let in the clutch and

his car moved easily on, but the noise it made brought a face to that little window and a pale child stared disconsolately down. Paul saw the boy gazing through the glass at him, and the afternoon suddenly roared and swung. The world splintered, and all the pieces moved madly in the sunlight with the effect before Paul's eyes of darkly falling rain.

Through this cataclysm he guided the car safely round the turn at the end of the drive, and drew up sedately before the open front door. Out of sight of that window things fell into place again, and, shaking his head to clear away the memory of that moment, Paul got out and stood, disconnected, in the shadow of the house.

By the time he had reached the Headmaster's study, however, it was all explained: glare of the sun, momentary black-out, and he was congratulating himself to old Elms on the way he handled his car.

"Nasty moment," he said, lying back in a leather chair and sniffing at the sherry which he had been offered too obsequiously. "Luckily, driving seems to be instinctive with me and I never lost control."

His deprecating smile did not belie the smug voice, but Elms, the Headmaster, never raised an eyebrow.

The afternoon wore gently on, and he was easily persuaded to stay to dinner. It was borne in on him that his old school was glad to welcome back one who had done so well; he was made too much of so that he swelled and relaxed in this unexpected atmosphere of praise, for his was not

the sort of success, he would have thought, to call forth admiration from the scholastic world.

"It's kind of you," he said over the after-dinner port, "to make me so welcome. I am not that much of a credit to you. Prince is a Q.C., and Jackson, he made a great name for himself during the war, didn't he?"

"That's so," said old Elms sadly. "But they don't come here any more. Not since the scandal. None of the boys who were here before the scandal ever came back. You are the first."

"Scandal?" Paul ruminated. "What scandal?"

"You don't remember it?" Elms's voice rose on the last word. He stared disbelievingly at Paul, unwilling to accept the possibility that the mine which had blown up his own life should have left no scars on the others who had lived through the disaster. "But you and Gorst must have been contemporaries, the same year. . . . And Gorst would have made a great name for himself, greater than Prince or Jackson."

"Gorst? Gorst! Of course I remember him. Our clever devil! But didn't something happen to him? Didn't he die? Or something?"

"Yes. Something. He hanged himself in the little detention-room."

"In the detention-room!" The world whirred again and flickered, and the points of the electric-light bulb seared through Paul's closed lids. "Did you say the detention-room?" he muttered, a little slurringly.

"Yes," Elms answered, glancing at

him curiously. "The room under the eaves. You remember it, don't you? You spent enough time there, as I recall."

Paul recovered his wits. "I did! But I don't remember Gorst—though I do remember now that he died. I had left, though, by then, I think."

"No," said Elms, with a queer, bitter emphasis, "you had not. You left afterwards, just as all the others did. Your parents took you away from a school where the Headmaster harried a boy to his death."

"I don't understand." Paul shook his thoughts free in his head; since that spinning of his wits just now he was caught in a vague, intangible uneasiness; he was afraid; his heart beat more quickly. "I don't understand. Gorst was a good boy. He was never in trouble; that's what we all disliked about him."

"Except once. That day. The day he killed himself. The day of the cricket match. Everybody was watching the cricket, masters and boys. Gorst was the only person left in the school."

"Yes, he was our best bowler, I remember. There was a lot of ill-feeling. . . ." It came flooding back to Paul now, but his nerves did not steady. There was something, something about that detention-room. . . .

"Ah!" Old Elms sighed. "I was much criticized. Yet, how was I to guess he would take it so much to heart? He never seemed a particularly sensitive boy. I had to keep discipline. And, do you know, I can't recall now why I kept him in! A decision which spoilt my life and ruined my school,

and I don't remember what it was!"

Paul suddenly burst out laughing. "What an extraordinary thing. It has come to me just this moment. I know why he was kept in! And it was not his fault! He was innocent."

"What was it?" Elms asked coldly.

"The bathing-huts! Do you remember? We weren't allowed to go there? Well, I used to cut along there for a quiet smoke. They found the butt-ends and Gorst's notebook, so they thought it was him, while all the time . . . Well, well!" He twisted his shoulders. Perhaps this accounted for his odd feeling? It was all his fault that Gorst had been kept in?

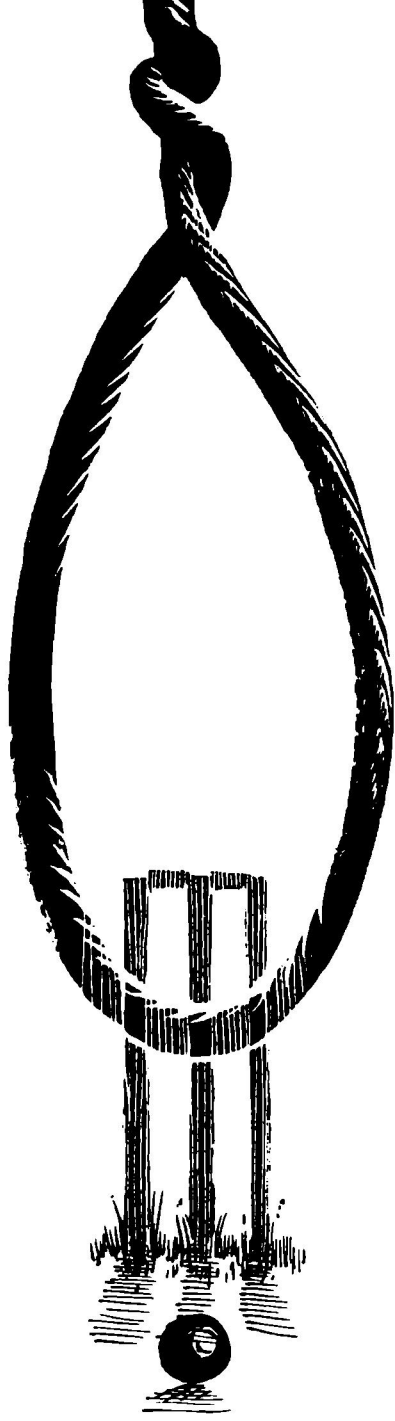
Old Elms straightened up; he looked now the real Headmaster, authoritative and remote.

"You!" he spat, with the furious sarcasm of his kind. "A tuppenny-ha'penny little twister on the Stock Exchange, you lived; whilst Gorst, the brightest boy I had, the greatest athlete. . . . No wonder he chose to die. He saw, at that age, and felt in his own person, the injustice of it all."

"Oh, come now! I say! How was I to know, any more than you did, that he would take it so hard? Besides——"

"You didn't even remember," Elms went on, paying no attention. "You didn't even remember the boy's death till I reminded you. Yet, you might say, it was all your fault."

"I can't see that," Paul answered angrily, though the fear inside grew sharper. "How was it my fault? You say now that Gorst was this and that, but you didn't think so at the time. He was clever, yes, and a wonderful



bowler, but nobody liked him, not even the masters. You were all glad to keep him off the cricket-pitch that day, even though we lost the match."

Old Elms sank back and passed a sad hand over his face. "Sometimes I am afraid you are right. There was—something wrong with Gorst. Queer, how one gets these feelings about people. He never did anything, yet I always thought. . . . Perhaps I was pleased to catch him out. But the boy defeated me in the end."

Paul offered the old man a cigarette and lit one himself. Strange, he was thinking, clinging to the last pinnacle of his crumbling complacency, how crumpled schoolmasters are when you meet them on the level. Who would not have thought that old Elms, Cat-o'-nine Elms, would have been so easily detached? He was distraught; his hands were shaking and his brains were addled with brooding. Paul shivered and glanced round the gloomy study. The school and its Head were alike—decrepit, wandering and lost.

"You know, Jamieson," Elms was muttering now, "I sometimes think that if only I could find out why that boy killed himself. . . . You are right about him, being kept in unjustly would not have made him miserable; it would have added to his self-righteousness. If only I could clear my mind of this worry, I sometimes think, then I could still rebuild this school, make it what it was before."

Paul sighed uneasily. "It has got a bit run-down."

He saw again the unkempt drive and the ragged playing-fields, the peel-

ing paint and that little eye of a window winking in the sunshine.

"Why," he asked suddenly, "if you feel so badly about Gorst, why do you still use that little detention-room?"

"Eh?" Elms sat up again and asked in a flat, curious voice: "Why do you think we do?"

"I saw a boy looking out this afternoon, disconsolate. Just as Gorst must have done. You can see the cricket from the window. . . ."

The dried, leathery face of old Elms became still more bloodless.

"We never use that room," he said quietly. "It's locked up. And we've boarded the window."

"Boarded the window? But then——"

"It's getting late." Elms stood up, finality in his voice. "It's very good of you to look us up. You are the first to come back—one of the boys who were here before. None of the others have ever come back. I—I have immensely enjoyed your visit. I'm proud of the man you've made. Call in again, when you are in this part of the world."

It was horrible, this caricaturing of pomposity. Paul no longer felt proud of the praise. He shook hands hastily and started on his way.

Half-way down the drive he stopped and looked back. The moon shone brightly on the house, and showed up the little top window of the detention-room. It was, as old Elms had said, boarded up.

He drove quickly to his hotel and got himself a night-cap in the bar.

"I must have imagined it this after-

noon," he told himself. "One sees, after all, what one expects to see."

But his heart went on hammering, and the protective layers of his smugness slipped away.

He had left, just as Elms suggested, at the end of that summer term; no doubt for the reason Elms had given, because his parents could not approve of a school where a Headmaster harried a boy to his death.

But it had not been like that. Gorst did not care what people thought. He liked his martyrdom. After all, he did not have to stay in detention. He had only to explain that he had lent his book to Jamieson; no need to say more. Gorst preferred to stay in detention, knowing he would be missed on the cricket-field, savouring the school's defeat because he was not there. He had insisted on staying in, refusing, spitefully and sulkily, to back up Paul's explanation to old Elms.

How silly it seemed now! Yet, at least one man's life was split by it. Old Elms was ruined. And when all was said, Gorst himself. . . .

Once again his mind roared open, and the room whirled with it; the bar seemed choked with the crumbling dust of Paul's assurance as the last memory clicked into place.

It was such a clever piece of organization. Jackson planned it, Jackson who made his mark in the war arranging escapes from prisoner-of-war camps. Of course, Paul thought, seeing in his mind the small boy Jackson and not the picture from the frontispiece of the books—of course,

he got his training that day of the cricket match!

Their alibis were all worked out most carefully. Only one boy at a time left the field; creeping through the shrubbery to the house, but the whole school, pretty well, was involved. Paul was one of the first to go. He felt again the twisting squiggle of fear as he screwed himself through the narrow opening of the detention-room door; he was doing something completely unlawful.

Gorst's hands were tied already in neat, sailor-like knots behind his back; the gag of sticking-plaster was firmly in his mouth. It was Paul's job to tie him to a chair. This he did, swiftly, in a most business-like way, explaining all the while, as his instructions were, the reason for this punishment.

"You wanted to stay in detention! All right! So you shall. Bound and gagged. You didn't care to play in the cricket match. All right! You need not. You'll be tied to this chair where you need not see it either."

Gorst moaned feebly through the plaster. Paul got the sense of it.

"It is your fault you are here. I told old Elms I left the book at the bathing-huts. He didn't believe me. He thought we were trying to get you off so that you could play in the match."

Paul was away from the cricket-field eight minutes. He was back in his place as number six in the batting order with plenty of time to spare.

"No one asked where you were," Jackson told him stiffly. "You were here with us all the time."

Jackson went last of all.

"He's fixed now," he said on his return as he helped himself generously to cake; cricket was too organized a game for him to play. "He is sitting on the chair with not even his hands tied. The gag's off. I thought it would be too much for him to have it on all afternoon. But he'll have to stay put. For a time, anyway."

"Why?" they had all asked.

At first Jackson would not tell them. He never felt any need to brag. But in the end they wormed it out of him, and were lost in admiration. Round Gorst's neck was a slack rope, but not so slack that he would slip it off; the two ends of the rope were tied to a beam in the ceiling.

"He's like a monkey on a stick. So far and no farther. Let him wait for us to release him."

"You clever little bug, Jacko," came the admiring chorus.

The plan had worked perfectly. It continued so to work, except for the catastrophe at the end.

Jackson took it upon himself to free Gorst at the tea interval. He was to be let out of detention then. Unfortunately, Jackson left it just a few minutes too late.

"We're for it now, fellows," he told them casually. Just so would he later break the news of the upsetting of one of his plans for escaping from prison-camp. "I'm afraid old Elms got there first. I saw him going in the door as I went up the top stairs. We'll have to operate the alibis. Gorst will split on us."

They operated the alibis. After all,

they regarded the police as only a milder form of Elmsian authority. What a little tick Gorst was to make such a song and dance, complaining to the police!

"We did not hurt him," Jackson pointed out to his fellow conspirators. "We were very careful with our knots."

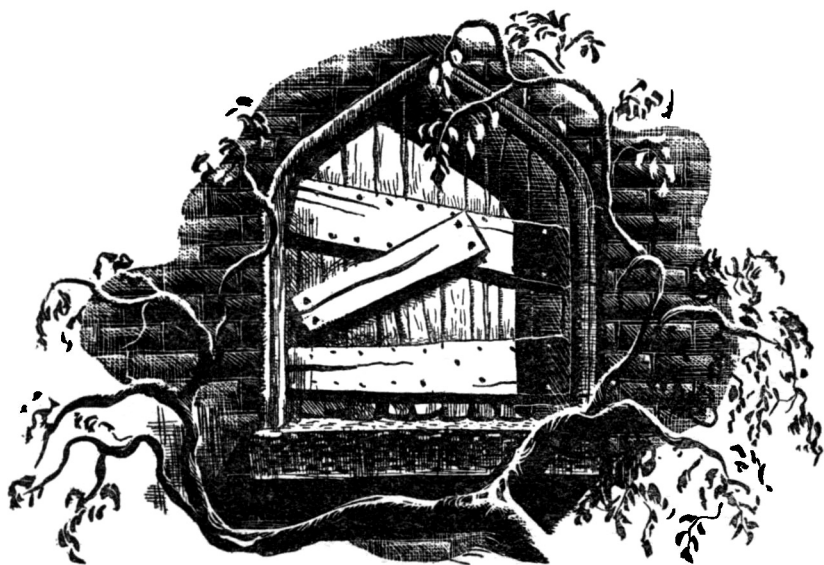
On both sides there was a wicked conspiracy of silence.

The day of the cricket match was the last day of the term, so when they learnt afterwards from relations and the newspapers that Gorst had

hanged himself, not one of them connected it with his tying up.

Only now, sitting in the new illumination of the bar, Paul saw. Gorst had committed his last act of sulky defiance, his greatest folly, so determined was he to spite his own face. Hoping to get his tormentors into trouble by doing himself some injury, he must have flung himself off that chair, not realizing how good those knots had been.

So, waiting disconsolately for the boys who never came back, he stayed there, in detention for eternity.



THE BLACK STRAND

ALWYN LAXTON

I LIKED BEING on the job with Spider J. His real name—Detective Inspector Jarrard—was seldom heard at H.Q. Among us it was always Spider J., the spinner of webs—reticules that had a way of implicating the unhappy informant, whether he was unsuspecting or wary. Recently there'd been grey tufts showing above his ears, and the eyes appeared more like streaks than ever, though still with effective margin, as you found when he toughened on a suspect.

It seems that Mrs. Jebb, her cheeks stinging with the night frost, had come in about eleven-thirty and gone straight up to the lounge, where the lights showed that her husband was still up. Quietly opening the door, she twiggled the switch—her way of announcing bedtime, but possibly just a little to annoy him too. The light went out—in—out—in. Then she saw him.

She stood, numbed by increasing shock. His head was caught under the big, shining lid of the grand piano, throat hard down on the broad ledge, and left arm extended alongside the hinged stick. The other arm dangled grotesquely. His knees hung, just skimming the floor.

Tension broke in her. She went with a rush to seize the lid. Under the impact the piano shook and the dangling arm swayed. She ran from the room with a scream of terror.

Across the landing the library door swung open and Violet Jebb stood staring at her mother. Behind her was the tall figure of Eric Saunders, her fiance, coming up as quickly as his sophisticated bent would allow. Downstairs, Chauffeur Wilson darted out from somewhere, half-undressed.

Mrs. Jebb stammered hysterically the words, "It's——" and "He's——" then passed out on her daughter's shoulder.

"Stay with your mother, Violet," Eric ordered, and, nodding to Wilson, said, "We'll go."

We arrived only minutes after the family doctor. Assistant Brown's part of the take-over included instructions to the cameraman and my standby order to a constable.

Spider J. did some initial questioning, then said, vexedly, "Pity you had to raise that lid, Doctor. I'd have liked a picture, just as you found things. How long do you make it since he died?"

"I'd say *within* an hour from the time I got here—about twelve."

"What did he die of?"

"Strangulation."

"Stunned first, wouldn't you say? Then a slow pressure." Spider J. walked over and tapped the lid. "There's no weight here to keep down a child. You didn't notice anything—odd, as though moved before you came?"

The question seemed to surprise the

doctor. His eyes widened, but then instantly shut with an accompanying gulp as the camera flashed. Recovering, he said with a trace of irritation, "I think not."

"Okay, okay," reassured the detective, "merely verifying what came over the phone from——" He turned enquiringly to Eric, then to Wilson.

"That's right," Eric said. "I phoned. As I told you, we left everything just as we found it."

Spider J. looked at the body. "The wise decision. Circumstances being very obvious to you?" he said, turning up his eyes with a hint of mistrust.

Eric said shortly, "That it was a police case—yes."

But Spider J. was looking at the body again and seemed not to hear. From it, his eyes moved slowly along to his feet, back again to where the body was, along to his feet again, then back, then along again. His action produced an occult silence in the room, every eye following, back and fore—except the eyes of Eric Saunders, who regarded the proceeding in silent hauteur.

It is at such times that I am watchful, my hundred and eighty-one pounds tingling for quick action. A dart to the door; a hand stealing to a pocket. . . .

Spider J. looked up suddenly and asked the doctor, "How's Mrs. Jebb?" and we let our breaths go.

"Asleep by now, I expect. I gave her an injection."

"She pretty bad?"

"Shaken."

"May I speak with her by morning?"

"I should think so."

And there was Miss Jebb and the housegirl too, he wanted to see. He turned to the cameraman. "Got all six?" he asked him.

"Seven," said the man, shooting a solemn squint over to Brown, who in turn shot one across to Spider, on seeing which he, as though on an afterthought, nodded. Then, pointing to the patch of carpet in front of him, he said, "Now give me a close-up just here."

The man adjusted his lens, knelt on one knee, and flashed. Spider stooped and picked some small thing from the patch. This he placed between the pages of his notebook, and addressed Wilson. "You'd swear it was Miss Jebb you heard in the kitchen?"

Wilson blinked nervously. "Yes, sir."

Then to Eric he said, "Was Mrs. Jebb with you, then?"

"The ladies left together. Mrs. Jebb went out to post some letters."

"Alone!" came Spider J. in his quick way.

Saunders grimaced back at him. "She's got a large dog," he said with a clear supercilious ring.

"And you said before, that you saw or heard nothing!"

"Nothing suspicious. There was—the clock."

Exhibitionism bordering on impertinence goes badly with me. But in the force we have a reputation, though its maintenance may put heavy demands on our powers of restraint.

Spider J. nodded to Brown to carry

on. There were prints to take; the body to remove. . . .

"And that is a possible first clue." Spider J. handed the lens over and looked past his assistant thoughtfully. Brown examined what proved to be a fragment of black worsted about three-quarters of an inch long.

"You'll forgive me, but I make of it innocent wear-and-tear," countered Brown. "No sign of a fresh break either end."

"There'd been a vacuum cleaner there only hours before. You noticed that?"

Brown's lips pouted dubiously. "Dropped since. Not much to go on there. Nothing on the piano lid, you said?"

"Nothing. Saunders raised it for the doc. Then the dead man's prints, and—strangely—all over the place. Genuine, of course—our man's no fool. . . . Well, I hope the old lady's fit to talk."

As we sped outwards against the morning traffic, a glum silence fell on our little party. The beginning of a case—a morass of speculation beset with nagging possibilities. We knew enough to leave Spider J. to his thoughts. It was as we turned in by the gates of the big house that he spoke.

"My uncle was a fiscal," he said. "He always deplored having to spend half his life getting people to talk. He died when he was fifty-eight."

Mrs. Jebb sat sniffing and dabbing her eyes every few moments with a little crêpe-de-Chine handkerchief.

"I shall not keep you, Mrs. Jebb," began Spider. "You found your husband about eleven-forty. Who had you supposed was last with him?"

"It would be Violet and Eric. I heard the piano. Then they came into the library."

"And your husband remained alone?"

"He would be."

"What time was that?"

"On eleven. They always have tea in the library then, before Eric goes."

"Would your husband be likely to handle the lid of the piano?"

"Oh yes. He liked to have it open and lean with his elbows on the ledge."

"Under the lid. Was he—slightly deaf perhaps?"

As she looked up at him, her face, until now expressionless, relaxed. In a voice, faint with emotion, she said, "He liked to watch the things—those hammer-things—especially when Mr. Arnot was playing." She stopped to dab her eyes again.

"Mr. Arnot? Who is Mr. Arnot?"

But she was sobbing silently and not hearing. Suddenly she wailed aloud, breaking down completely.

He helped her to the door.

I was instructed to call Miss Jebb to her mother, and as I moved off Spider called, "And I want to see Miss Evans."

Plump, pretty Martha Evans, housemaid, told him that Mr. Jebb was a "good, kind man" and that she sometimes asked him "things."

"Such as?" Spider coaxed, kindly.

She was silent while the lids of her eyes fluttered restlessly. Then her

speech came hurriedly with intermittent stops. "It was when Mr. Arnot started giving her music, and she didn't know—about him, like. I showed him a photo we'd had—the two of us."

"Shall we try to straighten that out a bit? Who's Arnot?"

"Bob—Mr. Arnot—that gives Miss Violet music."

"Teaches her to play?"

Martha nodded. The inspector made a note.

"You said something about a photo?"

"It was the two of us. Arnot and me."

Spider J. pondered. "And you showed this photo——?"

"To Mr. Jebb; he kept it," she began excitedly, but stopped as her hand went to her mouth.

"I see. You and this Arnot are—friendly?"

The eyelids were going again. She turned away her head and said in a low voice, "Not now."

"And that was why you went to Mr. Jebb. He was kindly, fatherly, gave you advice. Now, when did you show him this photo?"

"Yesterday morning."

The detective seemed in doubt as to whether to question her further. His eyes shrank to lines as he searched her face. Then, abruptly dropping his genial manner, he said sternly, "That's all, Miss Evans."

Violet was still with her mother. Spider said to her, we'll have a talk later, Miss Jebb. Tell me just one thing now. Where does Mr. Arnot live?"

There was the semblance of a start.

Then she smiled. "My music master? Er—North Road—fourteen. You *do* pry into things! *He* wasn't here yesterday."

An hour later we returned to H.Q. A report lay on the desk and Spider immediately became absorbed. Brown, who had been sent to check up on Arnot, bustled into the office shortly afterwards. "You needn't worry about that photo," he said. "It's definitely the wrong tree. He was playing in a dance band. Three Arch Hall."

"Not so far from the house," Spider mused aloud, without raising his eyes from the report.

The assistant grinned. "Not that way out, sir. We *did* phone the hall-keeper."

"And?"

"Arnot was there from eight till two."

The inspector seemed in no way disturbed by this information. He tapped his pencil on the report saying, "The mark of the blow corresponds with where the lid would have hit him." Then he threw down his pencil and sat back. "Brown, if you were leaning on a piano, where would you expect your feet to be?"

Brown considered this in silence.

Spider continued. "Both of Jebb's toecaps left an imprint on the carpet twenty-eight inches out from the piano."

Brown stepped back the distance, dropped forward from the hips so that his elbows hit the desk with a thump. Tall and lanky, with a big head that rocked loosely, he looked

just then like a hinged puppet jolted into shape. He said, "Natural enough."

Spider J. hissed. "Your opinion of what is natural would hold—so long as your back felt like remaining in one piece. In less than a minute you'll want to draw in one foot—forward. Try it! It's what the murderer evidently *didn't*. He dragged the unconscious man to the piano—in a hurry." Spider paused to rummage through his notebook. "Saunders was left alone in the library for fifteen minutes. . . . And here's something from the old lady"—he turned back some pages—" 'They wanted to marry but my husband thought her too young.' John Jebb had money, Brown. I wonder," he added, putting a match to his pipe, "would Saunders be the only one."

"You mean—Wilson?"

The inspector shook his head. "I'm not wasting my time there," he said.

"Harping back on Arnot?"

"I'm having his place searched."

"But the alibi!"

I saw on the inspector that contracted-jaw look I knew so well. Doggedness; unwavering pursuit after a notion, coupled with an angler's patience for the pull-in. As one possessed, he withdrew the pipe from his mouth and studied the stem. "You'll be interested to know that the photo's missing, *and*, discovery number two, specks of black worsted were found lodged in the dead man's fingernails," he said.

That evening I accompanied the inspector as he mounted the soft car-

peted stairway and rapped on the library door.

"Come in," came the voices of Eric and Violet.

"Sorry to break in on you," said Spider J., entering. I stood by the door while he drew a chair opposite their couch.

"How are the proceedings? Any suspects?" Violet offered the box of cigarettes.

"Thanks, no," Spider said lightly with a gesture that spoke for both of us. Then, in abruptly changed tone, he put his first question.

"I understand that Robert Arnot, as well as giving you piano lessons, often played for your father. Would he be—shall we say—sufficiently acquainted, to be treated as a guest?"

"He knows us well enough to drop in here any night for tea at eleven," Violet answered, adding significantly, "And he doesn't refuse a cigarette."

Her airiness, a little forced, vanished at the next question.

"Further than the relationship of master and pupil, were there other relations between you and Robert Arnot?"

"Now wait a moment," cried Eric.

Spider motioned him silent. "Miss Jebb?"

She was sitting bolt upright, her pale cheeks suddenly a burning crimson. "But I don't know what you mean; I—I shall not answer you! What a question!"

"Laughable—if not damned impertinent!" retorted Eric.

"Let's cut the redundancy, what do you say?" said the inspector. "What

kind of clothes does Arnot usually wear?"

They exchanged glances, as though in silent recognition of some standing joke, then turned to him with amused interest. Eric grinned.

"Come!" Spider said sharply. "You can answer that one. Light? Dark? Tweeds?"

"Well," said Violet, "matter of fact, he's rather oddly dressed. Brown wind-cheater and flannels—rather baggy——"

"Straggly hair," put in Eric. "Plays the piano with a filleted back—you know, vertical pillow style. Real artist touch——"

His satire withered out on the air of the room, which in the inspector's presence seemed to have turned solid, constraining, holding everything still.

The inspector's eyes had never left Violet. He continued, "Your father was proud of his piano. Liked to wait on after you—or Arnot—had been playing, strumming one-finger style. Had a mannerism of tapping absently too, on the woodwork——"

Violet burst into sobs.

"Must you bring it all so close?" Eric muttered grimly, his levity quite gone now.

Spider J. swung round on him. "You knew this too?"

"Of course."

"And Arnot?"

"Almost certainly."

In the cold semi-darkness of Three Arch Hall, we followed the keeper, a filing trio, up to a small gallery. There, under a dusty sheet the ghost of a grand piano revealed its shape. A

drum-set, a double-bass and other musical instruments lay about, left by the players like dead things that had lived. The keeper switched the lights on. Under a row of dark shades there appeared music-stands and a "mike," standing skeleton-like, each within a cone of glowing air-dust.

"What does the pianist use for light?"

The keeper threw back the sheet and opened the piano. A concealed light shone on the music-desk.

Spider J. edged between the keyboard and the back wall, sat down on the stool, and ran his thumb along the sharp protruding edge of the worn keys. From his position he surveyed the scene around him, then said, "So, when the main lights of the hall go out, only these music-stands are seen? The faces of the musicians are invisible?"

"That's about it, sir, 'cept for the 'mike.' You'd see the crooner."

The two detectives next examined the programme of the dance. *Night Waters* was a popular waltz, the last of a group of dances before the interval and timed for eleven o'clock, but was usually some minutes late. Coloured spot-lights, replacing the main lights, played on the dancers.

"Do you happen to know if Mr. Arnot was at the piano then?" asked Spider J.

The keeper surprised them by a broad grin—apparently the signal for a spontaneous burst of informative tattle. "It's Piano Solo, sir! Arnot himself. He was practising it all afternoon too. That's what surprised me. I shouted up when he'd finished,

'You're fair havin' a go, Bob,' I said, and he looked at me, cross like, as though he didn't like it—bein' disturbed, that is. Then he started up all over again."

Spider J. broke in irritably. "What's this?" he said, kicking at a heavy box under the piano.

"Case full of music, sir. I just give him a lift up here with it yesterday. He'd had it away 'sortin' it out,' he told me——"

But the inspector was moving to the door, sullenly studying his watch, and it was Brown who waited to listen. There was that about Spider's gait as he led the way downstairs that revealed a mood best respected by silence.

We were half-way back to the office before either detective spoke. Then Spider J. said, "Brown, your silence isn't soothing. Damn it, Brown! But you see, we've to fit the black strand in. Saunders was a visitor: couldn't have changed from his grey suit. Wilson possesses nothing with black in it. Besides there's that extra picture you got—that seventh. Smart, that. All three faces square and proper. But"—he shook his head distrustfully—"only genuine curiosity expressed on all three.

"So you'd better share my headache over Arnot. Look at it this way. A hundred people or more knew that Arnot must be at the piano precisely at a certain time. Precisely then, therefore, he'd fix things—if conceivably possible—to be elsewhere. And there's motive. That Violet girl's in love with him—it was the one question she refused to answer. Now meet

up with this. Arnot jilts Martha Evans. Jebb gets hold of their photo. He's murdered. The photo disappears."

Brown was silent until we pulled up outside H.Q. Then, with hand on the door lever, he began in his practical way. "There's the stubborn fact that (a), it was piano solo—Arnot himself, as the keeper testified; (b), if Arnot employed a deputy there would be the risk of suspicion on that deputy's part; (c), the risk of the dancers' detection of that deputy—they say no two players are alike—different—what is it?—touch. I'm afraid, sir, I haven't your visional facility. I'm tethered on fact (a)."

On the fourth day after the murder Robert Arnot reported at the Police Station. He wore a light overcoat, was hatless, with a dark crop that straggled in wisps on a pale chubby face. He was at once ushered to an inner room where the detectives sat comparing notes. Quite composed, he sat limp with his hands in his coat pockets, giving his name and other formal information promptly in a quiet voice.

Assistant Brown wrote on a slip and passed it to his superior. There was a pause while the latter read. Then settling in his chair, Spider J. began.

"Mr. Arnot, on the afternoon of the day that John Jebb was murdered—murdered," he repeated as Arnot darted him a look, "you were practising the music that you were to play that night—solo piano, I believe?"

"I was."

"You played it over twice—the second time, shorter, I think—with a silence between?"

"All very natural."

"Quite. You wished everything to be exactly as it would be at night—first play over, pause, then short encore?"

Arnot chuckled. "You have imagination. Yes. The rehearsal is 'full dress,' so to speak. All celebrities do that." He laughed with an air of mock conceit.

"Everything as it would be," repeated the inspector, "Even to the careful timing of the silence between?" Spider shot him a look from those grey streaks as though this last point was a matter for dispute.

Arnot returned the look but said nothing.

Spider continued. "When one is counting the seconds, Mr. Arnot, one does not like to be disturbed—by, say, a hallkeeper shouting interruptions such as 'You're fair having a go' or words to that effect?"

Arnot drew up. "What's this? What the devil are you driving at?" He looked from one to the other of the two detectives. "McLean *did*, in fact, shout up. I gave him a look—to shut up."

"Why?"

With a gesture of irritation, Arnot's hands leapt from his pockets and slapped the arms of his chair. "I was annoyed!" he cried. "Can't you realize? When your mind's on a thing——"

Spider's voice broke in firmly, "Hadn't you a particular reason," he said, silencing Arnot with the sheer

weight of his words, "for giving only a look—not shouting back? Or even *speaking? There had to be a silence?*"

There came over Arnot a kind of angry halt—as though jarred by a blow from an unexpected angle. His lips pursed. A moment later he leaned back nonchalantly, answering in a tone of complete indifference, "I don't in the least know what you're talking about."

Spider J. made notes, glanced again at the little slip handed him by Brown, and changed the topic. "The hall is cold during the day. Do you practise playing the piano sometimes—often—with your overcoat on?"

Arnot looked at him incredulously, then sighed resignedly, saying, "The answer, sir, is 'Yes.' Look, I've been summoned here for questioning. I hate wasting time. But I suppose your—methods"—he gibed the word—"demand it. For heaven's sake, cut it all you can. I'll answer briefly—in monosyllables when possible."

The fellow was clever. Spider licked his lips; then bit it. "Be brief by all means. But, to resume——" he said, leaning forward as he fingered the cuffs of Arnot's overcoat, the sleeves of which extended beyond those of the wind-cheater underneath. "That would account for this?" he suggested, indicating the worn under-part of the cuff. "It would touch—er—rub on the keys perhaps?"

Arnot shook his head. The gesture did not imply a negative, but an expression of utter incredulity at proceedings that were growing crazily red-tape. Disdainfully he said, "It would."

"And in the evening you wear— evening dress?"

"We don that ridiculous garb. One must make a living."

Spider nodded over to Brown. "And now—Mr. Arnot," he said invitingly, as one might who had spread for his visitor a net from which there could be no escape.

Brown opened a press in which there was a recorder, and switched on.

Arnot looked curious. "And have I said something terrible that I'm to hear again?"

There were muffled sounds coming from the loudspeaker. Then for a long time, nothing but the faint hum of the mechanism. Suddenly, the opening of a door—a loud slam—faint voices of a man in conversation with a woman, "Tell him I'm busy." "He wants to see you. Shall I show him up?" "No. Tell him to wait. I'll be down in five minutes" — door closed — a long silence.

Spider turned to Arnot. "Your big mistake," he said.

A trace of fear showed on Arnot's face, but he acted well. "I'm afraid I don't understand," he said in a voice that bore every trace of sincerity.

"Surprising! Allow me, then." The detective's tone, and something about the way he leaned over the desk as he spoke, told me that it was now about check-mate.

"You made your big mistake when you ran out the tape to obliterate the music of *Night Waters* which you recorded on that afternoon. The only way to wipe off a recording is to set the machine for re-recording—a very

natural arrangement, for who would erase a recording except to make another? During that run-out your landlady entered unexpectedly. You slammed the lid of the box—your music-case—in which the recorder was hidden. That was unnecessary, but you were probably excited. The voices we heard were your landlady's and your own."

One could not have told, except for a minute tightening of the facial muscles, that Arnot's resources were thoroughly shaken.

"One of the most important implements for the motorist," Spider continued, "is a large spanner. Yet it was the one tool that was missing from the tool-set of your car. And perhaps," he added, carefully reaching for a slip of clear paper, "you can identify this."

On the paper lay the black strand of worsted.

The two men looked at it. Then glared up at each other.

"It came from your dinner-jacket. We found the exact place—the worn, under-part of the cuff, from which, I suggest, it fell when the late John Jebb clutched at you," said Spider J.

There was a pause.

Arnot had gone deathly white. There was a trickle of cold sweat down the side of his face.

"Robert Arnot," said Spider J., with a stern look, "I arrest you——"

But Robert Arnot neither heard nor saw. His neck and torso muscles were loosening in jumps.

I caught him as he rolled, swooning, from his chair.

THE SLAVE DETECTIVE

THE CASE OF THE HIDDEN TABLET

WALLACE NICHOLS

Illustrated by J. Ramsey Wherrett

I

PERTINAX HAD NOT been in the imperial saddle for more than ten days or so—and to Rome's cost he was not to be there for more than eighty-six altogether!—when he sent for the Slave Detective.

"My position, Sollius, is more difficult than splendid: I am only a nominee, and that of ruffians; but my aim being to restore order and decency to the Empire after the unspeakable crimes of Commodus, I am not likely to be over-popular with my sponsors."

Sollius nodded, and waited. He partly guessed what was to come.

"For the moment," the Emperor pursued, "the Prætorians remain my backers, and I do not fear conspiracy among them—yet. But I fear conspiracy. There is no sacred majesty about a man elected by the whim of a brutal and greedy soldiery, so my first enemies will be among the honest men—among those, ironically, whom I would reign to benefit. But they will not believe. Commodus inured them to tyranny; the imperial power has seemed not a protection but a menace. This tablet," he added abruptly, "was found in my private apartment last night."

"'A dagger is in wait for the supplanter!'" Sollius read aloud.

"I can think of no one," commented the Emperor, shaking his head, "who does not breathe more freely because Commodus is dead. It had come to the pass where he had no friends, only terrified sycophants. Even the Prætorians, kept in humour by constant donations, turned upon him at last."

"And the gladiators?" suggested Sollius.

"They, too, must be relieved. To be honoured by a bout with the Emperor meant that the Emperor must win—and his opponent die. Even his favour was a form of disciplined suicide. No, Sollius, his constant companions have breathed the most freely of all since his murder. Only Commodus's wife has lost position, and they say she is heavily in debt."

"You wish me to find the writer?" asked Sollius, retaining the tablet.

"I command it," said Pertinax with a smile.

"Why," asked Sollius, eyeing the Emperor directly, "were you chosen by the Prætorians to succeed Commodus? You were not, I fully believe, privy to their plot."

"I thank you for that belief," replied Pertinax. "I can only think that they considered I would make an excellent cat's-paw, and carry the Senate and the Romans with me as a reputedly honest man. I shall not be anyone's cat's-paw, Sollius, but I must



not be in too great a hurry to let Laetus and his fellow officers know that!"

"Have you any suspicion, Majesty, how the tablet came in your apartment?" Sollius asked.

"None; I merely found it."

"Lucius shall mingle with the palace slaves. He may get something, O Augustus, that neither you, nor I, could."

"I leave it in your hands, my friend," said the Emperor, and the audience closed.

II

"It is difficult to see," said Sollius to Lucius, his assistant, "how anyone can be seeking to avenge the hated Commodus. It was his very favourites who killed him!"

"Is it some man deprived of being

the new favourite he had hoped to be?" suggested Lucius.

"That certainly will have to be well sifted. Any man may have the vanity that he can ride a tiger! But it could," Sollius continued, "be more political than that. I am thinking of the frontiers. The three main frontier armies of the Empire are those of Britain, Pannonia and Syria. Each has an ambitious general, and with the central authority weakened—as it always is—by assassination, the field may seem open."

"Who are the three?" Lucius asked.

"Clodius Albinus in Britain; Pescennius Niger in Syria; Septimius Severus in Pannonia."

"Will they have heard yet of events so recent?"

"They'll have their spies in Rome, and spies send news quickly," replied Sollius with a grimace. "The first

thing—for I am playing blindly, Lucius, so far, with no clues concerning this tablet whatever!—is to find out what I can about the spies of Albinus, Niger and Severus. Gratianus, no doubt, has knowledge of them, even if he leaves them alone. What have you, meanwhile, learnt from the imperial slaves?”

“Nothing, Sollius. The tablet could have been left by anyone during any of the crowded audiences.”

The Slave Detective limped away to see Gratianus at once.

“Oh, yes,” said the City Prefect. “I know the spies of Niger, Severus and Albinus. They are not exactly watched, but we know what they are: three fairly harmless men who just keep their ears open for the Roman gossip to send their masters, Bauto the Pannonian, Vercingo the Briton, and Abraxas, an Asiatic Greek. Actually they are friends, and meet constantly in a particular tavern. We watch it, yes, but it is all very open, their spying: they are more agents than conspirators. Their real business is to warn their masters, in advance, of any rumour of being superseded. In a reign like that of Commodus it was a wise precaution! What are you after?” he asked curiously, but Sollius shook his head: his commission from the Emperor was secret.

“Where is this tavern?”

“In the Via Gabiniana—*The Three Cranes*. I hope you’ve a good stomach, for it has a foul stench,” laughed Gratianus, and then sighed. “I hope your case—whatever it is—will be closed soon. I may need your help myself. Didius Julianus’s wife,

the haughty Mallia Scantilla, has lost a necklace of rubies, and the wife of the richest man in Rome is as mad as a jilted beauty!”

III

A few uneven steps led down from the cobbled, narrow Via Gabiniana into the tavern of *The Three Cranes*, and Sollius and Lucius found themselves suddenly in a dull, smoky light, for the single torch, slanting out from an iron sconce upon one of the walls of baked clay, gave off almost as much smoke as illumination. Set against the middle of the wall opposite to the doorway stood the kitchen furnace, and to either side of it, morticed into the wall itself, were two large urns, likewise of baked clay; there were thus four of these urns, and they contained certain cold foods prepared in advance for such customers as might be too much in haste to have anything cooked for them. Running in front of both urns and furnace was a long wooden table behind which an elderly woman, dirty and hook-nosed, was busied with culinary matters, for the tavern served an ordinary each night.

To one side of the furnace, and leading down behind it, was a short flight of worn stone steps which entered a cave-like, rough-hewn cellar. Here, on a shelf, burned a clay lamp, making visible many a great wine-jar and amphora, together with various utensils such as earthenware cups, cone-shaped vases, ladles, scoops and measures. Under the wine-jars lay a sprinkling of fine sand.

From hooks in the smoke-grimed ceiling of the room itself hung a number of salted and drying hams, together with two huge rounded cheeses, each suspended by strong rushes run through its centre; there were also three or four baskets made of closely woven fennel, containing mysterious commodities not visible to the curious eye. Benches stood along the walls, and a few plain stools were disposed about a rough table in the middle. The hardness of some of the benches and stools was softened by faded and half-split cushions, crimson and yellow, yet so dirty as to be hardly distinguishable, the one hue from the other, and stuffed with reeds.

Besides its visible characteristics *The Three Cranes* possessed others of no less particularity: its smells, for instance. The general, or basic, odour appeared to be a compound of stale wine and garlic; but others seemed like veins, or brief distillations, of sharpnesses and sournesses, both single and intermixed, which were wafted, now here, now there, as the chance of the draught from the open door might carry them. In spite of the air from the street, the atmosphere inside remained close and unwholesome. Dirt had silted everywhere; bugs everywhere disported. But nothing of all this seemed to nauseate in any way the company which Sollius and Lucius found gathered there.

It was impossible at first to distinguish in the smoky light one from another, but after they had seated themselves at the table, as though in wait for the serving of the ordinary,

they were gradually able to take note of their neighbours. The conversation soon showed what they were: a cobbler, a bath-attendant, a money-changer, better dressed than the others, a grizzled ex-legionary and an itinerant seller of philtres. On the money-changer's knees sat a painted dancing-girl, and a boy flute-player was making desultory music by himself in a corner. At the door stood a huge, brown African who had narrowly scrutinized them as they had entered, but said nothing. His occupation seemed to be watching the street. None of the three men they sought was there. Sollius was certain of that, for Gratianus had given him a detailed description of each.

The tavern-keeper came suddenly out of the cellar, where he had been filling a large, eared amphora with wine. He set it down with his two hands on the table, and then stared at his two latest guests. The little eyes in the puffy flesh of his face were suspicious.

"Don't know you," he said, still staring. "New customers, eh? I serve the best here, though not peacocks," he guffawed. "Patience, gentlemen, we only wait for a full table, and then you can stuff your bellies."

As he spoke, a man, young, in a stained cloak, and swayingly drunk, entered at the door. He steered a cautious way towards one of four empty places at the table opposite Sollius, and stared at the Slave Detective with a sullen, brooding gaze. More notice might have been taken of him had not three other men almost immediately entered at his

heels. After these had taken the remaining seats, the tavern-keeper crossed to his wife, rubbing his fat hands with satisfaction. The African seemed to have relaxed his vigil on the arrival of the three and, crossing to the table, began to pour wine from the amphora into the cups of all present.

"What have you for us," called out one of the newcomers to the tavern-keeper, who grinned, and without comment placed before each of his guests a dish which contained various small cuts of goat meat skewered with sprigs of myrtle and fortified with garlic and asafœtida.

"The usual goat," grunted the money-changer. "I always distrust these myrtle-skewered meats. Good meat needs nothing to make it look better than it is. I warn you: if this goat's flesh is tainted, you get no money from *me*."

"You know very well, Moschio," said the tavern-keeper surlily, "that I never give any but 'Greek' credit," which meant that he never gave credit at all.

The other dishes which the tavern-keeper took from his wife to place before his customers held coarse peas boiled in a great quantity of water, raw cabbage reeking with vinegar, and beets tempered with a sauce made of pepper and sour wine. The dancing-girl had by now slipped from the knees of Moschio, and had begun to dance voluptuously but ungracefully to the music of the flute-boy. Nobody took any notice of her.

Sollius and Lucius did their best to eat the fare provided. Still, however



crude the cooking, the goat's flesh was at least *not* tainted, and they could make a pretence of appetite. The wine was surprisingly good. While eating, Sollius kept the three men in whom he was interested under surreptitious observation. They seemed to him almost characterless and ordinary. None of them, he felt sure, could have penetrated into the Emperor's palace at any of the public audiences—unless considerably disguised. Or was their present outward appearance a disguise? The Briton was short and wiry; the Pannonian tall and burly; the Asiatic Greek slim and lithe. Their garments were neat, though of the poorest quality.

Little talk had taken place during the meal, and only the dancing of the painted girl and the melancholy flute-playing of the boy gave the passing moments a background. But when hunger had been satisfied, and the wine-cups were refilled, the three men in whom Sollius was principally interested began to converse together under their breath. The Briton sat in

the middle, and the two others leant across him as they talked. Each spoke Latin with an accent peculiar to himself. At the same time the drunken young man began a tortuous conversation with his left-hand neighbour, Moschio, the money-changer. They spoke, Sollius noted as he caught a word or two here and there, in Greek.

Suddenly the drunken young man broke off, rose, and lurched across to where the tavern-keeper, his wife and the African were idly in talk. He spluttered a few words, and then returned to his place. The African immediately closed the door into the street, fastening it noisily with heavy chains. The Pannonian, the Briton and the Asiatic Greek looked round, startled.

"What is the matter, my friends?" hoarsely asked the Pannonian.

"We have a spy here," said the drunken young man, and pointed a shaking finger at Sollius. "I know his face. He is the slave they call The Slave Detective."

Consternation set the whole table agape.

"Thunder of the Gods!" cried Moschio, half rising.

Sollius gave a swift glance at the three agents of the frontier generals. They seemed hardly interested; certainly they were not perturbed: while Moschio and the young man in the cloak undoubtedly were. Sollius shivered. Had he made a mistake and was he about to pay for it?

"To the door!" he whispered to Lucius.

They rose quickly, and backed away from the table. Lucius alone

was armed, and he drew the small stabbing-sword that he wore. With a bound the African forestalled them and reached the door first, and he had a long, thin, carving-knife in his hand.

"Kill them! Have them killed, Falco!" cried Moschio to the young man beside him, who now stood beside the table, and his drunkenness and his cloak fell from him together. He was dressed underneath in a slave's plain tunic, but the material of it was rich—no slave's garment, that!

"Wait!" Falco bade the African. "Let us get from him first what he knows, and how he knows it."

("I should have seen he wasn't drunk!" muttered Sollius in self-reproach.)

"Speak, fellow!" cried Falco.

"Who betrayed us?" demanded Moschio fiercely.

The three spies sat perfectly still, watching. The old legionary rose, caught up a knife from the table, and stepped stiffly towards Sollius and Lucius.

"A soldier of Rome," he muttered, "won't help murder," and he ranged himself beside Sollius, but the African leapt at him from the back, his long knife in his hand.

The old legionary had no chance at all, and fell, and the African was about to plunge his knife into him when a loud, heavy knocking struck the door. Everything was stilled in an instant.

"Open!" cried a loud voice. "Open in the name of Rome!"

The tavern-keeper, shaking and white, motioned to the African, who

hastened to remove the chain and pull the door wide. At once Gratianus and four men of the City Cohort entered, and halted just over the threshold.

"I wondered if you'd get into trouble," said Gratianus, smiling, "and decided to come here myself. We can always find a few stray birds in new places."

His eye roved over the company. In the smoky shadows, hardly distinguishable for anyone's in particular, Sollius saw a hand hover momentarily over the now empty amphora. Falco, the three spies and Moschio were all in a bunch together at the spot, standing, staring, aghast at the turn of events. The dancing-girl had run to the flute-boy, and both were whimpering in the farthest corner.

"Did you see?" murmured Sollius, nudging Lucius.

"I saw the Briton whispering to the Pannonian," Lucius answered, a little puzzled at the question.

"They were quite near, yes," said Sollius enigmatically, and then turned to thank the old legionary.

"Have you found your man?" impatiently asked Gratianus, and Sollius laughed. "By the Gemini," cried the City Prefect, "have you lost your senses? What is there here for laughter? Haven't you just escaped with your life?"

"I shall claim half of the reward," said Sollius, still laughing.

"Reward? What, in the name of Numa, do you babble about? I asked if you'd found your man."

"I have not," Sollius replied, "but if a certain lady has offered a reward,

my friend, I shall claim, as I said, half of it. But my cunning is mere chance. Have those two searched," he suggested, pointing to Falco and Moschio. "They sat together and under the table could exchange . . . anything."

At a gruff command, two of the City Cohort searched the money-changer and the young man dressed as a slave. On Moschio was found nothing; on Falco a bag of money.

"Then it was Moschio's hand," said Sollius.

"Must you talk tonight in riddles?" growled the City Prefect.

Sollius moved to the table, took up the amphora and tilted it as though to pour. A few red lees certainly trickled out, and then, in a gush, followed a flash of crimson light as a ruby necklace slid out on to the table. With a cry, Gratianus strode forward. He placed both men under instant arrest.

"You cannot arrest *me*," screamed Falco. "My father is a Senator. This is a jest: I took the necklace to frighten Mallia Scantilla. Moschio was to take it back to her—and claim the reward. For which he has been good enough to pay a few of my debts. That is all."

"This is a strange place in which to find a young man of fashion."

"We have to amuse ourselves: this amuses *me*."

"Theft is a serious charge."

"You should have seen her face!"

"Remain in Rome!" snapped Gratianus. "I shall report your 'jest' to the Emperor."

"That puppet Augustus!" sneered

Falco, and Sollius stared at him narrowly.

"You others," cried Gratianus, "are all under arrest."

IV

"What can you tell me, O master," Sollius asked Titius Sabinus the Senator, "of Sossius Falco?"

"A proud, disappointed man," replied Sabinus, looking down at his thumbs. "He had office under Marcus Aurelius, but none under Commodus. He became soured over the times. Not a rich man, but with a spendthrift son. I meet Sossius Falco in the Senate, but have never been intimate with him. Why do you ask?"

"I wondered, lord, whether he had an enmity towards the new Emperor."

"He was pointedly disrespectful at the Senate's reception of Pertinax," answered Sabinus, "but not, I think, through an enmity, but from pride of birth. He actually addressed the Emperor once as 'Prefect'—corrected himself, of course, but he had made the slip. Deliberately? You are the guesser here, Sollius, not I!" said his master, laughing.

"Were you, lord, at the great audience which Pertinax gave on his accession?"

"I was. Probably everyone of note in Rome ran to it. I never saw such a crowd. Even Crispina, the ex-empress, was there, and my heart bled for her forlorn look; even to be the widow of Commodus is to have lost position, and she was always very social."

"Was Sossius Falco there, too?"

"No," Sabinus replied. "He had

offended the Emperor, and I doubt if he was invited."

"Was his son present?"

"I cannot say: there was such a vast throng. . . . My toga's hem was actually torn!"

V

Sollius attended the interrogation of the three spies. Each of them laughed at the possibility of having been at an imperial reception. None of their handwriting coincided with that on the tablet, nor did the young Falco's.

"I am not satisfied," Sollius said to Lucius. "Falco is in debt all over the place, and if he stole Mallia Scantilla's necklace for help from Moschio, for whom else may he not have worked to get a similar advance of money? His favourite reading-



slave may have written the tablet."

But no investigation at the house of Sossius Falco produced any evidence about the handwriting.

"Why," asked Lucius lugubriously, "need it be any of the three, or Falco either? We have no evidence."

"I have already said," murmured Sollius, "that no one would think of avenging—or even of lamenting—the brutal Commodus. It is a political matter, designed to make the new Emperor uneasy in his tenure; and who would seek to do that except a would-be rival? Of such, only one of the three great frontier generals has the power for an attempt."

"For whom," asked Gratianus, "did Falco the Younger take the risk—if Falco the Younger it was?"

"It seems to me," answered Sollius, "that we should look for the paymaster. I doubt if any of the three generals' agents has money at his disposal; he would need a banker. Why meet at *The Three Cranes* except for a purpose—it could not be because of the food," he added with a gesture of disgust, "and why should not that purpose be to keep in touch with such a banker? And if, for one bribe, Falco could steal, for another he might perform an easier task. In a crowded audience hall it were child's play to secrete that tablet."

Sollius paused, and limped a few paces thoughtfully up and down.

"What are you thinking, clever one?" asked Gratianus.

"Tell me, are Bauto, Vercingo and Abraxas slaves or freedmen?"

"Vercingo and Abraxas were born

free," replied the City Prefect, "but Bauto was born a slave. He is, however, a freedman."

"Who was the master who freed him?"

"Septimius Crispinus, a Senator under Marcus Aurelius. He freed Bauto in his will."

"The uncle of the ex-Empress Crispina," elucidated Gratianus, "and a cousin of Septimius Severus."

"Let us have in Moschio," urged the Slave Detective excitedly.

Moschio was barely over the threshold when Sollius spoke.

"Is the ex-Empress Crispina in debt to you?"

Caught unawares, Moschio could not compose his countenance. It was clear that she was.

"I see everything now," said the Slave Detective. "In debt, the widow of Commodus was threatened with ruin after her husband's murder. The election of Pertinax was no help—he would not pay her creditors. But one of the ambitious generals was a kind of cousin, and might be grateful for any aid towards reaching the imperial power: and was not Bauto his agent, and was not her banker Moschio the very creature to begin loosening the new Emperor's self-confidence? That loosened, anything might happen in Rome's fierce mood. The desperate throw of an illogical woman? Maybe; but a woman's typical throw."

Moschio's cry for mercy confirmed the Slave Detective's suppositions. But the Emperor Pertinax was either too proud, or too occupied in his uneasy seat, to take any measures of revenge.

THE CHELSEA FIGURE

TSOFON DAJI

A love for the ballet and the memory of one who danced could not be extinguished at the hour of death. The old man used his Gurkha knife.



AS A YOUNG artist Henry Truscott's passion was the ballet. To him it was like no other entertainment, for when the curtain rose he saw not a stage but a window opening upon a vista, mystic and magical, a world of gossamer and dreams, of the fairy-tales he had heard from his mother not so long ago. And Mary, his wife for less than a year, had been one of those enchanting people from that enchanted world.

It was during their brief honeymoon that he bought the Chelsea figure. Exquisitely proportioned, its five inches of shell-like porcelain portrayed a girl in a white bodice and ridiculously inadequate ballet-skirt foaming out stiffly from her waist. She stood on the tips of her toes, her delicate arms were outspread in supplication and, although she must have been one of the most fragile figures ever made, she was entirely without blemish.

They called her Odette, for that was the part in Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* which Mary was playing when they fell in love. And now Mary had been dead these long, long years, cut off so tragically within a few months of their marriage. Odette, therefore, be-

came something more than a memento; to Henry Truscott she was the image of her whom he had loved and who, in dying, had taken with her so much of his heart.

Odette was now a much travelled figure, for when Henry became a successful painter of fashionable portraits she had toured the world with him. Kings, queens, presidents and potentates had been subjects of his brush, and Odette had always stood by his easel, encouraging him, flattering him, loving him. In addition to his fees Henry had received gifts of precious stones, gold and silver from his clients, but none of these had a value in his eyes approaching that of Odette. Indeed, except for a *kukri*, or sharp Gurkha knife given him by a princeling in Nepal, and one or two small objects in the sitting-room downstairs, all the royal and presidential gifts lay in the vault of the local bank.

But now Henry Truscott had forgotten all these other treasures. An old man, he lay upstairs in bed, racked by a return of the malignant malaria he had contracted abroad long ago. The fever, so long dormant, had broken out again, and now, amongst all the fantastic images which it conjured up before his tired, hot eyes as it sapped away his strength, the figure

of Odette was the only object in the bedroom which consistently retained its shape.

In the sitting-room his widowed sister, Mrs. Maystone, was holding an anxious conversation with the young nurse who had looked after her brother for nearly two weeks.

"Nurse, you heard him yourself! He said that Odette danced again last night. He said he awoke and saw her on the floor, life-size, and although she was still Odette she had become his wife as well. She was dancing the part of Odette again. Nurse, I'm terribly afraid! Not so much that my poor brother may die, but that he may lose his reason and live!"

"Don't distress yourself," the young nurse comforted her. "Fevers play strange tricks! And you know Mr. Truscott is better today than he was yesterday, just as his improvement began yesterday when he first told you this story. At least, whatever happened, it does seem to have brought the poor gentleman a lot of comfort!"

"I wish you were not going away so soon," pleaded the older woman. "I realize that you must, but I know that my brother will miss you. He has not much longer to live, I'm sure, and I do hope the new nurse will be half as sympathetic and gentle as you!"

The old man repeated his story the next two mornings. It became obvious even to Mrs. Maystone that her brother was not only unafflicted in his mind but that he was getting better. His temperature, though still high, was less erratic, his pulse more regular and his general condition one of hope.

It still worried his sister that he continued so frighteningly weak.

Then Nurse Evans arrived. No girl like her predecessor, she was a competent nurse of some twenty years' experience—keen, conscientious and efficient. If she had a fault, it was a deficiency of the human touch. To her, the difference between sickness and health was largely a matter of germs. It was for the physician to prescribe medicine and treatment, and for her to carry out his wishes scrupulously. It was also her duty to engage in ceaseless conflict with lurking germs whose presence might delay her patient's recovery.

During her first visit to the old man her glance alighted with disapproval upon Odette. She noted the interstices of her ballet-dress and her keen eyes saw traces of dust. The thin line of her lips grew hard. Dust, the prime carrier of germs, so near a patient's face? She waited until the young nurse had left and then returned to the room and began carrying Odette away.

"Nurse! What are you doing?" quavered the old man.

Nurse Evans knew how to handle patients, especially the very young and the very old.

"You'd like your little figure nice and clean, wouldn't you?" she asked brightly. "Sweet, isn't it? But it mustn't harbour nasty germs! Look at the dust inside these funny little holes in the skirt! We'll wash it in disinfectant and bring it back, shall we?"

"Please put her down," pleaded the helpless patient, too ill and too weak

to reinforce his displeasure with movement. "My sister dusted her only this morning!"

"But we can't clean that skirt just by dusting, can we? We'll have it back in a jiffy." And, despite the distress of the old man, she carried Odette off to the sink where she scrubbed her lacy skirt with a nail-brush and carbolic.

"I've taken such good care of your little dancer," she announced as she re-entered the bedroom. "It would be much better really if we put it on the mantelpiece, because then we could still see it but it wouldn't be right on top of us. Look, it's nice like that, isn't it?"

But Henry became suddenly so enraged that Nurse Evans, with a conciliatory remark, replaced Odette upon the bedside table lest her patient's condition grew worse.

That evening, after the old man had taken his customary sleeping-draught, Nurse Evans crept quietly into the room to take a final look at him before going to bed herself. In the glow of the night-light she saw that he was asleep and breathing faintly but regularly. Poor man, she thought, he will not be in this world much longer! But what jarred upon her was the proximity to his face of the china figure. Picking her up on a sudden impulse, she laid Odette gently on the mantelpiece and left the room. She knew she could replace her in the morning before he awakened and the old man would never know.

Mrs. Maystone awoke suddenly.

And uneasily. She looked at her watch. It was shortly after 3 a.m. An electric bell was pealing ceaselessly, its clamour in the darkness of the night fraught with evil. She left her bed in alarm and hastily threw on her dressing-gown. And still the bell pealed, urgently, frighteningly. She hurried to her brother's room and switched on the light. He was awake, his right hand gripping the pendant bell-push above his head. The tiled hearth was littered with the fragments of the little Chelsea figure. And then her brother's voice, shaking with rage but unwontedly strong, smote her ears like a buffet.

"Where is she? Damn her! She did it, she did it! Damn her to hell!"

His voice rose and broke in a horrible shriek. He caught his breath, sobbed, and gave way to insane laughter, laughter which shook him more than his rage or the agues of his fever had ever done. Terrified, Mrs. Maystone hurried to fetch the nurse. She opened the door, and in the bright electric light which was flooding the room she saw Nurse Evans still in her undisturbed bed. She saw on the pillow, the sheets and the bedding the ragged stain, crimson and glistening, caused by the spurt of the still oozing artery in her almost severed neck. There she saw too, still embedded in the flesh of her throat, the razor-sharp *kukri*. The bell had ceased to peal, and the only sound in Mrs. Maystone's ears was the maniac laughter of her brother, getting weaker—and weaker—and weaker——

APE ISLAND

HARVEY PETER SUCKSMITH

Illustrated by Leslie Domeny



THE TROUBLE BEGAN from the very first moment they came aboard.

Or so it seemed to Riley. The First Mate had stood on the main deck of the S.S. *Bombay* throughout the whole tropical evening, and nothing out of the ordinary had occurred. Then, at last, he turned to supervise the loading of that strange cargo, and at once he was affected by a curious reluctance to go on.

His attention was attracted idly to the great chattering gang of native workmen who swarmed like monkeys all over the two lorries on the quayside. In the clean bright sunlight the excessive whiteness of their garments suddenly irritated him. Here and there, where a workman had stripped to his drawers, even the naked brown body, glistening with sweat, threw back a moist brilliance that blinded the First Mate. A little way apart from the group of native workmen, the tall thin figure of Dr. Theodore Strang waited coolly and calmly. The immaculate radiance of his white drills, the self-satisfied swagger of his cane, drove Riley into a fury of bitterness.

At that moment Strang caught his eye and demanded with his superior

accent: "Are we quite ready now, Mr. Riley?"

At once Riley became aware that his shirt was drenched in cold, unpleasant sweat. He had begun to shout out an order, but his voice, from which all authority had gone, was stifled. He waved a silent command for the loading to begin, and, as he did so, he noted the long greasy smudge of oil on his uniform spreading even across the faded gold braid on the sleeve. At the same instant the white, upturned face of Dr. Strang flashed back at him in a dazzling sneer.

A huge steel crate, masked in tarpaulin, broke from the huddle of workmen round one of the lorries. It swung upwards and swayed across the narrow strip of water between the ship and the dockside. Quite suddenly the chattering of the workmen ceased; only the derrick creaked. All eyes were turned anxiously upwards to follow the swaying burden. One of the natives had remained clinging to the crate. Now as the naked brown figure stood perilously astride the great mysterious box, Riley slowly recognized him as a Lascar from his own crew. The fellow was there to guide the crate over the hold; so the First Mate told himself with professional awareness but without conviction. The next instant the Lascar seaman swept across the fiery circle of the sun. He

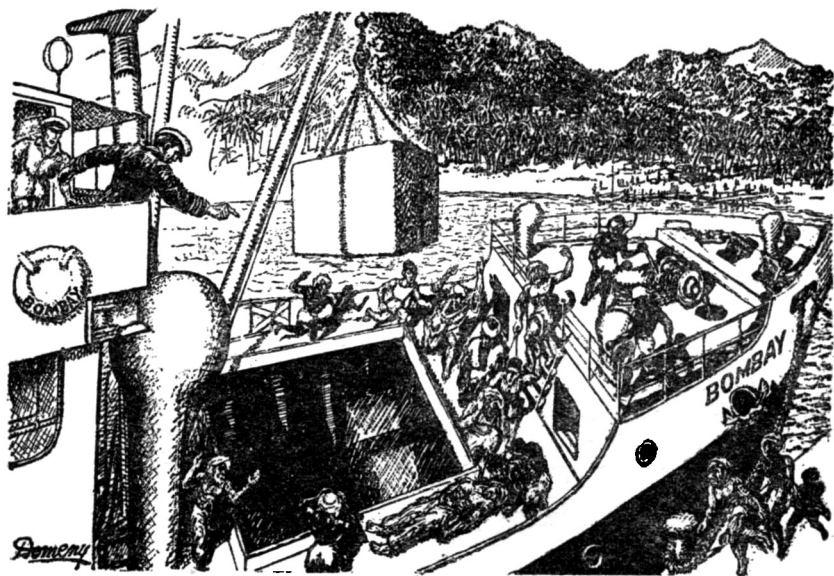
hung there, a black sacrifice pinioned with flame, spread-eagled in the blood of the dying day. Riley looked away and down. He shuddered as the cold shadow of the crate crawled across the deck and touched him for the first time.

At once, as though at some secret signal, the long fingers of the night stretched out across the harbour. The sun was gone. The tropical stars stared clearly. And almost immediately overhead the squealing and squawking of a thousand parakeets broke out. The commotion ended in a human scream, and before Riley could look up a dark form fell to the deck, narrowly missing the open hatchway of the hold. As Riley moved forward, he made out the twisted features of the Lascar moaning piteously.

Half of the native crew were shrieking and wailing by this time. On the dockside, the labourers joined in the general dirge. Although they had formed a lamenting ring around the injured Lascar, no one would touch him, and Riley found himself hauling the seaman to his feet. Apart from a broken arm, which he hugged to himself pathetically, the poor fellow, Riley saw at a glance, was distressed by fear. The Lascar kept jabbing a finger from his unhurt hand at the almost invisible box, wincing and closing his eyes with pain at the effort, and crying out as though it were a protective invocation:

"Devil-man! Devil-man!"

Riley stepped back, and almost simultaneously a spotless pith helmet was poked into the affair.



"These damned superstitious natives!" snapped Dr. Theodore Strang. The tall, meagre figure still remained frozen in his anger, and all the time he spoke he was tapping the naked, injured man coldly with his swagger-cane. "Let me remind you, Mr. Riley, I have over ten thousand pounds invested in that cargo. When are you going to get it down?"

The great steel crate remained suspended overhead. It had stopped swinging like a pendulum, and began to twist slowly and almost imperceptibly from side to side. The only information Riley could extort from the wounded Lascar was that he had jumped terror-stricken from the top of the crate. "Devil-man—he cursed me. In *my own tongue* he cursed me—to the death, Sahib!" The seaman could only moan the same explanation for his suicidal leap over and over again.

"Get back to work!" Riley ordered the crew. No one moved. The First Mate had to go aloft himself with a knife. He cut away the tarpaulin sheet, which fell into the hold. Underneath, a strong steel cage barred the night sky with deeper shadows. Within the gloom an even darker shape stirred and moved defensively; a shaggy lump of hair lurched blindly at the bars.

"You see," Riley called out clearly. "It's only an ape. Now get working! We've another two cages to get aboard before we sail."

II

"On the contrary, Mr. Riley, these are no ordinary apes." Dr. Theodore Strang spoke at the white walls of the

cabin. Riley noticed that, although he seemed to stare hard at you while he was speaking, he was actually staring right through you. Dinner threatened to degenerate into a lecture again. The First Mate hacked at his meat savagely. Then he caught the quiet eyes of Strang's Malay servant on him. The Malay stood silently behind his master's chair; his white wide-sleeved coat was as spotless as the walls of the cabin. Out of the corner of his eye, Riley saw that in cutting at the meat he had slopped a spot of gravy on to his clean shirt.

Before he could contain his bitterness the words were out: "Seem to know quite a bit about apes, don't you, Doctor? Pity you don't know as much about natives. Or about seamen. We're lucky to get 'em to sea on time after what happened last night. That Lascar—he could cause us plenty of trouble before we're through this trip."

"Then why didn't you get rid of him before we sailed?" Strang's face was as dry as a biscuit one moment; the next it had crumbled into a broken smile. He turned to the Captain with a great display of deference. "You will of course forgive me, Captain, if I am wrong, but I have always understood that that is one of the First Mate's prerogatives. Naturally, as a passenger, I do not wish to seem to interfere or even to criticize."

Captain Stewart, who had pushed away his food and begun to light his pipe, acknowledged the Doctor's qualification with a wave of the pipe-stem silently.

Encouraged, Strang went on: "All the rubbish from that Lascar fellow yesterday evening! Whoever heard of an ape speaking a native dialect? Really, my dear Riley, in your own interest you ought to stop all this superstitious nonsense."

The First Mate really choked this time. He simply could not swallow the Doctor's arrogance any longer. Yet although he tried to speak loudly and emphatically, his teeth clamped together like a vice and compressed his voice into something between a whisper and a hiss. "My men don't think it wise to meddle with Nature as you do, Doctor. Anger her, and they feel She'll settle with you in the end."

Captain Stewart coughed diplomatically. "You were explaining, Doctor, the kind of work you'll do with these—er—animals, when we put you ashore at Ape Island." The Captain flushed slightly at the words "Ape Island." "I hope the name won't offend you, but that is how we ordinary seafaring folk always speak of your headquarters. May I add that I find your explanation of your work fascinating, absolutely fascinating."

Strang turned towards the Captain again with that dry, crumbling smile. He looked right through the man in front of him, and began to readdress the walls. "If you've ever observed a child attempt to disentangle a Chinese puzzle, you've sampled a little of what we do. Of course, we use apes instead of children, and, *of course*, we are much more methodical about our observations."

The cold condescending tone of the

scientist repelled Riley. He felt injured by the analogy of child and ape; as though he, himself, had been reduced to the level of the ape, and as though the ape, too, had been insulted.

The Doctor continued to talk at the walls like a text-book. "Similarly, we determine the learning patterns of a chimpanzee by supplying him with such a problem. Outside his cage we put a banana. Inside we allow him two sticks which may be fitted into each other to make a single extended pole. The animal discovers when he rakes for the banana that each of the sticks is too short. Eventually he learns to fit them together, and so rake the banana into the cage. We observe his behaviour, and we carefully record the time he takes. All our experiments are an elaboration of similar techniques."

The Doctor stopped suddenly, as though he had become aware of a pit which had opened up at his feet. "That is, *almost* all our experiments. Sometimes we must step into the unknown. Into the dark." A reflection of anxiety like a pale spotlight in open day flickered across his features and left them as they were before: all confident, all optimistic, all cheerfully insolent and intolerant. "But that is the whole superior destiny of science—to face the challenge of the night."

Captain Stewart blew a puff of tobacco smoke gently from his lips. Even more mildly he suggested: "But you must admit, Strang, that what happened this morning does seem, well—pretty odd to the ordinary chap's manner o' thinking. The way those apes of yours set about their



cages with that crowbar—they nearly got loose, you know! And what's even more remarkable, they must have passed the crowbar to each other from cage to cage. Why, man, they must have worked *together!*”

“Not so remarkable as it may at first appear, Captain.” Strang remained unperturbed. “It’s hardly surprising that our three captives should try to escape. Charles Darwin records that he once saw a young orang-utan deliberately use a piece of wood as a lever. Two orang-utans in a London zoo, I believe, once helped each other to demolish the front of their cages with a piece of wire. Why, my dear Captain,” and here Strang turned not towards the Captain but towards Riley with a triumphant smirk, “even

children know from their visits to the circus that chimpanzees are intelligent. They certainly do not regard the exploits of such animals as miraculous.”

Riley reddened as he felt the cold eyes pass through and beyond him. The calm demeanour of the Captain, the very silence and impassiveness of the Doctor’s Malay servant, re-proached his own trembling face and hands. Relentlessly, Strang continued to dismiss the First Mate with his cruel stare and to intone: “Lloyd Morgan’s canon expressly warns us that we must never explain animal behaviour by attributing to our animals the thoughts and sentiments of men. That, my dear Captain, would reduce us to the level of Mr. Riley’s Lascar seaman.”

Ten days later the apes broke loose.

Riley was on the bridge at the time. The S.S. *Bombay* was approaching her island destination. She had cautiously sniffed and nosed her way delicately through the splintered fragments of a great reef system. The reef was past, and Riley leaned with relief against the door of the wheel-house. He prepared to relish his first glimpse of "Ape Island." Through his binoculars, he roved across the spacious lagoon, and along the usual narrow strip of sandy beach with its occasional clumps of palms. All along the island, a step in from the shore, he came up dead against the customary wall of jungle—sudden, black, seemingly impenetrable. He swung like a gibbon through the dense tree-tops up towards the summit of the island, and about half-way up the slope he came across a ragged clearing which vainly defied the recent encroachments of the eternal undergrowth. He had just begun to make out the smothered huts of the Doctor's headquarters.

Suddenly a hell of parakeet squalls burst out and resounded amid the tree-tops of the island. Shocked, Riley lowered his glasses, and only gradually became aware that the din was coming from the main hold of the ship. His immediate reaction then was without thinking. At a stride he was down the main deck.

Most of the crew were cowering for'ard. Nearer the main hold, a thin-bearded, wild-haired native seaman had thrown himself forward on to his knees; he was clawing ferociously at his breast while he wailed, implored,

gibbered to the one, the only, the almighty god of gods to spare him for his many sins. Towards the half-open hatchway a young Indian was advancing, his only weapon a machette thrust out defensively before him. As though beneath a rain of blows, his tightened features twitched involuntarily at the screaming from below.

Riley peered into the black throat of the hold. The high-pitched screeching lashed his nerves. His eye followed the rope ladder which slid down the reeling walls of the shaft and floated at length like silk thread in a well of shadows. Down in the lowest depths the three cages stood, catching the faintest light, like silver trampolins. From the roof of one of the cages, a great sprawling hulk bounced on boneless limbs and somersaulted high into the air with shrieks of insane triumph. Another ape, in crazy rhythm with his fellow, beat the open door of his cage until the whole structure shook and trembled under the blows. A third flopped to the floor and waddled into the darkness. There followed a groping, then a high shrill giggling, and finally a heavy, slow, shuffling step; the unseen ape was dragging something across the floor of the pit. Into the rectangle of faintest light, a huge hairy arm moved; it pulled a small naked brown figure. The next instant, Riley turned at a warning yell. The young Indian was brandishing his machette at the other wall of the hold. Riley looked downwards again. He discovered he was staring into eyes glowing in the semi-darkness like white-hot metal. Ugly flat red nostrils shrivelled as they

scented him. He caught the flash of brilliant teeth bared and slaving. He realized that the somersaulting ape must have sprung at the rope ladder; it was more than half-way up out of the hold. He saw the parody of human fingers and of long, thin, pointed nails tightened alternately on the rungs. Then he snatched the machette from the Indian's hands.

He felt an arm tighten on his own and almost dropped the machette. Strang's face thrust itself into his. "They cost me a fortune!" hissed the Doctor. Riley shook himself free and hacked twice at the end of the ladder. It broke away, and then fell coiling into a tangled net about the ape. With a hideous yelp, the ape crashed back into the pit, and then lay struggling and moaning on the floor of the hold.

It took the best part of three hours to secure the other two monsters. When it was done, Riley reported to the Captain.

Strang, of course, was there before him. He met the Doctor's complaint before he could utter it.

"You're lucky," the First Mate rapped out bitterly, "the other two apes broke its fall. All three of 'em are uninjured."

The Doctor's sallow face brightened a little. But he said nothing, did not even betray a motion of gratitude.

Captain Stewart poured out an ample guerdon of whisky. He pushed it across to Riley. "Shall we all drink now, gentlemen. To the conclusion of a successful enterprise!" He finished off his own glass quickly. Riley scarcely mouthed his. Strang was watching the First Mate through his

own glass. The Captain continued as though nothing had happened. "My God, they must be strong to break open a cage with bars that thick!"

Riley put a piece of strong bent wire on to the table. "They didn't break open the cage, sir," he explained quietly. "They picked the locks."

Even the Captain raised a reluctant eyebrow. "Er—apes picking locks?" he inquired.

The Doctor snorted. "Really, Riley, no animal could learn without training, no animal as quickly as that."

"Then how," the First Mate asked, "do you explain that I took the piece of wire from one of the locks on the *inside* of the cage? Do you suggest one of the men let the apes out?"

Strang began to ponder. "One of the men," he muttered to himself. "Who was on duty?" Finally he shouted, "That's it! Of course, it was your damned Lascar seaman, Riley. He was on duty today. He went down to feed the animals. He opened the cage. He stuck the piece of wire in the lock. He wanted to back up his story of 'Devil-man.' He wanted to save his face before the crew. The very first opportunity, and look what happens." He turned to the Captain brusquely: "I insist on this man being questioned."

The Captain shrugged his epaulettes. He glanced almost apologetically at his First Mate. "I suppose there's no harm in our just having a word with him."

"We can't," said Riley stiffly.

"Can't?" asked the Captain incredulously.

"No, I'm afraid not, sir. He's dead."

"In the cause of science, my dear Riley. All in the cause of science." With these words, Theodore Strang had pronounced the epitaph of the Lascar seaman. The First Mate had said nothing. Strang and the apes had departed over the side to the island. The S.S. *Bombay* had resumed her course. Six months had already been logged when she returned to the island on her homeward voyage.

"You know, Riley," suggested Captain Steward innocently, "I'll bet old Strang will be glad to see a white face. Imagine it. Cooped up on the island for six long months with all those apes and a single Malay."

"Oh, I don't know, sir."

The Captain looked at his First Mate queerly. "You never liked him, did you?"

"As a matter of fact, no, sir. But it's not that. I got the impression he could do without other mortals about the place. He was so bound up in his work."

"Well, we have to run him supplies from time to time. He's a famous man now, you know. Look at this." The Captain handed his First Mate a crumpled newspaper. "It's a little old, but it makes my point."

NEWLY DISCOVERED APE TO SUPERSEDE MAN?

Famous Scientist's Amazing Prediction

Tall, gaunt Dr. Theodore Strang, famous zoologist and animal psychologist, in an exclusive interview with

this newspaper here today, described the new species of apes he recently discovered and captured in Central Asia. The Doctor, who has brought his precious cargo on a perilous journey through mountain and desert country never before explored by man, arrived safely at the Southern Coast yesterday.

He told our correspondent: "The new ape is unlike any other species discovered before. It appears to combine all the most advantageous features of other species of ape. The new animal has the strength and stature of a gorilla and the intelligence of a chimpanzee. It can climb like an orang-utan and leap like a gibbon. All these factors point to a higher species. The whole expedition vindicates my view that we must now look forward rather than backward in our investigation of evolution."

When Dr. Strang was asked to elucidate, he replied, "I mean that I am not searching for a 'missing-link,' as so many other investigators have done. There is a theory that out of Central Asia will come a higher species to supersede man. I think I can say even now that the new ape points in that direction. Of course," the famous zoologist added, "mankind need have no immediate fear that the apes will take over. It should be about another million years before they catch up with us."

"Well?" asked the Captain when Riley had finished reading.

"Well," the First Mate commented dryly, "he did say they were no ordinary apes."

The S.S. *Bombay* had just entered the complicated system of reefs when she started to have trouble with her radar. Riley took one look at the screen and sent for the Captain.

Captain Stewart bent low over the radar screen. The bright reflection of the aerial swiftly circled the dark dial, tracing out a tiny, flickering continent of criss-crossed light: distorted coast-lines, impossible reefs, imaginary islands gleamed for an instant and faded into obscurity. The Captain took the pipe out of his mouth with surprise, "I've never seen anything like it, Riley. There's no apparatus that could do that within a thousand miles of here. Unless——"

"Unless?"

But the Captain did not elucidate. "You'd better get a man on deck with a lead. I'll take over. It's a good job I know these reefs fairly well."

When the danger of the reefs was past; the Captain gave an absurd little laugh quite out of character. "You'd think someone was trying to stop us getting in, eh, Riley?" He was scanning the island with his binoculars. Suddenly he dropped them. "Good God! Look at that, man." The First Mate took up the binoculars. "No—over there, where the clearing used to be." Riley was guided by the Captain's voice.

The same strip of sand. The same clumps of palm-trees. The same impenetrable wall of forest towering high over the beach. But the clearing half-way up the slope had vanished; the jungle had finally closed over the tiny settlement. Yet where the headquarters of Dr. Strang had once been

visible, there now poked up through the tree-tops a tall crazy superstructure of wooden laths. It was just like, Riley thought at once, the clumsy parody of a wireless mast which children would have tried to build in imitation of the adult thing. Children! He did not know why, but the very thought struck him as grotesque and ominous.

"The radar," said the Captain knowingly.

"Do you think he was trying to get in touch with us?"

"I don't know. That's what you're going to find out."

The small boat pushed off from the S.S. *Bombay* with a landing-party, unenthusiastic but well-armed. The oarsmen were ladling up the surf reluctantly when the firing broke out. Everyone in the boat dived flat. Only Riley propped his rifle over the gunwale and peered along the sights.

A tiny white-coated figure was racing along the beach towards the boat. To Riley this figure seemed, against the dense dark green barrier of the jungle, so inexpressibly lonely and helpless. The strip of sand which had once looked narrow now appeared to widen as the solitary figure struggled to cross it. More shots whined over the waste, spurting up fountains of yellow dust. By a miracle, the white-clothed figure had gained the water's edge. He plunged into the shallow ebb-stream, kicking up panic-stricken little splashes. A single shot and he seemed to trip over something in the water. His belly hit the swell with a heavy slap. For an instant his legs thrashed in the surf like a landed fish,

and were still. The incoming swirl lifted the limp body, carrying it far up the wet strand.

Riley had fired at the gun flashes. A dark shape flopped from the tree-tops into the undergrowth. Silence. Riley stood up in the drifting boat. Nothing moved. He prodded the shrinking crew over the side with the barrel of his rifle. They began to wade ashore.

The white-coated figure still lay, half in the water, half on the sand. As they waded closer, Riley recognized the Doctor's Malay servant. The once-immaculate garments were slashed into rags. The former impassiveness was torn like an empty mask from a face of agony. There were old scars on the limbs, as well as freshly cut wales.

The men gathered silently round the corpse. They glanced at it once, and then they stared at Riley. The First Mate knew he had to say something. "Looks as though he's been in the bush for months." The rest of his thoughts he left unsaid: had Strang gone completely off his head and hunted his servant down like an animal?

With a new sense of urgency, Riley herded the men forward at a trot. They moved towards the place where the sniper had fired. In the undergrowth, the First Mate found an ape. There was no mistake; it was one of Strang's. For the first time, Riley noticed how hideous were the bony masses over the eyes. Even in death, the beast still bared its teeth at the watcher in a snarl. He pushed the animal over with his boot. Underneath



lay a rifle. He picked it up. It was Strang's. The crew bolted.

He fired over their heads, but they continued to run. When they had disappeared he shouted for them to return, but they did not reply. He unclipped the magazine from the Doctor's rifle and stuck it in his belt. He took out the bolt, and then tossed the rifle back into the brush. Once more he called out to the renegades. No reply. Then he started up the slope, alone.

To his surprise he found his way to the settlement easily enough. The crazy attempt at a wireless mast was a certain guide. He had only to climb a tree; as any other ape would have done—his sharp sense of irony told him. Only the undergrowth resisted his going. It tripped up his boots like a moving net. Long creeps snaked round

his legs, snatched at his clothing. He kicked out violently with his feet. He turned round the rifle clubwise and slashed at the tangled barrier. He grew at length to ignore the painful reprisals on his hands and arms. At last he sighted the first of the huts, and stood at length in what had once been the clearing.

The foliage had spread and joined thinly again overhead. The underbrush had crept irregularly but steadily in towards the broken circle of the settlement. One section of the jungle had advanced quite openly on the front of a building, and a long insolent creeper lay athwart the open door. Now he was closer to it, the wooden wireless mast looked even more preposterous than from below.

Although it was neglected, the settlement was far from being deserted. It had about it that unmistakable air of habitation. And from a long heavily built shed to his right, Riley heard the sound of movements. He made for the shed. He stepped carefully up the veranda steps. He had meant to rush the door, but came to an abrupt halt on the threshold. At what he saw, his presented rifle slipped down again weakly to the trail.

It was Dr. Strang's laboratory. Two of the great cages stood empty and thrust to one side. The benches were over-burdened with equipment. Riley had only time to make out a bunsen

burner alight and a rack of test-tubes. Towards the third cage, one of the apes shuffled incongruously. As it lurched across the window, the First Mate could have sworn he saw a hypodermic syringe flash momentarily in a beam of sunlight.

The next instant his rifle was snatched from him. He felt a clutch like an iron wrench crunch into his shoulder. An unmistakable animal smell invaded his nostrils. He had forgotten the third ape.

It thrust him stumbling into the centre of the room. He fell at last, forced on to his knees. He saw what was in the third cage. He judged by the growth of beard and the dirty unkempt hair that it must have been there for several months.

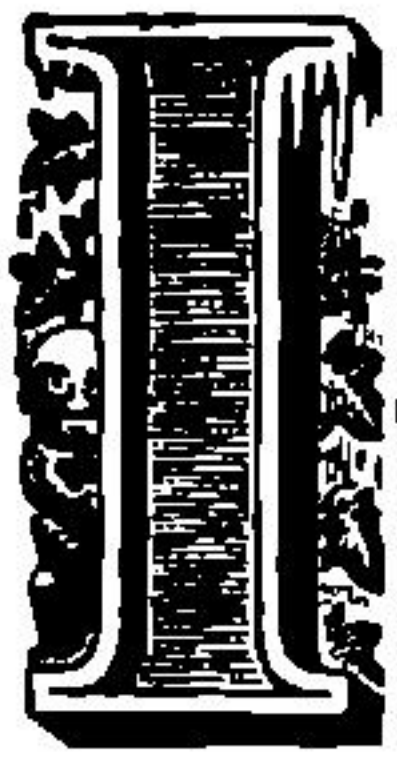
The creature still looked a little like the rest of its species; stark-naked, the flesh was so white. Riley faced up to the truth at last. He could not mistake the long thin frame. It squatted on bare buttocks, wretched and abject in the sparse sand of its prison; its meagre fingers clawed meaninglessly at the bars. From the very posture of the form all arrogance had long since fled, and it had sunk now under the last degradation into what it had, in reality, always been—something quite beyond the animal, and so a little *less* than human.

"Dr. Strang," the First Mate called out softly. But what was left in the cage no longer answered to the name.



THE KANE WITH A "K"

FRANCIS BUTTERFIELD



DISCOVERED Henry Kane.

By that I mean that he was not recommended to me, nor did his work come to me as a run of the mill reviewing chore. I came across him in a famous American monthly whose editor had devoted the whole space available for literature to one Kane story—"Armchair in Hell," I think it was called. But even if it wasn't called that, it was a story equally good, for Kane keeps well up to his standards.

His work is—let us face it—of the "by Hemingway out of Chandler school," grown adult under the eye of nurse Dashiell Hammett. Thus, Kane is a fortunate man—wise in his choice of parents and lucky in his tutor.

The comparison with Chandler is inevitable and neither suffers from it. They have many tricks in common, but each is individual. Jack is not better than his master, but the Master cannot be contemptuous of Jack.

Kane is an adept at metaphor and simile, and if they are borrowed and not home-made, he must have a valuable secret source tucked away somewhere. Like Chandler, he is able to fix an image with a word or two.

His plots are, to put it mildly, complicated. If I were to put it any other way than mildly, I might get myself into a verbal maze that would make the said plots look, in comparison, no more subtle or tangled than a "No

Parking" sign.

I don't think I have ever followed the customary clarification and explanation at the end of a Kane story.

I think that I lose some interest by the time the denouement arrives because I know I've come to the end of the tale, which always makes me sorry.

Kane's hero is a Private Eye, a Gumshoe, a Transom, a Peeper, a brash young fellow called Peter Chambers. He is not at all a lovable man, although many dolls seem to find him attractive. One of his redeeming features is that he gets beaten up quite frequently, and I am mildly astonished that more of this salutary punishment doesn't come from the Police Department with whose affairs he regularly becomes involved. He is a glutton for punishment, with a tenacity that is indispensable. Without it there would be no story—which would be a great loss. So we will tolerate Mr. Chambers, who in addition to being the axle for the action brings us into touch with as enchanting a gallimaufry of anti-socialites as one could wish not to meet in fact.

When American writers are good, they are very good and rely, quite properly, on hard work, contemplation and selection as well as flair for their effects, and if Kane, as a very good writer, seems to write for a market from a well-tried recipe, what is wrong with that?

Clam chowder is recipe stuff, too.

ONE AFTERNOON

GEORGE GOWLER



THE STRANGLER WAS moving westwards along the coast. First there had been that middle-aged spinster in Woodcombe, three days later a girl in Abbey Ridley, and then, seven days after that, a young widowed landlady in Seabay. All had been strangled. All had died with their faces contorted by an unspeakable horror.

Agnes Medley felt little shivers in her spine as she looked from the balcony of her apartment house and stared at the pretty harbour and the turmoil of holiday-makers. It was a shiver not only of fear but also had within it a certain amount of pleasurable excitement.

Not much happened in St. Clifton. Agnes's house was comfortably filled with boarders; as were all the other houses in the town, for St. Clifton had always been very popular. St. Clifton, in fact, lived on and for holiday-makers. They came when the season opened, filled the town with their chatter, their blazers and their children, and then bit by bit melted away, until at the end of September St. Clifton reverted to what it really was—a small collection of shuttered houses, closed shops and a bankrupt harbour. But now the cobbled streets were filled with visitors. The sandy beach was crammed with half-naked persons basking in the hot afternoon sun. As Agnes looked down, she could

see newspaper vendors selling both London and local papers. There were many buyers, for the murders had aroused intense interest.

Agnes reluctantly moved away from the window. She must start the preparations for the evening meal. Her sister Mary was out shopping and she was alone in the house. The doorbell suddenly rang. Agnes stood frozen for a moment, her mind still full of murders. Then she opened the door, still quivering. A man stood there. A tall, well-dressed man with smooth, handsome features. She looked at him, her heart beating fast. He gave her a rather tired, wistful smile.

"You are Miss Agnes Medley?" he asked.

She nodded, her gaze fixed on his dark eyes.

"I am a police officer. Inspector Rogers of Scotland Yard." He showed her a card.

She hesitated, then put aside that little queer feeling she had. "Won't you come in?" she said.

He thanked her and, following her into the lounge, accepted the chair she offered. He began to speak, and his voice immediately captivated her. It was a low-pitched and pleasantly modulated voice, so different from those of the irritable and nervy fathers with which her house was usually filled. Yet, somehow, it didn't seem quite to fit him.

"I have been recommended by the

local police to stay at your place for a week or so—if you have room, of course. You have an excellent reputation as a landlady, Miss Medley.”

She was surprised that the police knew anything about the qualities of the many landladies in the town, but she gave a little deprecating smile.

He went on. “I am one of several police officers drafted into the town. You can guess why, perhaps, Miss Medley?”

“You mean—the murders?”

He nodded. There was an air of melancholy about him. An air rather than a look, she thought. All at once she knew why his voice didn't seem to fit him. It was so alive, so responsive; whereas his features bore that same look of gentle melancholy whatever his words or their content. She pulled herself together and again listened to him.

“The police think,” said Inspector Rogers, “that there may be others. And that the murderer may carry on moving westwards.”

“Into St. Clifton?” breathed Agnes.

“Exactly. We don't know, of course, but it seems possible.”

He paused and she studied him furtively and sighed to herself. She was thinking, oddly enough, not of murders but whether he was married. She was sure he was. The pretty, sophisticated girls snapped up men like these, whilst the homely type like her—she blinked rapidly and again forced herself into the present.

“So,” he was saying, “all of us drafted into the town will be staying in boarding-houses. Firstly, because we want to disperse around the place

as much as possible, and, secondly—well, as you know, all the women murdered were landladies, and we think the killer was probably a casual caller who may call again. Probably asking for lodgings and knowing the lady of the house would be alone.”

“Just as it is here,” she couldn't help saying. She immediately wished she hadn't. He didn't reply for a moment; then he smiled, although it was a sad smile.

“That's a very good point, Miss Medley,” he admitted, then looked very serious. “We are warning all women who keep apartment houses of this very danger, and I'm glad you can see it for yourself.” He looked around the room. “Is there no one here but you?”

“At the moment,” she replied, “no. My sister helps to run the house, but she's out shopping at the moment. She'll be back in half an hour or so.”

A trace of anxiety crept into his voice, though his face remained placid still. “You must make sure you are not left alone in future, Miss Medley.”

She wondered for an exhilarating moment whether his anxiety was due to landladies in general or if it could be perhaps—just a little—on her account. Then she gave a little grimace of self-disgust. As if he cared twopence about her except as a potential murderess.

“I shall certainly take your advice, Inspector Rogers. Either my sister will stay in or we go out together.”

His eyes rather than his features expressed relief. In spite of herself, she noted it. He stood up rather re-

luctantly, she thought, and smoothed his hair back. She drank in every detail of him.

"Well, I'd better have a look in at the police-station," he said. "There is a lot to be done."

She was enormously loth to let him go. "Have you been in St. Clifton before?" she asked hurriedly.

"Only once," he said, moving across to the window. "But I was in these parts quite recently on leave. Which is one reason the Yard have sent me down here. I have the local colour, so to speak." She joined him at the window. "Pretty place," he mused.

The winding street ran down on to the beach. The sands were strewn with recumbent figures beaten into indolence by the fierce sun. The street itself was deserted. Everybody, even the owners of the boarding-houses, seemed to have fled to the beach. He sighed and turned away. "Horrible to think there may be a murderer about on a day like this."

She caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror. Really, she didn't look at all bad. Her slightly flushed cheeks suited her, and her eyes had regained a sparkle she thought had gone for ever. She really didn't *look* thirty-five. He was moving slowly towards the door. Then it dawned on her he was as reluctant at leaving as she was.

"Won't you stay a few minutes, Inspector. Perhaps a cup of tea——"

"No, thank you," he replied after a pause. "It's very kind of you, but I really must go to the police-station." He gave her another little sad smile.

"But can't you tell me anything

about this murderer?" she asked a little wildly. It had become a matter of enormous importance that he stayed at least until Mary returned. "Besides," she continued, "you said I shouldn't be alone."

"Yes, that's true," he said with his tiny smile. He looked at her and then sat down again, this time on the settee away from the window. Greatly daring, she perched herself at the other end of it.

"Do you know what he looks like?" she asked quickly.

He seemed to find difficulty with his answer, and then looked at her with his sad eyes.

"Well, yes," he said surprisingly, "yes, I do." He paused again, then spoke rapidly. "I know a lot about him, and I know enough to feel pity for him."

"Pity for him," she echoed. "But what about those poor women?"

"And pity for them, too," he answered quickly. "Great pity. Don't think I have no feeling for them." His eyes looked earnestly into hers, and she suddenly became aware of maternal feelings, as if she wanted to soothe his worries away and assure him she understood perfectly.

"Of course," she murmured instead. "Please go on."

"The murderer is insane, of course," went on the Inspector, "but not all the time. That's why he's so difficult to catch. Most of the day he will be as normal and well-balanced as you or I, and then—the cloud comes into his brain and he must kill. But even whilst he is killing, he still retains a gleam of sanity. He is re-

pelled at his actions, but unable to stop them. Do you follow, Miss Medley?"

She shivered. "I think so. But he's still a murderer."

"Yes," he said. "Oh yes. He's still a murderer, of course. I was trying to explain him, you see, not excuse him."

There was a silence for a few moments. She was aware of a fly buzzing loudly in the curtains and the distant cries of children from the beach. The room was very still, and then suddenly she found herself listening for her sister's return. All at once she was afraid.

"What does he look like?" she asked.

"As to that," he said, "it depends."

"Depends?"

"On when you see him. When he's quite sane, he looks like any other man, quite normal." She stared straight in front of her. "But when the madness takes him, he shows his real face. And that is a face of indescribable horror."

"Indescribable horror," she repeated. There was a question she wanted to ask—and daren't. Surely Mary couldn't be much longer.

"Let me explain," went on the Inspector.

She turned her head towards him, her body remaining at right angles. Then she saw for the first time how strangely smooth his skin was. There appeared to be practically no lines and crinkles in it, and it was peculiarly close shaven. No, not close shaven, but rather as if whiskers had never grown there.

"He was a pilot in the war," said

Inspector Rogers, almost as if to himself. "He was shot down in flames. They saved his life and they saved his eyes, but his face—they could do nothing with his face. It was baked like a piece of roast meat. The nose, the lips had gone completely."

Despite the heat of the room, she felt her body grow damp and chill. She could hear the fly still buzzing furiously in the curtain. He half turned his head as if he also was listening uneasily to it.

"Miss Medley," he said. She started violently at the sound of her name. "Miss Medley. You probably know there were lots of cases like that in the first war. Many of those men are still kept in Government hospitals, and will stay there until they die. They are too horrible to be released on the public, and plastic surgery has come too late to be of use to them."

She nodded, her eyes still fixed on his smooth face. Perspiration was forming on her own face. ("Perhaps," she thought, "if I make a great effort I can spring up and rush from the room.")

"A year had gone by," he resumed, "before his wounds had healed. They kept all mirrors from his room, of course, but one day he eluded his nurses and found one in an empty ward. They found him shouting and roaring at his fantastic reflection. His brain went from that moment. Not completely, as I have said. He is completely sane for days at a stretch. The spells of insanity are quite short. The hospital never suspected real madness, and when he was discharged he

obtained and still holds a very responsible position."

He paused. If only he would stop staring at her. She might be able to avert her eyes then. Perhaps her shaking limbs would support her if she could do that. She was almost sure now of the answer to her unasked question, "How do you know all this?" O, God, Mary, where are you?

"They made him a mask, Miss Medley. A mask as thin as skin, made of flesh-tinted plastic material with a nose and lips modelled in it. They fitted it on him and let him see his reflection. When he is sane he is pleased with it, but when the brainstorms come he wants to tear it off and show his real face to the world. To horrify and stun, as had happened to him."

Agnes could feel the sweat rolling icily down her body like rain. She

could feel also his nearness. They had been at opposite ends of the settee at the beginning. He was in the dead centre now! It was then she knew for certain!

"This mask of his fits right over his head like a diving-helmet. Of course, his hair and the entire skin of his scalp had gone."

She could see the room wavering and rolling out of the corner of her eye, and then she felt the pressure of his leg against hers, his wistful eyes no more than twelve inches from her own.

"He takes off his mask before he kills, Miss Medley. It's quite simple, you see. It pulls off from the neck. Like this."

Fortunately she only saw the real face a moment or two before his hands seized and squeezed the life from her.



The loathsome mask has fallen, the man remains
Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man
Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,
Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king
Over himself; just, gentle, wise: but man
Passionless?—no, yet free from guilt or pain,
Which were, for his will made or suffered them,
Nor yet exempt, though ruling them like slaves,
From chance, and death and mutability,
The clogs of that which else might oversoar
The loftiest star of unascended heaven,
Pinnacled dim in the intense inane.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY (1792–1822).



THE WHITE HEN

C. POTGIETER

Illustrated by Arthur Wragg

I OFTEN DINED WITH Van Buren, late District Surgeon of Police; for one thing, his table was excellent and, more important, I seldom came away without a good story culled from the rich field of his experience; so, as I am a writer in a small way, a night at Van Buren's was both enjoyable and profitable.

As I write I can still see, softened in the tobacco haze, the gleam in his bright quizzical eyes and hear the rumble of his deep voice as he made his usual opening gambit last evening:

"Did I ever tell you the queer story . . . of du Plooy's White Hen?"

"No," I replied, accepting the gambit according to the text-book; the

next move was his and invariably the same. He poured out two tumblers of Scotch, squelched the soda into them, pushed one over to me and began:

"I happened to be up-country a day or two before Christmas, visiting a case of suspected spinal fracture—the result of a blow with a pick-axe, if I remember rightly—at a telegraph linesman's camp, about a mile and a half from Japie du Plooy's farm, when I ran into one of the queerest cases it has been my lot to encounter.

"Japie du Plooy farmed single-handed a nine-hundred-morgen freehold bordering on the Native Protectorate of Basutoland, a remote and isolated holding of undulating pastureland sweeping up to the encircling and precipitous peaks.

“Du Plooy’s first wife had died, leaving him with a daughter, Lenie, now a girl of twenty-three and bed-ridden for a number of years with functional paralysis of obscure origin. He remarried, this time a widow, who died soon after coming to Duplooykraal with her small daughter, Sarie, now a girl of nineteen with as fine and upstanding a figure as you could wish to see anywhere; although there was just a suspicion in the underlip, the dark eye and superb carriage, and the suggestion of a premature ripening . . . well, you know what I mean.

“Du Plooy himself was a hard and brutal type whom matrimonial misfortunes seemed to have embittered still further. He despised his elder daughter as a weakling and an incubus on a struggling farmer; while his stepdaughter, Sarie, he worked hard and beat frequently. Perhaps his suspicions of her forebears had something to do with his attitude to Sarie. At any rate, life was only tolerable for both girls by the close companionship which existed between them and which acted as a shock-absorber of du Plooy’s violent outbursts.

“It was, therefore, with a sense of relief that they heard him announce one Saturday morning that he was going over to see Piet Koekemoer at Wittekleigat, twenty miles away, and so, late on the same afternoon, flicking a venomous whip over the quarters of his wheelers, he trundled off down the eroded track to Wittekleigat.

“Towards evening ominous cumuli began to gather over the mountains, and soon the storm broke roaring and

flashing, and in no time a devastating black curtain of water deluged the countryside. Du Plooy, now well on his road, had reached Meyer’s Drift and found the crossing impossible; the river was down with a vengeance, and there was nothing for it but to turn back and feel his way homeward through the ever-increasing fury of the night.

“Supper was over at Duplooykraal and Sarie was telling the cook that she might, if she chose, sleep in the room off the kitchen instead of her hut in the compound when, in a short lull in the storm, there came a loud knocking at the kitchen door. Sarie, on opening it, found a haggard old native woman who asked, in a curiously deep and hoarse voice, if she might have shelter for the night. Sarie, thinking that the cook might like company on a night such as this, admitted her and, having told her to make herself comfortable by the kitchen fire, departed along the passage to the bedroom which she shared with Lenie.

“Outside the turmoil and violence of the night seemed to be increasing, but after talking for some time the two girls fell asleep. As far as Lenie knew, it was some time after midnight when they were both awakened by a terrific thunderclap followed by a strange lull which was broken suddenly by a demoniacal shriek tapering off into a low, moaning whine like that of a woman in child-birth and which seemed to come from the kitchen.

“A wave of terror enveloped the girls, but Sarie, bravely stemming it,

got up and crept down the passage to the kitchen. The door was half-open, and by the dim light of the paraffin-lamp she saw, with a fascinating, clutching horror the nude, ebony body of a powerful black, the soft yellow light playing on the rippling muscles of his magnificent torso as, smearing himself with fat, he executed a slow, swaying dance. Sarie knew what that signified and, with the blood thudding in her temples, fled up the passage to the bedroom.

"Lenie had by this time lit the candle at her bedside, and when Sarie had told her what she had seen, the two girls clung irresolutely for a moment together. Then a strange thing happened . . . power was unleashed in Lenie's limbs, and to Sarie's amazement she got out of bed, groped her way to her father's bedroom next door and returned with his loaded shot-gun, which she passed to Sarie. Then, taking the now guttering candle, she placed it where it would illumine the door but leave the rest of the room in shadow. This done, they knelt on the far side of the bed with the gun cocked and levelled over a pillow they had drawn down the bed, and waited for the inevitable; while, outside, the storm continued its monstrous and maddening rhythm of fury and lull.

"They had not long to wait. Soon they heard the Thing shuffling along the passage, feeling its way blindly but surely . . . coming for their door. Petrified, they listened to this sub-human shuffling and groping, punctuated now and then by guttural, bestial sounds . . . and then the door was

opened slowly and fumblingly, and at that moment Sarie fired into the darkness of the passage . . . a hoarse cry. . . ."

And here Van Buren indulged in one of his damnably irritating pauses, as he usually does at these climaxes, and carefully tapping the ash from his cigar into the ivory ash-tray, looked curiously at me with those quizzical blue eyes of his.

"Go on, man," I said, "she got the black brute, didn't she?"

"No," said Van Buren with a slow smile. "That's the queer thing about it. The naked body that pitched forward dead into the room was that of a white man . . . in fact, no other than du Plooy himself!"

While I was gaping and striving to adjust my mental processes to this dizzying turn in the story, Van Buren was busy with the decanter and siphon, and then he went on:

"Lenie was a bit unstrung when I saw her the next morning, but her functional paralysis had disappeared. I was prepared, however, for a phantasmally distorted account of what had happened, but I am bound to say that her story was entirely free from any such distortion. She told me that she had fainted when she saw her father's body plunge forward into the room, and she seems to have lain unconscious till after dawn, when she stumbled down to the kitchen in search of her sister Sarie. There she found the cook talking in a rambling and agitated condition about the old woman. Lenie, however, could find no trace of either the black or the old

woman, and sent the cook off at once to the linesmen's camp for help."

"Pardon my interruption, Doctor," I broke in, "but I notice you have been talking exclusively during the last few minutes about Lenie taking charge of affairs. Where was Sarie?"

Again Van Buren lapsed into one of his musing pauses before he spoke again.

"That," he said, "is another amazing thing about this case for, from the time the shot was fired, Sarie du Plooy disappeared and has never been found or heard of since!

"The bedroom was in complete disorder, with chairs overturned, ewer and wash-basin smashed, bedclothes all over the place, and in a corner Sarie's torn and blood-stained night-dress. Lenie and I checked over her wardrobe, and her working clothes and shoes were accounted for; and, as far as we could discover, when that girl left the house at the height of the storm she had not a stitch of clothing on her body. She just vanished, and though search parties combed every square yard of veldt, gully, drift and mountain, they drew a complete blank."

"You're not pulling my leg, Doctor," I ventured at last.

"No, my boy," he said briskly, "these facts are as true as the fact that you are sitting in one of my arm-chairs . . . drinking my whisky," he added in a shrewd and oblique thrust.

"The case interested me," he continued, "in its medico-legal aspects, as well as in another way I could not define. It was from the legal point a curious dog's breakfast of a possibly



attempted rape, coupled with a definite parricide, accidental or otherwise, and complicated by the disappearance or abduction of a healthy young woman in a state of complete nudity in the middle of a howling storm.

"From the medical point of view, there was the interesting case of Lenie's recovery of function after a pronounced shock, and the establishment, a routine matter, of the cause of du Plooy's death; but I finally directed my attention to three aspects of the case which interested me strangely—first the nudity of du Plooy, secondly the strange part played by the blacks, and lastly the disappearance of Sarie.

"Regarding the nudity of du Plooy; this proved easier than I thought, for the body showed marks of extensive burning. We found his badly charred wagon a mile from the house, which confirmed that he had been struck by lightning on his way

back and every stitch of clothing ripped off him. Partial paralysis and partial aphasia would have super-vened, and this would account for his shuffling and uncertain gait, his babbling and incoherent speech; in short, for all the sounds heard by Lenie as he approached her room.

"The problem of the blacks presented quite a different kettle of fish. At first I thought that the whole story of the blacks was a product of Lenie's imagination. It is common for invalid women under stress to project themselves, with every appearance of circumstantiality, into erotically coloured situations that are entirely phantasmal; but I quickly dismissed this possibility, for Lenie struck me as a very balanced personality and, of course, there was the additional corroboration of the cook. She had been present when the old woman had been admitted, and she, too, had been awakened by the unearthly yell from the kitchen. She had peered in, and what she saw there made her beat a hasty retreat to her hut in the compound."

"And so," I said, "you never really cleared up the mystery of Sarie and

the blacks?"

"Well, yes and no," said Van Buren. "The cook gave me two curious pieces of information. The first was that when she looked into the kitchen she saw the *black* rising from the matting where the old woman had been lying and that the old woman was nowhere to be seen. And, secondly, the cook told me she saw, from her hut in the compound as dawn was breaking, the kitchen door open and the old woman emerge and *begin running with long, loping strides across the compound, carrying under her left arm a white, struggling and squawking HEN.*"

"That long, loping stride, Van Buren, gives me," I said, "a nasty feeling; but surely there's nothing unusual for a native woman stealing a white hen from du Plooy's place?"

"Well, my boy," said Van Buren, rising and stretching himself, "the longer you live in Africa the more you'll see that things occur here that the reason boggles at, but they occur just the same; and the curious thing is that there was *no white hen on du Plooy's place*, for he farmed only . . . RHODE ISLAND REDS!"



HOUSE OF EVIL

VIOLA BOWKER RIRIE

I HAD ALWAYS BEEN afraid of the old house and its walled garden. The haunted house, the townspeople called it, and they didn't realize how right they were and how wrong. I found out one night. One perfect June night, when the moonlight lay like a silver blessing upon the land.

My friend Devery and I walked through the sleeping town (it was very late) towards this garden and its horror. My friend Devery, whom I had known and loved from childhood, so changed. So changed, even then, and I didn't know.

She it was who had wanted this visit to the house in the night, who cajoled and coaxed until I agreed. There had been an excitement amounting almost to exhilaration in her manner the past weeks, and something hard and calculating in her eyes when they met mine. She would laugh unexpectedly, as if she meant to play a huge joke on me. That it concerned the haunted house I was sure, for as we neared it she had a gleeful eagerness I couldn't miss.

She pushed the creaking iron gate open and motioned me to follow her. I did, after a moment, and the gate clanged shut behind us. I wasn't sure, but I thought I saw Devery lock it. I started to protest, but she brushed by, catching my hand.

"Come on," she said, "you're not

afraid, are you?" She laughed, and I felt my first pang of terror.

I looked about me as I followed her. The moon was bright, but its light was different here—it was evil. It distorted, it menaced. The statues. The garden seemed full of them, gleaming like ghosts in the eerie light. There was something wrong about them. About their expressions that changed and leered as we passed. They seemed to move, to creep closer to the overgrown path we were following. My skirt brushed one of them, and when I went forward it clung and I had to jerk it free. I gave a cry. Devery, who had been some distance ahead, ran back. She looked almost frightened.

Clutching my arm she hissed, "Don't do that again. Keep still, no matter what happens, and they can't take you. If they do, you can never get into the house, and I promised—I promised——" Her voice trailed off.

"You promised? What did you promise? Who did you promise to?"

"I—never mind. Myself, maybe. Just keep still and follow me. You'll have to, you know, you'll never get out by yourself. They won't let you."

I thought she was talking about the statues, and I turned my head to look at them. Panic wrenched me. They had shifted and formed a barrier between me and the gate. They were swaying, grotesquely, in sort of a weaving motion. I ran up the path towards Devery, who was disappear-

ing around the corner of the house.

She was waiting for me beside a stagnant pool. It must have had lilies floating on its surface once. Now a foul mist rose from it, forming fantastic shapes which hovered, fell back, rose and formed again. A sickening stench came from it. I felt dizzy and clutched Devery's arm.

"Let's get on," I begged, "I can't take this. It's beastly."

She didn't move. She was staring into the pool with utter absorption, breathing in the fumes as if she satisfied a craving.

I shook her roughly.

"Come away, Devery," I begged. "What's the matter with you? I don't think you know what you're doing."

"Don't I!"

She lifted her hand with an effort, brushed it across her eyes and jerked from my grasp. She looked at me and laughed. There was something in that laugh I didn't understand. Something malicious, gloating. Something in her eyes that was not of the Devery I knew. Her expression reminded me for a fleeting second of the evil leer of the statues behind us—but just for an instant. Then she was the old Devery again.

"Come on," she said, turning down the path which led around the house, "we have to go this way to get out of the garden."

She turned the corner, looked back at me as she did so and smiled, the sweet smile that was Devery's. I ran towards her. For some odd reason I had been unable to move before. When I reached the corner and

turned it, she was out of sight. I knew a moment of complete panic before I could pull myself together. I was being silly; Devery had merely turned the next corner and would be waiting for me in front. I hurried on round the corner. She was not there.

"Devery," I whispered frantically. "Devery."

Then I noticed the front door was open. She had undoubtedly gone inside, knowing I would follow so she could play her childish prank.

I felt I couldn't go in. I think I would have left her there and gone home if I had dared; but I knew I could never pass the statues, and without Devery I knew no other way out of the garden. I had to find her.

The shadow which lay over the house seemed to darken as I approached the door. I thought the moon had gone under a cloud; but when I glanced over my shoulder, I saw the garden was still bright.

I whispered Devery's name once more, and went through the door and a little way into the entrance hall. I stood still and listened. There was no sound, not a creak, not a rustle—nothing. The darkness was so intense as to be almost tangible. Then the door closed sharply and with finality.

The stench of the pool was around me, and stark fear held me rigid in mind and body; but only for an instant, then I began to think. I knew I was in greater danger than I had ever been in my life. I felt I was in the midst of forces not of this world who sought to do me harm, who undoubtedly had Devery somewhere in this house. I seemed to feel the im-

portance of making no sound, that something was searching for me.

I must find the door. I must get out and brave the statues in a race for the gate, and bring back help to find Devery. I took a quiet backward step, trying desperately to keep my breathing noiseless. Suddenly I heard her voice from somewhere in front of me.

"Dimmis. Please, Dimmis, come to me. Oh, please come."

It died away in a sob. I stood undecided. Could I help her if I went? Wouldn't that put both of us beyond the power of getting help?

Suddenly I felt an urge to move, an overpowering urge. I lunged forward. As I did so I heard something heavy drop to the floor on to the very spot where I had stood an instant before. In my terror I lost all sense of direction. I only wanted to get away. Then I heard it again—Devery's voice, in a thin wail.

"Dimmis. Please, Dimmis, come to me."

Silently and cautiously I moved towards it with my hand held out before me. My fingers touched the frame of a door. Then the knob. I turned it, pushed the door open, went through and closed it behind me. Devery's voice came again.

"Come over here, Dimmis."

I went towards the sound, still very cautiously, lest I bump into something and make a noise. My knees struck against an object. I reached my hand and touched it. It was the end of a chesterfield.

"Devery," I whispered, "where are you? Devery."

"Here, on the chesterfield. Come closer to me, Dimmis. I want to talk to you, and I don't want to attract its attention. Hurry, I have so little time."

I felt my way along until I came to her. I felt a sort of relief at her touch; but behind it a vague sort of cold dread, a loathing I couldn't understand.

Then I heard it, the sound. I must have been hearing it all along underneath my fear. Something was moving in the room I had just left. Something blind, searching.

Devery heard it, too. She touched my hand again. Once more I experienced the sensation of dread and loathing. She spoke, and I noticed for the first time the change in her voice. It had a kind of blurred, guttural quality, which at times almost obscured her natural tones. For a wild moment I wondered if it really was Devery; but her words left me no doubt.

"Dimmis," she whispered, "that sound in the other room—it's made by the creature which just missed contact with you. When I first entered this house, it didn't miss me. It enveloped me and made me the thing I have become. It's blind as we know sight, but can see in its own way. That's why you must leave at once. It will find you sooner than you think, and then you'll be lost for ever. I love you, Dimmis, but I'm changed. You must remember that. I wasn't the Devery you knew when I persuaded you to come to this house tonight. I was working for it. I was the decoy.

"At times," Devery continued, "I

feel the way I used to, but not often and for shorter and shorter periods. This is one of those periods, so listen carefully to what I tell you. Your life, your soul, depends upon it.

"You are in greater danger than you have ever been before, than you will ever be again. This place is beyond all evil as you know evil; but there is a way out. How I know; I can't tell you, I don't understand myself. First I must warn you, if in the midst of my directions I change my attitude, don't listen to me. Under no circumstances must you come back. If I beg, implore you, ignore what I say. Will you promise?"

"Yes," I whispered, "I promise."

I could hear the movements of the thing behind the door, but I could see nothing. The darkness was of an intensity I had never known before, of a smothering quality, like being buried in soot. I felt Devery touch me, and I shuddered. She spoke.

"Turn around, Dimmis, and face the other way. Quietly."

I did, she touched me again.

"That's right," she said, "I can't take you to the wall; I can't move. I shall never walk again as you think of the term. Follow my directions exactly and listen carefully. I can't repeat, you must remember.

"I can see the way plainly. You walk straight ahead until you reach the wall. Feel along it to your right, shoulder high, until your hand encounters a small plaque. Push on it; it will open a small door in the wall, just large enough for you to go through. Inside there is a tunnel which leads to the stone crypt which

was built in the corner of the north-west garden wall by the one-time mad owner of this house. His coffin is there and sometimes he is in it, but I hope not this time. Oh, I hope not this time!

"The tunnel is narrow and you won't be able to see, and there are openings along it leading to horrors. Don't stray into any of them. Move with extreme caution. You will be watched. Oh, believe me, you will be watched; but the watchers cannot move out into the tunnel. You will be safe if you keep to it. At its end there is a door, push it inwards, being careful to make no sound. When you pass through it, keep to the left. Hug the wall, it will be covered with slime and crawling things; but you must not mind them. The coffin is against the other wall and the room is small. You must not touch it. If its occupant should be sleeping there, pray he doesn't waken until the stairs are down. Once on them you will be safe. He can't approach the stairs."

Her voice trailed off, and suddenly she laughed a sly mocking laugh in the stillness.

"Sit by me, Dimmis, come on," she coaxed; "we can be so cosy here, and after a while you won't be afraid. Please, darling, just rest a little."

For a horrible moment I felt impelled to obey, and I might have if Devery's hand hadn't touched mine. The revulsion of the contact brought back my senses and my terror.

"No," I breathed. "No, Devery, I haven't time. Tell me about the stairs. Please. About the stairs. How can I find them? Tell me. Come back,

Devery; tell me about the stairs. If you ever loved me, help me now.”

She sighed, a sound so fraught with weariness and despair that for a moment I was sorry to have called her back.

“The stairs,” she said slowly; “yes, the stairs. You keep close to the wall, and move ahead three steps; there is a rough stone set in the wall just there. Put your hand on it——”

She stopped. I held my breath and waited.

“Devery,” I urged after a moment, “tell me the rest, can’t you? Please, Devery!”

When she spoke her voice was a breath.

“I—I—Dimmis, I can’t see. I can’t seem to see the way any more. They are taking the me you knew away, but I’ll try. It’s so hard.” She sobbed. “It’s so very hard.” She went on, panting as if she had been running.

“There’s a stone on the floor, opposite the one under your hand, towards the centre of the room. Turn from the wall and take one step out into the room. The stone will be close. Step up on it, being careful not to slip off. It will be slimy. If you fall you are lost. When you are on the stone, reach up and take hold of the chain you will find there and pull.” She faltered, made an effort and went on.

“Pull hard, it will let down some steps and open a door in the garden wall. Climb the steps, go through the door and you will be free.”

She stopped talking. I heard the creature in the other room fumbling at the door-latch, and I began to

walk straight ahead through the smothering blackness. My outstretched hand came in contact with the wall, and I had begun to feel along it for the plaque when Devery cried out:

“No! No! Dimmis, come back, you can’t leave me here, you can’t. You’re my friend, you wouldn’t desert a friend. Not when she asks you to save her. And you can do it, Dimmis; you can. Just come back and take my hand, and we’ll go together. Oh, please, please.”

I stopped. Devery was right. I couldn’t save myself and leave her in the horror, but if I took my hand from the wall and turned back, could I find my way again? I would have to risk it and at once. I could hear the movements of the thing in the other room. There was a fetid odour I hadn’t noticed before. The thing was in the room with me, I was sure of it, but I was only a few steps from Devery, if I was careful. Then I seemed to hear it again, the warning she had given me. “Don’t turn back, Dimmis; no matter what I say, don’t turn back. You are lost if you do.”

All right, I’d be lost, then; I had to help her. I took my hand from the wall and half turned. There was a noise to my left, the filthy odour was strong in my nostrils. It had found me.

I must hurry. I took a careful step away from the wall, and then Devery laughed, a sly gloating sound as evil as the leer I had seen on the faces of the statues. Panic gripped me, and I held back a scream with difficulty. My mind steadied in a moment and I retraced the step I had taken, and

once more touched the wall and felt along it carefully. My hand encountered the plaque, and I pushed it and felt the door swing outward.

The noise on my left was nearer and the stench almost overpowering. The opening was low, but I was able to get through with no trouble and close the door. I stood still an instant, remembering the directions. I prayed I could walk forward and not stray to either side, so easy a thing to do.

I began to walk. The floor felt rough and uneven under my feet, as I put one foot slowly in front of the other. I found I had stopped shaking, my terror seemed to retreat into the background, and my senses were sharper. I knew there was an opening on my right; I don't know how, but I knew.

I heard a movement, and an indescribable odour swept over me, as if a creature from a charnel-house had breathed in my face. I felt close to fainting, but a few steps left it behind. I walked on like someone in a nightmare following an endless trail. How long a time I spent in the tunnel, I do not know; but it must have been a long time. There were six of the openings. The same stench and movement, as of something alerted, warned me each time, although the warning came almost too late at the fourth. I was on its very threshold before I sensed it. The creature caught at my skirt, there was a smell of burning mixed with the other, and that portion of my skirt came away when I sidestepped to safety.

I remember standing still for a long time after that. My strange calm had

gone, panic engulfed me. Then it died away as queerly as it had done before, and I was able to proceed and reach the door into the crypt. Terror took me for a while there, too. I thought of the mad scientist who had created this horror, this beastly trap. I wondered if this was his night to repose in the coffin he had prepared for himself in that long-ago time.

There was a sound in the passage behind me, and I knew I must linger no longer. So, forcing back my fear, I gently opened the door and crept through. It closed behind me with a tiny click. My shoulder brushed the wall and I touched it with my hand. It was wet and slimy. Something crawled over my hand. I could feel movement underneath it. I couldn't feel along the wall. I couldn't. Silent tears ran down my face. I began to shake.

"You've got to stop it," I thought to myself. "You've got to. Just three or four more steps; you can do it. Devery wanted you to get away. You can't let her down; you can't. Just one step at a time. If you can take one, you can take more. Come on now, you're nearly to the rough stone. You must be. See, you are. You've found it!"

With my fingers grasping the stone, some of the terror left me. So far Devery's directions had been accurate, so I must be only minutes away from freedom. Only minutes! Still touching the stone I took three steps away from it. Standing on one foot I felt about with the other for the large rock.

On my third try my foot brushed

against something which must be it. Now I must loose my hold on the stone in the wall, an action hard beyond belief. If by some chance I missed the rock, I would be lost in the darkness, the awful darkness. Slowly I drew my hand away, paused an instant, stooped and felt around in the direction my foot had indicated. It was there, the rock. I explored its surface. Wet slime and crawling things like the wall. I could never remain on top and I must not fall. I began to tear at the ooze with my fingers. I wiped with my skirt; but with all my efforts I couldn't remove the slime before me.

There was only one thing to do, remove my shoes. With bare feet I might stay on. I slipped off my sandals, and felt sick as my feet sank into the ooze. It was then I knew I wasn't alone in the crypt. The indescribable stench of the passage openings filled my nostrils. There was a small sucking sound as if a body had raised itself from the ooze of the floor to creep forward. Something blind that "didn't see the way we did." The thing I thought I had shut out when the door to the passage closed behind me.

I didn't know what to do. My mind became filled with confusion and noise. I couldn't think. I couldn't remember. I had no purpose. My body was heavy and without power to move. How long this lasted, I can't tell. Minutes maybe. Probably only seconds. Then far away and very faintly I seemed to hear Devery's voice; not in the room, but more as

if it were inside me but a long way off.

"Step on to the rock, Dimmis, very carefully. Don't fall, if you do you are lost. The evil is searching for you. It will find you soon. If you don't get away now, it will be too late. Do you hear me, Dimmis? Step on to the rock."

Suddenly the noise and confusion of my mind cleared and panic entered in. I wanted to scream, to shriek. I opened my mouth, but no sound came out. It was as if a hand had been laid across it. Then once again I seemed to hear it, Devery's voice, but fainter and farther away.

"The rock, Dimmis, the rock; step upon it. Do you hear me, step upon it."

Like an automaton I raised one foot from the ooze to the rock, then the other, and stood upright upon it, afraid to breath, afraid to move. The sucking sound seemed nearer, the stench made breathing difficult. I reached for the chain. I couldn't find it. I felt about frantically—it wasn't there. The whisper was a mere breathe against my ear.

"On your tiptoes, Dimmis, on——"

It faded away abruptly.

Fearfully I raised myself on my toes and reached above my head. My fingers brushed the chain. Closing them upon it and using it as a balance, I worked them up until I could get a grip, and pulled. I pulled with all the strength of terror and despair. A creaking, grating noise ensued, and the stairs came down, the bottom step resting against the rock on which I stood.

With a feeling of such utter relief that I have no words for it, I set my feet upon it and began to climb towards the oblong of pale light I saw above. Behind, such a maniacal din broke out as I hope never to hear again. Devilish, inhuman, screeching laughter that chilled my heart. Once I thought I heard Devery laugh as she had on the chesterfield, but I couldn't be sure. I stumbled through the opening to the pavement, skirting the north wall of the garden, and the door closed behind me, shutting in the obscene din.

I lay where I had fallen in complete exhaustion. For how long I don't know; but it was dawn when I managed to get to my feet, using the wall to help me, and stumble across the road. I can't recall much about my journey towards town, before I met the young man in the car; except being very, very ill once and lying on the grass for a long time. I must have been a strange object to him, dishevelled and wild of eye, for he made no protest when I asked him to drive me to the police-station.

There my story was met with a disbelief they didn't bother to conceal, and it was ten o'clock before they yielded to my passionate pleading and drove with me to the old house to look for Devery.

I didn't want to enter the gate again. I felt I couldn't; but when I understood no search would be made unless I did, I went through the gate once more into the garden. But it was

different; the statues were back once more in their old places, the evil leer on their faces gone. There was no mist of fantastic shapes over the pool, nothing out of order in the house and no Devery.

There was no sign of the door in the wainscoting which led to the passage, and pushing on the rough spot brought no results. It was as if the evil, content with its human sacrifice, had returned from whence it came. Except for two discoveries, I think the officers would have considered me mentally unbalanced. One was a burned spot on the ceiling of the large entrance hall and a huge black charred place on the floor beneath it, with a scorched trail leading to the parlour door and across its floor to the wainscoting. The other was Devery's sandals standing side by side in front of the old chesterfield, and a disturbed dust area on its seat. The old house was literally torn down in the search, and the discovery of the passage to the crypt told nothing.

I think Devery must have helped me in the crypt to get the stairs down, for when the officers took hold of the rusted chain it fell to pieces in their hands. No one ever saw Devery again; but sometimes I wonder, if I had gone back when she begged me, could I have saved her? Was her plea to me a last despairing effort to gain her freedom, or a diabolical try for another victim?

I wish I knew.



MORNING FOURSOME

JAMES KENNEDY



FOR THE PAST few weeks I have been playing my daily round with the assistant professional; it is having a good effect on my game. I was never likely to improve while I kept on plodding round in the four-ball foursome with Muntard and Zilon and Woolmont; we were all too much of a muchness.

But I shan't have many more rounds at Linksbay. My wife and I are setting out on our travels again. Miss Woolmont is coming with us.

I don't imagine we shall ever find a place that suits us as well as Linksbay. Lots of places have attractions for people who for one reason or another seek obscurity. But as a place Linksbay has been ideal. Its red-tiled roofs cover dwellings of all sizes, from six bedrooms and three bathrooms to the two-bedroom bungalow. There are three hotels and half a dozen boarding-houses for the transients. For amusement there are two cinemas and that splendid golf-course.

The shops are good. But the shopkeepers are wary; for Linksbay has a high record of fly-by-nights, who arrive with impressive manners and stylish raiment, and then suddenly and without trumpets depart with unpaid bills behind them.

Five estate agents peddle the properties. The number is large, but for one reason and another the turn-over of houses is quick in Linksbay. The

rising cost of retirement is always forcing someone to change to a village without a golf-course. Others find that whatever they were trying to escape from has caught up with them, and they must dart and double afresh.

Linksbay isn't for retired people whose civic or professional progress is recorded in *Who's Who*. If absence of a known history is a sign of happiness, then the unobtrusive and reticent population of Linksbay bear the hallmark of felicity.

From the moment we won the pools competition, Minnie and I were sure we wanted to start life afresh. Our children were married and off our hands, and we were old enough to know life wouldn't solve our problems unless we gave it a helping hand.

We didn't expect our money alone to accomplish for us the job of starting anew. We realized we'd have to remodel ourselves by our own efforts.

We began by changing our names. We were tempted to begin calling ourselves Newpas, and to leave it at that; quite a legal procedure, I gather. But in the end we used deeds poll.

Neither of us had much education; but if you've been interested in life and moderately fond of reading, it's wonderful what leisure and a bit of travel can do. We spent two years abroad and watched and read.

Beyond a change of name and background, we had no great desire to mould ourselves into very different people. But we certainly weren't the

same at the end as when we started—more knowledgeable and far more assured. I couldn't have written this before I changed my name.

We came to Linksbay eighteen months ago; we liked it from the beginning. Golf-links along a sandy coast have a simple, undramatic appeal; and the view from the ninth green is mentioned by writers who are usually more interested in their putts than in the scenery.

We got on well with the people. Our bankers' references pleased, and I think surprised, those with whom we did business. Without going out much, we entertained enough not to be thought mean. We didn't ask questions about the people we met, and they didn't seem to ask more than were inevitable about us.

I had begun to play golf in Southern Ireland, where the professional had been uncommonly skilful in turning my middle-aged joints in the right directions. I came to play the modest sort of game represented by a handicap of twelve.

After a few weeks at Linksbay, I settled into a four-ball foursome that we all found very pleasant. The four of us had arrived in Linksbay about the same time, we were all much of an age in our fifties, and all much of a handicap: Muntard and Zilon were thirteen and Woolmont was fourteen.

Each was discreet as to his own past and didn't pry about the others. I said I'd been rather obscure in the Civil Service till my wife and I had won a football pool, and I told them stories of our travels.

Muntard had practised at the Bar.

But taxation had turned him to business, where his career, though more remunerative, had been more chequered. He had obviously mixed in good circles and his fine appearance would match them, but he seemed to be well enough content with our company.

Zilon was short, slim and unpretentious. He said he'd been successful in commerce, but never explained in which branch.

All we knew about Woolmont was that he had been in the East. There was certainly about him an Oriental impassivity and even menace.

We played the old-fashioned four-ball foursome every morning, and had a rota of partnerships. We drove off about eleven, and after the nineteenth hole went home to a late lunch. We never played at week-ends, when our slow game would have held up the busy course.

We played off our handicaps, though we seldom played up to them. Perhaps for that reason none of us played in the Club competitions; indeed we played little outside our foursome.

We were all sociable enough in the club-house and mixed at ease in the bar. But away from the course neither Woolmont nor I went out much, whereas Muntard and Zilon were very convivial, and if they weren't visiting or entertaining of an evening, were to be found in the bar of one of the hotels.

Woolmont had a sister and I had a wife. But Muntard was a widower and Zilon was a bachelor, and each of the two had a housekeeper. Muntard and

Zilon seemed to have met before they came to Linksbay, but neither said anything to us of their earlier acquaintance.

It was rather an event when Woolmont and his sister invited Minnie and me to coffee one evening. Woolmont, as I've mentioned, had something sinister in his appearance; he looked squat though he was five foot ten, and there was the same rectangular squatness about his face. But I never could pin down what I found threatening about him, and came to the conclusion I was drawing unfair inferences from his impassivity.

He even played golf with marked and remarkable stoicism: the wildest slices and the fiercest pulls, which would have provoked denunciation from any of the others, evoked no response from Woolmont. Yet twice I saw him break a putter across his knee because he missed a putt on the last green; he broke the club in silence and without change of expression, and in a way that barred comment.

After our coffee-drinking Miss Woolmont became Minnie's constant friend. Both Minnie and I liked her, and one day Minnie said, "You know, Sid, if I were to pop off—which I've no intention of doing—the best thing for you would be to marry Madge Woolmont. It would have the good effect, too, of getting her away from that brother. Your other partners are jollyboys, but he's a dark horse of ill omen."

Woolmont went off on occasional visits to London, staying away for four or five days. During one of these

absences Miss Woolmont telephoned and asked me round.

She took me into Woolmont's study. "I need your help," she said, and her expression and her voice were filled with care and distress, "You're the only person I want to consult, for I'm going to reveal a terrible secret."

I nodded and lit my pipe.

"My brother Jason and I had a half-brother. He was the son of our Chinese mother by her first marriage. His name was Horace Turcombe."

I flinched as though a heavy weight of ice had been lowered upon me and begun to press. This was alarmingly near my own secret, and from the only person in Linksbay for whom Minnie and I had really formed an affection. But I tried to turn my start of surprise into a movement of interest, and Miss Woolmont went on:

"The three of us were brought up together. Horace was four years older than Jason, just of the right seniority for the hero-worship of childhood; and Jason adored Horace. Despite his unemotional exterior, Jason has very deep feelings.

"Is this," I asked, "the Horace Turcombe who was hanged in Thaneshire about twenty years ago?"

She nodded. "You remember the case?"

"It was in all the papers," I replied.

"Jason almost went mad," she continued. "He and I were in China at the time. When we heard the result of the trial, he became quite useless. He spent a year in an institution under medical supervision; his condition was referred to as a breakdown, but I think that was out of kindness to his

wealth. He was very rich at the time.”

“Fortunes have changed in China since then,” I said.

“Ours certainly have,” she agreed. “But don’t think I’ve invited you round to talk about money. We’re still comfortably off.”

“It would be easier,” I said slowly, “to help you in that way than in any other. Apart from our children, there’s nobody Minnie and I would sooner help.”

She smiled dimly. “That is very kind of you. But, as you’ve guessed, my problem is more difficult. Since the day he knew the result of the trial, Jason has never mentioned Horace or his crime to me.”

She paused and walked over to a small bookcase with wooden doors. I followed her. “But Jason has brooded over Horace,” she resumed. “He ordered and kept Press cuttings of the trial, and of subsequent references to the people who took part in it. Now I find he has all the books written about the case. I’ve never known that before, and they point to the immediate problem.”

She turned the key that was already in the door, opened the doors and pointed to six books on the top shelf. One was the formal report of the Turcombe trial in the Capital Trials Series, and the others were more general books about the case by well-known criminologists.

“It’s the first time he’s ever left the key in the door,” Miss Woolmont said, “so I thought I’d take the opportunity to find out what was inside.”

“It’s natural he should be interested,” I said soothingly.

For answer she turned over the pages of one of the more general books, and showed me two photographs. The first bore the words “Charles Muntard, Junior Counsel for the Prosecution”; the other the words “Arthur Zilon, Chief Witness for the Prosecution.” Even the lapse of time could leave no doubt that they were my foursome partners.

“But it’s odd,” I observed in a voice that I tried to keep level, “that he should want to play golf with them.”

“He’s waiting! That’s all! He’s waiting!” declared Madge Woolmont intensely. “He is as patient as he is violent. I once saw him push a man he disliked off a pier in China; then he swore the man had fallen by accident. I was standing by and had to swear the same to save Jason.”

I looked at the frail little woman; a spinster without much experience, you might have said, if you’d passed her in the street. And here she was living in the centre of deadly drama, and not for the first time.

“Jason and Horace,” she commented, “are half-brothers, but they are more alike than most brothers. I think they both take after our mother. I seem to have escaped the strain of violence by taking after my father.”

“What do you want me to do?” I asked after a pause.

“Only to advise me,” she answered.

I thought for a little. “Do nothing,” I said. “The only other course is to go to the police, and I’m not in favour of that. You’d only be transferring the risk from Muntard and Zilon to yourself. I’m sure Minnie would agree with me.”

"I'd be glad if you'd tell Mrs. Newpas," she said.

"I tell her everything. I've always a strong feeling she'd find out if I didn't."

"Let me know if she agrees with you."

"Why has your brother picked these two? Is it because they're both in the same place?" I asked.

"Two birds with one stone! It might be. But it's more likely that they're the first to be found."

When I got home I told Minnie what Miss Woolmont had confided to me.

"You were quite right, Sid," my wife said. "It would be different if we were going to run away. But we'll stand our ground, too."

We talked all round the problem for a bit, and decided we would remain in Linksby.

Next morning Jason Woolmont was composedly practice swinging on the first tee as though he had never had a half-brother, and in any event didn't give him a thought. I wondered whether he'd asked his sister about the key.

He and I were partners against Muntard and Zilon, and Woolmont played as though he hadn't a care—much above his usual form we all remarked. There wasn't a sign to corroborate the fears I had felt during the night.

Yet my fears remained. As I watched Woolmont swinging a heavy mashie behind the unsuspecting backs of Muntard and Zilon, I felt a surge of acute alarm. But the only drama of the round was that Woolmont

phlegmatically holed a five-yard putt on the last green to win the match.

The losers paid for the customary two rounds of drinks, and we all drove home to our late lunches. We had played our last foursome.

That night about 3 a.m. I heard the telephone ring. I rose and answered it.

"This is Madge Woolmont. The very worst has happened. I—I don't want to begin to describe it. Would—would you please come round? I'd rather you were here first and the police second."

As I drove along the front, a horned moon was sinking blood-red into the sea. My mind told me this was disaster—disaster for the Woolmonts and disaster for Minnie and me. My heart told me to despair.

When I got to Woolmont's house I made out a flash of white at the door. Miss Woolmont was standing in the porch.

She murmured, "Thank you for coming," and led me round the gable towards the garage. The door was open and she motioned to me to go in.

Inside, two bodies, each with a rope round the neck, were suspended from a roof-beam. They were Muntard and Zilon.

Both were obviously dead. But I knew at a glance they had not been hanged; and when I looked closer I found marks of the fatal blows on the back of each head.

I went back to the house where Madge Woolmont was waiting for me. She was in tears.

"We must send for the police," I said. And though it seems out of pro-

portion, I felt as sorry for Minnie and me as for her.

"I suppose so," Miss Woolmont replied. "I feel more like running away."

"So do I!" I said. But I went and telephoned.

"They weren't hanged," I explained as we waited.

"I heard him go out with the car earlier tonight. Then I heard him come back and after a time drive away again. It was at that point I rose and went out. I picture he killed them both as they were walking home, and then brought them here in his car." Her surmise proved substantially correct.

The police found Woolmont in the deep bunker beside the ninth green. He had fallen asleep.

The inquest passed off more quietly

than I could have hoped. Then at the trial Woolmont was plainly insane and unfit to plead. He was so found by the preliminary jury. So I didn't come into the picture other than as a simple neighbour who was a friend both of the dead men and of Woolmont. Only the police knew my full history.

Nevertheless, Minnie and I are going to tour the world again for a bit. We have stretched our good fortune in Linksby far enough.

The judge and the senior prosecuting counsel in the Turcombe case being dead, Woolmont had turned his attention to junior counsel and the main witness. I knew the hangman at the execution of Turcombe was dead, too. Whatever way you look at it, I was lucky to escape—for I was the assistant hangman.



You will ruin no more lives as you ruined mine. You will wring no more hearts as you wrung mine. I will free the world of a poisonous thing. Take that, you hound, and that!—and that!—and that!—and that!

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE (1859–1930).

Oh eyes, no eyes, but fountains fraught with tears;
Oh life, no life, but lively form of death;
Oh world, no world, but mass of public wrongs.

THOMAS KYD (1557–1595).

THE FUTURE-SEER

ROSWELL B. ROHDE



HAD IT NOT BEEN for the completion of the device which Brant Distaff terms "The Future-Seer," Jeff Norse would have killed his wife on November 21st instead of waiting.

Things had pretty well reached the point where he felt he couldn't wait longer and something would have to be done, when Brant told him that his invention—or discovery, rather—was practically ready to function, and so he held off a little longer. Perhaps they could look into the future—his future—and see how much longer Betty would live and how much longer Marilyn would wait. Because Betty was most certainly dying—the clinic had assured him that she had cancer and that she had failed to respond to either radium or X-ray therapy, and it was really only a matter of time until he would be free, anyway.

But Marilyn was so impatient, so impulsive. It was this impulsiveness that made him love her, Jeff guessed; but it was the sort of impulsiveness that borders on the radical—and she might, just might, up and marry someone else.

Not that Marilyn was really free to involve herself in further matrimony just now. She had a husband, John Ward; but she had time and again assured Jeff that when she wished she would shed him as quickly as she

could her clothes. Which was pretty quick. . . .

That was another thing Jeff couldn't really understand—her possessiveness—her desire to have him—when actually she had him already! It bothered him a good deal; he knew he wasn't that much of a catch, but it was flattering—this burning insistence of Marilyn's that they make their relationship solid and legal.

And so Betty's lingering illness had become a chain that bound him, and he had begun to get a horrible, ghoulis satisfaction hearing her say that she was worse, that the pain was greater than it had been—in seeing her fail and knowing that it meant freedom, and Marilyn.

When Betty begged him, as she had so often in the past two years, to take her back to Vermont, to the little village with its two stores, church and dozen houses where she had lived as a girl, it was almost a joy to refuse—to see the hope die in her once brilliant eyes. She was so certain that there she might recover—or was it only the certainty that she would be sure to rest finally in the churchyard where her family lay? Once in a while—not often—he found himself appalled at his own hardness, at his lack of sympathy with a condition common to mankind and as such to be universally mourned. But when he thought of Marilyn and how she made him want her—even when he had reached satiety—his only desire

was to possess her, to claim her, to know that no one else might have her, while now he must share her with her unwanted husband.

Marilyn's impatience seemed to grow daily; she wasn't going to wait for ever. Jeff was desperate the night Brant told him his experiments had reached fruition. And so he grasped at what seemed a straw, and asked Brant if they might not look into his own future. Of course he used as an excuse a desire to foresee relief for his wife, because she was particularly bad that day, and Brant had always shown the greatest sympathy for him and her.

"Sure thing," Brant told him as cheerfully as he could, for it seemed certain that the future could hold little that was good for Betty. "We'll go to my lab right now."

The "Future-Seer" was about as large as a good-sized calculator, it was round in shape, looking like an over-size, though completely non-transparent, crystal ball. There were a number of coloured wires connected to a plate at one side, but the other ends of the wires trailed out on a thick-topped table and were connected, so far as Jeff could see—to nothing! It all seemed rather silly, suddenly, and he wondered if Brant were kidding him; and he thought it was rather a shoddy joke—not that even he didn't realize he had one coming!

"I have not only been successful in looking into the future," Brant said, "but I have arranged so that the future may be viewed on a standard

television set. Notice the screen in the corner. . . ."

It was larger than any Jeff had seen, but otherwise it seemed perfectly natural.

"Now," Brant was saying, and Jeff found himself led to the table and seated near the "Future-Seer," "if you will just permit me to fasten these connectors to your wrists . . . it's necessary so that the machine will be in touch with your subconscious and know into whose future to look. . . ."

"Say," Jeff said, making a feeble attempt at levity, "sure it won't shock me?"

"Not electrically, if that's what you mean," Brant said in complete seriousness. "Otherwise—well, I can't say. I was pretty upset by some things I found in my own future. . . ."

The connection took only a moment. Then Brant dimmed the ceiling lights in the lab and switched on the television set, using a special control he had attached to it. Apparently the future was on none of the regular channels!

"I feel pretty silly," Jeff said. "I've a notion this is all a joke."

He started to get up, but Brant pressed him down in his seat.

"Careful with those connectors," he said. "They're sensitive. No, this may be many things, but it's not a joke, Jeff. If you think you can take it, well, it's up to you—you asked for it. If you want to call it off, just say so. . . ."

"Nuts!" said Jeff, inexplicably angry. "I can take it, I guess. Probably my future won't come through, anyway—whatever happens."

"I think I'd better leave you alone, Jeff," Brant said then. "After all—your future is your own business. This button here—right by your hand—when you've seen enough, just press it. It stops the whole process and turns up the lights. I'll wait in the living-room. If you want me, just call me when you're done. There—it's starting to come in already. . . ."

Jeff probably wouldn't have known if Brant hadn't left the room, for right then the future began to unfold on the television screen. It was more or less like a dream, except that everything was clearer and the impression strong. And even as things are said in a dream, so the characters that appeared now on the screen spoke, and their voices reached Jeff as clearly as though he were viewing a standard television programme, or were in the room with the persons portrayed, or were speaking himself.

The first scene was a hospital room, and though she looked even more ill than now, he was able to recognize his wife Betty. He was there, also, looking pale and thin; yet he was shocked to see on his face the expression of what had become his nearly daily thoughts—the desire to have Betty out of the way. Clearly things had reached a crisis, and though it was not specifically named, he was conscious of a certainty that the events which were to occur were happening not more than two months in the future.

A number of nurses and doctors were in the room also, and each seemed expectant, waiting. Suddenly

the door opened and another doctor entered—one he had never seen. He was in street clothes, and he carried a bag, signifying that he was not of the staff and had perhaps been summoned recently and as a desperate measure. Then Jeff was conscious that Dr. Brown, his family physician, had turned to him and was speaking:

"This is the last resort, as you are aware. We know what this serum will do with animals—it has never been tried on a human being. You wish us to try?"

"Yes, yes," eagerly. The waiting had been too much of a strain, it was beginning to tell on him. Perhaps this would end matters in a hurry.

"By all means," Jeff's voice quavered, and he saw, even on the screen, that he dared not look at Betty, who clutched his hand pathetically.

Quickly the strange doctor took a needle from his bag, filled it from a small bottle which he had also brought with him. A nurse sponged a spot on Betty's arm, and the injection was made. The strange doctor spoke for the first time:

"The results have been like magic. We should know within a few hours."

The scene faded, to be replaced by another. It was in the living-room of their own home—a week later, perhaps. Betty was well! She had not regained her former strength and weight, but it was evident that she was on the road to recovery.

And he was just leaving for an appointment with Marilyn—obviously wondering what could be done now, how he could conceivably straighten

matters out, what he could tell her, and murder was again in his heart.

When this scene faded, it was a long time before another replaced it. To Jeff, as he watched, it was clear that it represented an elapse of a year or more.

It was a picture of himself, walking along a street with tall buildings. There were a number of other people on the pavement, all of them strangers. He tried to recognize the street, but did not; for some reason, the signs seemed blurred; and the buildings disappeared in a haze above, which was odd, because he himself was distinct. It was as though a camera had been focused on him and everything else in the picture had been out of range.

Then, quite suddenly, it happened!

Something came hurtling down from the buildings above. It struck him squarely on the head, throwing him to the pavement with all the force of its long fall. Immediately a crowd of passers-by gathered about him. A doctor must have been among them, for one man knelt down, took his wrist, then opened a bag and applied a stethoscope to his chest.

Jeff found himself half-standing in his place, his hands trembling uncontrollably so that the connectors would have shaken off were they not securely fastened.

"No!" he screamed. "No . . . no . . . no!"

The doctor glanced up, appearing to look directly at him as he stood gaping beside the table. His lips formed one word:

"Dead!"

The scene faded, and Jeff collapsed into his chair. A cold sweat drenched him, and he shook as though he had palsy. Brant had been right—the future was no joke!

Had he possessed the strength just then, he would have pressed the button and shut off the horrible process that had ruined the remainder of his life. Why—he didn't even know when it would happen—when that brick would hit him! The suspense was worse than if he had been told the day and hour.

He closed his eyes in anguish, and when he opened them another picture was on the screen.

It was inside a church, and at first he thought it must be his funeral! Could this infernal machine torture him with a scene that no man, to his knowledge, had ever before been forced to see and bear? He did not doubt but that it could!

Then he heard music, and knew it was not a funeral but a wedding he was to witness. The church was filled; there was the hushed expectancy that accompanies the wedding march and precedes the entry of the bride. And in a moment the bride came—radiant, lovely. He gasped. It was Betty!

Quickly, as though in answer to his unspoken question, the scene switched to the altar, where the groom advanced to meet his bride. And again he gasped. The groom was John Ward—Marilyn's husband!

This was too much! He reached towards the table, his hand still shaking as he sought the button that would

stop the "Future-Seer." But the scene had already changed to show a rear pew, and two women, dumpy and conspiratorial, whispering as the ceremony proceeded.

"Poor man—I hope he'll be happy now. His first wife was a bitch, they say."

"I heard a dozen men were named at the divorce proceedings. Imagine—and she must have been carrying on with all of them practically at the same time. . . ."

"And Betty—I do hope things will be brighter for her now. Of course it was a miracle the cancer cure was found in time to save her—but her husband being killed the way he was well, that was hard on her. She loved him so much, and he——!"

The second woman leaned close.

"I hate to say anything, really," she said easily with relish, "but if anyone had it coming—he did!"

Jeff pressed the button, tore the connectors from his wrists and stumbled from the room. He did not see Brant in the entry, and he did not want to see him. He left the house and staggered into the street. A policeman on the corner looked at him with mild curiosity, as though wondering if he were drunk enough to arrest. He took another look at the house from which Jeff had emerged, and deliberately turned the other way.

Jeff tried to straighten, to walk naturally, but his attempt was a sorry one. What was the use? What difference did anything make now? He had seen the future, and it was bad!

Even now his only thought was for

himself, for the pleasures that would be denied him—Marilyn, the years he should have had. To end this way! Struck by a falling brick! If it were not so terrible, so horribly final, it would be ridiculous! He actually tried a laugh and achieved only a hoarse croak. God! He'd thought adulterers might at least be shot!

He tramped the streets for hours then, and the more he thought the more sure he was of one thing. He could never stand the wait, the awful dread, the uncertainty that the Future-Seer had created for him. Nor could he stand the thought that Betty would ultimately be happy with John Ward. No—that was too much! And gradually lucidity came to him and he knew, and knowing brought him a savage kind of joy—there was one way out for him!

Suicide!

He started for the East River, but half-way there he turned and walked towards his home. Not drowning; someone might hear him splash and drag him out. For a horrible moment he even thought that perhaps he *couldn't* commit suicide. What if he were doomed to live until that brick descended?

A gun—that was it! He had one at home. Nothing would deflect its bullet. He'd cheat the future!

He walked quickly, purposefully. In the hall of his home he stopped still. What of Betty? Might not the shock of his death be more than she could stand? If he could change the course of his own future by suicide, might not she die before the cancer cure was perfected?

For the first time in many months a wave of kindness towards his wife engulfed him. Should he explain to her why he was killing himself? And encourage her to hang on because her salvation was a matter of months at most?

The enormity of his own failing, of his infidelity, of the unworthiness of Marilyn. What was it the woman had said? Ten men! All this and the folly of his life suddenly dawned on him and he staggered. Then he heard a voice calling him from a side-room. It was Betty.

He squared his shoulders and went in, resolutely.

Did he imagine it or did she actually look better? She smiled, a small, sweet smile.

"I had a dream, dear. I was well—perfectly well—and we were together, ski-ing in Vermont. . . ."

She looked at him, and there was neither pleading nor reproach in her eyes.

"I always loved Vermont, you know . . . !"

Jeff straightened, and for the first time for months he felt that he was doing the right thing, the fair thing.

"We're going to Vermont, honey. Today! The business can run itself for a few months, and if it's as good as you say, I'll fix it so we can live there. . . ."

A little village in Vermont, he thought. No brick buildings—no Marilyn to fog him up. Could he, by taking a different course, bend his future, mould it, change it?

He did not know; he did not deserve it. But he saw Betty's smile, and what might happen to him seemed unimportant. And he felt, suddenly, good . . . !



Being your slave, what should I do but tend
Upon the hours and times of your desire?
I have no precious time at all to spend,
Nor services to do, till you require.
Nor dare I chide the world-without-end hour
Whilst I, my sovereign, watch the clock for you,
Nor think the bitterness of absence sour
When you have bid your servant once adieu;
Nor dare I question with my jealous thought
Where you may be, or your affairs suppose,
But like a sad slave, stay and think of nought
Save, where you are, how happy you make those.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564–1616).



THE PAPER BROTHERS

H. L. SPILSTEAD

Illustrated by Beresford Egan

MOST OF THE people in the village knew the distinguished-looking lady from the big manor-house.

Knew her by sight, anyway. She would make a shopping trip every Saturday in an old, dusty, red car driven by her son.

"One of my five boys," she would say. "He's not as delicate as the others, poor souls, and so can drive me around. After all, I'm long past eighty, you know."

And indeed she was. Although still full of life, she had thin snow-white hair which looped up with a bold swerve and then cuddled down across sunken cheeks covered in the deep

cobweb trceries of long living.

The grocer would chat with her in a respectfully familiar fashion as she ordered her goods, and many local customers would stay nearby to catch the conversation, hoping for titbits to assuage their curiosity.

No one knew much about the family in the village, and they were regarded as a great mystery. Their large house was a mile or so away on high ground near a wood, and, apart from the weekly visit by the old lady and her son, nothing was ever seen of them.

The son was about fifty-five, and he would sit motionless in the vintage vehicle waiting for the short journey to the next shop, and the next, and so on.

Most people thought the mother

very sweet but a "bit touched," and the son was unanimously declared to be only a few steps backward from the padded. Not that anyone had ever spoken to him, or heard him speak, for that matter. But, nevertheless, seeing the long-jawed melancholic face with pop eyes almost falling over a wedge nose, his old-fashioned semi-stove-pipe hat and faded morning suit, pulled tightly wrinkled at the top, with a butterfly collar, gave one leave to speculate about his sanity.

The mother obviously had a great affection for her son.

"He's the most capable of the lot." She would raise her voice for everyone in the shop to hear.

And when she had pushed her purchases away into a string bag, always with great gusto, she would stride out, with the proprietor following behind to help pack the goods in the back of the car and open the door.

Often as she rattled off someone would say in too loud a voice, "Perhaps one day the son might condescend to do a little fetching and carrying for his mother."

As much as anything, they didn't like waiting whilst the "Guv'nor" ran around after the "strange lady from the big house," as she was sometimes called.

"No wonder she locks herself away and lives a semi-hermit life if she's got four more at home like the one that drives her about." The Landlord of the Horse and Sickle would give that as his opinion to everyone, even to strangers.

Late one summer the old lady died, and was buried in another part of the

country, believed to be her birthplace. The first Saturday after this, the son drove to the village alone to do the shopping for the family, and never mentioned his mother's decease. The friendly shopkeepers asked as to her health, and the only reply was a neatly written sheet thrust under every nose containing the list of items needed. Nothing more.

After a few Saturdays, however, the son unbent so much as to bid the traders "Good afternoon."

An obituary notice in a London paper gave the news, however, and it was noted that Emily Jane Fullerton-Howard of the Manor House, Henching, Kent, had passed peacefully away, leaving five grief-stricken sons.

Everything seemed to work out satisfactorily. The little red car would chug into the village once a week as before, and the mournful-looking man would stock up and depart.

Then one Saturday he didn't come. Nor the next. Nor the next. The tradesmen, drinking together in the pub at the close of the day's business, could talk of nothing else.

"I think there's something wrong up there," the Grocer said; "there must be."

"You mean more than usual?" said the sarcastic Landlord.

"I believe Jim's right." The Butcher put his beer down firmly. "And what's more, I reckon we ought to ask Constable to pay them a visit. Just a courtesy call, like. Perhaps the little chap's been taken queer and the other brothers are too delicate to leave the place."

"Too loopy to be let out," smirked

the Landlord, busy with his customers.

"And if they haven't been buying food from somewhere else," said the Grocer, "they must be dead from hunger by now."

"Come on, Jim." The Butcher stood up. "Let's go and see Constable now."

The evening wore on, and at its end all three had pledged that the following afternoon at about four o'clock they would visit the rambling old manor-house and ask if all was well.

Spirits were not quite so high when the time came, but true to their word they met and cycled along the long green lanes which led to the hill lying before the hidden and still secret old building.

With a mutually unrealized air of something very like bravado, they cluttered their machines against the gates and began the long trek down the gloomy, curving drive.

The top of the house could be seen from the village, and one long chimney-stack stood out from the brisk flowing finger-tips of the trees like a watchtower. But approaching the house seemed to be like making a silent journey underground. Although it was mid-afternoon, the light filtering through the foliage and branches seemed to die and fall dimly on to the grey earth underfoot.

Eventually the outlines of the house grew together, and it appeared before them like the head of a blind giant with broken and mouldering teeth in a gaping mouth of colonnades and stone windows.

A bad breath of decay hung over the grey hulk, like an invisible shroud tethered from the green-smudged roof-slates to the soaked twig-prickly clay beneath.

The group halted.

"You'd better knock, Constable," the Grocer whispered. "We'll keep back here, in case anything is wrong."

"Right," the officer rejoined loudly, obviously indicating that lesser men might whisper but not he.

The knocker was hanging askew like a dusty wreath, but, grasping it firmly, he thundered until it flaked off in his hand.

Impatiently the officer pushed at the letter-box; it was stuck. But not so the door, for it swung slowly open, revealing a long passageway hazed in blue shapes of light ribbon-streaked from a colour-paned door at the end.

"Anyone home, this is Police Constable Philips calling?" His voice faded and lost conviction. The place looked as though it hadn't been lived in for years. He turned and waved to his comrades.

Without speaking, they entered the house and scrunched to a stop halfway down the hall. The wallpaper, peeling, hung like dried seaweed over the cracking plaster. The tired ceiling had collapsed into dusty heaps, littering the corridor and bulging through the balustrades of the stairs.

"We'll all split up," said Philips quietly. "You go upstairs, Jim; I'll do the rooms here, and Bill can search the back of the house."

They nodded and moved off.

Choosing a near-by door, the Constable turned the rough wooden

handle, pushing hard. There was a slight cracking sound, and he nearly fell into the room. It was bare. The inside of the windows were furred with cobwebs. He closed the door and tried the next.

The door gave easily, and he entered a long, low room lit by two foliage-stricken bay-windows. A huge dining-table several yards in length stood in the centre, flanked, on either side, by straight-backed chairs. And sitting, very still, on the last of these, was the little man. The light from the windows settled peacefully on him as if to soften the bright staring eyes, and his arms rested comfortably on the grimy table top with a sort of eerie grace.

The officer moved forward, catlike. He must be dead, the puzzled mind told him. And yet. . . . Nearer still. The small, huddled figure didn't stir.

"Great Scot!" he breathed, as the realization dawned upon him. "It's a dummy."

He touched the arm and the figure slipped slightly.

At that moment he heard Bill calling him from the passage and, shaken out of his trance, he joined him in the hall.

"I thought I'd found him," Bill panted, "but it was a dummy. Real lifelike, though. Sitting at a table in the kitchen he was. Proper made me 'air curl."

The officer nodded. "There's another one in there," he said laconically. "Gave me a turn, too. Let's go up and see how Jim is getting on."

They met at the top of the stairs.

A silent moment between them as

they looked at each other conveyed all.

"Where was yours?" whispered the Grocer.

"My two," said Jim, placing a not too steady arm on the banister. "Two of them. One in bed. Thought he was dead, of course. And one in the back bedroom squatting at a dressing-table. The reflection in the smoky mirror made me feel I was peering through a window at a fiend in Hell."

He paused and rubbed his forehead as though expecting to wake up at any moment.

"Peculiar," the Constable murmured. He tapped his foot reflectively, and a piece of plaster tumbled downstairs, clattering the men back into action.

"Let's get out of here." The Grocer moved.

"Not until we've searched this place thoroughly," the Constable commanded. "We'll finish up here first."

They moved quickly from room to room, and within twenty minutes had covered the unexplored portion of the house, excepting the library.

"We might as well go home," fretted Bill. "Obviously the four brothers were some kind of fantastic make-believe for the pair of them, and the son has quitted the place because he's at a loss and lonely without the old lady."

But the officer had paid no attention, he was staring at the burnished tip of a patent-leather shoe protruding from the drapery round the library window-seat.

Mutely he pointed.

"It's the real thing this time, I'll bet," whispered the Grocer.

Not a little nervously, the Constable strode forward and pushed the curtain aside.

A haze of dust flew about, but not enough to hide from the silent on-lookers the stiffness and familiar lineaments of yet another dummy.

"So much for your theories," Jim

gasped, "I can't begin to think of an answer to this one."

The others shook their heads, bewildered.

The officer walked to the door. "Come on," he said. "I think we'd better be going."

And they walked from the house slowly, each silent with his thoughts.

Within hours, the story had whipped round the village with the speed of sound. For the whole week there was no other topic.

When the dummies were brought from the house to the police-station, there was a huge crowd babbling with expectancy, craning to get a view. Actually the findings were hidden in wooden cases, but as each was carried in, the excitement and the whispered "They're in there" was intense.

Scotland Yard sent a very blasé young Inspector down, who was not the least bit impressed, and who departed, loftily advising the constabulary to get in touch "should anything of further interest develop." The "interest" was rather grudgingly given; obviously discovering a few old dummies in a derelict country-house was very thin fare after the richer diet of murders and bank robberies in the big city.

Within a few days local speculation reached a cul-de-sac of baffled imagination.

Even the forthcoming annual fête did not oust it as a topic of conversation. Unsatisfied curiosity is a very potent thing.

Preparations for the fête were made, tents erected and side-shows built. But the two events still jostled



each other in local minds for top interest.

Eventually, to the delight of everybody, the two were combined. The Chief Constable allowed the five dummies to be shown as an attraction at the fun-fair. Excitement prickled.

Needless to say, directly the fête was declared open a massive queue formed at the entrance of a certain marquee, and a strong circle of policemen was necessary, not only to hold the crowd back, but also to prevent, and dig out, the swarms of little boys bulging and burrowing under the canvas.

The dummies were displayed sitting side by side in a beautiful glass-fronted case suitably trestled and illuminated. Old Pickers the coffin-maker had excelled himself.

All day long the procession weaved and pushed into the vast tent. Several people went in more than once and, of course, no one could talk of anything else.

It was quite late at night when the committee decided to shut the marquee, and to close the tall iron gates at the entrance to the fête as a gentle hint to the sightseers and groups of chattering people who seemed to have become rooted by the fever of conversation and reluctant to go home.

In a star-sprinkled blackness, the moon stood at nearly its full height, reflecting clearly across the fields, trees and on the road which slipped like a satin sash round the near-by hill.

Slowly the crowd pushed out, and the Chief Constable stood by the gates, opening and closing them and



giving "good nights" in a hearty manner.

Suddenly an air of stillness patched over the entire company bringing a tight blanket of quiet upon them, and they found their conversation punctuated by a familiar sound.

A steadily growing pulse commanded the air and turned a startled mass of eyes in its direction.

It was the little red car which used to carry the old lady and her son into

the village every Saturday. As it drew nearer, a violent gasp escaped the crowd and every heart leaped.

The little man could be seen clutching the wheel and melancholically staring into the distance.

Closing his gaping mouth, the Chief Constable shook himself, walked calmly as possible to the roadside and waved for the car to stop.

It slowed down, coughing to a standstill under the officer's arm.

For a moment the two stared at each other. The onlookers silently waited.

"Good evening, sir," gulped the prop of the Constabulary. "We'd been wondering if you were all right, not having seen you about."

He waved his arms and nodded his head as if to finish the explanation by gesture, and looked very uncomfortable.

The little man shook his head.

"Thank you, officer," he piped clearly. "I've been away seeing my mother. There's nothing to worry about, thank you."

Chief Constable Philips took a step back and made a valiant struggle for words. He was still trying when the tiny vehicle caught its breath and purred on down the hill.

For a brief moment the crowd remained fixed and silent. Then tumult broke loose.

With great determination the Constable turned, pushed his way into the grounds again, and soon, with willing hands helping, was tearing down the front of the marquee hiding the dummies. The canvas entrance quickly

collapsed, and a stunned gathering were horrified to see, in the untouched glass fixture, only four little figures.

Constable Philips patted the glass case in a dazed fashion, looking blankly around. The world had suddenly become unreal, and his stomach was shrinking to a hard lump.

Tottering out, he heard the throng shouting that there was a fire glowing on the other side of the village near the big house.

"He's burning it down," they yelled. "Burning it down."

Within minutes, after a bit of lightning organization, the Chief Constable and a few local stalwarts were racing through the crisp silver lanes towards the flame-fluttering beacon ahead.

It was definitely the house, not that anyone had any doubts, and the men rushed into the orange tunnel of the drive, realizing they could do nothing except satisfy their curiosity.

Panting, they stopped and saw the building almost completely alight, flames springing out of the windows and smearing black fingers over the carved woodwork.

Hot, charred strips of climbing plants fell sparking in snake patterns on the ground around them.

A fierce heat, coupled with the possibility of a dangerous blow from falling masonry and flying cinders, kept the men away from the house. But they forced themselves nearer when the little man emerged from the front door, sat in the porchway and set light to a running chain of petrol

which flared and threw a rush of light down the long hall.

"Come here, you little fool," yelled Constable Philips. "You'll be burnt alive! Come away!"

"No!" shrilled the high voice above the roar and crackling. "Mother told me to dispose of the house, and this is my way of doing it."

He stood defiant, the long flames darting orange fangs around him.

Without thinking, the Constable and his men rushed forward, mounted the wide stone steps and grasped the little man, carrying him away from the fierce heat.

At first he struggled, but some dozen yards from the house he went limp and, to their horror, fell to pieces.

The head bounced off into the crimson shadow light and, not being sure what it was, the Constable put his foot out quickly and scrunched into its papier-mâché interior.

It was an unnerving second, and the three men cried out together in terror. Panic pulled their minds out of shape for a moment and, dropping the rest of the pieces, they ran down the garishly flickering drive, yelling like maniacs.



We thought of that inquisitive spirit of self-criticism, who had made his entry even into our inner chamber.

We thought of him, with his eyes of ice and long bent fingers, he, who sits within in the darkest corner of the soul and tears our being to pieces, as old women shred up bits of silk and wool.

Bit by bit the long, hard, bent fingers had torn away, until our whole self lay there like a heap of rags, and our best feelings, our deepest thoughts, all that we had done and said, had been searched, explored, taken to pieces, gazed at by the icy eyes; and the toothless mouth had sneered and whispered—"Behold, it is rags, only rags."

SELMA LAGERLÖF: *Gösta Berling's Saga*.

THE GIGGLER

JAMES PATTINSON

MRS. LEAMON stood at the head of the stairs and peered down into the darkness. Her heart was thudding, and her hand shook so that the flame of the candle cast grotesque, flickering shadows on the walls.

A wisp of grey hair fell across her eyes, and she brushed it away with a quick, nervous gesture, as though apprehensive of what might creep up on her while her vision was impaired.

"Who is it? Is anyone there?"

Her words fell like pebbles into the well of darkness, stirring a ripple of echoes which slowly faded away into silence.

"Is anyone there?"

Again she was answered by silence, a brooding, even menacing silence.

She hesitated, her flannel dressing-gown drawn tightly about her thin body, her feet growing cold in slippers thrust hurriedly on when the sound had aroused her from sleep. The candle flame wavered, dancing in a breath of air.

"It was nothing."

But she remained unconvinced. Suppose there were someone else in the house—an intruder! Mrs. Leamon drew a sharp breath and her pulse quickened.

Yet how could anyone have got in? Did not Janet have strict orders to fasten all windows before leaving in

the evening? Did not she herself lock the front door after the girl had cycled off to her home in the village, three-quarters of a mile away? How, then, could there be an intruder? The idea was ridiculous.

Still Mrs. Leamon hesitated, and silence seemed to come up out of the darkness like a sinuous, living thing, touching her face with soft, invisible fingers. She almost wished that the sound would come again, though she feared it.

Once more she called: "Who is there?" And the echoes whispered back "—is there—there—" until they faded slowly away into the menacing silence.

She began to descend the stairs, one hand on the banisters, in the other the candlestick with its wavering flame above.

She had reached the bottom stair when she heard a gentle, metallic rattle. Relief almost made Mrs. Leamon burst out laughing. It was the sound of cinders falling in the kitchen grate. The kitchen door was ajar, and she could see the glow of the dying fire on the far side of the room.

She did not for a moment question that it was this gentle noise that had aroused her. She walked through into the kitchen, and as she passed the doorway a gust of cold air blew out the flame of her candle.

Mrs. Leamon could feel the air cool on her face, and realized that the window must be open. She fumbled

for the box of matches in the candlestick and managed to strike one. It flared up suddenly, blinding her; then it was blown out by a fresh gust of air, and in her nervousness she dropped the other matches on the floor.

She heard the door close softly behind her, and a voice said: "Allow me." Then another match rasped into flame, a hand took the candlestick from her and the match was applied to the wick.

The candle flame drooped, and then, as the wax melted, grew to its full height. Behind it Mrs. Leamon saw a fleshy, rather tall man, dressed in a sober grey suit. His hair was black, brushed straight back from his forehead, and his face was pale, almost giving the impression that it had been moulded of lard. The lips were full and so vividly red that they looked as though they had been painted. They were moist lips, soft and pliable.

"Pray don't be alarmed. There is nothing to fear. Won't you sit down?"

He put the candlestick on the table and, grasping Mrs. Leamon's elbow, urged her into a chair on one side of the fire. Then he drew up another chair for himself.

"Perhaps I should introduce myself. My name is Clanders — Stephen Clanders. I have been travelling all day; my car broke down. I walked some way before finding this house; it is a very deserted countryside—very."

Mrs. Leamon sat stiffly upright in the chair in which he had placed her.

"What do you want?"

"If I could use your telephone to ring a garage——"

"There is no telephone."

"Ah!" He had sucked in his breath as though it had been a spoonful of soup. "I should have thought it would have been wise to have a telephone—living alone——"

"How did you know I lived alone?"

Clanders gave her a rapid glance from his dull, rather muddy eyes. His lower lip seemed to vibrate like a piece of rubber as he answered:

"I simply thought. . . . Then you are alone. Don't you consider that a little—dangerous?"

Mrs. Leamon shifted uneasily on her chair. "Dangerous? Why should it be?"

Clanders veered away from the subject, as though he had lost interest in it.

"I live in a very big house with lots of other people. There is a high wall round the grounds—so high you might think it could not be climbed. But it can—oh yes, indeed it can."

He leaned towards Mrs. Leamon and touched her wrist. His fingers were soft and moist—toadlike. They sent a chill coursing through her veins. She drew her wrist away and pressed herself hard against the back of her chair. Clanders giggled suddenly and pulled at his rubbery lower lip.

Mrs. Leamon said: "I don't see how I can help you. I suggest you go to the village. It isn't far."

Clanders giggled again. "No; I don't think I will go there."

With a swift movement he drew something from his pocket. Mrs.

Leamon did not realize at first what it was he was fondling so lovingly between his plump white fingers. Then he opened it, and the blade of the razor gleamed in the candle-light. He began cutting fine slivers of wood from the arm of his chair as though in absent-mindedness.

"It is exceedingly sharp, is it not? It would cut off a nose or an ear as easily as you could wish."

Mrs. Leamon had a moment of panic. She jumped to her feet.

"Sit down!"

Mrs. Leamon sat down.

Clanders began to strop the razor on the palm of his left hand.

"You have no doubt realized by now that I intend to kill you."

Mrs. Leamon's hand went to her throat. "Kill——"

"I have to, you know. I am not responsible. That's what they would tell you if they were here. I have to kill people, and I like to do it with a razor. The blood is so pleasant, don't you think? There is nothing really quite like blood."

Mrs. Leamon tried to speak, and the words caught in her throat. She swallowed and tried again.

"Let me make you a cup of tea."

Clanders folded the razor and put it back in his pocket.

"That is a very sensible suggestion. There is no hurry. We have all night. Yes, indeed, a cup of tea would be very acceptable."

Mrs. Leamon got up from her chair. Panic was still bubbling up in her, and she had to exert all her will-power to prevent herself from running.

Clanders half rose from his seat. "Where are you going?"

"I must fetch the milk from the pantry. It isn't kept in here."

He seemed doubtful whether to believe her; his hand moved towards the pocket where the razor was, and his tongue flickered out and moistened the pendulous lower lip. But after a moment he sank back again into the chair.

"Of course—the milk."

Mrs. Leamon went into the pantry, closed the door behind her and slipped home the bolt.

A moment later the handle turned and the door shook as pressure was exerted on it from the other side. She heard Clanders's voice, muffled by the timbers.

"What are you doing? Why have you locked the door?"

Mrs. Leamon did not answer. She climbed on to a shelf, opened a window through which the moon was faintly shining, scrambled through and dropped heavily to the gravel path below. Then she ran—round to the front of the house, over the lawn and up the drive.

The moon peered out from a cloud and the air was frosty; it cut through her dressing-gown and the thin night-dress, but she scarcely noticed it. Fear of pursuit drove out all other sensations.

She had reached the gateway and had her feet on the tarred road when she heard a door bang. Glancing back, she saw a dark figure leave the shelter of the front porch and set off up the drive at a shambling run.

Mrs. Leamon ran also—over the

dark shadows of trees and the silver speckles of moonlight, her breath coming painfully, searing her throat, burning into her lungs. And whenever she paused for a moment she could hear the heavy thud of her pursuer's footsteps and could discern the dark figure not far behind her. Now and then she thought she could detect his high-pitched, foolish giggle.

The road bent suddenly, and for a moment she was out of sight of Clanders. There was an overgrown ditch on one side of the tarmac under the shadow of a hedge. Mrs. Leamon, almost exhausted, dropped flat in the ditch and lay still.

It was not completely dry. Icy water penetrated her clothing. She felt blood trickling from a scratch in her forehead. But she did not consider these things; she was listening to the thud of approaching feet.

They came closer, closer, until they seemed to be immediately above her head. Then they passed by, went on a little way, slackened and stopped.

Mrs. Leamon lay in the ditch, shivering with cold and terror. She heard Clanders returning slowly, as though he were searching. Soon she was able to hear the low mutter of his voice as he mumbled to himself.

An insane desire to scream seized her. She felt that Clanders must be standing just above her, gazing down at the spot where she lay.

Then she heard his steps moving on again, and after a while she knew that he had turned the corner, going back the way he had come. The steps receded and died away in the distance.

Mrs. Leamon got up out of the ditch and limped away in the opposite direction.

Beryl Daykin was astonished to see her aunt standing on the doorstep at such a late hour and in such a bedraggled state. But she was a capable woman and knew what to do. In a very short while she had hustled Mrs. Leamon into a hot bath and had revived her with warm milk and brandy.

Under such treatment Mrs. Leamon felt her confidence returning, and would not listen to the suggestion that she should stay for the rest of the night.

"My dear child, don't you realize that my house is unlocked? It cannot be left like that. Wallace can drive me home in his car."

Wallace Daykin looked at her quizzically. "You're quite sure there was a man?" He was being as tactful as possible, though he was quite sure that the whole affair had taken place in the old lady's fevered imagination. "Perhaps you had a nightmare."

Mrs. Leamon sat upright in her chair, stiff with disapproval.

"Are you suggesting that I am feeble-minded?"

"No—no, of course not."

"Get the car, then."

The door of Mrs. Leamon's house was closed but not locked. Wallace went in first, carrying an electric-torch and a heavy spanner.

"He's not likely to have come back, but we'll make a search."

Mrs. Leamon was surprised to find the kitchen window closed and

fastened; even more surprised to find the door to the pantry standing ajar but the window also tightly closed.

Wallace scratched his head. "Didn't you say you bolted yourself in there and climbed out by the window?"

Mrs. Leamon nodded. "I—I don't understand. . . ." She began to wonder whether she had, after all, merely had a vivid dream, whether there had been no Stephen Clanders, no razor.

When they had gone through the whole house and found nobody, Wallace made a suggestion.

"Don't you think you'd better come back with me? You'll feel safer."

But Mrs. Leamon, sensing the doubt he did not put into words, was obstinate.

"I shall sleep here."

"Well—if you're quite sure. Anyway, I'll wait in the car until the light goes out in your bedroom. Then I'll

know you're safely tucked up and locked in. All right?"

Mrs. Leamon carefully locked the front door behind him and put on the chain. Then she went upstairs to her bedroom and bolted the door on the inside. In a moment she was in bed. She blew out the candle and heard the self-starter of Wallace's car. Then the engine came to life, and the car moved away with a crunch of gravel.

She closed her eyes, relaxed her tired body and began drifting into sleep. Until this moment she had not realized how weary she was. Her body was warm under the bedclothes, and it seemed soft, as though melting under the spell of slumber.

Then suddenly she was wide awake and rigid, staring blindly, fearfully into the darkness.

Somewhere in the room a man had giggled.



If a madman were to come into this room with a stick in his hand, no doubt we should pity the state of his mind; but our primary consideration would be to take care of ourselves. We should knock him down first, and pity him afterwards.

SAMUEL JOHNSON (1709–1784).

FROM CHARTRES TO CAYENNE

THE MIDNIGHT MURDERER OF CORANCEZ

S. JOHN PESKETT

IN 1931 AN OLD CONVICT DIED in the French penal settlement of Cayenne. In the tropical squalor of French Guiana it was a long way from the green fields of his native country close to Chartres. Thirty years before, Edouard Brierre had been sentenced to the guillotine for a monstrous crime. By an act of clemency his sentence had been commuted to one of penal servitude for life. Some said it was because there was some doubt about his guilt. Edouard Brierre had no doubt about his innocence, and he proclaimed it to the last. We have, of course, heard this story before, and if we were to release all prisoners who proclaim their innocence, we should soon have our prisons empty.

An American humorist once wrote, "It is impossible to tell where the law stops and justice begins." This is an illustration. It is the case of a man whose guilt was doubted after his conviction, but who served out his life sentence and died with the query still unsettled.

One night in April 1901, in the village of Corancez near Chartres, three men were awakened in the early hours of the morning by the cries of their neighbour, Edouard Brierre. They found him lying, covered with blood, at the entrance to his farm. He was apparently very severely wounded.

The three men bent over him and he managed to murmur, "I didn't recognize him . . . struck down with a knife. Carry me in!" "Where shall we take you?" asked one of the men. "Into the stable, nowhere else," replied Brierre.

They carried him into the stable and laid him down on the straw to undress him. While one man stayed with him, the others went into the farmhouse. In the meantime Brierre said, "I was attacked by two men as I was coming back from the pub. Don't frighten the children! Don't say anything to them at all."

In case the attackers were still in the farmhouse, the other two villagers had armed themselves with sticks. As they came into the first bedroom, they were horrified to find the bodies of two of Brierre's children, Celina aged four and Laurent aged seven. In the second bedroom lay the bodies of three more of his children. Beatrice aged eleven and Laure aged six were in one bed, and on the floor was the body of the eldest daughter, Flora aged nineteen. All had been brutally murdered. On the way back to the stable the two villagers came upon the body of the farm dog Ravachol. Its throat had been cut.

It now appeared that Brierre was much less seriously injured than was thought at first. When told of the fearful tragedy in the farmhouse, all

he could say was, "The children! The children!"

By daylight the police and the examining magistrate in Chartres had been alerted. It could be seen then that the murderer had broken in by the back door. Brierre had been carried into the farmhouse kitchen, where he lay surrounded by the mutilated bodies of the five children. It was a nightmare spectacle. Skulls had been smashed in and the whole place was spattered with blood. Brierre himself had been struck down with a knife, but the children appeared to have been murdered with some heavier instrument.

From Brierre's halting account, the examining officials were able to some extent to reconstruct the crime. "I had been at the pub the whole evening with a friend. Coming back just before midnight, I fell in with my neighbour Lubin, who was going the same way. He took me off to have a drink, and then came with me back to the door. I had scarcely got in when I was attacked by someone with a knife. I had managed to get a hold on his throat when I was struck from behind. I must have fainted. When I came round, I crawled to the road and shouted for help. That's all."

No weapons were found. There was no trace of the knife, nor of the blunter instrument with which the children had been slaughtered. Brierre stated that a sum of 1,580 francs, in gold and notes, was missing from a drawer in a wardrobe in the second bedroom. This piece of furniture had obviously been searched, and clothing lay strewn on the floor where the

eldest daughter's body was found.

Edouard Brierre had been a widower for three years. In all he had six children; the five murdered that night and one other daughter, Germaine aged fourteen, who was away at the time staying with an aunt in Paris.

At first glance it was a clear case of murder for robbery. At least that was Brierre's story. But there were a number of points which did not hang together. How was it that Brierre remained in a faint from round about midnight till three o'clock when his cries for help roused the neighbours? Then there was the dog, which in the true Sherlock Holmes tradition did *not* bark in the night. Now, Ravachol was known as the fiercest dog in that part of the country. According to the neighbours, no one but his master could ever go near Ravachol without his barking rousing the whole district. Then it was well known that Brierre was deeply in debt, and the story of the 1,580 francs, a considerable sum in those days, did not fit in. It was curious, too, that he had asked to be carried into the stable and not into the house.

Now, in the second bedroom, where Flora and two of the younger girls slept and where they had been savagely beaten to death, an inkpot had been upset in the general struggle. Brierre's hands and clothes were marked with ink. Moreover, it was now quite clear that Brierre's comparatively minor wounds could have been self-inflicted.

Then the policemen found, under a heap of rubbish, a blood-stained

waistcoat and a short cutlass. Later they found a blood-stained ploughshare hidden at the back of the house. It was obviously the weapon with which the children had been murdered. It was also marked with ink!

By this time the examining magistrate, who is called a *juge d'instruction* and who appears at the scene of the crime in France, had had enough. He looked Brierre in the eye. "It was you, Brierre, who killed your children!" Brierre protested that it was not he. How could he have killed his children? Now, there was one good reason. At least it was a reason for Brierre.

For four years Brierre had had as his mistress a young woman called Germaine Lubin, the daughter of the neighbour who had offered him a drink on the night of the crime. In fact, this liaison had been known to Brierre's wife, who had died, as the saying is, of a broken heart. Brierre had proposed marriage to Germaine Lubin soon after his wife's death. She had replied, "You must be mad! You've got too many children!" This affair was not just a matter of a father seeking a foster-mother for his motherless children. It was known that he had a most violent passion for Germaine Lubin and was obsessed with the desire to marry her. Whether this is a sound enough justification for murdering five children, the reader must judge.

Edouard Brierre appeared at the Chartres Assizes to answer this charge of murder. The trial, with such a case compounded of the right ingredients

of murder and sex, caused a sensation throughout the countryside. Cavalry had to be called in to restore order. While on trial, Brierre was visited by his sister and the surviving daughter, the fourteen-year-old Germaine, who had come from Paris to greet her father. Then occurred one of those inexplicable moments which defy all reason. The magistrate himself conducted the sister and the little girl to see the prisoner. He said to the sister, "It is possible, Madame, that your brother will be acquitted. Indeed, I hope so and I wish you this happiness." He explained this curious statement by saying that he could of course have said, "Your brother is a frightful scoundrel and I am sure he'll lose his head over this." He had, however, conceived it his duty to speak with kindness, and he did not regret it. At this the young girl had thrown herself at the magistrate's feet and had pleaded with him to give her father back to her, as he had always been so good to them. This caused Brierre for the first time to shed real tears.

The prosecution was deadly. Apart from the motives already cited, it was found that Brierre was under the impression that marriage with Germaine Lubin would not only completely satisfy his passion but would re-establish him financially. He was in desperate straits. Everything was mortgaged, and his creditors were pressing in. As it happened, the Lubin family were far from well off, but Brierre did not know that then. In fact, they were sold up a few years later, and Brierre maintained then that an alleged motive for his crime

fell through. Nevertheless, at the trial the prosecution carefully put every nail in his coffin. In his defence he was particularly unfortunate. The advocate in charge of his case had just been informed that he was to be debarred from practice. A lawyer in such a situation could hardly be expected to put his heart into the job, and Brierre's defence was a mediocre and futile effort. The verdict was obvious. After just over one hour's deliberation, the jury returned a verdict of Guilty. Brierre was sentenced to death by the guillotine. It was Christmas Eve, 1901.

Brierre's sentence was later commuted to penal servitude for life. This is the kind of absurdity which happens when we do not know for sure where the law stops and justice begins. This act of grace on the part of the President saves the life of a man found guilty of the horrible murder of his five children. If the authorities were uncertain of his guilt—and they clearly had the feeble defence in mind—then why condemn to life imprisonment at Cayenne a man who might be innocent?

Throughout all this Brierre steadfastly maintained that he did not commit the crime. Later, as a prisoner at Cayenne, he often repeated this to visitors. Then, seven years after his condemnation, Brierre made an appeal to the courts, based on the fact that the Lubin family were indeed very poor, and that their alleged riches had been one of the motives put forward at the trial. This appeal failed,

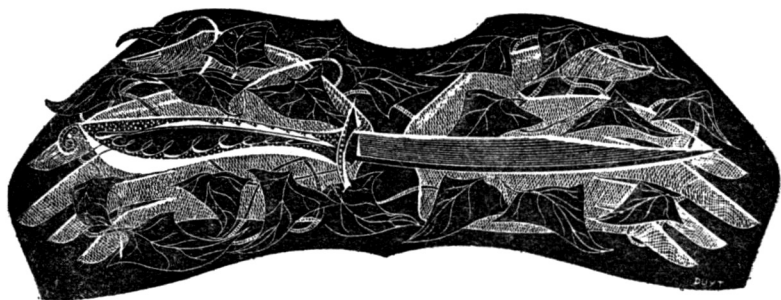
but the newspapers took up the case, probably in the absence of any more sensational news, and Brierre's chances looked brighter despite the flimsy ground for the appeal.

Gaston Leroux, a name known to all connoisseurs of crime fiction, claimed that Brierre should have been pardoned. He based this on the lamentable defence at the trial.

Many years later, another convict was said to have confessed to the multiple murder at Corancez, but no trace of the alleged death-bed confession was ever found. When murderers do confess on their death-beds, they rarely have a notary public in attendance.

The curious thing about this case is that the mystery could have been solved. In 1901 there could be no finger-print corroboration of the crime. It was only after 1902 that the finger-print system of identification came properly into use in France. Bertillon, one of the originators of the anthropometric system in France, later declared that it was quite possible for bloody finger-prints to be checked long after a crime. That was in 1909, and *Le Matin* drew attention to this possibility of a solution of the crime. However, no move was made, and now, a quarter of a century after Brierre's death at Cayenne, we are still not *quite* sure if his finger-prints were on the grim relics of the crime which for years remained in the courthouse at Chartres. Now we shall never know the answer.





CROOKS IN BOOKS

A review of some recent crime, mystery and detective books

ANTHONY SHAFFER

"THE CASE OF THE FLYING FIFTEEN," by Osmington Mills (*Bles*, 11s. 6d.).

Two plots seem to have got built into one in this energetic volume. Set in the Isle of Wight in Cowes Week, Mr. Mills has successfully avoided the temptation to o'erlard his tale with great gobbets of spinner and centre-board, but has, none the less, not quite been able to integrate his plots. The result of this is that at least 50 per cent. of the book is a red herring, which is altogether too much of a good thing in sailing but strictly non-fishing circles.

"MURDER OF AN OLYMPIAN," by Margot Neville (*Bles*, 11s. 6d.).

Miss Neville's latest homicidal exercise is set in Melbourne at the time of the Olympics. The fact that in this quest for the killer of Irene Francis — expansive, tentacular,

femme fatale—she rather jumps the gun temporarily speaking, does no more to earn her a higher award than a silver medal. She is edged off the gold-rostrum perch by reason of the book's lack of excitement, coupled with its dullish suspects, but saved from the ignominy of bronze by her jigsaw-puzzle ingenuity.

"DEAD FOR A DUCAT," by Leo Bruce (*Peter Davies*, 12s. 6d.).

It is people like Leo Bruce who will save the English detective story, as we know it, from a swift demise; that is, if it is to be saved at all. He neither mocks it, follows old tirednesses, nor thinks it easy. He is always original, often brilliant and brings to his task a dedicated mind and a jovial pen. The regrettable Sergeant Beef apart, he is not to be missed. This one is really good. It survives a country-house setting and

a comic vicar, to blossom forth into a solution (of three deaths—two poisons, one shooting) that is at once perverse and logical in the noble tradition of this kind of literature.

“SECRET DRAGNET,” by Bruce Sanders (*Herbert Jenkins*, 10s. 6d.).

Any book which starts off with a ravishing girl called Sally Dean of Scotland Yard’s Ghost Squad as its heroine puts itself firmly behind the probability eight ball. This one, with scenes on sinister yachtboard, an abduction on board a bomber and characters who range from “the uncrowned king of the underworld” (*sic*) to a sinister Egyptian political power maniac, makes absolutely no attempt to do so. However, it does go at a good pace, and is quite entertaining, even though the goody-goodies don’t get roughed up much. If only the priggish Dean herself had ended up being raped by the mad Arab on the floor of the bomber, all would have been delightful. But it is not to be. What a pity some authors can’t make the best use of their material.

“VENICE OF THE BLACK SEA,” by Helen Robertson (*Macdonald*, 10s. 6d.).

What a good writer this woman is. She has brought to this book the same attention to atmosphere and the same gradual tightening of the screw as she brought to the *Winged Witness*, her last and indeed first book. Orkney Island or London suburb, it doesn’t matter. Miss Robertson writes as if she has lived

in each for thirty years (which of course she may very well have done, though it seems unlikely). The plot itself—concerned with a couple of seedy, excessively genteel sisters, one of whom is murdered whilst the other disappears—is one to delight the heart of Alfred Hitchcock himself; whilst the characterization proves that the two-dimensional approach so popular with authors of this type of fiction is not indispensable.

“MURDER IN HAITI,” by John Vandercook (*Eyre & Spottiswoode*, 10s. 6d.).

This novel has a band round it labelling it the thriller of the month. This apparently guarantees it as “an original and distinctive thriller in the modern mood.”

This description would have been true if the month it had been published was, roughly speaking, November 1934. This is in no sense a derogation of *Murder in Haiti*. Rather it is intended as an admiring puff in support of a red-blooded thriller in the Olde English manner (when thriller didn’t mean whodunit, and when everyone from ruthless czar of international finance to intrepid, not-nearly-so-fatuous-as-he-looks English sporting detective was eight times as large as life).

Mr. Vandercook, though favouring the pre-war mode (this is his first book since the war, incidentally), is no slouch at contemporary motives for mayhem, as any reader who goes aboard the good ship *Vittoria* on the most fantastic gold hunt of recent fiction will discover.

Andrew Garve

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Too many duffle coats! Desmond Merrion, and Inspector Arnold soon find themselves involved in a case of great complexity.

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"A TELEGRAM FROM LE TOUQUET," by John Bude (*Macdonald*, 10s. 6d.).

This book has the sort of plot one feels like giving away, not because it's so original, but because it's so far-fetched that the reader has no chance of "getting it" from the given data, anyhow.

It is set in Kent and the South of France, and no voice, I feel sure, will be raised against the revelation that everything kicks off in a country house-party. (No mind will be poleaxed with astonishment either.) I'm not one to cavil about such a setting which, as every "A" subscriber knows, is as necessary to this kind of thing as were castles to the Gothic novel. But, really, Mr. Bude has been a little too cynical about the concomitant traditional lack of need to create anything more than two-dimensional suspects. Surely we could have been supplied with something a little less mouldy than: (a) the dominant sister and the mousy repressed one; (b) the florid fortune hunter; (c) the oily Frenchman; (d) the Bohemian artist; (e) the slow-moving, comfort-loving though razor-minded French detective; (f) the breathless young *amantes*, who won't let the prospect of a fortune stand in the way of their marriage—"If you don't care about the money, I'm damned if I do, etc., etc." I doubt that many readers will feel like this about the purchase-price of the book. Agreed that most detective stock-pots have got to have their stock characters, but must we have the entire contents of the larder at one meal?

"VOTE AGAINST POISON," by John Sherwood (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 12s. 6d.).

Really a most novel situation. A Member of Parliament is murdered, and in the resulting by-election the rival candidates become the chief suspects. The subsequent high jinks among the arcadian follies and ornamental lakes of one of the stately homes of England reach a level of straight-faced lunacy (i.e. every action is dictated by the exigencies of the whodunit plot) that might well recommend it to those film producers who once made their home in Ealing. In fine, a delicious mixture of meaty detection and real, non-facetious fun.

"RIDDLE OF A LADY," by Anthony Gilbert (*Crime Club*, 10s. 6d.).

The wily Mr. Gilbert is an old hand at this sort of tale. Once again Arthur Cook, unprincipled, flamboyant lawyer, sifts out in his illiterate way "'im wot did it from them wot didn't." It this time is a mysterious woman with green eyes found murdered in her house, and the solution reveals "'im wot is least likely."

"WIDOW'S WEB," by Ursula Curtiss (*Eyre & Spottiswoode*, 10s. 6d.).

Another good one by the authoress of the *Deadly Climate*. The hero of the book comes back from Korea to look up an old friend, only to find he has committed suicide. His wife has suspiciously disappeared, resuming her maiden name. He traces her and finds her involved in more deaths. Round these bald facts Miss Curtiss

weaves a sinister and thoroughly unpredictable *Widow's Web*. Good stuff.

"DEATH IN A DUFFLE COAT," by Miles Burton (*Crime Club*, 10s. 6d.).

What a happy thought of Mr. Burton to realize that from the point of view of recognition there is nothing that so baffles the observer as the duffle coat. Everyone in this novel wears a duffle coat—the murderer and the victim and the suspects, which of course makes investigation just peachy. As far as the victim is concerned, the practised or reflective mind will immediately see the possibilities of such concealment; but, none the less, Mr. Burton has once again produced a soundly constructed, exciting story that baffles till where it is designed to stop baffling.

"THE VOICE OF MURDER," by Margaret Erskine (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 11s. 6d.).

Good closed-circle slaughter of aged Victorian-type aunt with logical, well-concealed, if too swiftly explained, dénouement. The voice of the title comes over the telephone—that handy, horrific instrument, and friend of many detective-story writers, which so nicely conceals identity and, indeed, sex if need be. One day someone will write a detective story solely in terms of telephone conversations, and it'll be a winner. (*Blood on the Blower?*) Until that day *The Voice of Murder* will have to do. It is competent, neat and reasonably intriguing, but is rather a bit of an also-ran.

"FELL CLUTCH," by Peter Motte (*Cassell*, 11s. 6d.).

This book could have been so much more than just another better-than-average detective story. As it is, it turns out to be a little less. It is a suburban saga of a man who misses out just once on his daily routine of home to office and back home again, and unluckily picks the night when his Xanthippe of a wife is murdered.

The seedy, bitter-respectable atmosphere, with relentless circumstantial evidence building up, recalls the plight of the Marbles in *Payment Deferred*, but it lacks the fever of that celebrated classic by reason of the too-cursory analysis of the suspect's thoughts and emotions, the debilitating coincidence of the main premise, and the actual murderer, who is not in any way integral to the plot, but is dragged in as a sort of *Deus ex machina* when all else has failed. (This sort of thing dates from the era when ruffianly second cousins from Australia turned up regularly, unrecognized, in the villages of their birth, to do in some haughty Charlie or other who has chiselled them out of their birthright.) However, by and large, the narration is exceptionally lucid, and the book as a whole represents a very enjoyable evening.

"THE CHINA ROUNDABOUT," by Josephine Bell (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 12s. 6d.).

Another of Miss Bell's detached, well-written, intelligently constructed murder books. She shows such sympathy for her characters that it comes as a bit of a surprise that she gets

round to murdering any of them, particularly for the reasons given here. The plot is adequately described on the dust-jacket — The China Roundabout—a charming toy? A source of mystery? A motive for murder? At all events, as baffling a problem as Inspector Mitchell faced in *Port of London Murders* or *Death at Half-past Ten* (two previous novels by Miss Bell). Well, I must confess to being baffled myself, half by the plot and half by the plethora of people who at one stage seemed to my reeling brain to outnumber the cast of *War and Peace*.

“SUPERINTENDENT SLADE INVESTIGATES,” by Leonard Gribble (*Herbert Jenkins*, 10s. 6d.).

A lively rag-bag of fifteen Superintendent Slade cases notable for their consistently high standard. Each story is scrupulously worked out to the last detail, and the reader has in most cases an even chance to solve the case. Of course the dénouements are more inspired in some cases than others, but what a change to find a detective who has no tricks or quirks of character beyond a time-hallowed but always irritating refusal to give a straight answer to a subordinate who has asked for the identity of a murderer his chief has omnisciently admitted to knowing.

“CANDLES OF THE NIGHT,” by Antony Carr (*Cassell*, 11s. 6d.).

There is something of Ten Little Niggers about this book, particularly in the opening in which three men and three women are invited by a

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life so competent is his approach.” *Anthony Price (Oxford Mail)*. “Taken at its own tempo, it is quite beautifully done, an obviously relished blend of

Death

ingenuity of plot with the sharpest etching of stage and stagey people.” *Glasgow Bulletin*. “One must record how skilfully the tale is first of all con-

to Slow

ceived and then expounded.” *Laurence Meynell (Wolverhampton Express and Star)*.

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Thrillers of the Month from

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Mr. Orlando to dine at a Bloomsbury hotel. Needless to say, none of them has ever heard of Mr. Orlando; but the menu cards provide clues to the reason for the gathering in the shape of signs of the Zodiac. Again, needless to say, the link between the six is murder, and one of them did it. The whole thing is very pleasantly worked out, but if I come up against this particular twist again, I shall feel very tempted to douse my candle of the night by which I read detective stories.

"DEATH IS A RED ROSE," by Dorothy Eden (*Macdonald*, 10s. 6d.).

Miss Eden has a remarkable talent for combining the innocent, the eccentric and the sinister into one glorious, perverse *compote*. She writes in a style which enables her to walk this awkward tightrope safely until she is prepared to reveal what exactly has been going on. And she does all this without preciousness.

It all starts when an eccentric old lady puts an advertisement in the paper: "Wanted to let. Ground-floor flat in large West End house. Rent nominal for attractive girl whose names must be Cressida Lucy. Apply in person."

It is hardly surprising that this advertisement proves irresistible to a charming girl of the requisite nomenclature—our heroine, in fact; and she goes to see the flamboyant, parrot-owning, camel-loving old Gorgon. She finds that she is obsessed with the memory of her long-dead daughter, and very briefly her job would be to take her place. Out of a sense

of adventure, she agrees to stay, but finds herself trapped in a nightmare conspiracy, menaced on all sides by the odd tenants who infest the house (the voiceless Miss Stanhope for ever creeping round with notebook and pencil; the mysterious musician devoted to the dirge; and a used gourd of a spinster called Miss Glory).

The dénouement (perhaps the weakest part of the book, but this may only seem to be so after the preceding grotesqueries) is pretty far-fetched, as it must be to explain away all the diverse happenings of the book. But it will take me a long time to forget this forbidding and foreboding house.

"MURDER OF AN OWL," by Glynn Carr (*Geoffrey Bles*, 11s. 6d.).

The title of Glynn Carr's latest will have his many devotees wondering if this mystifying label means the breaking of new ground. But chapter one discovers Sir Abercrombie Lewker once again, dogged (as he would put it) by another opportunity of exercising his unique gifts for crime detection. Set in that small area of North Wales which Mr. Carr must know so intimately and love so well, this may be the mixture as before—but that is enough for Lewkerites. If you have actually covered the ground, you can live each step with Lewker; if not, who knows, you may be tempted to try it one day. This is an ingenious and lively yarn with a splendid sketch map of the district. Glynn Carr certainly makes fiction with a difference.

Recommended Thrillers

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JOSEPH TAGGART, *The Star*
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BOARDMAN

"INTENT TO KILL," by Michael Bryan (*Eyre & Spottiswoode, 10s. 6d.*).

Brain operation on South American political big-shot. Attempt to assassinate him with air embolism (allegedly traceless). Attempt frustrated at last minute by heroic, nicely principled doctor. Plenty of detail and hard gem-like prose. Dialogue very very dry. *Toute en toute* average Robert Mitchum style film, enjoyable for those who go for that sort of malarkey. Personally, I find that all brands of lazy heroics are a shade indigestible.

"WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED," by Victor Bridges (*Macdonald, 10s. 6d.*).

Exactly what the doctor ordered for those in need of what used to be called a "rattling good yarn." High jinks with stolen money and purloined pictures, boyish heroes, sailing ships and pretty girls. The background is East Anglia, and it is always exciting to hear of anything happening there, except of course for Mr. Bridges's last book.

"SCORPION REEF," by Charles Williams (*Cassell, 10s. 6d.*).

A really magnificent thriller—extremely well-written, and the greatest fun all the way through to its delightfully clever ending. The book starts with a sloop being found adrift 150 miles out from the Florida coast, her dinghy still on deck, a coffee-pot still warm on the primus stove, but no one on board. The log-book tells the story of how a man and a woman, under the impression that they are on an errand of mercy, find themselves

involved in far more sinister activities.

But a bald summary of the plot can do little to convey the sheer joyous excitement of the tale, which is told in a style reminiscent of James M. Caine, with overlays of Conrad, if such a thing can be contemplated.

"MURDER MOVES IN," by Elizabeth Ferrars (*Crime Club*, 10s. 6d.).

An exciting village murder puzzle with the comparatively few suspects all emotionally involved with each other. It's notable for the customary Ferrar's ingenuity (she takes great pains and always satisfies by reason of her great love for the detective story) and the number of people in a small village who can fall in love with the same woman. Bravo Miss F.

"JUSTICE ENOUGH," by Harry Carmichael (*Crime Club*, 10s. 6d.).

I consider Harry Carmichael to be in the van of detective-story writers, and this book—car crash fatally involving honeymoon couple; more to it than meets eye; ramifications in Spain and East End; surprise ending—is well up to scratch. But how perverse the detective story is getting; how two-faced. In fact, it is an axiom with those who set out to solve these things that what you read you merely interpret back to front to find the eventual answer. For those who doubt this statement, I recommend them to apply it to the next half a dozen closed-circle books they read, and if it doesn't give them the correct solution in at least three cases, I'll eat my deerstalker.

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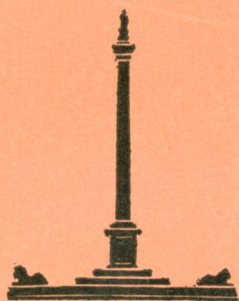
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