

LONDON
MYSTERY
MAGAZINE

35



A quarterly anthology of the best
CRIME, MYSTERY & DETECTIVE

• **FACT & FICTION** •

A Norman Kark Publication

TWO AND SIXPENCE QUARTERLY

Salud Amigos!

ASK YOUR WINE
MERCHANTS FOR THESE
NOBLE SHERRIES



SOUTHERN CREAM—CREAM

SADANA—AMONTILLADO

AFFINITY—FINO

MANUEL

FERNANDEZ

Y CIA LTDA

Sole Agents: W. E. SMITH & CO. LTD., 13 Maze Pond, S.E.1

STATE EXPRESS 555

*The Best Cigarettes
in the World*

The House of STATE EXPRESS. 210 PICCADILLY. LONDON. W.1.



*The ideal Gift
for the man
who matters*

Culmak
SHAVING BRUSH



THE LONDON MYSTERY MAGAZINE

"*De non apparentibus,*" wrote the great English jurist Coke, "*et non existentibus, eadem est ratio.*" All masters of the twilight, supernatural and the unseen, from Sheridan le Fanu and Poe to M. R. James and Algernon Blackwood, have been intuitively aware of this principle, and all beginners in this most difficult field of imaginative writing, a field which THE LONDON MYSTERY MAGAZINE has done much to bring under cultivation again, would do well to remember it. For them—not to insult their classical education but to ram the point home—here is a very free and angled translation: "The process of reasoning must be the same, just as credible, just as logical, for things which cannot be seen and do not exist, as for those which appear and exist in everyday life."

As life itself becomes more and more like the fantasies of a mere twenty or thirty years ago, fiction today, we feel, must necessarily keep rigidly within the limits of its own disciplined logic. Pick up any reputable newspaper now, and you find, in the news columns, reports of man-made satellites circling the earth, and, in the appointments column, vacancies for Rocket Engineers. Thirty years ago *this* would have been science fiction. To sum up, here is a simple injunction: to write mystery stories, as much as to play chess, the first essential is to learn the rules and the second to remember them. And, please, we should like some more mystery stories of all kinds. See page 127.

Meantime, let dons at Oxbridge delight, let canons at Barchester carouse, let maiden aunts in ivy-clad Mummerset cottages make whoopee, for another season of fogs and mellow fearfulness is come, and here, as its harbinger, is THE LONDON MYSTERY MAGAZINE No. 35. Now is the time for overworked and underpaid sociologists in Wapping, 'flu-bound secretaries in Surbiton and expense-account executives in not quite rural Surrey to tear themselves away from the 17-inch screens for a few hours—to enjoy the dainty delights of murder, mayhem and the mysteries of the demonic half-world elegantly presented.

EDITOR.

NORMAN KARK PUBLICATIONS, COURIER HOUSE, BLACKFRIARS BRIDGE,
LONDON, S.E.1

**You've
never had a
smoother
shave**



*You've never had a
smoother shave
A faster and a better shave
And think of all the
time you save
You'll like to shave
with Lazy Shave.*



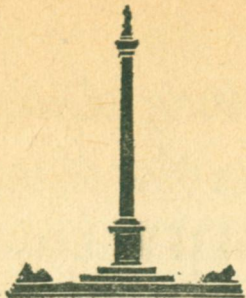
*Trade Mark
applied for

No brush, no fuss... just press the Aerosol button and smooth on that rich foam. Your razor just glides away those whiskers. And since Lazy Shave is super-concentrated, one pack will give you months and months of superb shaving. Join the multitude of men who've found the greatest-ever way to shave! Get Lazy Shave right away!

Months and months of superb shaving for only **6/3**

MAX FACTOR FOR MEN





THE LONDON MYSTERY MAGAZINE

NUMBER THIRTY-FIVE

7	Where is Thy Sting?	Gerald Hughes
20	A Witch in the Office	Rosemary Timperley
23	A Nice Young Man	Arthur Pike
27	High Fidelity	Richard Clark
31	Large Black Umbrellas	Frederick Gonner
41	You Can't Catch Me	Margaret Coghlan
47	Dead Man's Sea	Michael Donne
50	The Slave Detective	Wallace Nichols
59	Driven Snow	L. B. Gordon
65	The Tail was Missing	Geoffrey Humphrys
69	Short Measure	Anthony York
75	The Shepherd Hut	G. W. Bonnett
79	Driftwood	Peter Thornhill
85	The Mine	Robert Wells
92	The Laugh	T. J. Johnson
99	Mystery Competition	
108	The Search for Armando	Jack North
112	Too Many Questions	Cecil F. S. Hill
117	Crooks in Books	Anthony Shaffer

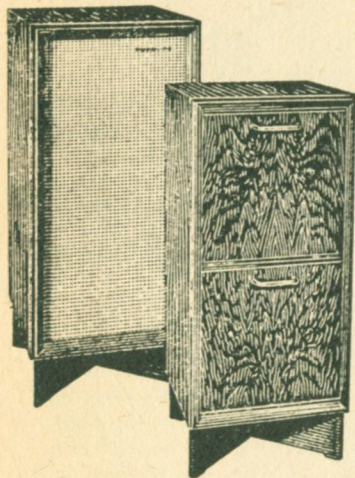
THE LONDON MYSTERY MAGAZINE IS PUBLISHED QUARTERLY
BY THE NORMAN KARK PUBLICATIONS LTD.
DECEMBER 1957

Copyright of all contents is reserved. This periodical is sold subject to the conditions that it shall not be disposed of by way of trade except at the full retail price; nor in a mutilated condition; nor affixed to nor as part of any advertising, literary or pictorial matter whatsoever.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES

U.K. and Sterling Area 11s.
U.S.A. and Canada \$1.75

Why you,
as a music lover, should choose
PHILIPS rather than any other
HIGH FIDELITY EQUIPMENT



Philips High Fidelity Equipment is housed in these two cabinets. One contains the amplifier with provision for any type of sound source—record player, radio tuner, or tape recorder. The other houses a 12" bass and a 7" dual-cone treble speaker. The price is 77 gns. with sound source extra. Separately, the amplifier (AG 9110) is 48 gns. and the speaker unit (AD 5010) is 29 gns.

With a radio tuner, a tape-deck, or a record player as sound source, this remarkable Philips equipment gives you *consistently superlative reproduction*—and you can switch from one source to another at will. You can also buy any part of it separately—to add to existing equipment, for instance.

But perhaps you were thinking of building your own High Fidelity system? Well, with home-built equipment you might approach the sound quality of this Philips system, but we suspect you might also fall short of its elegant, tidy appearance. The two cabinets—simple and beautifully finished—are at home with any style of furnishing. No bits and pieces exposed to dust and damage, no loose wires to trip over!

Ultimately, though, the best reason for choosing this Philips High Fidelity equipment is simply the way it sounds—literally too good for words. So we won't try to describe it. We merely urge you to hear it for yourself—soon—preferably with one of your favourite records for purposes of comparison.



Philips Electrical Ltd., Century House,
Shaftesbury Avenue, London, W.C.2.

(PR931B)

WHERE IS THY STING?

GERALD HUGHES

Illustrated by Del

MC MURTRIE watched the sheet peel back from the dead man's face. Two long wings of hair, more immaculately silver-grey than nature could ever achieve without the help of expert barbering, lay spread out over the kapok pillow in a bedraggled fan. The face itself looked ugly and fragile, and utterly forlorn like a fledgling bird's.

"This is what I wanted you to look at," the house-surgeon said.

The dead man's right arm lay across his narrow chest, stiff as a bent stick. The swollen wrist was twisted so that the swollen hand lay palm upwards in a cramped, unnatural position, with the fingers crooked to form a grotesque beggar's claw. There was a minute, livid spot in the centre of the palm.

"Technically the cause of death was heart-failure," the surgeon said. "Probably due to pain and shock. But this, in fact, was what did it. Really rather extraordinary. . . ." He gave the swollen flesh a detached and faintly proprietary prod with his forefinger. "The old fellow was stung."

"Stung by what?" McMurtrie asked.

"Nothing that ought to be loose outside a zoo. We had an emergency

call about half-past nine last night, and the ambulance was at the house inside ten minutes. By that time he was completely paralysed. He was still just about alive, but to all intents and purposes as you see him now. He was dead by the time they got him here. We've been in touch with his doctor, and it seems he had a fairly serious heart condition dating back some years, but all the same—" Absently the surgeon clenched and reclinched his fingers as if asserting their dissimilarity from the stiff and lifeless claw. "There's no reason to suppose whatever killed him couldn't kill a healthy man. It was something quite exceptionally venomous."

"A scorpion — something like that?"

"Possibly—I don't really know. Frankly, Inspector, the whole thing is rather outside my medical experience. In the London area we don't treat many cases of scorpion bite"—the surgeon gave a mirthless snort—"or anything like that."

"No, I imagine not. Did he say anything—anything at all—before he died?"

"I don't think so. By the time our men got to him, he couldn't move or speak; there was no indication he could hear or see, either. Poor old chap, he wouldn't have much time for explanations or anything much to explain, except that it hurt like hell."

The surgeon drew up the sheet, covering the twisted hand and forlorn, astonished face. Under a white shroud, in a disinfected sepulchre of white tile, the small corpse lay lumpish beneath a glare of white neon light.

They moved into the basement corridor, and McMurtrie sniffed gratefully the musty, unhygienic smell of lagging round hot-water pipes. "I'll get you the ambulance report upstairs," the surgeon said. "I don't suppose you need any advice, but if I saw anything crawling over the carpet, I'd put my foot on it first and arrest it afterwards."

"As a matter of fact," McMurtrie said, "I was thinking of using a lasso."

The dead man was Ivor Bulteel, a bachelor of private means aged sixty-eight. He had lived and died in the ground-floor flat of number 28 Porchester Gardens near Eaton Square. Sergeant Petherham opened the door. McMurtrie dropped his hat on to the seat of a Sheraton chair in the tiny hall.

"Seen anything, Sergeant?"

"No, sir, not a thing. But I won't be sorry when we're shut of this one. I keep feeling little bleeders crawling up the back of my legs."

"The best cure for that," McMurtrie said amiably, "is to tuck your trousers into your socks." Pulling on a pair of leather gloves, he moved past Petherham through the living-room door.

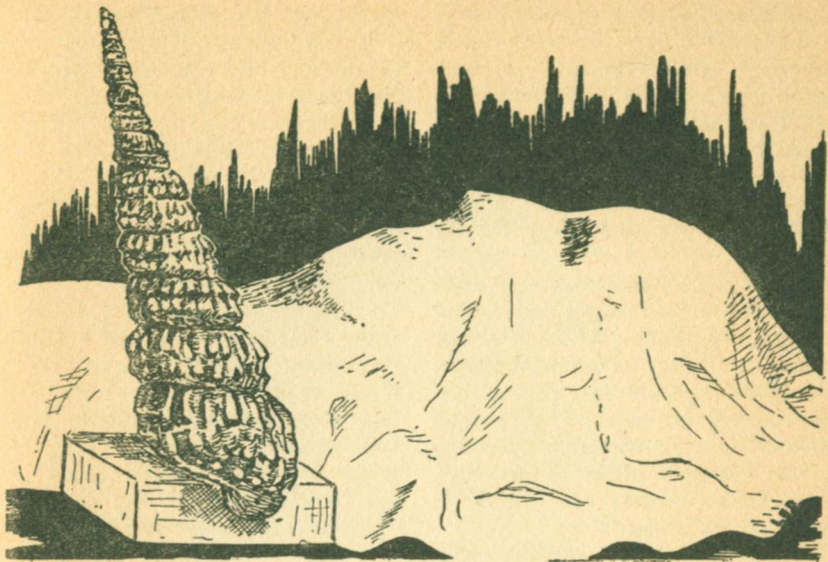
The room was a set-piece. As he took stock of it, McMurtrie began to

build in his mind an image of Ivor Bulteel to replace the fragile waxwork he had inspected at the hospital mortuary less than twenty minutes ago. The glitter of gilt and silver, the sheen of porcelain and polished wood, dove-grey walls and gold curtains, a darkened painting of classical ruins in the style of Claude Lorraine—these combined to create an environment of faintly old-maidish splendour in which an elderly bachelor of delicate tastes could make himself primly at home. For most rooms, rumpling and tousling are routine hazards of the working day, but this room had the trim, untouchable air of a museum, a museum in which Ivor Bulteel's public self was set out on permanent exhibition.

"It was over by the mantelpiece," Sergeant Petherham said. "Seems he put his hand to something up there and it stung him. You can see where the knick-knacks went for a burton."

In the centre of the mantelpiece stood a fine eighteenth-century clock. More than half the space to the right of this had been laid bare as if by a sudden, convulsive sweep of hand and arm. An assortment of objects lay on the hearth-rug and in the grate: four sea-shells, two enamelled snuff-boxes, a small Oriental carving of a bullock in rock-crystal, and a porcelain shepherdess whose pretty head had rolled across the carpet a foot away from her slender neck.

"For a start," McMurtrie said, "we'd better give the place a spring-clean. Phone the station and get some lads over here straight away—as many as you can grab, up to half a dozen.



And, Sergeant"—McMurtrie picked up the little porcelain head and rolled it absently between thumb and forefinger like a marble—"nobody knows anything about this little perisher except that it can kill people. So if you see anything creep, crawl, hop, skip or jump, don't touch it. Just lift up your skirts and scream."

The search lasted for two and a half hours. Cautious, methodical, meticulously thorough, the searchers moved through the six-room flat, shifting carpets, shaking hangings, stripping upholstery, probing into every crevice and hollow of furniture, ornament and utensil—seven full-grown men in leather gloves hunting a live and lethal thimble. At half-past ten the daily

woman came and, suffering from mild hysteria, was removed to her home in a police car. At a quarter-past twelve McMurtrie called a halt. One large domestic spider had been found behind the waste-pipe of the kitchen sink, and duly identified by a contemptuous entomologist from the Museum of Natural History. It was the hunter's solitary trophy. The five police constables restored some semblance of order and departed.

"It could have crawled under the door," Sergeant Petherham said, "or out of the window. Perhaps the little basket flies. It might be anywhere by now."

McMurtrie tore wolfishly at a stale cheese-roll brought in from the local pub. "It might be anywhere," he said.

"But it must be somewhere. We don't know what it was, we don't know where it came from and we don't know where it went, but we do know it sat on that mantelpiece at about a quarter-past nine last night and stung an old man so bloody hard he dropped down dead. That's a little trick that isn't performed by the fairies."

"Only he dropped down dead within ten feet of two people and neither of them saw what did it." Back in their accustomed place on the mantelpiece, the shells, the snuff-boxes, the crystal carving and the porcelain figure stood serenely uncommunicative, glistening in the full light of the midday sun. Petherham eyed them with dislike. "It gives you the willies."

McMurtrie chewed stolidly, swallowed and brushed the dry crumbs from his trousers. "I don't like it either," he said. "I don't like queer accidents that happen without traceable cause. Violent accidents usually happen for simple reasons. When they don't, they're inclined to look more than accidental." He reached for the two sheets of carbonated typescript which lay, crumb-strewn, on the floor at his feet. Statement from Charles Ivor Bacon, 17 Baker Street, W.6. Statement from Charmian Felicity Eames, 8 Copeland Square, N.W.6. "Well, there's only one thing left that we can do. Let's get hold of these two, Sergeant, and ask them what it was they didn't see."

Charmian Eames worked as a mannequin and photographer's model. She was spectacularly tall and slen-

der; a sleek and splendid giraffe with a stylized mask of make-up that accentuated the gentle giraffe-like hauteur of her long oval face.

"It was horrible," she said. "It was the most horrible thing I've ever seen."

"I'm sorry to bring you back to it," McMurtrie spoke gently, "but it's very important we should know exactly what happened."

"It happened so suddenly. I wish I could remember more, but I wasn't prepared—I couldn't seem to believe it was really happening at all." An inner struggle for self-control kept her voice strained and expressionless. She might have been recounting a story not of violent death but of some minor personal embarrassment.

"He was standing by the mantelpiece when it happened?"

"Yes, but, you see, I wasn't paying much attention. I suppose he must have been fiddling with something. He was a very finicky person, always tidying things up, putting things straight. It was a nervous habit—particularly if he was upset."

McMurtrie watched her long thin fingers weaving an invisible cat's-cradle in her lap. "Was he upset last night?"

"Yes—yes, I suppose he was."

"Do you know why?"

"Oh God, I——" Her voice trailed away and she shivered slightly. "It was a ghastly evening. It was stupid from the beginning and horrible at the end. I only wish I'd never gone at all."

"In what way was it stupid?"

"It was just pointless and unpleas-

ant." She shook her head, a quick, convulsive movement, half-petulant, half-distraught. "I can't see that it matters very much, now that he's dead."

"Do you know what killed him?"

"No." She looked up quickly.

"Neither do I." McMurtrie slapped his hand lightly on the mantelpiece between the headless shepherdess and a cone-shaped shell, smooth as porcelain, patterned in tiny brown and white dominoes. "But I wasn't there when he died. Perhaps if I had been, I still wouldn't be any the wiser. On the other hand, perhaps I might. We like to know everything, Miss Eames. Until we know everything, we can't tell what isn't important and what is."

"Do you like listening to gossip, Inspector?"

"I've even been known to pay for it." McMurtrie watched her large dark eyes narrow in distaste and smiled.

"Gossip is the policeman's raw material, Miss Eames. I don't despise it, I don't overvalue it and, as far as possible, I treat it as confidential. Gossip about what a man did immediately before he died, suddenly, painfully and for no apparent reason, I would count under the heading of vital information." He picked up a snuff-box. On the lid, minutely enamelled, a rose-pink matron reclined at her ease, while, from behind some well-placed rocks a satyr leered at her, his mouth open in a lewd, faintly idiotic grin. "And so it was a poor sort of evening. . . Why?"

"Well." She made a small embarrassed gesture. "Really it was all very trivial. If it's going to make any sense

at all, I'll have to start by telling you something about Ivor. I first met him at a party—it must be nearly two years ago. He was very kind to me. He knew some people in the rag trade, and he went to endless trouble. . . . It was he who really put me into the modelling business. We weren't—" Her long fingers parted and came together. "I mean, I don't think he had any special interest in me. We didn't really have very much in common. He just liked to help young people. He didn't seem to have many friends of his own age; he liked to be with people who were young and be treated—well, you know—like one of the boys and girls. He used to give lots of little parties; they were always extremely proper, everyone very sprightly and well-behaved. Actually it could all be rather a strain. I hope it made him feel young, because it sometimes used to make me feel awfully old." She gave a slight, wry smile. "But he—he was a very sweet person."

"It all sounds very inoffensive," McMurtrie said.

"It was that, exactly. Poor Ivor led a very sheltered life; he was used to being well looked after. He could afford to make a private world for himself where nobody—" She hesitated.

"Broke the china."

"Or even looked as though they might. He liked people to be—what he called 'sensitive.' That was one of his favourite words. So, you see," her voice, less strained now, carried a note of compassion, "it was very easy to hurt him quite a lot."

"Yes, I understand." McMurtrie took down another shell, fantastically armoured with radiating spines. He scratched the spines against his palm. "Now, to carry us over an awkward moment, am I right in supposing that Mr. Bacon isn't the sensitive type?"

"Mr. Bacon is the kind of person who could take very good care of himself wherever he went. I should imagine he's been to places that Ivor didn't even like to read about in books. That, of course, would be true of a great many people, but he chose last night to give a fairly crude demonstration of how the tougher half lived."

"In what way?"

"Well, as I said, it was all very trivial." She gave a brief, uncertain laugh. "I suppose I could give you an example. Ivor always produced a bottle of wine at dinner, and he was fond of having a little chat about it. Sometimes it used to sound a bit like the bishop's blessing, but it gave him pleasure and it wasn't really very hard to bear. Last night we had some claret. He said the bouquet was a trifle resinous, but it was a wine you could use to separate true claret-lovers from those people who would, in fact, prefer an honest domestic burgundy. Then Charles Bacon cut him short and started to talk about some terrible Australian hooch with a stupid name."

"Plonk," McMurtrie said.

"Yes, that was it—Plonk. He said it was a domestic burgundy with a bouquet like horse manure, but you could use it to separate the men from the mice. The whole evening went more

or less along those lines. Poor Ivor was full of fads and foibles and little harmless vanities—he was easy game. It was none of it very serious, it might even have been quite funny, only——" She raised her head and, for the first time, gazed at McMurtrie in direct appeal. "You see he was such a helpless old man; he simply wasn't able to cope with antagonism of any sort. It's never really funny to watch the weak go to the wall."

"You'd say he was deliberately baited?"

"Oh yes, it was certainly deliberate. But not important. I don't want to make it sound important because of—of what happened later. That kind of petty sadism goes on all the time. It isn't pleasant, but——" She shrugged her shoulders.

"But nobody dies of it," McMurtrie's voice was friendly and unemphatic. "No, I don't think you've made it sound important. Had you met Mr. Bacon before?"

"No, I gather he's a nephew of Ivor's. He only arrived back from the Far East a few days ago."

"I see. . . . Well now, let's return to where we started. Mr. Bulteel was standing here by the mantelpiece. What was he doing?"

"I don't know. I was aware of him moving about the room, but I didn't watch him. I didn't want him to see that I knew how upset he was. Then quite suddenly, he screamed. He screamed like an animal. He"—her voice faltered in bewilderment and distress—"he must have been in terrible pain. I saw his hand jerk sideways, and some things fell down into

the fireplace. Then he turned around and stood facing us with his hands held tight against his chest. I think he was trying to say something, but he didn't make any—any recognizable sound. I didn't know what had happened. I didn't know what to do to help him. Before I could move, he fell forward on to the floor, and lay there with his knees up and his arms still hugged against his chest, as though he was trying to shrink into himself. He didn't seem able to speak or even cry out—scream—anything. He only made a sort of choking noise in his throat." She shook her head from side to side. "I was frightened. I was too frightened to touch him."

"And what did Mr. Bacon do?"

"He started to unfasten Ivor's collar. Ivor always wore a stiff collar—it was difficult to get it undone. I tried to help him, but he told me to telephone for an ambulance. I used that telephone over there on the Chinese table. When I looked at Ivor again, he wasn't moving or making any sound at all. I was sure Ivor had hurt his hand and I said to Charles Bacon, 'Look at his hand.' He said, 'Better leave him alone. I think he's dead.' So we didn't touch him any more, and he lay there like that until the ambulance came."

"He was, in fact, stung on the hand," McMurtie said. "Did you know that?"

"Yes, I was told."

"As far as we can judge, he was stung by something alive."

"But it makes no sense!" The girl's voice was decisive, almost fierce. "Inspector, when it happened he was as

close to me as I am to you. If there was anything there—anything—I would have seen it. Good God, don't you suppose I realized that it was some—some *thing* that hurt him like that? Oh, I was watching for it, Inspector. I was watching like a knife because I was afraid."

"Yes," McMurtie said, "if it was there I suppose you would have seen it." He walked to the window and stood for a moment staring incuriously at the sleek black body of a Daimler parked across the street.

"And the one thing we know for certain," he said softly, "is that it was there."

Charles Bacon had left his room in Hammersmith early that morning and his landlady did not know where he had gone. The Rhum Baba coffee-bar in Matchett Street, Bloomsbury, where he occupied his evenings as a dishwasher, did not expect him until half-past five.

At a quarter to four McMurtie and Petherham sat together in Ivor Bul-teel's flat, alone.

"I wonder what they'd call this in the insurance business." Petherham scratched morosely at the rim of his ear. "Act of God, for God's sake?"

McMurtie hoisted himself an inch in his arm-chair. His eyes were almost closed. "What would you like to call it, Sergeant? Premeditated murder—something like that?"

"It could be. We haven't got far with accidental death. What would you say are the odds against old men in Kensington getting knocked off by invisible bloody insects?"

"Much the same as for old men in Wandsworth. All right then, call it murder—the man or the girl?"

"Or somebody else."

"No, nobody else. There's only one advantage to be gained from calling it murder; we don't have to worry about where this thing came from and where it went. It would have been brought here, and it would have been taken away. Somebody else might have brought it; nobody else could have taken it away. The man or the girl. . . ." McMurtrie thrust himself abruptly out of the chair on to his feet. "And I can do even better than that. It wasn't the girl. It couldn't possibly be the girl because the girl couldn't possibly commit a planned murder. Tens of millions of people in this country don't, and within limits they're a recognizable type. So it was the man.

"The man." McMurtrie moved to the mantelpiece. He picked up the spiny shell and joggled it loosely in the palm of his hand. "The man recently came back from the Far East with a tame scorpion. It was intelligent, loyal and absolutely clean. He taught it to turn somersaults, waltz, balance balls on its nose, jump out of his pocket, sting his uncle, disappear into thin air and flush itself down the loo. That was why he never got caught."

"You don't think he could have done it, either?"

"I haven't the least idea. Could have done it—could have done *what*? It only confuses the issue."

"I'd go careful with that thing, sir, if I were you," Petherham said.

McMurtrie had been idly scratching the spines of the shell against his palm. He stopped doing so, and gazed at Petherham in unfeigned surprise.

"It's one of the things the old man might have been mucking about with." Petherham returned his gaze, sheepish but resolute. "You never know."

"No, I suppose you never do. Bulteel didn't, anyway." McMurtrie looked down at the shell and laughed. "D'you suppose it's pickled in curare?" He pressed the ball of his thumb against the longest spine. "No, Sergeant, if I stuck myself with one of these, I'd bleed like a pig. We're looking for something sharp as a hypodermic, working on the same principle and self-operated. Something alive."

"Alive, alive-o." Petherham sighed dismally between his teeth. "Well, there isn't even a budgerigar. We might as well pack it in."

McMurtrie did not reply. He stood staring at the mantelpiece with the intent immobility of a naturalist who watches some rare and secretive creature emerging cautiously from its hiding-place into plain view. After a moment, slowly, softly and tunelessly, he began to whistle "Molly Malone."

"Are we starting or finishing?" Petherham said.

"We're starting:" McMurtrie glanced at his wrist-watch and moved rapidly to the telephone. "I want to talk to the cleaning woman. Bring her up here and keep her here till I get back. I ought to be back inside the hour." He lifted the receiver and began to dial.

"D'you know what this thing is?"

"No," McMurtrie said. "No, I don't. But I have an idea that I know where it lives. That ought to be the next best thing."

"Like some coffee?"

McMurtrie shook his head. "No, thank you."

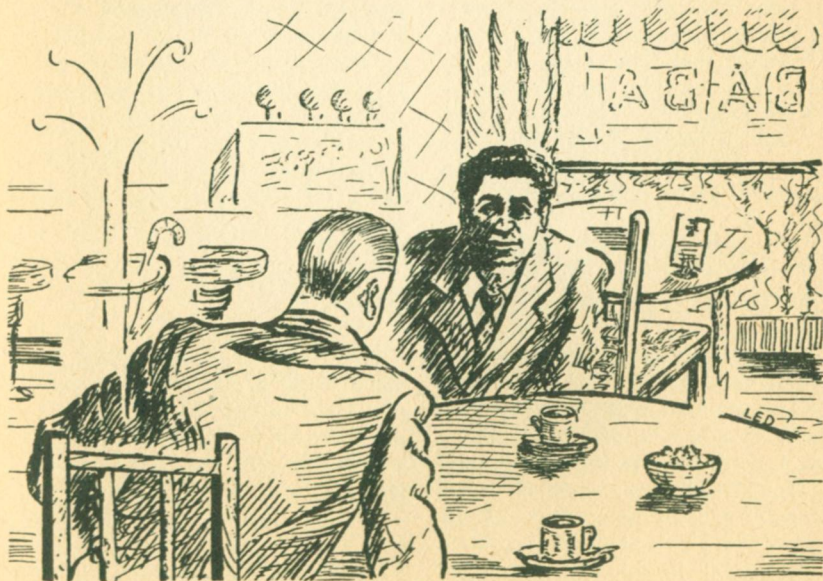
"I drink it all the time," Bacon said. "It's misery on the guts, but it's free."

The décor of the Rhum Baba coffee-bar in Matchett Street was a grisly tribute to amateur enthusiasm. The longest available expanse of wall was painted with a tangle of looping streaks in black and vermilion, like the ground-plan of some enormous still-born scheme for urban traffic

control. A case of stuffed humming-birds, shabbier than railway-station sparrows, had been salvaged from decent junk-shop retirement to stand on a bracket behind the counter. There were the usual rubber plants and bowls of congealed brown sugar; the usual long-player skiffled insistently from somewhere out of sight.

It was almost eight o'clock. Dusk was falling, and high above the street outside skeins of starlings swirled home to roost in Trafalgar Square. For the past twenty minutes McMurtrie had listened to Charles Bacon retelling the story of Ivor Bulteel's death.

Bacon had sat opposite him at a corner table, with his heavy shoulders hunched and his arms hanging slack



between his knees. His handsome, rather equine face had seemed almost vacant; his voice level and without emotional stress. His account had tallied exactly with that of Charmian Eames; there had been no addition or variation of fact. All that McMurtrie had learnt besides was that his parents had been killed in the war and Ivor Bulteel had been his guardian. For three years, before he joined the army, the flat in Porchester Gardens had been his home. Now McMurtrie watched him as he filled his cup at the Espresso machine, patted in passing the ample rump of the girl at the counter, and strolled back to the table.

"I hear you've just come from the Far East."

"Yes, I've been there for the last five years. I got myself demobbed out in Malaya. Did two years with a tea-exporting firm at Penang, but I had a bellyful of that. The tennis club, the swimming club, the snogging club—it was like Roehampton, only stickier. So then I travelled around doing one thing and another, and ended up in Australia. Have you heard of two-
up?"

"A gambling game," McMurtrie said. "Illegal."

"But crime pays." Bacon grinned. The careful self-control of his earlier narrative had vanished, and he seemed relaxed and expansive. "I got into a hard school one night and my luck was in. I made two thousand nicker—two thousand in less than two hours. Those outback farmers come into the city and chuck the stuff away—it's the kind of thing that makes you believe in Father Christmas. After that I gave

myself a slap-up holiday. It was the best four months I ever had; but my wad got thinner and my judy went back to Sydney, so I blued what was left on a plane ticket, and here I am."

"What made you decide to come home?"

"I believe you're only lucky in one place once. And I hate to see a good thing turn stale."

McMurtrie took the sugar spoon and dug it through the sticky brown crust in the bowl. He said, "You seem to have struck lucky again."

"How's that?"

"You're Bulteel's next of kin, aren't you? He died intestate."

"Did he?" Bacon rubbed his hand slowly across his mouth. He leant his elbow on the table, and the hand passed on to prop his chin, leaving his face grave and disinterested. "That's a most surprising thing."

"Perhaps it is," McMurtrie said. "On the other hand, he doesn't sound the sort of man who'd find it easy to reconcile himself to the idea of death. You have to accept death before you can make a will. Did you think your uncle had changed much, Mr. Bacon?"

"No," Bacon said. "He hadn't changed at all."

"A bit of an old woman." McMurtrie gently levered the embedded sugar spoon with his forefinger. "Why did you want to see him again? Not, I gather, to be polite."

Bacon grinned. It was a grin like a satyr's, mouth quirked at the corners, lower jaw hanging slack. He looked alert and confident, yet, at the same time, faintly loutish, and for all the

alertness, faintly stupid. "You've been talking to Miss Muffet," he said.

"I talked to Miss Eames."

"She tell you I took the mickey out of the old man?"

"Yes, I gathered that. Did you?"

"Yes." Bacon stretched his heavy shoulders and leant back in his chair.

"Yes, I did. It was something I'd been wanting to do for years. You see, I never got on with him, Inspector. Is that what you wanted to know? For one thing, I was always so bloody unrefined. I used to say boo to all the little girls who wanted to hold hands with the little boys who wanted to design for the ballet. I even used to touch the china. If you'd seen me, you'd never have believed that I came from such a beautiful home."

"It's a pleasant place," McMurtrie said. His voice was quiet and without expression.

"Fit for a queen." Bacon chuckled in soft derision. "But then, you see, I was never the type. Well, that's it, Inspector, if that's what you came to find out. I suppose I'd have made a bigger point of liking him if I'd known he was going to drop down dead; but there are plenty of people who would tell you I didn't, and there's no reason at all why it shouldn't be me." The grin still lingered, but now it was bleak and bellidose, set across his face like a mask. "Anything more I can tell you?"

"No. Unless you can remember something—anything that might help us to find out how your uncle died."

"We both of us searched, Inspector. We saw nothing—nothing at all."

"There were some ornaments scattered about on the floor."

"That's right, he knocked them over. I told you. Still, I don't suppose he was bitten by one of his pretties."

"No, it doesn't seem likely." McMurtrie put his hand into his coat pocket and took out a shell. It was the same cone-shaped shell, intricately patterned in brown and white, that had stood on Ivor Bulteel's mantelpiece four hours ago. He set it down carefully in the centre of the table. As though compelled by some involuntary reflex, Bacon's fingers crept crabwise towards it. They hesitated, stiffened, curled back into a tight, hard fist.

"Take it," McMurtrie said. "It won't bite you."

"Bite me? Why the hell should it?"

"Well, let's say sting you. You see, it's only a shell." The cone was curled loosely, leaving a channel-shaped cavity from base to apex. McMurtrie traced the channel idly with his forefinger. "D'you know anything about shells, Mr. Bacon?"

"No."

"Shells are made by living creatures—a kind of natural armour-plate. While the creature is alive, so, you might say, is the shell. Like cockles and mussels—alive, alive-o. This, of course"—McMurtrie pressed his thumb over the hole at the apex—"is a dead shell. I expect it was on your uncle's mantelpiece when you were a boy. The scientific name for it is *Conus textile*. You find it off the coast of Queensland—the Great Barrier Reef. Ever been there?"

"No."

"No. Well, when it's alive this shell is something you need to look out for. It houses a creature that stings. It has a sting which injects poison like a hypodermic needle—here, through the hole in the tip where I've got my thumb. If you're stung by it, first you go deaf and then you go blind; finally your whole body is paralysed and, unless you get medical help, you'll probably be dead inside an hour. The pain is so intense that it sometimes kills people outright. That would almost certainly happen if it stung a man with a weak heart. A very unpleasant way to die."

Bacon said nothing. His eyes met McMurtrie's without seeming to focus, as though the two men were separated by a wall of opaque glass, and he sat with his private thoughts, isolated and alone. McMurtrie picked up the shell and rolled it between his palms.

"Supposing you wanted to bring one of these into the country alive. It would fit into something quite inconspicuous and small—say, a plastic soap container full of warm salt water. It wouldn't need exercise or fresh air, and, if the customs at the airport looked like finding it, you'd declare it quick as something unusual for an aquarium. Once you'd told them what it was, I doubt if they'd let you keep it, but I don't suppose it'd land you in any very serious trouble, either. After all, none would need to know how you intended to use it.

"But you get it by. After that it's a question of two simple substitutions: new shell for old, and, when Bulteel

was dead, old shell for new. You'd need perhaps ten seconds unobserved on each occasion—certainly not more. The live shell is safe enough to handle, providing you know what it is and keep your fingers away from the opening. Coming or going, you'd carry it in your pocket, probably in the same container you had used before, only this time dry.

"Of course you'd have to think how Bulteel could be made to pick it up. It seems he was a very fastidious man; a man who liked—who needed—everything and everybody around him to be just exactly so. So last night you gave him a little hell. Nothing serious, but enough to make him look round and check that his private world was all in order. It was a nervous habit he had; Miss Eames described it to me; it was something you must have seen him do very often. I talked to the daily woman, Bacon. She said that this shell always stood on the left-hand side of the clock. It has stood there for as long as she can remember, and she remembers you as a boy. But last night it had moved to the right-hand side. You're a gambler, Bacon, aren't you? How did you reckon your chances? Two to one on?"

Convulsively, like a man forcing himself free from the envelopment of sleep or stupor, Bacon shook his head. "What can you prove?" he said. "You can't *prove* anything. A stupid damn lie—no proof at all." He leant forward across the table, and his voice grew soft and slurred in an intense intimacy of hate. "You," he said, "you watch yourself. You watch out. I know you, you bastard, there's always

someone like you. I tell you—if you don't leave me alone, I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll——”

“You'll do nothing,” McMurtrie said. “There's nothing at all you can do except give yourself away. If you've got any sense left, you'll sit quiet and do nothing and wait. Anything you do, and everything you've said or done from the moment you found that shell until now, is potential evidence against you. That should give you something to think about. Last month I detailed twelve men to search a nine-acre allotment garden for the spike off a broken belt buckle. They found it, Bacon. It was dull work, but I wish you could have seen it, just the same.”

Bacon rose to his feet. The first spasm of rage had almost spent itself, but his body still shook with it as though with a fever. “There's always someone like you,” he said. “You

watch out. Keep away from me.” He turned and walked quickly out into the darkening street. A stocky young man left his stool at the counter, put three threepenny bits neatly alongside the cash register and went out after him.

“Where has he gone to now?”

McMurtrie looked up to find the waitress standing beside him. “I'm sorry,” he said, “I'm afraid I don't know.”

“Well, honestly, what can you do!” She patted distractedly at a loose lock of hair. “Honestly, we've had five boys to work here in the last three months, and every one of them was crazy—absolutely crazy.”

McMurtrie reached for his hat. He stood up, with the breakneck swirls of the mural behind him, solid, middle-aged and out of place. “Better try again,” he said. “I doubt if you could do any worse.”



The devil's most devilish when respectable.

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

The louder he talked of his honour, the faster we counted our spoons.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON.

A WITCH IN THE OFFICE

ROSEMARY TIMPERLEY



MR. ROWLEY, one of the directors, staggered into our office with a large map of London, planked it down on the spare desk and said:

"You're going to have Mr. Pemberton in here for a few days doing a little job. We're going to put you all on the map so you can't get away." He grinned and walked out again.

We were mystified, and could hardly wait for Mr. Pemberton to arrive and tell us what was up.

Mr. Pemberton had been with the firm for over forty years, had suffered from a serious illness, returned to the office too frail to do any serious work, so had been turned into a sort of glorified office boy. He took messages—unimportant messages which he always gave an air of great importance—answered routine letters and for the rest of the time read newspapers.

When he came to join the map, he oozed secrecy and importance. He was clutching a number of little pink paper flags on pins. He sat at the desk and balanced a large open ledger on his knee.

"You look as if you've got a Top Priority job, Mr. Pemberton," I said hopefully.

"Yes, indeed," he replied.

Myra, my impatient, red-headed colleague in the typewriter-bashing

department, said: "Pemby, don't be stuffy. Tell us what you're up to."

"Everyone doesn't know about it yet," he said, "just myself and the directors. . . ." He often started his speeches that way. "But the idea is that if there should be a rail strike, bus strike, power-cut, war or any other disaster that prevents people from coming to work normally, we shall know by the flags on this map where you all live and how to get to you. I have all the addresses of members of the firm in this ledger, have to find them on the map, then put a flag with your name and address in the right place."

"Like people playing battles in wartime," said Myra. "What fun. Can we help? I'd love to stick flags in."

"This is a most confidential job," said Mr. Pemberton acidly. "That's why Mr. Rowley asked me to do it. I can't accept your offer of help."

Myra couldn't take the hint. She leant over the map and ledger.

"Get away," said Mr. Pemberton. He looked up at Myra, and, to my amazement, I saw that his thin little face, usually so mild, was full of fury.

I had occasionally seen him look like that before when he thought someone wasn't respectful enough to him. He clung to his importance desperately, though he must have known that he wasn't a bit important in the firm now.

To make matters worse, Bert, the office-boy, came in with the tea while

Mr. Pemberton was at the other side of the room, looking up the district of an obscure address in an atlas. The boy, not seeing him, said:

"I hear silly old Pemby's got some crackpot job." Then he saw Mr. Pemberton, who was giving him a white glare, muttered, "My sainted grandmother!" and fled.

The rest of the day was spent in silence but for the sound of Mr. Pemberton's little hammer as he knocked flags into the map. He was completely tense and absorbed. Surely there was no need for so much passion in the driving in of a pin!

But I forgot all about Mr. Pemberton when I reached home that night. The house was in an uproar. Mum was dashing wildly about, a saucepan in one hand, a butterfly-net in the other, trying to catch our two budgies who had escaped from their cage. She couldn't understand how they'd got out, and she'd broken two vases and a statuette of Venus in her efforts to capture them.

Strangely enough, when I reached the office next morning Myra too had had an upset at home. Their main water tank had sprung a leak for no apparent reason, and the whole place had been flooded.

When Mr. Rowley came in to look at Mr. Pemberton's map he said: "I see my honourable mansion duly marked. Lucky it's still there. We had a fire last night." And he described the inexplicable fire that had started in the small hours.

Bert came in with the tea and said: "Rare howjerdo at my place last night

—we had burglars. They took my mum's diamond ring and my dad's false teeth. Pretty nasty. To take the teeth, I mean."

When he and Mr. Rowley had gone, Myra and I looked at each other in amazement.

"Four calamities last night," she said. "Isn't that queer?"

Mr. Pemberton came in late. He was white-faced and looked tired.

"Everything all right at home, Mr. Pemberton?" asked Myra.

"Yes, thank you," he said, but he looked so queer that I thought he was hiding something.

During the morning other members of the firm wandered in with tales of woe. There had been burst pipes and broken windows, accidents such as falling down stairs or slipping on the mat, electric fuses, gas leaks, all the things that often do happen in houses—but not all to the people in one firm at the same time.

Mr. Pemberton sat there smiling while these recitals went on. He gave me the willies. My suspicions were fantastic, but as soon as Myra had gone out to lunch, I broached them with him.

"Mr. Pemberton," I said, "what have you been up to?"

"So you know," he said. "I'm not sorry that someone knows. I thought I'd show them that I still have power, that I'm not a nobody. My great-grandmother was burned as a witch. She used to stick pins into waxen images. I stick pins into houses, like *this!*" and he gave a savage knock at random to one of the pins on the map.

"You're ill," I said sharply. "You

mustn't do it any more, do you hear?"

Myra came in then and no more was said. I didn't tell her or anyone else about my conversation with Mr. Pemberton, but the tension in the atmosphere lightened when he went home early with a headache.

Next morning he didn't arrive at all. Mr. Rowley had a telephone call from one of his neighbours. Mr. Pemberton's house had collapsed in the night; he had been buried in the ruins and killed. No one could explain how it

had collapsed. "Like magic, it was," our informant said. "Just like magic."

We still have the map in our office. The pink flags are dusty and faded now, but the pins still stick up perkily. Except for one pin, the one which Mr. Pemberton had struck so viciously and at random during my talk with him. It was so far embedded in the wooden board behind the map that we couldn't get it out. But we had removed the pink flag, which had borne the name "Pemberton" and his address.



If an earthquake were to engulf England tomorrow, the English would manage to meet and dine somewhere, among the rubbish, just to celebrate the event.

DOUGLAS WILLIAM JERROLD.

A NICE YOUNG MAN

ARTHUR PIKE

Illustrated by John Wood

BUT I FEEL SURE he didn't do it," said Miss Penny mildly.

There was a prolonged silence. Her fellow jurors stared in mingled disbelief and exasperation.

"Come now," said the Foreman sharply.

"Well, really," said Miss Marples.

Sharp and intimidating, the cries of protest gained in volume. The Foreman rapped the table with his knuckles, waited for the noise to subside and peered short-sightedly at Miss Penny.

"In reaching a verdict we must be guided solely by the evidence and not by any impression, favourable or

otherwise, that the prisoner may have made upon us," he explained judicially.

His Lordship had said something rather like that.

Miss Penny stared miserably into space. The evidence seemed conclusive, but she could not erase from her mind the calm, refined features of the prisoner. A modern Jack the Ripper, the prosecution had called him. Miss Penny shuddered as she recalled the hideous details of the medical testimony, refusing to associate those terrible facts with the young man who had stood in the dock. Why, he was little more than a child, so youthful in appearance that it called for no great effort of the imagination to picture him as one of her pupils. Several



times during the proceedings she had found him staring at her—her alone, as though sensing her compassion. He had looked away, but not before she had seen the strange, disquieting light in the great, dark pools of his eyes. Miss Penny had rarely seen a more beautiful face.

"Such terrible murders," she said lamely. "It is difficult to think of that nice young man in connection with them. I mean, one's mind boggles, simply boggles, at the idea."

"The man's as mad as a hatter," snorted Miss Marples.

She was a large woman with a faint wisp of dark moustache touching her upper lip. A director on the board of a large public company, she dominated her male colleagues by virtue of her formidable personality and unquestionable ability.

Miss Penny stared at the moustache apprehensively.

"Surely——"

"Miss Marples is right," said the Foreman. "Why, if people were judged solely on their appearance, half of the population would be in prison and quite a fair proportion in asylums." It was apparent how he would have accommodated Miss Penny had he been afforded the opportunity.

Miss Marples took up the argument and enlarged upon it. Miss Penny listened absently. She was visited by the sudden and unreasonable conviction that the boy in the dock had trusted her. She would defend him in the same way that she would defend one of her pupils against the lawful injustice of an irate headmaster.

She smoothed her greying hair and set her spectacles more grimly on her nose. Her eyes appeared enormous and belligerent.

"I feel very strongly," she began. "I mean, I believe——"

Her mind clouded with momentary doubt. She recalled that in the past she had frequently fallen an easy prey to the blandishments of little boys who had concealed twisted tongues behind the innocence of their smiles. But she remembered the way in which the prisoner had looked at her and was reassured.

"I have faith——"

Miss Marples threw back her head with a grunt of exasperation.

"This is not a question of faith, Miss Penny. Let us consider the evidence."

The jury had been out for only half an hour, yet already, by a process of natural selection, the shepherds had been segregated from the sheep. The three positive personalities — Miss Marples, the Foreman and Miss Penny—were the shepherds. Where they led the others would follow, and what they decided would be the decision of all.

The Foreman clenched his fists and placed them carefully on the table. "Let us take the points one by one. First, the question of opportunity. It has been shown that the prisoner was in the vicinity at all relevant times. You do not dispute that?"

Miss Penny shook her head.

The Foreman nodded. "Right. Are we, then, to believe that coincidence led him to the scene of the crime, not once but time after time?"

"No!" said Miss Marples with decision.

"Secondly," said the Foreman, pausing long enough to smile his appreciation, "the prisoner is known to have studied surgery. Medical evidence has left no reasonable doubt that the wounds were inflicted by a person having a comprehensive knowledge of anatomy. They were caused deliberately, and from their very nature we are forced to the conclusion that they were intended to induce the maximum amount of suffering before death occurred."

"But why?" interrupted Miss Penny. "Why?"

"That much is obvious," replied Miss Marples. "The man is insane and a sadist."

"Quite," said the Foreman. "And if we need further evidence of his mental condition, don't forget that his victims were always middle-aged spinsters." He smiled apologetically at the two ladies.

Miss Marples, contemptuous of his delicacy, turned her attention to Miss Penny. "Remember, also, that the murders were committed in every case on nights when the moon was full. What more do you want?"

"I have never denied that the murders were the work of a lunatic," protested Miss Penny. "I merely maintain that that nice young man is innocent."

Miss Marples and the Foreman exchanged glances of resignation. Then, together and with marked patience, they took Miss Penny through the evidence from the beginning.

Miss Penny sat silently, and allowed

the words to swirl unheeded about her head. She nodded absently from time to time. The tall, cold jury-room took on an unreal aspect, rendering more tangible the shadowy presence of the prisoner. She felt sure that he had sensed her sympathy, and, perhaps, had even liked her a little. Enough, anyway, to entrust his destiny into her keeping. He has a beautiful, sensitive mouth, she thought. If I had had a son he would have looked just like that.

She was aware that the babble of words had subsided.

"Well?" said the Foreman, glaring in intimidating fashion at Miss Penny.

Miss Penny sought refuge by pressing herself hard against the back of her chair.

"But that nice young man——"

The Foreman passed a hand over his brow.

"It seems that we are still unable to reach agreement," he said wearily.

He had not been near his office for a week, and he did not trust his partner, either with the business or with his wife. The responsibility of deciding the fate of a fellow-being overwhelmed him with its magnitude. Not that there could be any doubt, of course. He felt suddenly very tired. The tension found its outlet in a single, involuntary expletive.

"Women!" said the Foreman of the Jury with a disgust that welled from the depths of his soul.

There was an expressive silence. Miss Marples drew herself up to her full height. Very slowly and deliberately she rested her Amazonian forearms on the table.

"The medical evidence *was* rather

conflicting," she said quietly, looking directly at the Foreman.

Miss Penny looked up hopefully.

Six hours later the jury recorded their verdict.

Some months after the acquittal, Miss Penny was making her way homewards following an unusually late visit to a friend. She had missed the last bus, and a taxi was an unthinkable luxury. Miss Penny hurried along, a little breathless.

A full moon made magic of the night, and pale clouds whisked ghost-like across the sky. Despite her haste, Miss Penny had time to find it all very beautiful. She began to recite poetry to herself. She was savouring the last stanzas as she turned the corner.

The shadow came at her out of a patch of greater darkness against the wall and purged the night of beauty. She saw a white, contorted face and caught the spectral gleam of a knife before sight and sound merged into a world in which pain was the only reality.

Miss Penny's mouth was open, her vocal cords quivering under the onslaught of great gusts of air. Suddenly the pain stabilized and her faculties began to return. With the intrusion of the world, the agony gathered in her chest and abdomen, and, because it was no longer infinite, was accentuated by comparison with an existence where all was not pain.

The nerves of Miss Penny's torn body, acting as so many tiny antennæ, picked up the strident notes of a whistle and the vibrations of heavy, pounding feet.



A figure bent over her and she recoiled instinctively. She sensed a hand supporting her head, and, slowly, vision focused.

The shocked policeman could not know that the gentle reproach on her face was not intended for him. He bent closer as her lips trembled in faint utterance.

"But he seemed such a nice young man," said Miss Penny wonderingly, and gently expired.

HIGH FIDELITY

RICHARD CLARK

Illustrated by Del

IT STARTED WITH whispers, and Bonesett should have let it end with whispers; but he was one of those stodgy fanatics who must go prying and probing beyond their own understanding.

Bonesett's passion was High Fidelity, and he lusted after sound as most men lust after the flesh. The complex of wire, wood and glowing valves that jammed his soundproof study was the person of his mistress, and in it he sought to slake his desires. But the ultimate in ecstasy always eluded him, as it usually eludes the rest of us.

I didn't really like the fellow, but he had some superb records and, because I usually found something else to squander my money on, my own collection was meagre. So I used to go and hear all his new ones. Not that he cared at all for music as music; his joy was in the clarity with which he could distinguish the more obscure instruments, the ones that are only a subdued fragment of the whole in even the best recordings. That was one of the drawbacks of listening with Bonesett, he would chatter so.

"There! There, did you hear the flute," he would squeal.

He once followed the cellos all through the 1812 Overture and I nearly went mad.

I was there when he first heard the

whispers. We couldn't tell at once what they were, and I thought they were just a flaw in the pressing. But Bonesett had a sharper ear, and he realized that the little noises were human noises.

"It's someone in the orchestra," he yelped. "Talking."

"I don't really think conductors encourage that sort of thing when they're recording," I pointed out.

Bonesett snorted. "You forget," he said, "the conductor wouldn't hear them. Not with all that racket going on around him. And the chances are that the mikes wouldn't pick it up either.

"They're not as sensitive as the stuff I have here," he added smugly.

It was a good few weeks before I saw Bonesett again, for Chloe was pliant and very beautiful and, as she liked music, not terribly expensive. We used to go to the Festival Hall a great deal, and sometimes to the airier seats at Covent Garden, for Chloe had a Voice. She was being trained by an odd but excellent Italian, and there were rough patches which she didn't seem able to smooth. She sounded bell-clear to me, but I was at the fawning stage then and perhaps uncritical. I adored her, for she was fairy-like and pure, and would not let me maul her. She needed, I was sure, Help. That was why I took her to see Bone-

sett. He could record her voice, and she could listen for the faults and then put them right. She would be grateful to me for this service and possibly reward me.

Bonesett was unexpectedly delighted to see us. He grunted at Chloe and hurried us through to his study. It was even more tangled and crowded than the last time I'd seen it. I know little of these things, but I saw that he'd added more amplifiers and a great many boxes; boxes which I took to be full of valves and condensers and things.

"You'll be the first to hear it," he squeaked. "They *were* voices! Just listen to this."

He put a record on the turntable and started to fiddle with switches.

"I've recorded it over and over again," said Bonesett. "I've faded the music itself and brought the voices up." He crossed to a control panel and began to adjust its dials.

"Now!" he hissed.

For the first ten minutes there was only the music, muted and blurred. Then I heard the first of the voices.

"If I've got to play this once more I'll go daft," it said. More music for a few minutes, then the reply:

"Not a chance. He'll be paying us overtime in half an hour."

I recognized the next voice, because it was the conductor's and I'd met him once or twice. I used to wonder why he always mouthed as he conducted.

He was muttering a string of incredibly obscene oaths to himself.

Chloe blushed and turned her head, but I was too fascinated by the record to worry. Above the music, men

mumbled and sighed or made plans for when the recording session ended. At one stage someone told quite a long, dirty joke, and the lady harpist laughed at it. The first voice was the last.

"Thank God *that's* over," it said.

It was unquestionably an astounding piece of technical wizardry. As I say, I don't know much about these things, but I doubt whether anyone besides Bonesett will ever get as far as he did even in those early experiments. And I hope no one ever duplicates his ultimate achievement.

He crowed with joy at my astonishment, and he agreed happily to let Chloe record on his machines. We used to drop in on him quite often, though sometimes he wouldn't let us stay long because he was working on a new machine, a recording machine.

"I want it to match the other," he explained.

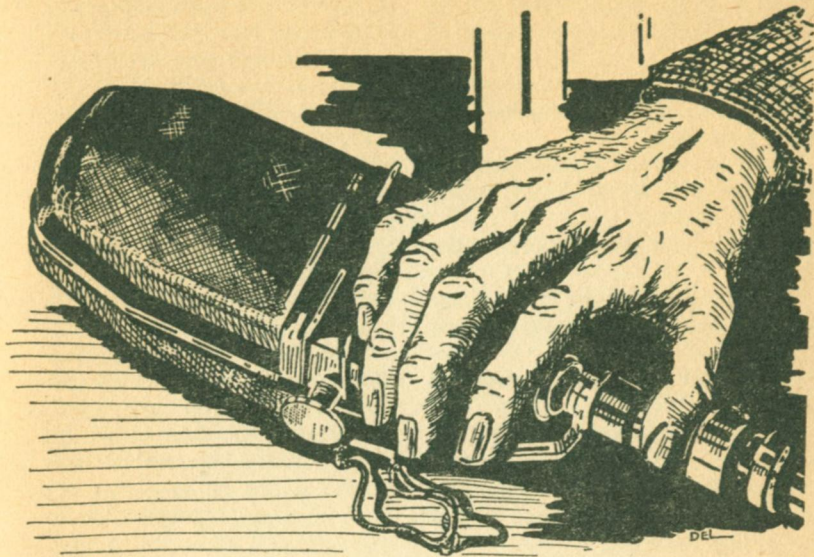
I tried to persuade him to tell some of the big boys about his developments, but he got flustered and swore us both to secrecy.

"Wait until I've got them both perfect," he used to say. "Then you'll really hear something."

But he used our voices, Chloe's and mine, to test his new recorder as he worked on it. Even Bonesett had a go. He recited Kipling.

As it turned out, by the time the recordings were ready I wasn't seeing Chloe any more. She had seemed to lose interest in me, and after I'd caught her out in one or two little fictions we had a row and she dropped me. If only I'd known.

Anyway, Bonesett telephoned me



one night, and he sounded disturbed. On the recordings we'd all made he had picked up tiny little background noises, miles beyond the range of our hearing, and something else besides.

"I can't quite make it out," he said. "There's something behind the background noises, someone speaking."

"But we were all terribly careful while you were doing them," I reminded him, "after those other records."

"I know, I know," he snapped, "but I can hear words in the background, and they don't make sense."

I made little jokes until Bonesett switched on the first recording, of me singing a popular song in quite a pleasant baritone. The voice was muffled, the background noise a little sharper and the third sound quite

clear. It was a thin voice, hollow and echoing, and the phrases it uttered were jerky and often entirely disconnected. But I recognized them. I was listening to myself thinking the thoughts I'd had while I was singing. They weren't very nice thoughts, and there is no need to set them out here. I almost wept with fear, but before I could say or do anything Chloe's voice started.

Her thoughts dumbfounded me. I wondered where she learned it all. My adolescent sentiment must have infuriated her, and I'm not surprised she dropped me; but if only she'd given me a hint, some little sign to show that all was not as it seemed.

Then the tape ran out and I leaped to my feet. My hands were wet, and I nearly screamed when Bonesett

turned a dumb, puzzled face to me and said, "Well, what do you make of it?"

"Good God, man, didn't you recognize the recording you made yourself?" I shouted.

"I haven't played it back yet," he said. "It's not worth it. My voice doesn't record well. . . ."

I yelled at him as I stumbled for the door.

"Play it, play it, you fool! Hear it, and then smash that damned machine."

He was still gaping when I slammed the door.

The next day he telephoned me. He knew what his machine had done, and he was beside himself with delight. He laughed until he wheezed and I begged him to stop the work.

"He he he," gasped Bonesett. "You're jealous."

When I went on begging, he put the telephone down. It's easy to blame him, but, for all his money, Bonesett was a grey and undistinguished little man, accustomed to being overlooked.

Bonesett barred me from his house, and for months I tortured myself. When I was alone I writhed at the thought of what he could do with that record, how he could humiliate me. It shows, mark you, how selfish we are, for at the time I never thought of the immeasurably more terrible uses to which he could have put the machine.

But in a few months I heard from him again, by way of a note thrust through my letterbox. "I am going to try something quite new tonight," he had written. "Come and listen to it."

There was no reply when I tele-

phoned him, so I just crept obediently to his house. He didn't answer the bell, and as the door was ajar I went in. I found him in a small space in his living-room, which was now almost as jammed with apparatus as his study. He had shot himself, but not very expertly, and he was still a little alive when I lifted him.

His eyes were empty and his face expressionless. In a strange way I knew that he recognized me, though he didn't show it.

"I listened to myself thinking," he murmured. "That wasn't all. I took it further." He raised himself a little.

"Smash it all. Burn it all. It's too much." There was no hysteria, no drama; it was all so matter of fact. Then he died: I put him down and started to look about the room. There was a tape on the recorder, and it was labelled "H. Bonesett." The "H," by the way, was for Harold. The recorder was quite simple, and unthinkingly I started it, winding the tape back to the beginning. Then I began to play it.

I heard his words, the background noises and his thoughts, but over it all a terrible voice shrieked and groaned. Aloud it wailed doubt and terror, and most hateful of all, utter truth.

"Know thyself," it is said. Now, Bonesett wasn't a bad little fellow, and he'd never done anything particularly vicious; yet no man, I think, can ever listen to his own soul before it has passed the comfortable filters of the mind.

I smashed as much of the machinery as I could, then I struck a match and set fire to it. I didn't play my own record.

LARGE BLACK UMBRELLAS

FREDERICK GONNER

Illustrated by Leslie Domeny



LUCAS LISTENED absently as the Inspector summarised his instructions. It seemed a simple enough case. This old lady — what was her name?—Miss Pelling, had disappeared suddenly a month ago. The search had been exhaustive but failed to find trace of her. There was no reason for suspecting foul play, but it could not be ruled out until she was found.

Where was this village? He looked down at the road-map balanced on his knee. Maw. He put his finger on a barely perceptible dot at the heart of the Pennines, at least three fingers from the nearest dot of respectable size. He winced.

He wondered about Miss Pelling. Probably she'd got sick of village life and fled to the welcoming fireside of a half-forgotten relative who lived in a town. Strange how often it happened that way. Or maybe it was a holiday, and for once she'd thwarted the voracious ears of the village busybodies by not telling a soul. Perhaps she was regarded as a witch—they still treated elderly spinsters with superstitious caution in some of these remote villages—and she'd had enough of it and broken away for a few weeks.

Still, he mustn't let his quixotic fancy fly away with him. A police-

man's mind should be open and objective, not influenced by prejudices and preconceptions. He smiled inwardly. He and the Inspector would probably now be at different sides of the desk if he had read Simenon instead of the Romantic poets and the Inspector had preferred *Christobel* to *Maigret*.

"There is one irrelevant factor which might appeal to your fertile imagination," the Inspector was saying.

Lucas's mind came back with a bound.

The Inspector shuffled through a thin sheaf of papers, some of which bore signs of considerable age. "By a coincidence, we possess records of queer goings-on at this village of yours since the year"—he scrutinized the faded writing of the bottom sheet—"since 1827. It seems that Maw makes a habit of losing an inhabitant now and again."

He adjusted his spectacles. "In 1827 a Miss Annie Todd, who lived alone and who was 'given to divine revelations,' disappeared without trace. There's even an unsatisfactory explanation given by one William Tench, an alehouse keeper, that it was his opinion that the devil had come for his own."

He drew out the next sheet. "Here's another, dated twenty years later. A boy this time, 'aged twenty or there-

abouts.' He apparently was 'somewhat lacking in sense.'

"The next one's dated 1856. One Simon Tyler, aged forty-five, disappeared unaccountably."

He threw the bundle to Lucas with a laugh. "There are half a dozen more. They read like an account-book from one of those fairy stories about dragons. 'For ye annual sustenance of ye Dragon, six maidens.'"

"I shall enjoy the office of dragon-slayer," Lucas laughed.

"If we had the records we'd probably find similar reports for every village in England. And for my money there's a deep and murky river passing right through the centre of the village, and possibly an uncovered mine-shaft or two."

Lucas thumbed interestedly through the brittle papers. "Of course there is a common factor in some of these cases."

"What's that?" asked the Inspector.

"In six of them the villagers held that the missing person was in some way mentally abnormal."

The Inspector guffawed. "When someone disappears in a village the neighbours *always* remember something queer about him, and if it's supernatural, so much the better."

He stood up. "Anyway, I can't waste time discussing the social behaviour of the English village. There's other work to do."

Lucas moved towards the door.

"You'll enjoy your few days of spring on the Yorkshire moors." The Inspector looked out into the fine London rain. "The county police have

given it up and we don't expect too much, Lucas. But don't let that imagination of yours run away with you; at least not in your report to the Super."

Lucas drove slowly and tentatively. Already he had taken the wrong road three times, and he was irritable. The narrow lanes all looked alike and the moors on either side were grey and forbidding. This part of Yorkshire had not yet surrendered to the frivolities of spring.

The surface of the road deteriorated and he drove a score of miles without encountering heavier traffic than a farm cart drawn by a disconsolate horse. With every mile the country became bleaker, more desolate. Even the infrequent farmhouses seemed lifeless and insubstantial, as though trying to draw away from him into the shadowy slopes of the hills.

Black rain clouds exaggerated the gloom, and although night was an hour away, he switched on his headlights. He drew up at a road junction, but, like the one before, it boasted no more than a black-and-white pole without arms. Impatiently he drove on again, and ground up a steep incline into what seemed the very heart of the moors. A wet, gusty wind sprang up, and he shivered. Wisps of mist floated by, and he descended the slope beyond into a dense white pool. He cursed and slowed the car. The rocky edges of the road were indistinct and the moors lost in a uniform blackness. Should the car break down, he realised, it would take hours to find help out there. But according to the



map the road must ultimately bring him into Maw.

He had a vague feeling of depression, of foreboding. The hills were not just obscured—they seemed to have come tangibly closer, to overhang the road.

Despite the engine's untroubled purring, he was conscious of a brooding silence outside the car. He glanced nervously in his driving-mirror. The Inspector had been prophetic—he *was* letting his imagination run away with him. He took a firm grip on the steering-wheel and tried to concentrate on the road ahead. He felt he understood now why these moors had held such power over the Brontë sisters. There was something savage and evil about them, something which oppressed him.

He reached the village almost before he was aware of it. The mingling cones of his headlights picked out grey stone walls and a cobbled square. He drew up in the square and got out. The mist was cold in his nostrils. He could see a number of dimly lighted windows, and from a telephone call-box learned that it was indeed Maw. A lighted doorway and the murmur of voices directed him to the inn.

The inn parlour was dingy and poorly lit. As Lucas entered, the half-dozen men about the bar fell silent. He felt their eyes on him as he crossed the sanded floor.

The man behind the bar was fat, thirtyish, with heavy black brows and sullen eyes.

Lucas felt tired and impatient. "My name's Lucas. I wrote a couple of

days ago about a room. Perhaps I could speak to the landlord. . . .”

At first the man made no reply. He stared at Lucas with dark, expressionless eyes. “Ah’m t’landlord,” he grunted at last.

“You received my letter?” asked Lucas, irritated by his slowness.

“Aye, ah got tha letter. Ah’ll show thee to tha room in a bit. It ain’t much of a room, but we’ve nowt better. You see, we don’t get many strangers in these parts.” He reached below the counter and raised a tankard slowly to his mouth. His sullen eyes never left Lucas’s. He took a long swallow, ran his tongue along his upper lip, replaced the glass. Unhurriedly he came round the bar and picked up Lucas’s suitcase.

“While I’m gone tha can draw tha beer thisen,” he announced to the half-circle of customers. Then he led Lucas through a narrow doorway behind the bar.

The bedroom was small and dark, and the tiny oil-lamp revealed an iron bedstead and a cheap dressing-table. The landlord placed Lucas’s case beside the bed and turned to go.

“T’bathroom’s along the way and breakfast’s at eight,” he said over his shoulder.

“I left my car in the square,” Lucas cut in quickly. “I noticed a yard at the back. No doubt I could leave it there.”

The landlord shrugged. “As tha wishes. But folks don’t walk in t’square by night and it’ll come to no harm.”

Lying in the narrow, comfortless bed, Lucas suffered the full weight of the depression that had grown ever

since he had entered these moors. The darkness was intense, and the mist seemed to seep through hidden cran- nies in the window-frames, so that even the bedclothes felt moist.

For a long time he lay awake, his mind revolving turgidly, conjuring strange, meaningless shapes. At last, by an effort of will, he subdued his dancing imagination and sank into a coma-like sleep.

Contrary to his expectations, Maw was no less forbidding in the early morning sun. Lucas stood by the window, feeling tired and dispirited. The mist had thinned, but the sky remained leaden and low. It hugged the summits of the hills, throwing long white tentacles down the broken slopes. The hills were like huge, black walls; the sky a sagging roof of cloud.

Lucas felt as though he were trapped at the bottom of some primeval crater. He turned from the window, and with a feeling of doom hastened downstairs in search of his breakfast.

The meal was plain but adequate. The innkeeper was as sullen and uncommunicative as before. He placed each dish in front of Lucas and retired hurriedly to the kitchen.

Lucas asked for hot water he did not need, and when the man returned took the bull by the horns. “A Miss Pelling recommended your inn to me,” he lied glibly. “I met her in London a couple of weeks ago. She said she lived here. We became quite good friends.”

The innkeeper’s eyes widened with surprise, and for a fleeting moment

showed unmistakable fear. Then the heavy brows dropped and the broad shoulders rose in their habitual shrug. "Ah've not heard nowt of 'er for months," he said gruffly.

In the doorway he paused, and spoke so low that Lucas had to strain to catch his words. "Tha's best let it be if tha's wise."

Lucas spent the morning wandering idly about the village. There was neither river nor mine-shaft—so much for the Inspector's theory. Few of the villagers were about, but once he fancied a staring face at a window and several times a curtain twitched as he passed.

He visited the blacksmith, the shop-keeper, the schoolmistress. To each he explained that overwork had brought him to Maw on holiday. And in each he met a sullen reticence and wary distrust that was identical with the innkeeper's. They smiled, they agreed with him, they remarked on the weather, but where his "acquaintance," Miss Pelling, was concerned, they showed familiarity with nothing but her name.

On the strength of his card, Lucas obtained the key of Miss Pelling's cottage from the village constable. He spent an unfruitful hour looking through her meagre belongings, then returned to the inn for lunch. Undoubtedly there was a mystery in Maw, but it seemed to lie less in the vanished Miss Pelling than in the valley and the people themselves.

During lunch the sky cleared and Lucas emerged to find Maw bright with sunlight. With the case assuming

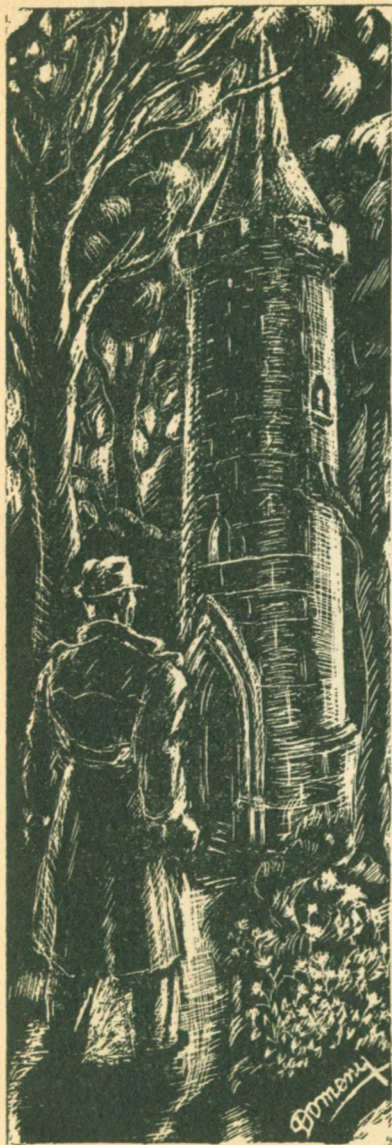
less and less importance in his mind, he climbed high up a grizzled hill that rose steeply behind the village. From it he could look down on the whole of Maw.

He picked out the thirty-three cottages, the school, the church, the inn. Maw looked compact, peaceful, uncomplicated. It was ludicrous to think it harboured any grim secret. No mystery could remain there long unsolved.

It struck him that Miss Pelling must often have climbed these hills. That she had enjoyed walking he knew from the muddy brogues and jars of wild flowers he had found in her cottage. Perhaps the Inspector had been on the right track, after all. These slopes were steep and treacherous. A slight fall on one of them could be fatal to an old woman. The piles of scree, the gullies and the deep heather might explain why the search party had failed to find her.

This seemed the obvious solution, the only solution. He shrugged. In that case the problem no longer concerned him, a detective. He would make out his report that evening, suggest a careful combing of the hills. He could be back in London by Friday night.

Inexplicably, as he made up his mind, he felt a twinge of regret that he was leaving so soon. In the sun Maw looked almost pretty, no longer sinister or depressing. At least it was not imperative that he leave that night. He glanced at his watch. If he hurried, he would be in time for tea. Then perhaps another walk, followed by a quiet evening in the bar. He



looked about him. Already there was a nip in the air. He noticed a faint track that led up the hill to a narrow fissure in the rock. A sheep track, he thought, but at least it suggested another world beyond the barrier of hills, a possible way out of the crater.

It was later than he had intended when Lucas set out again. He said nothing to the landlord, but resolved to be back before dusk. Curiosity led him back up the hill to the sheep track and the hole in the rock. The hole was wider than he had thought, and he felt certain that it offered a way out of the valley. He stepped between the crumbling faces of limestone.

An hour's scrambling brought him out behind a small col on the farther slopes of the hill. He looked out over a valley that was lower than the one he had left and perhaps eight miles in width. It was considerably broken by outcrops of stone and dense black woods, and here and there patches of dusty grass and the glint of water told of the existence of marshes. The contrast with the bleak greyness of Maw was astonishing.

Lucas sat on a rock and lit a cigarette. The scene before him conjured in his mind the one word, desolation. Looking down on it he had a strange feeling of unreality, of observing in full consciousness the wasteland of nightmare.

The woods encroached to the base of the hill on which he sat like a dark sea, and nowhere in the vast expanse could he detect any sign of human life: no cultivation, no cottages, not even a sheep. Night seemed to reach here earlier than Maw, and already

the farther woods and marshes were swallowed up in the gloom. Night was again bringing its mists, and a faint miasma hovered above the marshes and between the trees. There was a strange hush about him, and try as he might he could hear no song of birds. The grey roof of a building caught his eye, barely visible above the trees at the centre of the wood below. It looked like a tower, but he could not be sure.

Leisurely he got up and descended the slope. The hill was already in shadow, and at the bottom, he told himself, he would turn back.

As he walked, he wondered if Miss Pelling's walks had ever brought her this way. As though evoked by his thoughts, he glimpsed a small bunch of wild flowers at the foot of the nearest tree. At once his mind leapt to the jars of wild flowers in Miss Pelling's cottage. But it was rash to connect them with her. Children could have dropped them. Even if they were hers, they need have no connection with her disappearance.

He picked up the tiny, shrivelled bunch. But what if there were others? A trail that would lead him to her? The fancy took on the attraction of truth, and he began darting in and out among the trees, stooping low to search the ground. Here, with the inevitability of fate, was a snowdrop, there a violet. He picked them up, adding them to his bunch.

He was possessed by a wild, unfamiliar elation. He rushed deeper into the wood, oblivious to time and direction.

Suddenly he realized that he could

no longer see. Night had fallen about him, black and intense. Only the nearer trees were visible, their trunks pale and close like the bars of a cage. He felt a surge of alarm. What a fool he had been! Now he was lost.

Clutching the flowers, he panicked, rushing hither and thither until halted by trunks that grew suddenly closer. He stood panting, shivering, fighting to control his catalytic imagination. Painstakingly, he tried to regain his sense of direction. He started one way, paused, went another.

Branches clutched at him, whipped his face. Briers, toughened by a year's exposure, seared his hands, tripped him like wires. What must have been a bat swooped low over him from behind, squeaked once and sped away on palpitating wings.

He fell back against a tree, gasping for air. He was unreasonably frightened. Of what, he asked himself. Surely not the darkness, the loneliness, of being lost. Of what, then? He shivered violently and stumbled on.

At last he glimpsed the vague, white shape of a building through the trees and made blindly towards it. A brier lashed across his face and he tasted the salt of blood.

He burst into a small clearing, and there, unmistakably, was the tower he had seen from the hill. There was no moon, yet the pale, old walls glowed with a curious, phosphorescent light. There was something phantom-like in the way they rose solidly only to dissolve abruptly, twenty feet above him, in mist and darkness.

Lucas felt cold, and the mist had soaked him to the skin. His shivering

was violent and incessant, and instinctively he knew that he must find shelter here until daylight. Hands outstretched, he began fumbling his way along the harsh, circular wall, sobbing with frustration and fatigue. There must be a door somewhere.

At last his fingers found the edge of a stone lintel, and he felt the warm, rough grain of a wooden door. He took out his cigarette-lighter and cupped the tiny flame in his hands. Though the tower was obviously uninhabited, he knocked with his bunched fist, and the sound was soaked up by the heavy oak. He kicked desperately, and heard the echoes crash away into the emptiness within.

He felt the door move beneath his foot and put his shoulder to it. It swung back with surprising ease, and he was met by a draught of sharp, almost sickly, air. He thrust his way in recklessly, and leaned with his back to the hard wood.

For several minutes he did not move, allowing the convulsed labourings of his heart and lungs gradually to subside. His eyes and ears tried to pierce the heavy gloom about him, but it was some other sense that ignited a new fear, an irrational, superstitious fear that clutched at the roots of his hair and curled along his spine.

Once more he controlled himself on the edge of panic. His imagination was playing tricks with him. It was as though he were a child again for whom every shadow held a nameless horror. Somehow he must control his imagination. Far better to spend a night here than fight blindly through

an unfamiliar wood and end his days in a marsh. He swept back his hair and took an uncertain step forward.

The flame of his lighter was feeble and he could see less than a yard ahead of him. He could see a floor of stone and sensed a high roof. There was no draught, and the sickly smell was pungent and unpleasant. Probably bats, he thought.

His hand brushed a wall, and carefully he felt his way along it. His footfalls echoed disturbingly and he tried to deaden them. Suddenly he had an overwhelming sensation of being watched, and terror leapt up in him. Again the skin moved along his scalp and fear gripped him like a shock. His shin struck stone and he gasped with pain. The lighter nearly fell from his grasp. He had a desire to run, but he no longer knew the position of the door.

He lowered the light and saw that his leg had struck the lowest of a narrow flight of steps. They rose in a spiral within the thickness of the wall, proving the existence of a higher floor. He felt a powerful compulsion to climb them. The smell was nauseating, the feeling of being watched terrifying in its certainty. It was as though some nameless, sentient being lurked, watching his every movement, waiting to fulfil some malevolent purpose with him. His eyes tried to pierce the great reaches of blackness, and recoiled in horror without desecrating anything. If he could only get to the roof and the air . . .

Slowly, fearfully, he mounted the steps, dragging his back along the wall. His eyes were turned behind

him, expectant, staring into impenetrable blackness.

Step by step, up and up, he went. His hands quested for a break in the wall, but found none. The stairs seemed interminable, yet the upper floor must be near. He no longer felt he was being watched, but a new realization arose in him, grew into horrifying certainty. The thing from below could no longer see him because of the spiral, but now it was following him, dogging him silently up the stairs. He was trapped! Now there was no going back. Panting heavily, he quickened his pace. If he could only reach the roof. . . .

The doorway caught him by surprise so that he fell to his knees on a stone floor. The light went out, but its last flicker showed him a tiny, yellow

flower lying between his feet.

His hands pressed to the stone, his head cocked, he sensed rather than heard a whisper of movement on the stairs. The sweat from his forehead smarted his eyes. The stench up here was stronger, suffocating him. "Bats, bats . . ." he muttered aloud.

Desperately, he staggered away from the door, stood there swaying. The darkness was thick, complete; the air rank. He felt the presence come closer, pause in the doorway, watch him again.

He struck again and again at the lighter. His head turned from side to side, striving to see where seeing was impossible. Then there was a new movement, this time above his head, there in the roof.

He half-turned, felt the thing be-



hind him move into the room. He was aware of something in his hand that his fingers had torn to shreds. Miss Pelling's wild flowers! Instinctively, he knew that the secret was here, with him in the room. He had found Miss Pelling.

With his last strength he ignored the thing behind him, raised the lighter high above his head. He must know. He must see.

He struck and struck at the lighter, felt the thing close in on him. Struck, and the recalcitrant wick burst into flame. In terrible fascination he raised his stricken eyes. He saw beams, a

row of thick, black beams, and hanging from those beams . . . "Large black umbrellas!" he cried idiotically.

Then the thing from the darkness reared itself above him. And in that instant he knew that he was wrong, knew the secret of Maw, of Miss Pelling, knew that the beams did not hold large black umbrellas. He felt something black flow into his soul. He screamed, and the sound flew back mockingly from the high roof. He sobbed, began to gibber. Then in the last moment of human consciousness he knew that he was no longer gibbering—he was squeaking like a bat.



The bat that flits at close of eve
Has left the brain that won't believe.

WILLIAM BLAKE.

Like one that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turned round walks on,
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows, a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE.

YOU CAN'T CATCH ME

MARGARET COGHLAN

Illustrated by Rolf Harris

THE CAR WAS SWALLOWED up by the gloom and the driving rain, and Ruth Clark turned slowly back to the house.

The fear that had been in the background all day crept closer, keeping pace with her as she walked, scurrying before her into the darkening house.

The long mirror in the hall cast back her reflection, but the shadows turned the neat, middle-aged figure into that of a stranger—one who watched and copied her every move.

Hurriedly crossing to the sitting-room, she drew a chair to the fire and lit an unaccustomed cigarette.

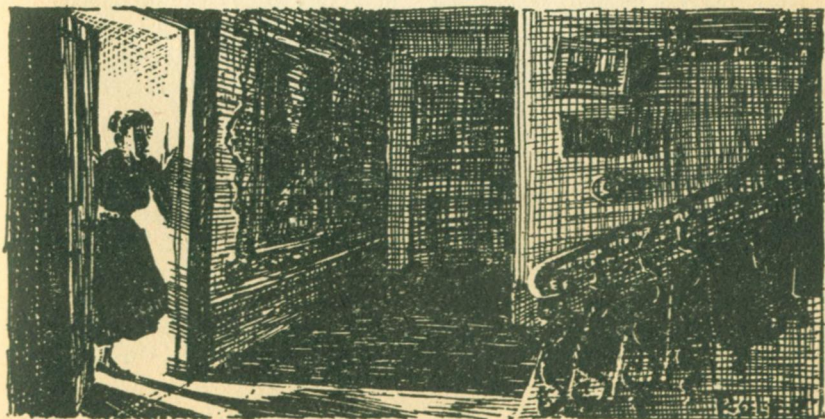
It was twenty-past seven. At least

two hours before Stephen would be home again.

He had known she was nervous. "I hate leaving you alone, dear," he had said. "But if I swing this deal tonight, we'll be able to sell this tomb." He had smiled tenderly. "Maybe buy a place on the coast. You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

Again Ruth had tried to tell him that her money was his. They did not have to wait; they could go right away tonight.

But it had been no use. Stephen's lips had set. "Don't let's have all that again, darling," he had said. "You know how tongues wagged when we got married. A man can't marry a wealthy woman fifteen years older than himself and not expect gossip. If



I let you finance us now, I'd be just the fortune-hunter I've no doubt they said I was."

Leaning back, her eyes closed, Ruth felt again his arms around her, and her heart beat quickly. The happiness of these last few months. From plain, middle-aged Ruth Parker to loved, wanted Mrs. Stephen Clark. It was like a dream.

Suddenly a door closed. She rose slowly to her feet. The rain had stopped, but the wind had gathered strength. She could hear it among the trees; pushing at the windows.

Couldn't it have banged a door shut? But the door had not banged. It had closed, gently. But who . . . ? She was alone in the house!

Hands clenched tightly, she crossed the room and opened the door leading to the hall.

The light from the sitting-room forced the shadows back grudgingly to the dark stairway stretching upwards. The woman in the mirror was there again. Watching!

Straining, she listened, but there was no sound. Even the wind was still now, as if it, too, was waiting.

The conversation she had overheard before Stephen left filled her mind. He had been speaking on the telephone.

"That's bad. I thought they would have caught him by this time. No, I haven't mentioned it to Ruth—only alarm her. They'll have him soon. Parkwood's a well-run place. Yes. Good-bye."

Stephen must have been waiting for the call because she had not heard the phone ring. As she would be alone to-

night, he had been anxious for news of the man from Parkwood, the county asylum for the insane.

No one could have got into the house. Stephen had bolted the back door and secured the window-catches before he had left. She was getting into a panic over nothing. Couldn't one of the doors swing shut by its own weight? Well, couldn't it?

Go upstairs, she told herself, and see there is no one there, and then behave like a grown woman.

Slowly she climbed the staircase. It creaked as if trying to add to her fears; but the sounds were familiar and she ignored them. All six doors on the upper landing were closed. One by one she entered the rooms.

Everything was in order. In their own room a slight untidiness—drawers not properly closed, wardrobe door ajar—bore witness to Stephen's hurried exit. But nothing else.

Relief swept over her as she started down the stairs. There was no one there. She was a coward, and she was going right down to the kitchen and make some tea. Then she would listen to the radio, something funny to make her laugh.

She stopped then because the footsteps had started behind her! Footsteps behind her, coming after her and there was no one there! Hadn't she examined every room? Hadn't they been empty? And still there were footsteps!

Someone giggled and, as the sound changed to a sob, she realized it was herself.

The wardrobe! She remembered

then; it had been ajar. He had been in there. Watching her, waiting for her to turn round.

Feet slithering on the polished floor, she made for the sitting-room. The telephone! Why hadn't she thought of it before?

She heard the stairs creak as she fumbled with the knob of the door. It had stuck! It wouldn't open!

Frantically she threw herself against it, and it jerked open so suddenly she almost fell into the room.

Shut the door! Quick! Quick! There was no key. Pushing a heavy chair against it, she raced to the telephone.

Now, 9-9-9. "Hallo, hallo, get me the police. Hurry, please hurry. There's someone . . . someone . . ."

She stopped, her lips working. The line was dead. A sound sent her spinning towards the door. It was opening, pushing away the chair.

"Go away. Go away." The whispered words rose to a scream and died as she saw the french window. It led on to the drive. Once there, she could run, hide, somehow get away.

The catch slid back. Quietly, she pushed it open and ran drunkenly away from the house.

The gravel cut through her shoes and the bushes tore at her skirt as if they resented her trying to escape. She was glad of the shadows. They would help to hide her. Her own shadow hurried ahead as if it, too, were afraid.

She stopped. Funny, the shadow of that bush in front had moved, too. But a shadow can't move of itself. Then it was not a shadow!

She looked around despairingly. He was there, waiting for her! By running outside she had done just what he wanted.

She must run. Run faster than ever before back to the house. Down to the cellar. That's where she'd go. Down the cellar ladder and then move it away. She would be safe. He could not follow her then.

But now she must run. Her hair in damp strings about her face, she ran back the way she had come. The blood pounded in her head and lights danced before her eyes.

Run, run for your life. She giggled wildly. Wasn't that what she was doing? The gravel crunched behind her! Stephen, help me. Dear Lord, let me get to the house. The house! Round



the next bend. You'll soon be there.
But run! Run!

Absurdly, a childhood jingle rose to her mind—"Run, run as fast as you can. You can't catch me, I'm the gingerbread man."

But she wasn't. She was just plain Ruth Clark. Not very young and not very clever, but she did not want to die out here in the dark.

Choking, gasping, she lurched forward. She would have to stop. Let him come. She could not get away.

The house! There, just in front. One last effort. A few more steps, and then the cellar—safety. Blindly she stumbled on through the french window.

The catch. Quick, fasten the catch! Now the cellar. Run, the key's in the lock.

Her hands, wet with sweat, fumbled with the key. It wouldn't turn! It wouldn't—the lock clicked back.

She threw the door open, took a step forward and then saw it. The yawning, black cavity below that was the cellar, but . . . the ladder was no longer there!

She screamed hoarsely and threw herself back. For an instant she swayed, and then with a twist jerked herself back on to the floor.

Sickness swept over her. She had almost been killed. Wouldn't it have been funny if she had been accidentally killed while fleeing from a homicidal maniac? Wouldn't it have been funny?

The wild laughter died as she gazed into the blackness of the cellar. Only, it wouldn't have been an accident. The ladder had been moved.

Was he watching now, furious that she had escaped? Was he creeping round the house searching for a way in? Was he already in?

There were sounds everywhere. There at the window. Was it a branch tapping? There at the door, a shuffle. The stairs creaked.

Whimpering, she cowered against the wall. It was no use. She could not rise and start running again. She was tired, tired.

Presently one of the shadows would move closer. "You can't catch me. You can't catch me." The words beat in her head. But he would. When he grew tired of waiting.

Sounds again! Weakly she struggled out of the darkness into which she had been slipping.

Footsteps, but loud, confident now. A key in the door and then—oh, Stephen's voice.

"Ruth are you there, dear? I'm home."

"Stephen. Stephen, here." Laughing and crying, she stumbled towards him. Fingers plucking at his coat, she poured out the story.

Stephen listened, his face grim. Almost roughly he pushed her into a chair and began to search the house.

She leaned back, feeling the comfort of his presence like a glow. Her finger hurt and she sucked it absent-mindedly. She smiled shakily. After all she had been through, she winced because her finger hurt.

"There's no one in the house, dear," Stephen looked at her closely. "You're sure . . ." He stopped. "Poor dear, you're exhausted. What you need is a drink and then bed."

It was nice to have someone take care of you, she thought. Not to have to worry or be afraid.

Why, then, was she so tense? Why did she feel that it was not finished? That something more had to come?

Her finger hurt. Bending forward, she saw just below the nail, a thorn. She remembered then. When Stephen came in she had pressed close to him and felt a sharp jab as she touched his coat. Of course, that's when she'd got it.

But . . . her hand flew to her mouth. There was only one thorn-bush in the garden. The one she had seen move thinking it was a shadow.

Stephen? He was pouring drinks, his back to her, but before her was his reflection in the mirror, and not even the gloom of the hall could hide the expression on his face.

Stephen! It was an old story. Young man marries plain, middle-aged spinster with money. There is an accident and . . .

The deal which took him out to-night. The phone call she was meant to overhear. Only there had never been a call. She had not heard the telephone ring; she had noticed that at the time.

Then the building up of the terror. He could have caught her several times tonight, but that was not his intention. Every move had been made with one end—to send her crazed with fear hurtling down into the cellar.

"Here, darling, drink this." His voice was gentle. It came back again, that silly gingerbread-man jingle. He had been eaten by the fox, the one person he trusted.

She took the drink clumsily. What to do? Dear heavens, what could she do? It would not be poisoned. That would be too dangerous. Drugged! That was it. There would be something in the drink to make her sleep. When she was unconscious he would



drop her down into the cellar. An accident!

He was watching her. "Drink up, dear; it'll do you good."

Don't make him suspicious, she told herself. Drink it, and then, think. Think! Even now, there must be something you can do.

It tasted bitter, but she smiled as she gave him back the glass. "You didn't look down in the cellar, Stephen. I heard something down there." Did her voice sound odd, she wondered.

"In the cellar?" Stephen echoed.

Her eyes were getting heavy and the shadows were deepening. With all her might she fought the drowsiness. She must stay awake for a little longer. Just a few more minutes. Then

it would be settled one way or the other.

"Yes." She swayed in the chair. "There, did you hear that? Someone moved down there."

Puzzled, the man moved to the cellar door and peered down.

Gathering the remnants of her strength, she rose from the chair and lurched after him. Barely conscious of the action, she placed her hands on his back and pushed.

She did not hear his startled cry or the thud that rose like an echo.

She sank to the floor, her eyes closed. So tired. So very tired. Sleep now. Sleep. No more running. Ever again. "You can't catch me. You can't catch . . ."



Men fear death as children fear to go in the dark; and as that natural fear in children is increased with tales, so is the other.

FRANCIS BACON.

DEAD MAN'S SEA

MICHAEL DONNE

Illustrated by Jennifer Gordon

NODDING GOOD-HUMOUREDLY to the two natives turning the pump, George stepped back into the sea. He floated in his diving-dress, surplus air escaping from the open valve in his helmet.

He glanced uneasily at the derelict lugger drifting near his own *Dingo*. Something ruddy queer about that wreck. No crew aboard her, and yet . . . there was *something*.

Still uneasy, George shut the valve and sank out of sight. He was lowered through clear water, landing on the sea-bed amongst jagged coral. For a

time he watched rock fish darting for cover; then he began to brood about the wreck again.

There was *something* aboard her. Maybe he should have investigated before diving for his pearls.

George was dominated by pearls. For years he had saved and scraped in order to build up his own tiny pearling fleet. He knew excessive greed could lead a man to destruction, but what were the odds when the prize was a fortune? And this patch of seabed abounded with fine gold-lip pearls.

Strange, though, what mysteries the sea tossed up.

That morning, the *Dingo* had made



good speed from the Tasmanian coast. Nearing the spot marked on George's map, they had come across the derelict. George had cursed and spat into the sea, sensing interference.

Soon it became clear the vessel was an aged wreck. Her paintwork was blackened, her masts broken. She was a prey to the currents, no life stirring on her rotting deck.

"A ghost ship!" said Jim, the new-chum diver, in an awed voice. "'Ow many years 'as she been floating about the Indian Ocean?"

George pushed a strong hand through his mop of ginger hair. He beckoned one of the native hands.

"Torro, lad, swim across and look 'er over."

The young man, crinkly haired and dark-skinned, flashed white teeth in a grin. A minute later he was over the side, swimming like a fish for the wreck.

He scrambled aboard her, cupping his hands to shout a description of the bug population. Then he picked up an object lying there, holding it aloft for them to see. Sunlight glinted on a human skull.

He tossed it aside and entered the cabin. George stirred impatiently, itching for his pearls. Suddenly he heard a muffled shriek. Torro dashed out of the cabin, jumped straight into the sea, and swam frantically back to the *Dingo*.

The Javanese pulled him up on deck. He lay there, dripping water, his eyes rolling in terror.

George inquired what he had seen in the cabin. Torro, shuddering with superstitious dread, would not an-

swer. He seemed afraid to speak about the *something* hiding on the wreck, lest it should come to wreak vengeance on him.

His fear got the other Javanese excited. They gathered round George, clamouring to leave this sea of dead and decaying things.

"It dead man's sea!" they chanted, and George ordered them to be silent.

"We're goin' nowhere till we've got them pearls," he thundered, but the undercurrent of rebellion persisted.

"An' every man-jack of 'em with a throwing-knife!" George growled.

He wiped the sweat from his broad, red face.

"I'm diving," he said firmly. "I've got dynamite in the hold, Jim. Tonight you an' me's goin' to blow that perishing tub skyhigh. That'll settle what's-its-name!"

He climbed into his diving-suit.

At last he stood on the sea-bed, watching the anchor chain, clearly visible some thirty feet away. Well, he'd got there all right, but he'd be glad to surface again. He had a queer feeling that something was wrong.

He began to hurry, searching feverishly for gold-lips. The wild life of the rocks scattered before him.

The boys were still pumping the air steadily along his air-pipe. Everything seemed normal, yet . . .

The anchor chain was no longer visible. It was hidden behind a blue-black inky cloud drifting down from above. The cloud spread out quickly, darkening the water.

George laughed. It was merely some black stuff breaking up, staining the water for a few seconds. He in-



flated his dress and floated, determined to find a clearer place. Instead, he was surrounded by a circle of darkness that encroached malignantly.

Cursing, he tugged on the signal cord. The life-line went taut; they were hauling him to the surface. He was conscious of fierce, penetrating cold, such cold as he had never known before. His heart was pounding; his limbs no longer had power in them.

The next thing he knew someone was unscrewing his helmet.

"Thanks, Jim," he croaked, opening his eyes, but still he could see nothing.

"'elp me into the cabin, Jim," he said.

He was relieved of his diving-dress and assisted through a doorway.

"Thanks, son," he grunted, and the darkness cleared gradually.

He discerned the outlines of furniture. Then he stiffened. *This was not the Dingo's cabin!*

He heard a footstep behind him. An

icy draught blew through the room. He turned, hoping pathetically it would be his friend.

But it was not Jim who stood there, snarling.

When the native crew on board the *Dingo* finally hauled George to the surface, he was quite dead, apparently from heart failure.

Jim, who had read about psychic forces, decided George had not died from natural causes.

He swam across to the wreck with several waterproofed sticks of George's dynamite. He lit the fuses and tossed the sticks down the hold.

Then he noticed *something* move in the doorway of the cabin. Hurriedly, without stopping to investigate, Jim swam back to the *Dingo*. He had hardly got aboard when the wreck disintegrated with a tremendous roar.

Jim smiled. No ghost could endure without a home.

THE SLAVE DETECTIVE

THE CASE OF THE TWO SOOTHSAYERS

WALLACE NICHOLS

Illustrated by J. Ramsey Wherrett



I
THREE FRONTIER generals, Pescennius Niger from Syria, Clodius Albinus from Britain and Septimius Severus from Pannonia, had each raced for Rome and the imperial power when the millionaire Julianus had bought the title of Emperor from the Prætorian soldiery. Severus had been the successful one. He had first ousted and slain Julianus, and then had defeated and killed Niger and Albinus in turn. He was now seated in Rome as lord of the Roman world.

One day, not long after the victorious general's accession, a visitor came to the great mansion on the Esquiline Hill of the Senator, Titius Sabinus. Ushered into the library of the master of the house, he announced himself as Plautianus. Though he had never met him, Sabinus knew him as the favourite officer of the new Emperor and already appointed as the Prefect of the Prætorians. Knowing that Severus was thinning the Senate of all but his known supporters, Sabinus—though he had been very careful in his public conduct—felt a twinge of apprehension.

"What is it, O Plautianus?" he asked as firmly as he could.

Plautianus, a grim-faced giant of a man, set his rigid features to as near a smile as he could achieve.

"Hearsay came to me even in far Pannonia," he said, "that you possess a slave famous for elucidating mysteries."

"Ah, my Sollius . . ." murmured Sabinus.

"Is he entirely and unusually discreet?"

"He was entrusted with investigations by the Emperor Marcus Aurelius—and even by the Emperor Commodus, no easy man to satisfy."

"You say truly," replied Plautianus. "May I see this slave?"

Sabinus clapped his hands, gave an order, and presently Sollius stood before them. Plautianus then gave the reason for his visit, a reason which greatly relieved the Senator.

"I am being threatened. Anonymous missives are being thrust into my litter, or in a crowded thoroughfare inserted surreptitiously into my hand, and both are so skilfully done that the doer is never seen. I want this villain discovered and tracked down. I will pay a good fee, O Sabinus, for the help of this slave of yours."

Wishing to keep in the good graces of the new government, Sabinus gave a gracious reply, and Sollius was lent to the Prefect of the Prætorians for



as long as that functionary should need him.

"Have you kept those missives?" asked the Slave Detective.

"I have them with me, all five; on Egyptian paper. Read; each says the same."

"The butcher shall be butchered!" read Sollius aloud. "Do you, lord, suspect anyone?"

"I have enemies," answered Plautianus. "Anyone in my position must have. But if I knew the man I should have torn his throat out by now," he added brutally. "It is for you to find the clues."

"How, lord, can I work without a beginning?"

"Let me tell you this," replied Plautianus. "The success of Severus has become none too welcome to the Prætorians, for he is no Emperor like the mild Pertinax or the mere moneyman Julianus, but a soldier and a master. No more donations; only dis-

cipline! He set me to tame them. I am taming them. Nose among my Prætorians, Sollius," he concluded in parting advice.

II

Sollius was not pleased with his assignment. How could he safely nose among a dangerous and murmuring soldiery? The Prætorians had been a law unto themselves for so long that he feared that Plautianus was flattering himself when thinking that he was taming them. Nor had he himself any friends among them whom he could question—and then suddenly he remembered the one Prætorian whom he did know: the centurion named Quadratus, who had acted as the auctioneer when the Prætorians had put up the Empire for sale and the ill-fated Julianus had bought it.¹ It would be foolish, he thought, to seek out

¹ See the *London Mystery Magazine*, No. 33.

Quadratus in the Prætorians' camp, but he remembered the working jeweller, Servius, whose daughter Corinna was Quadratus's girl; and about meridian the next day he set out for the Porta Capena, near which Servius's workshop was situated. There, somehow, he would get into touch with the centurion.

The bow-legged Servius remembered him and greeted him with surprise.

"What stolen necklace are you after now?" he asked.

"None," laughed Sollius. "I want a word with your daughter's friend Quadratus. You needn't frown. There's no danger to *you*. I want only a little information which I think he might give me. When do you next expect him?"

"Corinna!" bawled out Servius, and when the girl came into the shop from the living quarters behind he asked: "Is that Quadratus coming to-day?"

"He's already late," she replied petulantly. "Are you after him, Slave Detective? I know something's wrong, he's so ill-tempered these days."

"No, I'm not after him," smiled Sollius. "I want his help."

"Much help he is to anyone lately," she pouted. "A moody man is no joy to a girl at all. I'm looking for a new fellow, and you can tell him so," she added over her shoulder as she left them.

Sollius gossiped with Servius until he was tired of the jeweller's sardonic humour, and then at last a heavy marching step was heard outside.

"What, you again, pot-belly?" cried

Quadratus, entering. "We saw great days together once—and now it's all a dead bonfire!" he growled. "We Prætorians are no longer what we were."

"I did hear," said Sollius slyly, "that your donations were being withheld."

"Withheld? They're no longer even granted! We, who were once Rome's lords, are now no better as regards privileges than the provincial legionaries. It's an offence to the Gods, that it is! Under the mean-minded Pertinax it was bad enough, but the strictness of Severus is a very strangler's cord. Castor and Pollux, Slave Detective, he is a soldier and a Cæsar, and we daren't wag a head!"

"You speak of the Emperor; but what of your new Prefect, Plautianus?"

"A hard man! We haven't known such discipline for years. Discipline may be hated, but to true soldiers it is the life of life. Plautianus? Oh, we hate him all right—but he's a man. The Emperor owes him a lot. It was he who killed with his own hand—and not prettily, I can tell you!—the escaping Albinus after his defeat. Oh yes, pot-belly, Plautianus is a man, and we Prætorians follow a man."

"But what about the lack of donations?" persisted Sollius. "You killed Pertinax for his meanness; what are you going to do to Severus and Plautianus?"

"Stomach it, the Gods rot 'em both!"

"Are any of the old officers of Pertinax—or Julianus—still in their commands?" Sollius asked. "Or have they been—dismissed?"

"Severus has made a clean sweep at least of the tribunes, and has promoted favourites from his Pannonian legions. I'm lucky to be one o' the few centurions to be still posted," answered Quadratus.

"There must be many angry men among those dismissed."

"Oh, I don't know," said Quadratus indifferently. "They've been settled on the land. Mind you," he pursued, "we are disappointed men, but not mutinous. We daren't be!"

"I believe you rather admire the Emperor and Plautianus," said Sollius.

"Hard men!" muttered Quadratus, shrugging his shoulders. "But they've both a weakness and have the same folly. Any soothsayer can get their ear. They never move a step without consulting one o' such."

"A frequent folly among adventurers," murmured the Slave Detective.

"There's always a new one—with more fortunate promises, I suppose," growled Quadratus. "It's they who get the donations now, Jupiter thunder upon 'em! The latest is a sly Syrian, Zamesh of Emesa. Most o' these soothsayers come from the East. Corinna!" he called out impatiently. "What's keeping that daughter o' yours, Servius?"

Suspecting that he would get no more from Quadratus, Sollius took his leave, and thoughtfully returned to his master's house, not at all convinced that the threat against Plautianus came, as that officer appeared to believe, from the Prætorians.

III

During the rest of the day and for a good part of the night Sollius wrestled with his problem. He had no clue from which to advance and on which to build. Or had he? This Zamash of Emesa. . . . Emesa was in Syria. One of the defeated generals, Pescennius Niger, had been the Syrian Governor. Had Zamesh had relations with him? He decided to have his own fortune told by Zamash the Syrian.

He found him much the kind of man he had expected, a bearded, middle-aged, bland and loquacious adept in all the niceties of his art. Sollius waited with an inward chuckle for the usual tale of warnings and prophecies, but to his astonishment he received an account of his life which so shrewdly hit the mark that he could not conceal his surprise. Suddenly, with a contemptuous gesture, Zamash broke off his patter and smiled into the face of his client.

"Was it necessary to seek my art in order to question me?" he asked after eyes had clashed with eyes. "You see, I know you. This is not my first sojourn in Rome. What do you want of me? What have I done?"

"You say you have been in Rome before," said Sollius. "Why have you returned to it again?"

"Why does any man do anything in this hard world? To better my fortunes."

"Had you so few clients in Syria?"

Zamash did not answer at once. The pause grew. The two men faced one another.

"I had one client on whom I lived," replied the Syrian at last. "Then I cast

his horoscope—for myself. I saw him doomed—and changed sides. I was the personal soothsayer of Pescennius Niger.”

“A lucky change!” murmured Sollius.

“I trusted my art,” said the other. “I trusted it so much that I was already in the camp of Septimius Severus before he and Niger met in battle. I was able to assure Severus of his coming fortune. Grateful, he brought me back with him to Rome. What, therefore, have I done to be visited, Slave Detective, by *you*?”

“Have you prognosticated for Plautianus?” asked Sollius, ignoring the question.

“I have not,” answered Zamash. “I am the Emperor’s soothsayer only. Having that patronage, I need no other. Speak out, Sollius; what do you want from me?”

“Your opinion, Zamash—as a soothsayer—of both the Emperor and Plautianus.”

“The Emperor was born under a fine star; he will be fortunate, and I shall reap well from it. Could I ask more from Fate? Plautianus’s horoscope I have never cast. I know nothing of him but what the world knows. I have waited on him with felicitations, and he was gracious to me; but, having the Emperor’s favour, need I strive after his?”

He spoke lightly, and there seemed no undercurrents in his tone. But every soothsayer, thought Sollius, had to be something of an actor.

“I feel,” said Zamash satirically, “that your visit to me has been wasted. That I should regret,” he went on

suavely. “But may I recompense you by returning your fee, and paying you myself one instead for a service in your own art, Slave Detective?”

“In what way, O Zamash?” asked Sollius cautiously.

“I am threatened,” said the soothsayer.

“You!” cried Sollius, startled.

“Listen,” pursued Zamash, lowering his voice confidentially. “The power of a soothsayer over even the best of patrons can be precarious if his influence is undermined by a too clever rival.”

“And you have one?”

“The rumour of one—one, it is said, with a new magic. But nobody can tell me who he is. It is a secret soothsayer, but, with the promise of a new magic, the Emperor can always be caught. He is that kind of man. I am worried, Sollius. Find me this unknown soothsayer, and I will pay you well.”

“If he is unknown, how have you learnt of him?”

“From my servant, who noses for me among all the rumours in Rome—ah, very usefully! This soothsayer makes secrecy a condition of his services, so no one gives him a name.”

“How does he find his clients if that is so?” asked Sollius.

“I think it is a trick of advertisement,” answered Zamash with a shrug. “He’ll come out into the open one of these days after building up a most mysterious reputation, and then . . . I want all this forestalled. Find him for me!”

“Lately,” said Sollius with a grimace, “I seem to be given cases en-

tirely without clues! Do these rumours give you no hint?"

"Only one," replied Zamash. "It is said that the new magic is called 'Druids' Magic'. But who the Druids are or were, I do not know. The name is not known in the East. Can I entrust all this to you?"

"I will do my best," answered Sollius doubtfully, "but I cannot promise a result from so small a clue."

With florid compliments the two men parted.

IV

Sollius set his young assistant, Lucius, to make inquiries about the mysterious soothsayer who practised the magic of the Druids, and himself concentrated upon Zamash. On his own confession that Syrian had once been the private augur of the defeated Niger. Might he not be seeking to avenge a loved master? Yet, according to his own statement, he had deserted Niger before his defeat by Severus, and as a result had become the private augur of Severus himself.

Why, then, should he threaten Plautianus? Or was his soothsaying for the new Emperor a screen behind which he hoped to strike secretly and deftly at the Prefect of the Prætorians? But, again, why? Sollius remained puzzled.

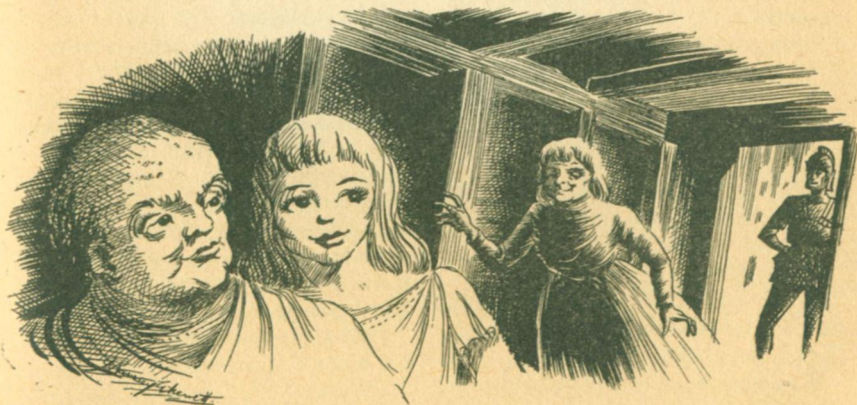
Lucius was more quickly successful than either of them had expected.

"Only a soothsayer for slaves," he reported, "with no rich clients. She lives in the Subura."

"She?" exclaimed Sollius.

"It is a woman," said Lucius.

The Slave Detective decided to see for himself. He found that she lived poorly, in a hovel; which, nevertheless, she kept clean. In herself she was a surprise, for she was young and a beauty. Her beauty, however, was not Roman, and Sollius was unable to place her, with her blue eyes and long, fair hair. She spoke Latin with a strange accent which he had never heard before. She used none of the usual tricks of the trade, but stared into the eyes of her clients and seemed to prophesy out of intuition. His own intuition told him that she was inex-



perienced, and he decided that the skilled Zamash had little need to fear her as a rival. Yet she had a certain shrewdness.

"You are a man," she had said after staring at him, "of curiosity and speculation. A philosopher?"

"I try to be such," he murmured, surprised, for he knew that his slave's dress would not differentiate him from her usual kind of client.

The rest of her patter was perfunctory, though at times curiously accurate, and after she had finished he sat smiling at her.

"Is this what is called 'Druids' Magic'?" he asked.

"That is not for slaves; only for rich clients."

"Have you any?"

"They are coming to me," she replied with an upward, glowing look.

"What is this 'Druids' Magic'?"

"That of my native land."

"What land is that?"

"Britain. I come from Eboracum."

"Have you been long in Rome?"

"Only since the new Emperor's accession."

"What is your name?"

"Nest."

"What brought you to Rome?"

"An awful star!" she replied, and her eyes burned in her face.

"Are you a slave?" he asked.

"My mother was; my father was a great man in Britain."

"A Briton?"

"A Roman," she answered proudly, and her eyes suddenly filled with tears.

"He is dead," she breathed.

As she spoke an old woman entered,

evidently a familiar servant, joy upon her features.

"It has come," she cried out, "your chance, your fortune! You have been summoned by one of Rome's mighty to work the magic of the Druids. Here is his messenger."

To Sollius's amazement the old woman had been followed in by Quadratus. He saluted Nest with precision, and cocked a wondering eye at the Slave Detective.

"My commander has sent me for you," he announced to the girl soothsayer. "He has heard of your new magic, and wishes to test it. Do not fear. He is a good patron of you magicians, but you're the first woman he has trusted in that way. All the less reason to fear, say I! With your face you'll be Plautianus's chief augur in no time! And there's your fortune made."

"Plautianus sent you for her?" cried Sollius sharply.

"No one else!" replied Quadratus. "Are you ready, Druidess?"

Her face, which had been a mask, suddenly blazed. She briefly disappeared into an inner room, and came back cloaked; and then, after a word to her servant in her native British, departed exultantly with the centurion. Sollius followed them out.

Quadratus had come in a small one-horsed chariot. He whisked off Nest without ceremony. Sollius stood for a while, watching them go; then, with a smile on his lips, he returned into Nest's abode.

"What is your name?" he asked the old woman.

"Widan."

"Do you come from Britain, too?"

"We both came among the followers of the army of Clodius Albinus. I was Nest's nurse. We escaped after the battle and reached Rome."

"Nest's father, she told me, was a Roman. Was he in the army that was defeated?"

"He was killed," replied Widan simply.

"One of Albinus's officers?"

"Clodius Albinus himself," she whispered, and then looked frightened at her revelation.

Sollius smote his brow and rushed from the place.

V

He was old, and felt his age as he had never felt it before. He could certainly not run; he could hardly hurry. Yet speed was urgent. As always, the streets of Rome, even the byways, were crowded with jostling and hurrying folk. He could do nothing but push his way as well as he could towards the headquarters of the Prefect of the Prætorians. The best that he could hope was that Plautianus would be too officially busy to see Nest at once.

Not only was he physically harassed, but mentally torn as well. He recognized his obligation to his employer Plautianus, but had also great pity for the young British soothsayer. Plautianus had brutally killed her father with his own hand; yet to kill him with hers was contrary to the laws of both Gods and men. He did not know whether he would be glad or grieved to arrive in time to prevent it. Yet he knew that he had to try.



At last, despairingly breathless, he reached the Prætorian Prefect's personal quarters, and ascended laboriously the marble steps into the audience hall, filled with obsequious officers and hangers-on. By the bronze door at the farther end stood Quadratus—on guard. He should be standing guard, thought Sollius, on the other side of that door! He thrust through the throng and hurried up to him.

"Let me in, Quadratus!" he gasped. "This is urgent—a matter of life and death."

"Now, now, pot-belly, contain yourself," laughed Quadratus.

"You've seen yourself how pretty the girl is; would you interrupt their magic-making? No, no; would you lose me my centurion's stick? Stand back! Have you gone mad, Slave Detective?"

He drew his short stabbing-sword, and Sollius, always physically timid, shrank back. But he did not lack another kind of courage.

"Plautianus!" he cried out in a high, ringing voice. "Plautianus!"

As if it had been a veritable signal, the bronze door opened and the Prætorian Prefect stood on the threshold, his own sword, dripping with blood, in his hand. His eyes narrowed as he saw Sollius.

"So you found my enemy?" he growled. "But so did I." He laughed grimly. "She was not dangerous. Pretty fool! To think she could kill a Roman soldier. See!"

He drew back, and Sollius saw the girl in a pool of blood, dead, on the marble floor inside.

"Still," went on Plautianus, "you tracked her down. You shall have your fee. Clean up the mess, Centurion!"

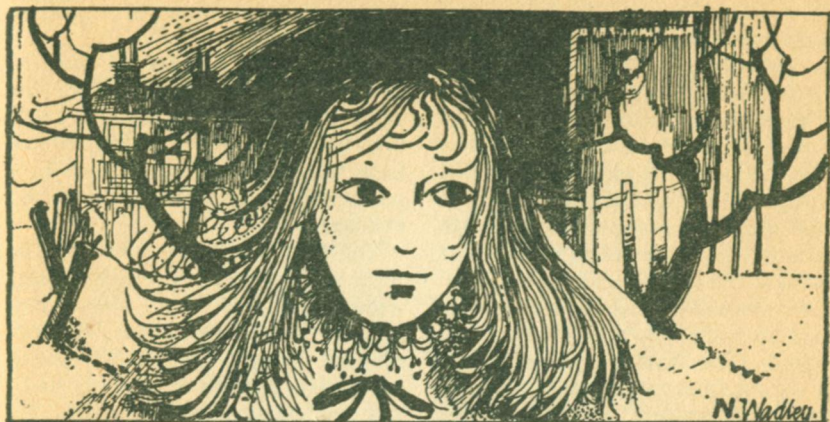
"My fee?" cried Sollius, suddenly revolted. "I give it as a donation—to the Prætorians!"

Blindly he pushed his way out through the throng of Plautianus's sycophants.



And doomed to death, though fated not to die.

JOHN DRYDEN.



DRIVEN SNOW

L. B. GORDON

Illustrated by Nicholas Wadley

HER CHILD'S VOICE filtered through the darkened window of sleep.

Elma Thainton sat up. The night was in its inkiest middle, the silence broken but by the rhythmic sigh of her sleeping husband, the murmuring tick of the bedroom clock, and—the subdued flow of little Diane's words from the room next door.

As Elma emerged fully from the waters of unconsciousness and shook off the last clinging drops of sleep, she heard faintly what seemed to be a very one-sided conversation from her six-year-old daughter's bedroom. All the talking was being carried on in

Diane's piping treble.

Her mother found a solution quickly enough. Diane was dreaming. She was a fairy princess watching her armoured knight ascend the battlements of the grim tower in which the wicked ogre had imprisoned her.

The doors of both rooms were always left ajar so that any cry from Diane could be more easily heard. But there was no inflexion of distress in the child's speech, which proceeded for a minute or two as though she were carrying on a normal, fully-awake conversation. The only flaw in that theory was that the other someone made no vocal response. Therefore, the child must be talking in her sleep and, though the peoples of her dreams were no doubt talking to *her*,

there would be no chance of her mother overhearing the words of these shadowy companions.

After what Elma judged to be two or three minutes, the talking stopped. It *must* have been a dream. She was about to lie down again when a cold draught from the door struck her. It was instant and pronounced as though someone had opened one of the outer doors in the face of a strong wind.

But both front and back doors had been securely locked before they had retired. John was always meticulous in his attention to this point. Perhaps a window had been left too open?

She yawned, pulled the blankets up on her shoulder and turned over.

"What a talking you had in your sleep last night, Diane."

"Mummy, a little girl was in my room, looking all around for something she had lost. She had a pink nightie."

Elma Thainton smiled as she poured milk on to Diane's cereal. So it had not been knights and ogres, after all. "And did she find this something?"

"No, and she was crying. I asked her what she had lost, but I couldn't hear what she said. Whose little girl would she be, Mummy?"

"Darling, you were just dreaming."

"No, I was sitting up speaking to her, till I heard her say she would go and look outside."

Elma gave her a little pat. "Time you were running along to school, dear."

Looking back afterwards, Elma could have said truly that she must

have half expected to be awakened again.

The setting of the second occasion was wellnigh identical. There was the same stygian midnight, the softly breathing John and, more sudden this time, her own jerking back to consciousness. There were, however, two changes.

The first was in the weather. The night was not quiet. A lonely January wind disturbed it, whimpering urgently round the house, its sobs muffled strangely into sighs, making her aware that, from the breasts of the grey-plumed clouds which had massed themselves around the hill-tops during the fleeting hours of daylight, great feathers of white were falling. She pictured the soft flakes eddying restlessly down, and being brushed by the uncaring wind into white mounds piling, gently but remorselessly, into wreaths upon the buried earth—their first snowstorm of the winter.

The second change brought her sharply from bed and into a dressing-gown. Diane was not only talking this time, she was up and pattering about.

Carefully switching on a shaded light, Elma walked quickly to the other bedroom. As she entered the door a chill wind nipped her legs, making her draw her gown more closely around her. She put on the light in the child's bedroom, and saw Diane scuttle across the room and leap into bed.

"Diane, what *are* you doing? And the room is in such a mess!"

"She was back again, Mummy! I got up to help her. I do wish I knew

her name." Diane sat in bed, looking up, blue eyes dilated with excitement.

"Don't be silly, Diane. How could you be looking in the dark? There's no one here, and you'll catch your death of cold running around on your bare feet." She tucked the child in.

Back in her own bed, Elma did not find sleep willing to return this time. An army of thoughts marched through her mind.

Diane had been sleep-walking, or—what other explanation was there? An over-vivid imagination? Was she being starved of company of her own age? Elma thought, long and carefully, over that point.

Failing these more or less plausible solutions—no, she shrank from the two fantastic and horrible alternatives that presented themselves. Both were grim, unthinkable, and yet, lying there in the darkness, the ruthless hand of memory drove her face to face with the first of them.

John's uncle, Richard, reputed to be "queer," had had to give up his profession of architecture. "Gone crackers" had been the popular verdict, "overwork" had said the doctors. Elma had spoken to the grey-haired man with the haunting and haunted brown eyes, who now lived harmlessly enough in the care of relatives, and still spent his time with blueprints and scales.

He had spoken to her eagerly about his "plans," which were removed quietly from him periodically, burned, and a new set of blank papers given him.

After much thought, Elma had decided that his mind had broken itself

in a struggle to attain perfection; an impossible perfection that some demon within him had imposed.

She gently touched John's sleeping form. He, too, a chartered accountant, tall and dark, had, in a modified degree, this longing for the perfect. Everything had to be just right. The modifying element in his case was his passionate love of children; his absorption of so much of his spare time on child welfare. Had she failed him as the perfect wife in bearing only one child? She stirred uneasily.



He it was who had arranged the purchase of this house, modern, five-roomed, with fine garden, garage and outhouses. A friend had told him of it, and it had been remarkably cheap considering its seclusion, its charming location near the hills and yet with quick accessibility by good road to his city office. They had been in it only for a few months. She had hardly met any of the neighbours. . . .

Her mind leaped back to the two alternatives. Had the twisted hand of insanity touched John's daughter?

She shivered in the warm bed. There was such a minute fence between the sunlit fields of normality and the gloomy forests of madness!

A clock downstairs chimed three. The wind moaned; the soft presence of snow passed its frigid breath between the swaying curtains. And—she might as well face the other alternative. If Diane was suffering neither from dreams nor delusions—what had she seen?

Here Elma found herself in even deeper waters. Surely, such things did not, could not, exist? Her mind groped in its library of experience for an answer, a clue even.

Haunted houses!

She caught her breath. Was there something about this house, something—wrong? How could she find out?

She had worried over the problem all day as the snow fell unceasingly and the wind whipped it at times into a white, blurred tapestry. Tomorrow, if the weather had moderated, she would walk over and discreetly tap

Mrs. Blair, who had lived here many years and would surely know of any sinister paragraphs in the history of this house.

She saw Diane safely into bed and suggested an early night to John.

"All right, dear," he agreed. "You look a bit done up."

"I didn't sleep very well last night."

"The wind will hush you off to-night."

Elma lay, listening to the clamour of the gale and picturing the snow being driven into drifts, blocking roads, causing all sorts of inconveniences.

She sighed wearily. She was dead tired, but the idea of a possible midnight disturbance was as a wall dividing her from the sweet, warm waters of sleep on which she could have so happily drifted away. She took two more aspirins. She felt her head nod. . . .

Weird fancies invaded her mind, a pink-and-white phantasmagoria of children and heaps of snow.

She started back to reality, feeling a hand clutch her.

"The back door must be open," John was saying. "What a banging and what a draught!"

"Be careful, John," she begged, as he got into slippers and dressing-gown. "Didn't you lock the back door?"

"I did," he replied grimly. "Or—but I'll soon see."

She heard him go downstairs. She heard the wind whistle through the house, heard his yell.

"Elma! There's a kid in the snow here!"

She raced down to him.

"There!" he cried, directing the light of a torch to a deep snow-drift lying against the tool-house. "A little girl in a pink nightdress. She'll freeze to death!"

He dashed out and, before her horrified eyes, began to lift armfuls of the cold powder. Then he gazed round. "She's gone," he moaned, "I could have sworn she was here!" He hunted around, feverishly.

"John darling, do come in. There's no one there but yourself, and it's you who will freeze to death."

He suddenly darted inside. "Diane!" he gasped, closing the door.

They flew upstairs. Diane was peacefully asleep, but her eyes flickered and opened under the light.

"Daddy, you're all snow!"

"Diane," Elma sat on the little bed, "have you seen that little girl again? You know, the one with the pink nightie?"

"What *is* all this?" demanded John.

Elma flashed him a warning look. "Well, Diane?"

"I shan't see her again," said Diane patiently, as though explaining to stupid grown-ups, "cos she told me she was going to look for her ball outside."

"All right, dear, go to sleep again."

She led John back to their own room.

"A drink is indicated," he said hoarsely. "Brandy?"

She nodded. When he returned, they sat in bed while she told him of Diane's "companion" in the pink nightdress.



"So you and Diane are the two in this house who can see ghosts." She smiled wanly. But she looked at him closely. Had both John and Diane seen a ghost, or were they. . . ? She thought of Uncle Richard.

"You can have that sight! Ghost or no ghost, it will haunt me for ever. The little kid buried in that heap of snow—ugh!"

Had his fondness for children anything to do with it? Had Diane conveyed to him in some spiritual way her own mental vision?

"John," she said after a while, "I am going to find out, if I can, whether there is anything—anything strange about this house."

"It *was* suspiciously cheap," he muttered.

She walked into the quiet air and halted curiously at the gate of the house next door. Surely it must be empty. But as she looked up the snow-covered path, she suddenly saw a woman at the front door. Seeing Elma, the woman smiled and walked down the path through the softening snow.

"I'm Emily Carrison. You must be the new people next door."

"Yes," said Elma. "Do you know it—our house, I mean?" she asked.

"Why, yes. I used to play there as a child with a friend. I had an awful hunt for a ball once which my playmate had hidden from me. I even sneaked into her room once in my nightie——"

"Pink?"

"Yes, pink. But, I have found it now, so I shan't be going back."

"You mean," said Elma bewildered, "you have found the ball you lost as a child?"

"That's right! I never *could* get over losing it!"

So there was the explanation, thought Elma. How strange, that the spirit of this woman as a child could . . .

"But I mustn't detain you," Emily Carrison broke in. "I'm sure I have troubled you *and* your family quite enough as it is. But, I assure you, it is all over now. Good-bye!"

She laughed, a childish, girlish laugh, and half ran, half skipped back to the house.

Elma stared after her retreating form. Confused though she was with both a sense of mystery and a feeling of relief, yet she was aware, too, that

there was something wrong here—something drastically wrong.

She turned and walked slowly through the snow to Mrs. Blair's.

"No," answered Mrs. Blair, "I never heard of any trouble at your house of that kind. But the last people were *very* secretive."

"Do you know an Emily Carrison?" pursued Elma.

"Ah yes, *there* I can help you. She used to stay in the house next door to yours. It is empty now, and——"

"Used to stay?"

"Yes. But she left there, dear me, *many* years ago. I'm afraid she cannot help, you know, even were she here." The old lady's voice became solemn.

"Why not?" asked Elma, "I——"

Some flash of intuition made her hold back her revelation that she had spoken to Emily Carrison only minutes ago.

"She died last week, my dear, down Bristol way, somewhere. My goodness, are you all right?"

"Yes, yes." Though a strange, nauseating dread had seized her, Elma successfully controlled herself—until the second flash of light came.

She knew now what had been wrong, so terribly wrong, with Emily Carrison. She had walked from the front door to the garden gate through the tiny dunes of snow between the boxwood hedges. She had run *back* along the path before disappearing at the front door.

But, on the white, serene face of the driven snow, she had left not one mark!



THE TAIL WAS MISSING

GEOFFREY HUMPHRYS

Illustrated by Buster

HENRY GALBRAITH, bespectacled, slight of build and cowed by the overbearing presence of his wife, stared with growing repugnance at the silver fox tie she handled so complacently. He took an instant dislike to the animal; it looked too real, with its perfectly preserved head, fierce beady eyes and tight, sneering mouth. But Nancy made up her mind without hesitation.

"I'll take this one," she said to the

furrier's assistant, stroking the sleek fur ecstatically. "It's beautiful."

A cold prickly sensation ran through Henry's body as the eyes of the fox focused upon him and radiated animosity. It was as if the animal held him responsible for its being killed to be made into a female garment. Henry looked up at his wife with a light of urgent appeal in his grey eyes.

"I'm sure we could find something better in another shop," he whispered.

She silenced him with a quick, stony glare. "It's beautiful," she repeated.

"Just what I want; nothing could suit me better."

Henry knew it was futile to argue. The beast's bloodshot eyes protruded ominously — accusing, threatening. But he had promised Nancy a present of her own choice. This was it; he couldn't back out now. He shuddered as his wife, so elated with her acquisition, draped it across her shoulders and swept regally through the showroom. He followed behind uncomfortably, all the time conscious of the furious eyes glaring at him. He tried to avoid them, but Nancy walked so fast that it was difficult to keep in front of her.

Upon arrival home, Nancy took off the fur and laid it on the back of a chair, its head curling up on the seat, staring at him. Without warning, it

stirred and let out a low-pitched, deep-throated snarl.

Henry jumped back with a startled exclamation.

Nancy stared at him reprovingly. "What on earth is the matter with you?" she demanded.

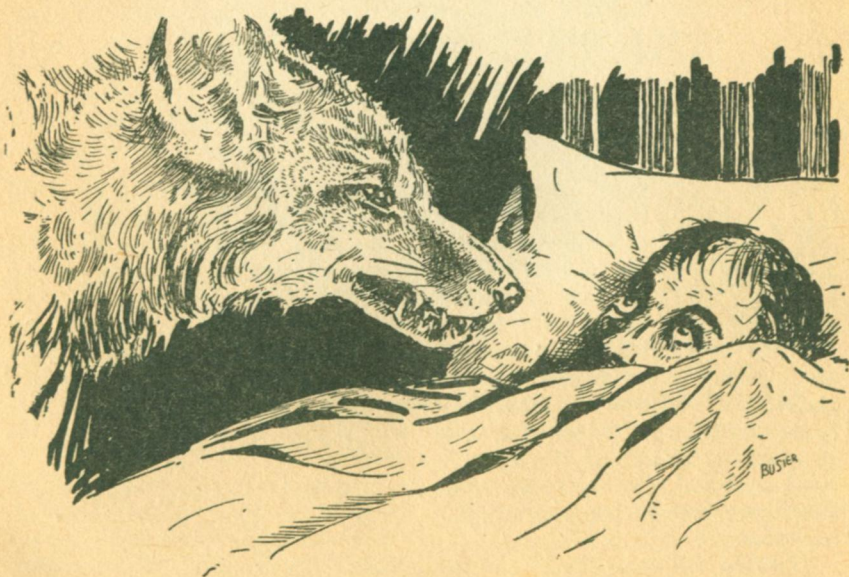
"That fox . . . that fox . . . it snarled at me," he spluttered.

"Where did you say you went before you met me?" she asked suspiciously.

"I tell you . . . it . . . snarled at me," he persisted.

"Henry, you've been drinking again," she accused, snatching up the fur and storming out of the room.

That night Henry had a fearful nightmare in which the fox kept pursuing him. Upon waking, the first



thing he saw was the beast curled up on a bedside chair staring at him. He leapt out of bed in a state of wild panic.

Sitting in the cold kitchen, he agitatedly pushed his hands through his thinning black hair. He would hide the fur. Yes, that's what he'd do—lock it up in his large trunk, get it out of the way for good. But he'd have to wait until Nancy came down. She was up there in the bedroom with the fox. He trembled at the thought of being alone with it. But Nancy wasn't in any kind of danger, for although she wore the fur it seemed well disposed towards her. He was the chosen victim of its malevolence.

When his wife came into the kitchen, Henry slipped upstairs to the bedroom. With a sense of eerie loathing, he snatched the fur from the chair, tossed it into the trunk and covered it with a weighty encyclopædia. He hurriedly shaved, then, breathing normally for the first time that morning, made his way to the office.

Back at home in the evening, Henry went to the bedroom to change his coat. He recoiled in horror at the sight of the fox lying snugly in the centre of the bed. Seeing him, it moved and bared its jagged teeth in a vicious snarl. He rushed downstairs, feeling sure the beast was at his heels, and reached the passage just as Nancy came in at the front door.

"I'm sorry I'm late, Henry," she apologized. "I had to wait so long for a bus."

He stared at her wildly, his face ex-

pressing incredulous amazement. In the half-light of dusk, it looked as if the fox was round her shoulders.

With a piercing cry, he dashed upstairs again. But the fox was still in the bedroom. Could it have passed him coming up the stairs? He was going crazy. He dashed from room to room, seeking refuge. But the fox seemed to be following him. He could see it everywhere he turned. At last, in terror, and defying Nancy's calls and exhortations, he rushed out of the house.

Once in the nearest pub, he drank two double whiskies in a twinkling and, having regained his breath, went on to drink more. As the mellowed spirit took its effect and tingled through his veins, a new confidence arose within him. He had been off drinking too long. Nancy was prejudiced in saying that it affected his liver. Nothing of the sort; it did his liver good, stopped him seeing things. He called for another, and swallowed it in one gulp. That was better. There were no foxes around anywhere. He laughed loudly, ignoring the puzzled frowns of others in the bar. What did he care? His head felt light and airy, a new courage coursed through him. He had drowned the fox. It was safe to go home now.

As soon as he stepped unsteadily into the house, Nancy came rushing up to him. He expected a tirade of words about his drinking excesses, but she was far too upset.

"Oh, Henry! Thank goodness you've come home. Something terrible has happened," she gasped.

Her words had a peculiarly sobering effect on him.

"What?" he asked.

"I don't know, but the chickens have gone mad. They've been screeching so loud and making such frightening noises that I was scared to go out. You go, Henry. Please go and see what has happened," she pleaded.

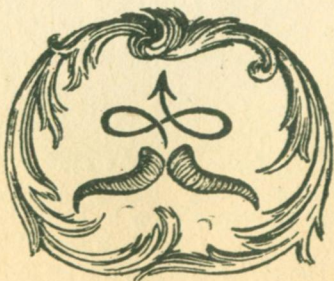
Dutch courage had not completely deserted him. He puffed out his chest manfully, picked up a torch and strode out into the back garden. The torch beam shone on the small chicken-run, and the hens began screeching in terrified unison. Moving nearer, he noticed the door of the run was open, with the chickens huddled together in the far corner. He shone the torch around the garden; feathers were strewn all over the place. The bright beam lit upon the gleaming white carcase of a chicken, and a few yards away was another. A whirling sensation in his stomach accompanied his return to positive soberness. There

were only four chickens in the run; two were missing. He caught sight of a white fleck in a thick part of the hedge; closer scrutiny proved it to be the tail of a fox. He picked it up and took it into the house.

"How did you get your fur from the trunk?" he asked his wife seriously. "I locked it up and took the key with me."

"You . . . you gave me the spare key months ago," gulped Nancy, staring at him white-faced.

His eyes were concentrated on the fox tie now hanging behind the door, although one glance was sufficient to confirm what he had already guessed. The creature was noticeably fatter and its tail was missing. He snatched it from the hook, rolled the fur into a tight ball and threw it on the fire. There was an immediate crackling and singeing, followed by agonized yelping sounds. When Nancy heard them reverberating from the fireplace she, too, felt in need of a drink.



SHORT MEASURE

ANTHONY YORK

Illustrated by Leslie Domeny



ZORO GLANCED at his watch. Five to seven—time to get moving. He had a murder to commit by seven-thirty.

He touched the starter-button of his specially built car—specially built because he was a dwarf—and slid out into the stream of evening traffic.

The pouring rain was the final requirement in his murder plan, and he grimaced his approval. He could have murdered Albert Poiteers at least a fortnight ago, but he had curbed his impatience, waiting for rain. A slight shower might have served the turn, but a heavy downpour was perfection. And Zoro worshipped perfection. He was a magician, and in his business perfection was more than an essential—it was a god.

As he drove, Zoro went over the plan it had taken him a year to evolve, examining each item for a flaw. The rain, the whisky, the Luger, he ticked them off rapidly in his mind. The photograph, the suicide note, the house janitor—and finally his story to the police. The one weak spot was the Luger, but that was a chance he had to take. Even for a perfectionist there was always the element of chance, and this one was calculated. Anyway, the risk involved was slight. Albert Poiteers was a playwright and a man of habit, as Zoro was well aware after

a year of cultivating his friendship.

No, apart from the Luger, the plan was foolproof. Each detail had been carefully considered, even down to a wet Sunday. And for a special reason the murder had to be done on a wet Sunday.

Poiteers always spent Sunday afternoon at the theatre, leaving—alone—at seven sharp to walk home to his bachelor suite in a block of luxury flats. On wet nights he took a cab. "But not tonight," Zoro muttered thickly, "not tonight. He'll ride free tonight."

It was for this reason he had waited for rain. Poiteers was hardly likely to refuse a lift in a rainstorm.

Zoro grimaced again as the theatre showed up through the driving rain. Across the drenched bill-boards he could see his own name splashed in giant lettering.

"ZORO THE GREAT MAGICIAN!"

The slogan brought back a flood of memories. He still felt a pang when he thought of Sally, his one-time assistant, whose beauty lay mouldering in an early grave. Then he thought of Poiteers, the man who had driven her to suicide, and his coarse, dwarfish features twisted in a scowl.

The famous playwright emerged from the theatre as Zoro braked. The dwarf smirked, pleased with his timing, and pulled over to the kerb.

"Hello there!" he sang out through the ready-lowered window. "Can I give you a lift, Albert?"

Poiteers climbed into the car as if he owned it. "Hope I'm not taking you out of your way," he apologised off-handedly.

"Think nothing of it." Zoro nosed the car back into the traffic. "As a matter of fact, I wanted to see you about a passage in the play you asked me to read."

Poiteers laughed. "What's the matter? Can't you read my writing?" He asked the question as if bad handwriting was one of his special achievements. "Foolish of me not to have my secretary type it before giving it you," he went on. "Never could handle a damn writing machine myself."

The exclusive block of flats where Poiteers lived was only a few minutes away, and Zoro drove, unbidden, round to the resident's car-park at the rear of the building.

"You'd better come up for a drink," Poiteers offered in his superior manner. "You can tell me about the play in comfort."

A quick dash through the rain and they were inside the building. The hall was deserted, as Zoro knew it would be. It always was on a Sunday evening at this time, but in half an hour or so some churchgoers would be returning. That, too, had been taken into account in Zoro's master-plan.

In the self-service lift, Poiteers pressed the button for the twelfth floor, and a few moments later they entered his apartment.

This was the tricky part, Zoro reminded himself. If, for any reason,

his host had moved the Luger he kept in his desk to a new hiding-place, the plan would fall through. He had never before been in Poiteers' rooms, but he had overheard him telling a mutual friend that he kept the Luger—loaded—in the right-hand corner of the drawer in his writing-desk.

"You were saying about my play?" Poiteers slid out of his coat and tossed it carelessly over a chair. "What will you drink?"

"Nothing, thanks," Zoro declined the offer as he slid casually towards the desk. How could he explain that he did not want to be found outside Poiteers' door smelling of whisky when he was not supposed to have entered?

"Really?" Poiteers busied himself with the decanter and again Zoro grimaced his satisfaction. The more whisky his host drank the better. It would add that touch of realism to the scene he intended the police to find.

He reached out and tugged gently at the drawer. It was locked, but he had come prepared for that. Poiteers was still occupied with his drink. Zoro produced a thin sliver of steel and inserted it in the key-hole. He was barely three feet tall, and it was just level with his chest. A few expert twists and the lock was released. It was all part of his art.

The palms of his over-large hands sweated a little as he edged the drawer open. For the first time he felt doubts. Suppose the gun was not there? Suppose Poiteers turned. God! He *was* turning!

Zoro tugged frantically at the

drawer. It came away, jerked, squeaked, jammed—then freed itself and slid open. His hand darted to the right-hand corner as Poiteers turned.

"What the devil!" he blurted, but Zoro had the gun out and levelled at the playwright's stomach. "If this is some sort of joke——": Poiteers began. But Zoro cut him short.

"It's no joke, my dear Albert. Not from your point of view, at least."

He waved the gun expertly, motioning Poiteers to the desk. "Bring your drink over here, Albert," he grinned. "No, don't leave the decanter behind. You are going to drink a lot of whisky. It will help make your—suicide—authentic."

"Suicide? You're mad!" Poiteers blustered. "Stark, raving mad!"

"Never mind the theatricals." Zoro ignored the insult. "You are playing to a very limited audience at the moment." He flourished the gun menacingly, thrusting Poiteers into the swivel chair at the desk. "Drink your whisky," he ordered.

The six-foot playwright glared defiance at the three-foot dwarf and clamped his lips shut tight. Zoro's finger tightened on the trigger, taking first pressure.

"Drink!" he hissed.

Poiteers tossed the raw spirit down his throat in one gulp. Zoro reached up and pushed the decanter across the desk. "More!" he ordered.

Three drinks later Poiteers was close to tears. "I . . . I don't understand," he wailed. "What are you up to? What is it you want?"

Zoro grinned evilly, his lips curling back in a wolfish snarl. "I told you I



wanted to see you about a passage in your play," he uttered at length. "I wasn't lying, Albert," he sneered. "In fact, I brought it with me."

His free hand described a blurred movement in the air and a slip of paper suddenly appeared in his supple fingers. "I snipped it from your manuscript," he explained. "Allow me to read it to you.

"I once thought I could not live with her. Now I realize I cannot live without her. I must join her, wherever she is.' Touching, don't you think?" Zoro leered.

"I . . . I don't understand," Poiteers was on the verge of breaking down. He shook his head in bewilderment. "I just don't understand. . . ."

"You will," Zoro assured him and indicated the whisky decanter with a wave of the Luger. "But first you better have another drink. You look as if you could use one."

Poiteers needed no prompting. He splashed a stiff measure into his glass, gulping it down so hurriedly that some of the whisky escaped to dribble down his chin. The dwarf magician waited for him to look up, then his free hand again traced out a swift arc in the air. The paper disappeared, to be replaced by a photograph of a girl. Across one corner the words "For Ever Yours" were inscribed.

Zoro held it up for Poiteers to see. "Recognize her?" he grated.

The playwright licked his lips. "Sally Winters!" he croaked, and suddenly the light of understanding dawned in his eyes. "Zoro, I swear I didn't know!" he garbled. "She never told me. I——"

"Shut up!" Zoro's voice was suddenly harsh. "You killed her, Poiteers," he accused, "as surely as if you drowned her with your own hands. Now it's your turn, you swine. How does it feel, Albert?"

Poiteers was desperate now. "You won't get away with it," he blustered. "Not murder. They still hang——"

"Murder?" Zoro mocked. "Such a harsh word, Albert. A different term was used when you killed Sally."

"I didn't kill her. She committed suicide."

"Yes," Zoro blazed, "she committed suicide. After you got her into trouble then turned her down, she committed suicide!"

Poiteers cowered away from the hate in the dwarf's eyes. "Listen to me, Zoro," he pleaded. "Listen to me. I didn't know about Sally. I would have seen her all right, if she'd told me. I would even have married her! You must believe——"

"Married her!" Zoro's voice dripped with scorn. "You would *even* have married her!" he repeated. "You, who were not even fit to lick her shoes, you would *even* have married her." His face mottled with rage and Poiteers was horrified to see thin flecks of white appear on his lips. "Thank God, she's dead!" Zoro shouted.

Suddenly his large eyes misted over and his thick lips quivered.

"She was beautiful," he said, and his voice was strangely gentle. "Beautiful and kind and sweet. She never laughed at me or mocked me because of my height. She treated me like an ordinary human being and I loved

her. . . ." He paused, and the mistiness in his eyes cleared away. "Yes, Poiteers, I loved her," he went on, "and for a while she was rather fond of me. Then you came snivelling round!" The gentleness in Zoro's voice gave way to loathing. "She had no time for an ugly dwarf after that. Not with a handsome young playwright to dance attendance on her, Pah!" Zoro literally shook with hate, then he wiped a hand across his brow and continued in quieter tones. "I'm going to enjoy killing you, Poiteers. I only wish I could do it twice!"

"You don't mean it, Zoro!" Poiteers whined. "If you shoot me, you'll hang. The police——"

"The police," Zoro interrupted, "will find a very tragic scene, and the Sunday papers will remember you for ever with reverence. Allow me to sketch you a brief outline of my greatest illusion—on or off the stage. In a few minutes the house janitor will begin his rounds. He will climb the stairs to each floor and punch his clock at the checkpoints in the corridors. When he reaches this floor, he will find me outside your door ringing the bell. I will explain that I heard a muffled report as I came up in the lift—the janitor in a trifle deaf and may not hear the Luger when I shoot you—and that I am a little concerned because I can get no reply to my ringing, although I am expected.

"The janitor will use his pass-key, and you can imagine how horrified I will be to find you slumped across your desk, the Luger in your hand, and the suicide note—written in your own writing—propped against the

picture of Sally." Zoro cackled insanely. "You should have learned to type, Albert," he goaded, and suddenly the scrap of paper he had cut from Poiteer's play was back in his fingers.

"Of course there are a couple of other details—props, I think is the word. The whisky decanter will be in a prominent position, and your glass—up-ended perhaps—with its contents splashed across the desk top—will be close to your free hand. Altogether a pretty picture, don't you think, dear Albert?"

Zoro's eyes narrowed, a mirthless grin baring his teeth, as he levelled the Luger at the playwright's temple.

"Zoro don't! No! You've forgotten something! Zoro——"

The gun belched once and Poiteers' face disappeared in a mess of blood.

The janitor acted exactly as Zoro had predicted, and in a matter of minutes the police were on their way.

Zoro paced the floor till they arrived, a worried frown creasing his narrow brow. Had he pulled the trigger too soon? Poiteers had yelled out that he had forgotten something. Had he? He played the scene over in his mind again. No, he had overlooked nothing.

For a wild moment he had been tempted not to wait for the janitor, descend in the lift and drive off in his car. But that was risky. His car might have been noticed, and he himself might have been seen leaving the building by the residents returning from church. No, it was better to stick

to the original plan and help the janitor find the body. Besides, there was nothing he had not allowed for.

But he should have heard Poiteers out, just to be sure.

The police arrived in a hurry. Zoro was ready for them, answering their questions calmly and confidently.

Yes, he was a close friend of the dead man. Yes, he knew of the girl who had committed suicide because of Poiteers. No, he did not know that it had been playing on his friend's mind. Perhaps he had been drinking a little too much, but not what you would call excessive—unless he was drinking secretly. No, he had never visited the dead man's suite before. Yes, he had come alone, and of course he had come up in the self-service lift.

Did the inspector think he would walk up twelve flights of stairs when there was a perfectly serviceable lift?

What? What was that? How did he reach the button for the twelfth floor?

"Why I . . . I——"

Zoro's jaw drooped foolishly as realization dawned. That's what Poiteers meant! That's what he had forgotten!

Being only three feet tall, the top floor button on the self-service lift was out of his reach!

"I asked you a question," the stern-faced inspector said patiently. "If you came up in the lift alone, how did you reach the button for the twelfth floor?"

Zoro was still gaping stupidly when they led him away.



THE SHEPHERD-HUT

G. W. BONNETT

Illustrated by Arthur Wragg



HE WALKED STEADILY up the sloping pasture, his feet and ankles lost in the milky night - mist which lay like a moist, fleecy blanket over the lush farmlands of the valley. Another, more insidious, mist swirled through the wild spin of his thoughts, mocking his efforts to think clearly and blunting the raw edges of his grief. The dewy grass soaked into the turn-ups of his trousers, so that they flopped soggly against his ankles as each step brought him closer to his objective, a grove of trees showing as a black smudge at the top of the moon-bathed rise.

A vague sense of guilt nibbled at his conscience, he felt that it was foolish to spoil a new suit this way. Janey will say I'm mad, he thought, and then stopped as he remembered that she would never see the new suit that he had bought for their wedding. Janey, lying stiff and cold with her face blown into horrible nothingness, would never see anything again. He stood motionless for a moment while his mind shook beneath the first terrifying onslaught of conscious grief.

Across the valley a fox, out of temper with the brooding stillness of the night, barked sharply. The sound, shivering on the clear air, roused him and he moved on to skirt the trees; his

natural obstinacy fighting to control the aching turmoil of his mind.

On the other side of the grove the weather-bleached boards of an old shepherd-hut gleamed palely from the shelter of the dark, towering trees. Taking care to stand fully revealed by the moonlight, he halted a few yards from the open doorway of the hut. He peered intently, but could discern nothing within.

He called softly, "Jim; are you there, Jim?"

The words died away, dissolving slowly into silence. A disturbed rabbit rustled through the undergrowth. No sound at all came from the black oblong of the doorway. He stepped forward a pace.

"Don't move! I'll shoot, George!"

The sharp warning voice came from within the hut. "What d'you want?" it asked. "Why have you come here? To kill me yourself?"

"I might," he replied, wondering at his own impersonal calmness, "but I want to know why you did it."

"It's not like you think it is. If I let you in, will you listen to me before you try anything?" said the voice.

"All right."

"Come inside, then, shut the door and light the candle—I've got a sack over the window."

The flickering yellow candlelight slowly bloomed, revealing the contents of the hut. There was a crude



bunk made of chicken-wire and unplanned timber standing against the side wall beneath the sack-covered window; opposite was an upturned egg-crate on which stood the candle, stuck fast in a pool of its own grease. Against the end wall was a rusty iron stove and a rickety, broken-armed chair.

Beside the chair stood a young man

wearing dirty, oil-stained overalls and holding a shotgun in his hands. Taller and leaner than George, he appeared to be the younger of the two. In his eyes lay the furtive, hopeless expression of a desperate, hunted animal. He licked his lips nervously and asked, "Where are they looking for me?"

George leant against the door, the dark-grey lounge suit covering his strong, stocky figure striking an incongruous note in the primitive hut. The broad muscles of his face were frozen into a blank, immobile mask; only the eyes, eloquent with pain, had life, burning feverishly beneath heavy brows.

"They've gone to search the wood. You were seen going in there. There's another lot coming from Gomford way and there's cars patrolling the roads. You can't get away. It's hopeless."

"I know," said Jim. He stared down at the gun in his hands as if seeing it for the first time. Carefully he leant it against the stove, and then sat down in the shattered old chair. "I don't want to get away. I only hid up here because I knew you'd look for me here."

"I'm here. Tell me why you did it."

Jim did not seem to hear, his gaze wandered around the hut. "It seems queer, we'll never be here together in the hut again. And you and me been coming here to fish and shoot since we was kids."

There was a stony patience in George's voice as he interrupted. "Never mind that. Tell me why."

Jim huddled down in the chair, his thin hands twisting nervously together and his thin features quivering

with distress. His pale, frightened eyes leapt in terror as George came towards him; the loose rungs of the chair rattled as words came tumbling out of him in a disjointed rush.

"She started it—I wouldn't do a thing like that to you, honest. I know how you been slogging and studying so you could be manager of Glebe farm." His voice rose hysterically. "Me and her have ruined it for you. But she started—she started it. I'm glad I killed her—I'm glad I tell——"

His head rocked back as George slapped him hard across the mouth. His face twitched and broke as if he were going to burst into tears. A trickle of blood ran down his chin.

George sat on the end of the bunk. His voice still held its strong patience as he said, "Now start at the beginning."

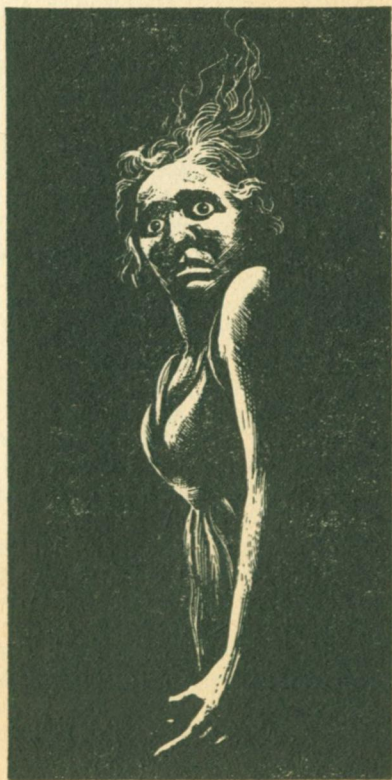
Jim twisted uneasily in the chair. The candle spluttered viciously in the silence, making the shadows dance madly across the walls. Slowly, hesitantly, he began to speak. "Well, when you went off on your manager's course at the Farm Institute, you asked me to keep an eye on Janey and take her out now and then—so's she wouldn't get lonely." He paused, waiting for confirmation. None came.

Jim flinched and continued, "Well, that's what I did. Sometimes we went to a dance or the pictures in Gomford. Sometimes we stayed in with her mother or went for a walk." He flung out his hands in a sudden exasperated gesture. "It's different for you, George. You can't understand. I can't plan everything like you do. I didn't mean no harm—honest."

"Leave that. What happened?"

"We went to a party at Hackets, about three weeks ago. You know what it's like there—all those home-made wines they make. Well, when I walked her home she told me her mother was staying in Gomford with her sister-in-law for the night. She said she'd be lonely on her own. . . ."

He broke off abruptly and sat watching George intently. Then, in an agony of self-reproach as he saw the other's compressed and bloodless face,



he continued, "I stayed with her. Afterwards she said I wasn't to tell you. I kicked up and said she'd got to write to you, and then we would get married and go away from here. She wheedled round me and said to wait till you come home. She came up the farm this afternoon at knocking-off time. She said you'd written to say you'd passed and was on your way home. She said she wasn't going to marry a tractor-driver when she could get the manager of Glebe Farm. I told her I wouldn't give her up. She said if I kept my mouth shut, we would keep on after you'd married her; but I wouldn't have that, so she said she'd tell you I'd forced her. She spat in my face."

He lifted a shaking hand and rubbed his face desperately as if he still could feel the warm, wet spittle there. "I had the gun in my hands—I was going out after a rabbit when she came. Something seemed to happen to me and I shot her."

Jim stirred uneasily and asked, "What are you going to do?"

"I don't know," said George. "I —" He held up a warning hand.

From the roadway below the meadow came the sound of cars pulling up, and they heard the crisp ring of slammed car-doors.

In one swift movement Jim left his chair, doused the candle, wrenched the door open and then stood listening intently in the doorway.

George rose from the bunk and stood in the centre of the pitch-dark hut. He said, "You'll hear their boots on the footbridge if they're coming this way."

Faintly they heard the hollow drumming of boots on wood.

"They're coming," whispered Jim. "Oh God, what'll I do?"

George laid a hand on his shoulder. "You'd best wait for them here. There's nothing you can do."

"I've got to get away," Jim insisted. "Quick, give me the gun."

He turned to pass George and regain the shotgun, but George barred the way. "No, Jim, you've done enough with that," he said quietly.

Without a word Jim turned and ran out across the meadow, racing for the shelter of the tall, dark hedgerow; away from the search-party approaching the hut.

He was almost beneath the hedge before he noticed the indistinct shapes standing in its shadow. He stopped, defeated, as they closed in. Hands seized him roughly; benumbed, he hardly felt the manacles on his wrists. Dimly he was aware of someone addressing him.

"Now, young man, what have you done with the weapon?"

"Gun, the gun," he mumbled, striving to collect himself. "Oh God, the gun!" he cried suddenly, and tried to make a dash for the hut.

His captors threw their weight on his arms, restraining him.

Lunging wildly, he shouted, "In the hut, quick, my brother!"

From the hut came a sudden obliterating crash. An owl, a white spectre in the moonlight, sailed on silent wings out over the hut. Jim sank to his knees, his chest heaving with dry, racking sobs.

DRIFTWOOD

PETER THORNHILL

Illustrated by Viive



THE PORT NELSON Women's Institute was a very lively body, and my wife, Melissa, who is very much younger than I, was one of the most enthusiastic members. For this reason many cultural activities were introduced into my home. We went through the phases of poker-work, felt-work, leather-work and—perhaps the most horrible of all—flower arrangement. One could enter no house in Port Nelson without seeing some arrangement of moulting bulrushes, fading strelitzias and withering leaves, flanked by sprays of shrivelling amatungulu berries.

It was the MacIneries of the Clan Tea Room at the bridge who started the craze for driftwood ornaments. Jock found a piece of driftwood vaguely resembling a horse, which he polished and mounted on a pedestal. This was followed by a large branching affair of no particular shape, on which Christine draped trails of grenadilla vine and other greenery. The W.I. soon followed suit, and Melissa was a most ardent collector, bringing me various specimens to polish and mount for her: a distorted object to act as centre-piece for yet more revolting flower arrangements; another with a crotch which could

hold a jar full of varnished leaves and so on.

Then I caught the infection. One Sunday a party of us crossed into Ponedoland to spend the day at Umtwena Beach, and there I found a piece of driftwood that really appealed to me. It was about two foot six in height, and roughly resembled a crouching figure with a bullet head and arms widely extended. Melissa was frankly scornful.

"I don't know what you can do with that great ugly thing," she jeered.

"Just wait and see," I told her as I packed it carefully into the boot of the car.

In my spare time I spent several happy hours, cleaning off the barnacles and splinters, polishing it until it shone, and finally mounting it on a neat pedestal of African mahogany. I was in the workshop putting the finishes to it before taking it into the house, and as I rubbed gently at the knob of a head, it looked as if it were grimacing at me with a wrinkled monkey face. I took it over to the window for a closer look, but I decided that it must have been some trick of the light that had created the impression of a wizened face. I took it inside, and tried it in several places before I found the right spot in one corner of the living-room. I thought it looked most effective, but Melissa was not impressed.



"It's absolutely hideous!" she declared. "And it doesn't go with anything else in the room." As she spoke she looked fondly at a fragile little piece, rather like a stork standing on one leg, which I had mounted on a small wall-bracket for her. "Now, this is really lovely," she continued.

"Don't you believe it," I joked. "In time you will come to realize my Pongo's hidden beauties."

"Beauty, indeed!" she said, and flounced round to look scornfully at my artistic effort. As she did so she somehow swept her little stork off the bracket, and it fell on the granolithic floor, smashing into three pieces.

"Just look at that!" she cried in distress, kneeling to pick up the pieces. "It's your beastly Pongo bringing me bad luck, the hateful thing." Melissa was really upset at the loss of her pet ornament, and I had some difficulty in consoling her.

When I returned from the banana fields the next day, I found that a large arm-chair had been placed in front of my Pongo.

"Look what that stupid girl has done," I complained to Melissa. "She apparently doesn't approve of my work of art, either."

"I put the chair there!" snapped Melissa, "I tore my dress on the beastly thing this morning. I don't know why you left such a sharp point on that branch that sticks out."

"You should be more careful where you walk!" I said, feeling unaccountably angry as I moved the chair away.

"I suppose you'll be satisfied when someone gets hurt on that thing!" retorted Melissa with unaccustomed acerbity.

"If anything like that happens, I shall have to do something about it," I conceded, and sat down at the supper table. As I looked over at Pongo in his corner, it seemed as if the arms moved slightly, but as Melissa adjusted the lamp-shade I realized it was an illusion caused by moving shadows.

A few days later there was another

unfortunate accident connected with my poor Pongo. A young humming-bird flew in through the open window while we were sitting at breakfast. He panicked at finding himself in such unfamiliar surroundings, and began to dart wildly to and fro across the room. Both Melissa and I endeavoured to catch him or to coax him in the direction of the open window; but his flight became more wild and frenzied until, to our horror, he dashed at lightning speed into the corner where Pongo stood, and impaled himself on the pointing finger.

"Now you see what's happened!" cried Melissa, staring at the little bleeding corpse and bursting into tears of real distress. "Perhaps now you'll take that hideous thing away—or at least cut off that beastly point."

Gently I disengaged the little mangled body, and then dropped it to the floor with an exclamation; possibly because of the bird's dying flutter, or some reflex movement, I had gained the distinct impression that Pongo had tried to hold on to it. Inwardly ashamed of such a fantastic idea, I picked up the bird and took it outside. When I returned, Melissa again implored me to cut off the point and, with a strange reluctance, I went to the workshop to fetch a saw. As I approached Pongo, I again had the impression of a little wizened face peering at me—this time with a rather pathetically appealing expression; but I disregarded this peculiar hallucination and took the offending limb in my left hand. To my horror it felt warm, almost like living flesh, probably because the sun had been shining

on it through the window, and I felt I could no more cut off that point than I could cut off one of Melissa's hands.

It was an occasion for diplomacy. Stepping back I gazed at Pongo judicially, and then said to Melissa, who was watching me with a rather puzzled expression, "You know, 'Lissa, it will spoil it if I shorten that arm. With your artistic taste you must appreciate that it will spoil the—er—proportion."

Melissa came a little nearer, and looked very wisely with her head on one side. The appeal to her æsthetic taste won the day. "Perhaps you're right," she acknowledged. "Leave it for the time being, anyway."

As we settled down to our interrupted breakfast, I glanced back at Pongo, and I could swear that he winked at me.

It was about this time that my wife's cousin George came to board with us. Every few weeks when I took the big truck into Durban with a load of bananas or pineapples, I had to stay overnight and, as Melissa was afraid to stay alone, it was my custom to leave her with her aunt at Scottborough on my way in and pick her up again on my way home. Now her cousin had been transferred to a branch of his firm in Margate, and Melissa suggested that he might come to stay with us. He could travel into Margate on his motor-cycle each day, and he would be company for Melissa when I had to stay in Durban overnight. The scheme worked very well. George was a pleasant, cheerful young man, and Melissa seemed to be

brighter for having young company about the house.

But George did not like Pongo and, like Melissa, referred to him as a hideous brute.

"I'm afraid you don't appreciate the finer points of modern art," I teased him.

"I always feel the damn thing is trying to grab me," he grumbled, and aimed a playful kick at it. With a sharp imprecation he jumped back and bent down to rub his shin.

"Did you hurt yourself, George?" asked Melissa in alarm.

"That's funny!" exclaimed George, rolling down his sock to expose an angry bruise on his shin. "I could have sworn I didn't touch the bally thing, but it hit me all right."

"You be careful, George, my boy," I said solemnly. "Pongo is my watchdog, the guardian of my hearth and home; and he'll catch you if you get up to anything in this house."

"I'll certainly treat him with due respect in the future," said George ruefully.

I suppose I should have guessed something from the look he exchanged with Melissa, but it failed to register at the time.

One Sunday morning a few weeks later I noticed that Pongo was looking very neglected. Obviously neither Melissa nor the native girl had been dusting him regularly, so I took out my pocket handkerchief to rub him over. Suddenly I felt a movement against my shoulder. It seemed as if Pongo were pointing at something behind me. To rid myself of this hallucination, I rubbed my eyes and

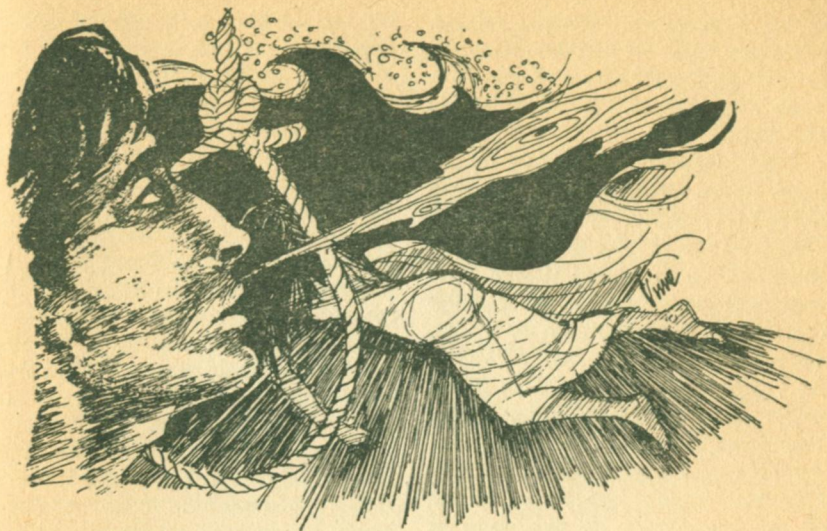
looked again; but this time there was no mistake. Pongo was deliberately pointing at something behind me.

I turned round and looked out of the window, but all I saw was Melissa followed by George. They had just come up from the beach where they had been bathing. George called out a cheerful greeting but Melissa looked flushed and a little discomposed. I felt a little uncomfortable, but said jokingly, "What have you two been up to now?"

"Ha! Are you getting suspicious of your beautiful wife at last?" continued George in the same strain, but Melissa snapped crossly, "Oh, don't be silly, George!" and went inside. George wrinkled his face comically at me, shrugged his shoulders and followed her.

I still felt uncomfortable at the patent artificiality of his humour, and began to wonder. But when Melissa came in a few minutes later, fresh and charming in yellow linen, and kissed me sweetly and teased me for a lazy fellow, my misgivings vanished. I was not in the least perturbed when George also rallied me on my laziness, suggesting that a little more exercise would reduce what he called my "swelling paunch."

The climax came the next time I went to Durban. By an unexpected stroke of luck I disposed of my whole load early in the day, and would have returned the same evening if I had not had an appointment with an estate agent about the purchase of some more banana land. Instead of staying over the next morning, I left Durban at two o'clock, intending to surprise



Melissa by arriving home for breakfast. It was pleasant driving through the warm starlight, and by five o'clock the sun was already above the sea. I whistled happily to myself as I drove along the South Coast Road at a steady thirty miles an hour, thinking of the little present I had bought Melissa from the Bombay Bazaar.

Shortly before seven o'clock I turned off the main road, passed the ornamental pylon that marks the entrance to the township of Port Nelson, and drove more slowly over the uneven township roads. When I reached the house, it was strangely still, with the curtains still drawn. I was surprised. As the native girl was not due to arrive until half-past seven, Melissa should long ago have been up and about, preparing breakfast for George if he was to be on time at work. With

some misgiving, I left the truck in the yard and tried the back door, but found it locked. I called out to Melissa a couple of times, but, receiving no reply, I went round to the front and found the front door also locked. The bedroom windows as usual were wide open, and in a mood of growing apprehension I climbed in. The bed was unmade, the bedclothes thrown back over the foot of the bed, but there was no sign of Melissa. Calling out to her again, I walked down the passage, peeped into the empty kitchen and then pushed open the door of the living-room. The room was dim, as the curtains were thick, but I could see a figure on the floor and another on the settee. Cold with alarm, I drew open the curtains to let in the bright morning sunlight. Melissa lay huddled up on the settee

in her night-gown, moaning faintly. I laid my hand on her shoulder, and she jerked upright with a shriek, babbling insanelly. "He killed him! He killed him!"

Then I looked at the figure on the floor. In the corner George was lying in his pyjamas, flat on his back, with Pongo on top of him. As I picked up the piece of driftwood, I met with some resistance, and found that the sharp point had penetrated his throat, and he was lying in a pool of blood. As I withdrew the point dark blood welled up afresh. Quickly I felt for his heart-beat, his pulse. He was dead. Standing up, I looked round carefully. It seemed to me he had slipped on one of the grass mats on the polished granolithic floor, crashed against the pedestal and brought the image down

on top of him, with ghastly consequences. I looked in horror at the blood on my hands and the blood on the image. As I picked it up, I could hear Melissa insanelly babbling, "He killed him! He killed him!" Those are the only words she has said ever since.

A horrified exclamation behind me made me turn round. There stood the native girl, who had let herself in with her own key to the kitchen door.

"Oh, Baas, you've killed him!" she exclaimed. "I said you would kill him when you found out about Baas George and the missus."

"Don't be a fool!" I shouted irritably. "Of course I didn't kill him." And I explained what must have happened to George, but she didn't believe me.

Neither did the Judge.



Sand-strewn caverns, cool and deep,
Where the winds are all asleep;
Where the spent lights quiver and gleam;
Where the salt weed sways in the stream;
Where the sea-beasts rang'd all round
Feed in the ooze of their pasture-ground.

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

THE MINE

ROBERT WELLS

Illustrated by Buster

STROVIC AND PINCK are dead, buried some hundreds of feet down under the ruins of the St. Austin mine. Zabig is still alive if you can call his existence living: sitting on the floor in the corner of his luxury suite at the Bella Vista private asylum, staring at his hands and never saying a word; while his relatives prepare for the legal fight to decide who gets his millions when he dies.

For Zabig is still a rich man. Although he lost the St. Austin mine on that terrifying night twenty years ago, there remain five others whose diamond output adds a million pounds to his assets every year. Yet for all his millions the Diamond King can't be cured. Perhaps he doesn't want to be. He seems happy enough in his corner all day watching, eternally watching, those green hands of his. Specialists from all over the world have examined them, and have gone away without a hope of an explanation. When they asked Zabig gently, coaxingly, for his story about them, he returned a smile to their questions and said: "Ask . . . Pinck, Strovic . . . or . . . Lyndos." But, as I have already said, Pinck and Strovic are dead, part of the rock and rubble of the underground galleries of St. Austin. And Lyndos?

I have changed my name and am

living quietly at the other end of the world, where I can keep to myself the story nobody is going to believe, anyway.

Twenty years ago I was working in the research section of the St. Austin mine. I had become interested in a long series of calculations which were being made there in connection with a typically eccentric Zabig project for wet-rock blasting, and I was so fascinated by the stage my work had reached that one Saturday evening I stayed on late, using the big computer long after my colleagues in the central building had hung up their overalls and checked out. I worked on into Sunday morning, and when I switched off the machine to go home it must have been two o'clock.

The offices were dark and unfriendly as I passed through them, and there was an eerie, artificial breeze from the air-conditioning plant blowing shadows about in the gallery outside. I closed the door behind me and heard it latch to, and as I did, at the same instant I caught sight of a figure which had been crossing the gallery. It paused at the sound made by the door and looked over towards me.

At first I thought it was Strovic, the night-watchman. The story went that he had been trapped in a rock-fall when he was young, and had lain three days underground in the utter

dark, with the rock and the terror of it draining off his reason and his memory. Now by someone's kindness he was allowed to wander around the workings at night like a frail, old ghost. But a second later I realized, with violent surprise, that the person I now saw was Zabig.

I had only seen the photographs of him in the offices or glimpses of him on the newsreel when he attended galas or official dinners, but there was no mistaking him. I hadn't even known that he was in town, let alone at the mine, and I might have been nervous at any time to meet the big boss; but to come face to face with him in the gallery at that hour on a Sunday morning scared me stiff.

I stood still and he came over. When he got close, I saw that he was smiling.

"Hi, Lyndos," he said. Like another great general in history, he was reputed to know the names of all the people in his armies, right down to the girls who did the cleaning.

"Good morning, Chief," I said.

"You working late again?"

"I got wrapped up in those fourth-group calculations," I told him almost apologetically. He was looking at me with a sceptical, rather sad smile. "You know, the group for the wet-blasting project," I said.

"Sure, I remember," said Zabig. He sounded like the physics master whose bright pupil has just discovered specific gravity for himself.

In the pause which followed I took a good look at him and got another shock. I had thought that he was carrying some sort of bag when I had

first caught sight of him. I was wrong. Now that he was closer, I could see that he was swinging an underground helmet by the straps.

"You're pretty interested in the job, son?" said Zabig.

"Sure," I replied enthusiastically, "if we can get it started, it'll be a big advance in technique. . . ." I stopped, embarrassed by my own enthusiasm, but Zabig seemed not to be affected in any way. Deliberately he swung the heavy helmet up into the crook of his arm so that I couldn't miss seeing it.

"Go ahead," he said, "you didn't say what a great advance it would be for the human race, etcetera, etcetera. . . ."

"It won't be," I said. "I'm sorry."

"Forget it," he said. "You don't need to be apologetic about enthusiasm. You got a wife?"

"No."

"Girl? Anyone?" He regarded me inquisitively.

"No, sir."

"So you're not in a hurry to get away to bed?"

"No, sir."

Suddenly Zabig jerked his head in the direction of the working. "Feel like coming below?"

I won't say that this surprise offer didn't scare hell out of me the moment after I accepted it. As we walked over towards the minehead together, I found myself wishing I could get out of it. In my mind the question uppermost was why Zabig should be going several hundreds of feet down into the sub-levels of St. Austin at that hour of a Sunday morning. It also seemed strange that since he had obviously

intended to make the drop solo, he now chose to invite me to accompany him. Maybe he often went down into the silent galleries over a week-end to gloat over all his potential wealth waiting to be hacked out of the earth's guts. Maybe he just inspected it for efficiency's sake. I didn't know.

I thought that Pinck, the shaft-head night-duty man gave me a sharp, meaningful look as I stripped off my coat with Zabig in the changing-room, but I noticed that he was not in the least surprised to see the Diamond King.

We went into the lift, and as Pinck dropped the gate behind us Zabig said to him: "Drop me to Gallery Eight, Pinck, and hold her there until I buzz you."

"Uhhuh," said Pinck from the platform. Pinck could not talk normally. Like Strovic, he was another ex-underground man who had got injured and gone dumb of it.

"You ever been down before, Lyndos?" asked Zabig as we fell.

My stomach seemed to be starting up into my throat, but I managed to croak out a negative answer and Zabig grinned at my discomfort. The strange, sickening descent ended as swiftly as it had begun, the gate shot up, and indicating that I should do the same, Zabig fixed his helmet and stepped out of the cage into the main road of Gallery Eight.

It was deathly still down there and humid, although somewhere remote I could just hear the thud, thud of one of the turbines driving the air-conditioning machinery up above. Zabig



seemed quite cheerfully at home and set off at a fair pace down the road, although as we went farther I noticed

that he seemed to become more gloomy.

After several hundred yards we branched off the main gallery into an unlighted tunnel, and we had to switch on our headlights. In a very short time indeed this new tunnel was so low and narrow that we had to go in single file, I behind Zabig, and after another minute's walking it also decreased in height so that we were forced into the crouching position.

"You know, Lyndos," said Zabig over his shoulder, "I often come down here at week-ends. Somehow things seem to sort themselves out for me here. The thing you've got up there is a lot of noise and worry, and a load of concern about things that won't bother you a hundred years from tonight. Then you come down here, and you see just how old the world is. Millions and millions and millions of years of it piled up in layers. And in all those millions, just for a fractional part, we've been making a noise and worrying and thinking we're having fun with all those things you can buy for a pound or two. Lyndos, look at it and you'll realize we're worth nothing."

I was trying to think up a suitable reply to this unexpected jump into philosophy when from behind us, as though in the main gallery, came a faint sound: a twanging or whirring accompanied by a little sigh of air as though a giant had turned over in his sleep.

Zabig stopped, one hand braced on the rock. "What the hell?" he said. "I told that ape to leave the cage down until I buzzed him for it, didn't I?"

I agreed. Sweat trickled out from under my helmet and ran irritatingly down my nose. Probably there was nothing more to the incident than a misunderstood order; but the departure of the cage for the surface, leaving the two of us alone in the deserted mine with a few hundred thousand tons of rock and earth over our heads was to me at least unnerving.

Zabig seemed unexcited, anyway. The road was too narrow for him to turn round, and he just stood with his head cocked on one side for a moment or two, and then, when there were no further sounds, he moved off with a grunt.

A couple of minutes later he warned me to halt, and I could just see up front the beam from his lamp thrown on to a thick door, like the door of a safe, that terminated the road. There was a notice on it in luminous paint, warning: "No one admitted."

Crouching behind the Diamond King, I heard the little sound made by the combinations of a lock dropping over. Then I saw him give a little push, and felt a dank breath of air blow over me down the passage as the door opened.

I couldn't think what was coming next, and the sweat was coming faster now and stinging my eyes. Then I realized that I was alone in the passage, because Zabig had gone forward through the door. Dashing some of the sweat off my face I crawled after him.

I found myself in a high, natural chamber which had been very little worked. Strangely enough, although

the rest of the mine had seemed humid, this place at least was curiously cold and clammy. After a moment I saw that Zabig had switched out his lamp, but that there was yet another sort of light—a kind of phosphorescence—in the cavern. The glow seemed to fall from one of the walls. I heard Zabig call to me to switch off my own headlamp. I did so, and almost immediately cried out in terror.

About head high in the cavern wall on my left, prone, but with the face turned towards us and partially hidden by a raised right hand, was the image of a young negress of about eighteen or nineteen years. That is to say that at my first terrified glance I thought it was an image and I thought it was that of a negress, but on closer inspection I saw that it was neither. It was a whole body, and the woman belonged to no race known in the world today. It was perfect, except that the right foot remained concealed in the black rock. The whole of the rest of the body, although it had remained entombed in the rock for God knows how many æons of time, was bathed in the eerie, green light which shone through the chamber.

I was utterly stunned. "Zabig," I called "Zabig."

"Yeah," he replied calmly from somewhere on my right.

"What is it?"

"At the risk of giving it a vulgar, scientific name," he replied, "it's a fossil."

I could see him now, and for a moment I took my eyes off the beautiful miracle to look at his face. In that moment I learned almost every-

thing there was to know about the famous eccentricity of the Diamond King. He was drenched in loneliness, living day and night with a mystery he could not understand and dared not let go, as though it was the key to life.

"Who found it?" I whispered.

"Strovic and Pinck," said Zabig after a pause, as though he had heard the question only from a great distance.

I cowered back against the wall behind me. Strovic and Pinck! I thought of one, a frail old man without a memory, and the other, a brutish animal stripped of its tongue. Now I had shared the secret, and what was to happen to me?

"It's a miracle that teaches us something," Zabig was saying. "What I learn from it is humility—my insignificance compared with the forces that could do this thing to her and then preserve her like a universal joke for all time. When I come down here, Lyndos, and lock myself in, I'm down here with suns and stars that have gone out, and the big constellations moving away so fast that our biggest telescopes can only just catch their lights going out, too; and here with the old voices—millions of voices—pickled in the atmosphere, and the comets that come around cheerfully one night and go on their way for another thousand years or so. When I'm locked down here I'm not human; I'm immortal—like her."

He paused, and in the hissing silence my agitated senses caught the tiny, distant sound of a pebble falling, as though into the bottom of a mighty

well. But he had not heard, and he went on murmuring about the insignificance of man and about time and before time was, and how there were stars in the sky now which we see but which have really gone out millions of years ago, and many other such things, while before us glowed that little miracle of immortality.

The drone of his voice, almost like that of some high priest at an ancient, pagan ritual, actually lulled me momentarily out of my fear. Part of my brain, though, must have remained keyed to a high pitch of awareness, for suddenly I found myself compelled to tear my gaze from the body in the rock and peer into the black throat of the tunnel beyond the door to the cavern. I had heard the click of a boot stealthily put down but

clumsily in contact with a loose stone.

"Zabig," I said, thoroughly frightened, "I swear there's someone coming up the tunnel."

He continued to mutter. He had not heard me.

"Zabig!" I screamed.

Framed in the doorway was the gigantic Pinck, naked to the waist, bathed in sweat, his face contorted into an inhuman mask of hate. He held a long pickaxe in his hands.

God knows how the blow he swung missed the Diamond King's skull, but it did. As I dropped to the floor of the cavern, I felt Pinck's boot crash against my shoulder. Simultaneously I heard a noise like splintering glass and the crash of a revolver shot. Then I felt a heavy body fall across my legs and heard Zabig moaning and weep-



ing as he emptied the remainder of the gun down the dark tunnel after the sound of running footsteps.

I writhed out from under Pinck's lifeless body, and with a trembling hand switched on the lamp in my helmet, for now the cave was in almost total darkness. All in a moment I made out the body on the floor, the gun near by, empty, and Zabig shrieking and cursing, his hands pressed over a gash in the rock-face through which seeped in ghastly putrescence a kind of green light which, suddenly I realised, was not light at all *but fluid*, oozing out over his hands and slowly falling to the floor, where its luminosity rapidly faded and died.

It was all over in a few minutes, but the Diamond King remained for much longer, his hands pressed to the gash in the wall through which his miracle had escaped. At last he fell to his knees, staring stupidly at his hands which glowed faintly. I dared not speak to him. After a little while he began to make a terrible, high-pitched wailing sound, and with that horrible nightmare certainly I knew that he was mad, and I turned and fled.

I had not gone twenty yards before I heard him after me and, screwing my neck round in very fright, saw those awful, glowing hands bobbing along in the dark, clutching at air.

I know the hands would have caught me if it had not been for Strovic. He had obviously accompanied Pinck into the mine on a joint mission of revenge, and had been hit in the back as he ran away and Zabig fired after him down the tunnel. His had been the footsteps I had heard as

I lay on the floor of the cavern under Pinck's body. Now he lay dead himself almost at the junction of the small tunnel with the main road of Gallery Eight. I saw him just in time, jumped the body and ran madly back down Gallery Eight towards the lift shaft. Behind me I heard the thud as Zabig tripped on the body and fell heavily.

His fall gave me the advantage of the few extra yards that I needed. Weeping and trembling, I staggered into the lift which Pinck and Strovic had left at the bottom of the shaft to make their getaway, slammed the gate fast, and in a moment was using the emergency gear to wind myself to the surface.

Even as I staggered out into the control hut at the top, I heard the gears clank again and saw number two lift begin to descend, and I began to run. Even the first explosion couldn't stop me. I have never stopped. And here I am at the end of the world. For what if the hands should catch up with me? No, no. The walls are high; and look—there are bars at that high window. I have changed my name, too, as I said. That is certainly not my name on the door is it: PQD 8345? But be most careful not to tell Zabig you have seen me; nor Pinck, nor Strovic. . . . No, no; that is wrong, too. Listen: Pinck is dead, Strovic is dead. I must try to remember that. Doctor Strauss says so. I will begin again if you will only be patient with me. Listen: Strovic and Pinck are dead, buried some hundreds of feet down under the ruins of the St. Austin mine. Zabig is still alive if you can call his existence living. . . .

THE LAUGH

T. J. JOHNSON

Illustrated by Alex Portner



TOM SOMERSET SANG, as he drove fast through the night, a half-remembered tune that was snatched by the wind and lost in the full-throated roar from the exhaust. At each twist and turn of the Corniche the tyres joined in with their screaming protests. Ahead of him, his headlights swept yellow swathes through the black shadows of the towering rocks. He was happy.

Glancing down once more to his left where the sea lay shimmering under the pale moon, the song died forgotten and he slowed to a more gentle pace. Ecstasy bowed to tranquillity.

What a night, he thought. And then he grinned. What a night indeed.

He had played the Marquesa's system, and he had left the casino rocking gently on its foundations. As a result, the delightful little principality of Monaco was now poorer by approximately ten million francs. Ten million francs. Enough to keep him in comfort, and fast cars, for many moons to come.

Removing one hand from the wooden rim of the steering-wheel, Tom gave himself a cigarette with rather less than his usual practised ease. He knew that he was undoubtedly drunk. He had only a hazy recol-

lection of his triumphant exit down the casino steps. But, what the hell, he didn't win a fortune every night.

There was little traffic on the Corniche, as one would expect at four in the morning. In fact, after well and truly leaving the black Citroën that had followed him out of Monte Carlo, he had been alone.

Alone with the Jag, the moon and the stars. And ten million francs, he added with a chuckle, scattering little red sparks from the end of his cigarette.

The lights appeared in his driving-mirror dimly and spasmodically at first, rapidly increasing in size and intensity until, sweeping round the bend immediately behind, they held him in a prolonged, searching glare. Then the black car swept past, its brake-lights flashing red before disappearing round the next bend.

Ah, the Citroën who tried to hold a Jag, Tom murmured to himself. You may go, my friend, Somerset is no longer dicing tonight. I'll be at the villa soon, anyway, and once I've popped all this paper in the piggy bank I can sleep right through the day if I wish. He drew smoke into his lungs contentedly as the big white Jaguar ambled along in the moonlight.

A few kilometres farther on, where the Corniche began a convulsive twist

inland, Tom eased the Jaguar round a corner to be confronted with a strange tableau. The black Citroën was parked untidily in his path, and the shadowy figure of a man was bending attentively over another, stretched out on the ground.

Braking hard and slipping into neutral, he stopped behind the stationary saloon. Since the silent pair occupied the rest of the road, he had no choice but to switch off the ignition and climb out. With a slight stirring of uneasiness he approached.

"Bonsoir, monsieur," he said. "May I be of assistance? Perhaps I can——"

The words froze on his lips as he saw the black handkerchief covering the man's face. Tensing, he heard a movement behind him—too late. Something hard and heavy descended on his head, and as he lost consciousness a woman's laugh rang out, harsh and unmistakable. . . .

He woke to the familiar sound of the start of a Grand Prix, only this time it was inside his head. Opening one eye with an effort, he found that he was sitting in the open cockpit of his car, bound hand and foot, wet and numb from the chilling early morning dew. The slight movement sent a searing pain through his head, and he shut his eye again with a drawn-out groan.

The noise in his head slowly increased with a regular throbbing beat until it seemed to fill the air around him and became almost unbearable. And then suddenly it was cut off and he heard a man's voice raised in enquiry. Through half-opened eyes Tom saw the faded blue shirt of the man bending over him, and felt strong fingers working at the cord binding his arms. . . .

"There it is, M'sieur Somerset. We will, of course, do all we can to re-



cover your money, mais alors." The dapper little *chef de police* shrugged. "I cannot promise. You are not the first to be robbed in this manner. You remember little, you say, and I am not surprised. But the circumstances seem only too familiar. So far"—he paused to regard a highly polished shoe—"so far they 'ave eluded us."

He looked up quickly, and smiled charmingly above his immaculate grey gaberdine uniform. Then his eyes darted to the clock on the wall and, rising, he said: "I will not keep you from that bath, hein?"

Taking Tom by the arm, he shook his hand. "Rest assured," he beamed. "'Ow is it you say? No stone will be left under our feet."

Tom was not inclined to take the matter so lightly and opened his mouth to say so, but his rising anger magnified the pain in his head and he suddenly felt very, very tired.

"Such a lot of money, m'sieur. And the wine. You know"—the *chef de police* was shaking his head sadly at him—"it was asking for trouble."

Tom gritted: "I'll remember that next time"; and went out into the bright sunlight.

As he drove along the rue Grimaldi towards the Corniche, he noticed that even Monegasques looked twice at dinner-jacketed Englishmen out in the midday sun, and glancing in the driving-mirror he saw why. Bloodshot blue eyes stared back at him from a pale, unshaven face, and his normally smooth fair hair stuck up like hay above the startlingly white bandage.

In spite of his throbbing head, Tom was angry. Angry with the thieves,

angry with the police, angry with himself.

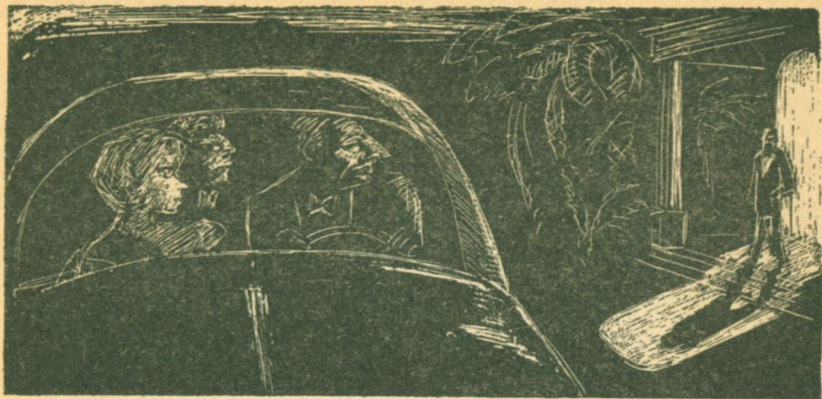
With the anger came the firm resolve to get his money back, even if he had to do it by himself. His case was only one of a series of similar crimes, that dandified policeman had said. Well, perhaps there would be another robbery soon, and if he played his cards right he would be there when it happened.

Night after night under the smoke-laden chandeliers of the casino, Tom had kept his dogged vigil, drifting from table to table, his tall, slim figure merging in the crowds, watching, listening—and waiting.

He was becoming heartily sick of the faded splendour of the place, of the monotonous drone of the croupiers and the heavy atmosphere of scent and cigar smoke.

Big winners were rare birds, he thought wryly, and big winners with a lonely drive home seemed to have become extinct. There was no guarantee even that there would be another such robbery. Thieves, like old soldiers, sometimes retired.

So why was he waiting? He was waiting, he supposed, because he was a Somerset and an unusually stubborn example of a particularly stubborn breed. He was waiting because, during the years in which his life had depended on it, he had learned to trust his sixth sense, and it had not let him down yet. It told him now that it was here, among the tables of the casino, he would find the clue that would lead him to his money. And he would dearly love to meet the wielder of



blunt instruments—face to face this time.

God knows, he could not afford to hang around the casino like this every night. Back at the villa his long-overdue second novel, of which so much was expected and on which so much depended, lay half-completed, neglected and gathering dust. There would be an inquiring note from his publisher soon, and he just could not leave the work in abeyance much longer. He smiled at the phrase, a well-worn relic from a military past.

His thoughts were interrupted by outbursts of laughter and excited shouts from a table away to his right. As he joined the animated knot of spectators a thrill of anticipation ran through him when he saw that the centre of interest was the big, florid-faced American whom he knew had been winning steadily all night. It was obvious that he had been drinking equally steadily. The man's face was flushed with success and with pleasure at the ready response his heavy shafts

of wit drew from the people around him.

Quite suddenly, Tom was tingling with suppressed excitement.

Above the general laughter, one laugh had started an alarm bell clanging in his brain. It was harsh and mirthless, but a woman's laugh nevertheless. And quite unmistakable.

The woman was standing a few paces away from him. She was beautiful in a hard, almost savage sort of way, and exquisitely dressed. Her jewels outshone those of the women around her, and that was an achievement in such company. There was some quality about her that reminded him of a panther: sleek, graceful—and dangerous.

The American was rising unsteadily behind his enormous pile of chips, and announcing in thickly slurred accents that it was time he was hitting the road for Cannes.

As Tom watched, the woman exchanged a quick glance with the sallow youth standing beside her, and

they both looked across the table at a man standing unsmilingly near the American. His responding, almost imperceptible nod told Tom everything, and withdrawing unobtrusively towards the casino entrance he walked quickly down the steps and across to where his car was parked in the shadows.

This is it, Somerset, he told himself. It's up to you now.

He had barely finished loading the snub-nosed little automatic which he had acquired on a hill in Korea when the woman and her two companions appeared on the casino steps. His simile had been an accurate one, he thought, as he watched her move down the steps with an easy, feline grace. Just across the road, near the Café de Paris, they got into a black Citroën and sat there, waiting.

What a cat-and-mouse game this is, he mused. Only in this version the cats seemed to outnumber the mice fairly decisively.

After fifteen minutes had slowly ticked by and Tom was longing for a cigarette but dare not risk lighting one, the unsuspecting mouse at last appeared and made his way uncertainly to a big, pale blue Cadillac. With much pitching and over-revving he drove off down the hill. The Citroën tucked itself in behind, and Tom followed at a distance, driving on sidelights only.

He was feeling much the same expectant thrill that always gripped him at the start of a race, but this time driving skill was of secondary import-

ance and he was under no delusions as to his fate if he made a mistake.

It was just beyond l'Ermitage where the Corniche straightened out for several kilometres that the Citroën pulled out and passed the Cadillac. Tom quickly closed the gap and took up station just behind the American. After passing through Nice he had been driving without lights, and his eyes felt as if they were out on stalks. He had been apprehensive at first about the Jaguar's snarl, but found that in overdrive top she glided along like a wraith.

At the end of this straight he remembered that there was a very acute corner with a junction formed by a minor road leading inland. Judging from the Citroën's action, he reckoned the party would take place there, and he would have to act on that assumption.

He made his decision as the meandering Cadillac slowly rolled out of view round the corner. Gently and silently, Tom brought the coasting Jaguar to a halt and sat quite still, listening.

Through the night air came the shrill squealing of hastily applied brakes, and he whistled with relief. Very slowly and very calmly he counted ten.

Then he let in the clutch hard, slammed his foot down on the accelerator and roared round the corner, flicking on all his lights as he did so. With the Jaguar sliding and howling like a banshee, he brought her tail back and instantly braked hard as he saw what lay just ahead.

In the blinding glare from his battery of lights every detail stood out in arrested relief: the two masked men, one in the act of rising from the ground, the huge bulk of the American standing over them, and behind him a woman poised with an uplifted club. All four startled faces were turned towards him, dazzled by the powerful beams.

Springing, pistol in hand, from the car, he caught the glint of metal as one of the men made a quick movement. Tom fired first and his shot sent the weapon spinning as the man's sharp cry of pain rang out above the reverberating echoes from the rocks.

"Do not move, any of you, or I fire again. And drop that weapon, madame, the game's up." His voice was cool and commanding.

To the American, who was standing transfixed, he said: "How do you feel?"

"Brother, I'm sober as a judge!"

"All right, then. Do exactly as I say. Get behind our three friends here, and make quite sure they have no more weapons on them."

As the American carried out his search Tom smiled at the sheer hatred in the woman's green eyes, the eyes of a beautiful enraged cat caught in a trap.

"Monsieur!" the youth beside her burst out wildly. "Monsieur, we did not——"

"*Silence, Jacques!*" She spat the words viciously. "*A quoi bon? Dites rien!*"

The hoarse, yet curiously attractive voice rather surprised Tom, and he found himself thinking that this

would be an interesting one to tame.

"I guess that's the lot," the big man called. "Two automatics and this here sleep-indooocer."

"Good. Now listen. Keep the armoury. Drive back to the nearest police-station—there will be one at Cros-de-Cagnes—and get help here as quickly as you can."

"Gee, I don't know how to thank you," the American began, shaking his head.

"Save that for later," Tom interrupted tersely. "You don't have to, anyway. I have to thank you. Now hurry up, there's a good chap."

While the Cadillac started up, turned and faded into the distance, Tom's eyes never left the silent group before him. Behind him the sea whispered faintly, and the click from his lighter as he lit a cigarette sounded like the crack of a whip in the stillness of the night, a stillness charged with tension and suppressed emotion.

"It will now be necessary for you all to lie face downwards," he said. "I am sorry about the mink, madame, but then you will not be needing it again for a long time. The last laugh, I am afraid, is on you."

The sunlight caught his glittering insignia as the *chef de police* gestured buoyantly.

"And so, M'sieur Somerset," he was saying. "All is well. You 'ave your revenge and the satisfaction of knowing that by your 'eroic efforts you 'ave rendered Monte Carlo a great service. 'Ow is it you said? The last laugh is the loudest."

"And my ten million francs?"

"Oh, la la!" the *chef de police* clicked his tongue in mock reproof. "I was forgetting," he said with a twinkle in his eye. "Permit me, m'sieur."

From the safe behind him he produced a small, neatly packaged bundle. Breaking open the seals, he placed it on the shining desk.

"Check the notes, if you please," he requested. "And it is necessary for you to sign the receipt."

Tom's fingers trembled slightly as he laid his hands on the banknotes. When he had finished counting them, the *chef de police* went on: "You are fortunate indeed, m'sieur. Madame Orsini was a most methodical woman. In the safe at 'er villa we found all the proceeds of the casino robberies carefully preserved. Such consideration."

He sighed. "To the Orsinis it was a family business. And this was to 'ave been the last job before retiring to Capri." He laughed. "They reckoned without the British bulldog, hein?"

"And now, m'sieur, before you go."

Tom saw that for once the grey eyes were serious.

"A small token of gratitude and respect from the police of Monaco to a brave man," he said quietly.

As Tom took the silver cigarette-box with the red-and-white arms embossed upon its lid, he did not quite know what to say.

He felt much the same three days later when he was struggling in the rain with the Jaguar's folded hood and his groping fingers encountered the small bundle of very large banknotes.



Logical consequences are the scarecrows of fools and the beacons of wise men.

THOMAS HENRY HUXLEY.

Things past redress are now with me past care.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

MYSTERY COMPETITION

IN LONDON MYSTERY MAGAZINE, No. 33, we published an unfinished story, and offered a prize to the reader whose ending was considered by the Editors to be the best.

The story showed Julian Marshall on his twenty-first birthday, and with only a few hours to live. Since his eighth birthday, Julian had suffered from a recurring nightmare—a dream of himself, in the twenty-first bed in a dormitory, and of a hooded figure, symbol of death, which took possession of the eighth bed. On his ninth birthday the dream recurred, only this time the figure approached the ninth bed, and every year since then the dream had been the same, with the figure getting nearer, and Julian, desperate, felt that his only hope of survival was to provide himself with a shield against the evil spirit. Diana, one of his party guests, agreed to stay with him as the traditional defence of innocence against evil, and no sooner was Julian asleep in Diana's arms than the dream began, and the hooded figure embarked on its purposeful shuffle down the dormitory. . . .

Our story ended here, and judging the competition was a difficult job, partly because so many readers, in so many varying styles, dealt with Julian and Diana in the same way. At least half of them were in favour of Julian strangling Diana in his sleep, and then variously paying the penalty. One good thing, at least—very few readers were in favour of a happy ending with sweetness and light prevailing. There were three or four attempts to make a whodunit out of it, with Diana herself, or divers iniquitous relations, the culprits, and at least one story contained an ingenious mechanical device for inducing dreams.

The three stories awarded prizes were chosen because they showed a proper sense of the supernatural, and developed the theme set into a satisfyingly chilling climax, with no sense of anticlimax.

The First Prize (£10) goes to **Jay Garnet**; Second Prize (£5) to **Miss P. Hadwen**, and Third Prize (£3) to **Sergeant J. Munro, R.A.F.**

I should like to thank all readers for their contributions, and only regret that we couldn't give prizes to all the many skilful and enthusiastic essays in the supernatural.

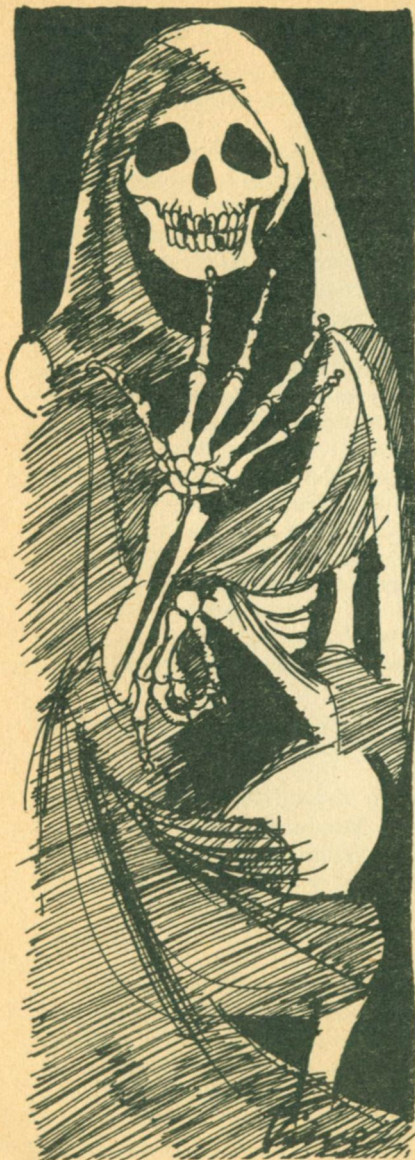
EDITOR.

FIRST PRIZE

JULIAN'S SENSES HEIGHTENED to a pitch of intensity beyond enduring. Panic rose in him like a rending wail, higher and higher until it vibrated in his brain and drilled into the very core of his being.

As the inexorable figure advanced, a foul miasma preceded it; a palpable vapour, flowing through him, adulterating his blood, shredding his own flesh with putrefaction, saturating him in vileness.

The Thing had reached him and



now filled his vision, growing larger until only the hooded skull remained in focus, swelling obscenely, and there was nothing but a grotesque projection of the corrupted mouth, moving, splitting into a dark cavern that widened in direful horror.

It was the absolute of evil, and Julian felt his life being drawn from him, his entrails barbed and scalding.

Over the years he had come to regard Death as a friend, believing it would put an end to his annual torture. This was a new concept of Death—*without release*.

His agony became an exquisite sphere of knowledge; a crystal globe containing a single truth.

Death could not conquer the force that sought to overwhelm him.

Time, measured in the few weeks' yearly convalescence from his birthday ordeal, was but a fleeting instant to his consummate and everlasting doom.

A supernormal faculty had been added unto him. He had reached a plane of consciousness more vast and terrible than he had previously possessed the ability to imagine. Out of reach of time and space, lacking the curve of the universe to furnish an horizon, it was . . . *it was an illimitable vista of Sin.*

Yet it was more. He had once caught its reflection in the eyes of a dying man—and called it fear. Fear? Fear was a glandular reaction, a charge of hormones into the bloodstream. This was *entire*. A complete registering in one cringing soul of every heart-stopping moment since

the first life-cell's spasm disturbed the primordial slime.

He clung to Diana. "Daughter of Jupiter, sister of Apollo, Goddess of Light, save me," he gibbered.

The girl's body fused into his until their embrace became the merging of flame with flame. He plunged deeper into the inferno, penetrating its farthest limits, thrusting again and again into the fire as if the cataclysmic frenzy of his surrender must pacify his tormentor.

Sensation spilled out of him like precious molten metal from an overburdened ladle.

The fantasm hovered, its gaping eye-sockets turned on Diana's burnished hair and lovely limbs entwined with Julian's own.

Slowly, with a scrape of crumbling vertebræ, the skull fell back, the hood slipped off and the jaw-bone sagged.

It laughed.

The whole jangling frame shook and clattered with sepulchral merriment. It dropped forward, doubled up in an uncontrollable paroxysm of mirth. It rocked from side to side, clutching its empty pelvis and slapping its rib cage as if the ghost of a stitch had convulsed its phantom vitals.

At last, with an almost skittish lift of its shoulder blades, the Thing shambled away as if it had wreaked its utmost havoc and thus invoked its own unholy exorcism.

Julian went limp, feeling drained of all goodness and mercy, every nerve and fibre utterly spent. Bludgeoned by exhaustion, his over-sensi-

tive mind still strained to order his turbulent impressions.

Was it triumph, mastery, threading his veins like a live wire only thinly insulated by his torpor? Yet he felt culpable, subjugated, prisoned by a guilt that had freed him from isolation.

All his life he had been oppressed by a sense of personal destiny, convinced he must undergo a unique suffering that would fit him to serve a higher purpose.

Somehow he had failed the supreme test.

Robbed of his martyrdom, he gloried in the loss of its burden. Was it so shameful to have a share in the violence and pity of mankind?

He drifted from waking to sleeping, unaware of the transition, unable to mark the line between his nightmare and reality.

He woke as Diana stirred in his arms.

"Julian?" she murmured drowsily.

He buried his head in her breast, his cheek wet and cold against the warm fragrance of her skin.

"You're so lovely, Di." His breath caught in a sob as her sweetness appeared doubly dear after the nauseous stench of his persecutor. "So untouched, so . . ."

With a shock he heard his voice coarsen and felt the spring that had found release in him compress again, the tension urging his loins with a surge of wondrous power that no longer held any terror.

Desperately he fought down the savage instinct that threatened his honour and that of a girl as innocent

as he had resolutely kept himself; a girl whose very purity had seen him through the extremities of hell and into the explosive brilliance on the other side.

"Di," he croaked and pushed her from him, dragging on a deep, shuddering moan. "Why did the Thing laugh?" he asked, bemused and wracked by an eagerness to taste again a half-remembered ecstasy. "It looked at you and laughed."

A shaft of moonlight fell on her.

He stared up as she lent over him, one hand flung back against a tumble of golden hair, the soft skin of her underarm gleaming and softly curved.

She was smiling. She, too, had seen the grisly joke, and in her smile lay the enigma of his own eternal punishment.

His eyes filmed with horror as if he gazed once more upon a grinning malevolence, for her pulsing white body was not strange to him and her woman's eyes were full of a yet unsated greed.

Julian knew now the name of the spectre that had haunted him since boyhood and stalked him down the years.

This, then, was the end of a long and carefully measured journey; the entering into man's estate. Destruction had two faces.

Diana held out her arms and slowly bent over the pillow in an attitude of complete possession.

JAY GARNET.

SECOND PRIZE

IN AN AGONY Julian lay, scarcely breathing, as his dread visitor, paus-

ing occasionally to gaze first at one empty bed then at another, slowly proceeded down the long room. Once again, as it passed the window half-way down the dormitory, a shaft of brilliant moonlight fell upon its face, and once again he saw, with horror too painful to be borne, the gleaming skull set in the ghastly grin of death, the eye-sockets tenanted no longer by the windows of the soul but by the crawling parasites of decay, and the few strands of greasy hair which still clung around the Thing's domed forehead.

Sixteen, seventeen, eighteen . . . now he could smell the stinking breath of the grave which hung around the creature in a fetid cloud. It filled him with an overpowering nausea, and as he lay shrinking and powerless, he gathered his feeble remaining strength in an effort to pray for deliverance, but the words would not come and he knew, with terrible resignation, that there could be no help for him. He must face his end alone.

Now, as the visitor approached the twenty-first bed in which he lay, he almost welcomed it. The bony arms and fleshless hands stretched out to him, the stench of decomposition surrounded him, and now he heard the voice of Death, grating and inhuman, speaking the words which before he had but imagined. . . . "Come, my friend, embrace me . . . for I am Death." He struggled upright with a great effort and, as the icy fingers touched his forehead with seeming gentleness, he fell back unconscious upon the pillow.

Hours later, he awoke to find bril-

liant sunshine glinting through the curtained windows, and the air alive with the music of a thousand birds. For a few moments he did not recall the events of the night, but as recollection gradually returned he was filled with a tremendous joy. At last the shadow was lifted from his life, at last he could begin to live without the frightful burden which had pressed upon him since early childhood. Now he could think of marrying—of a loved and loving wife, of merry children and a beloved home. And who should that wife be but Diana—sweet, gentle Diana, who had so unselfishly fallen in with his wishes and so helped him to overcome his horrible destiny. Diana . . . swiftly he turned to her, to touch her cheek. “Di, darling, wake up. It’s all over—you did it for me, Di, my own love . . .” But the words froze on his lips and turned to a gasp of unutterable despair. For it was not Diana who lay sleeping quietly beside him but a Thing of mouldering bones and earth-stained rags. A Thing to whose polished skull still adhered a few strands of golden hair; the golden hair of his love, his talisman.

P. HADWEN.

THIRD PRIZE

IN THE ROOM nothing had changed. In the pearl-grey moonlight the beds lay silent and empty and he was alone with what had come into the room—for him.

His heart pounded and the salty taste of fear clogged his throat as the familiar odour of corruption reached him. The bed creaked as he tried to

sit up—his arms—legs—they—wouldn’t—move. A whisper of trailing cloth and it was near now . . . oh God, don’t let it touch me—make it go away—please make it go away. . . .

It came to the foot of his bed and turned to face him. Arms slowly raised and white arm bones gleamed through the tattered, crawling shroud.

A cold wind whined through the room, and corruption and tainted earth stank in his nostrils. Screams burst from him as cloth brushed his face—he was crying a name.

And then he was falling through silent, velvet darkness.

The room swirled round the bed. He was sitting up, straining against encircling arms. Diana’s face was pressed to his and she was whispering that it was all right, everything was all right. His head throbbed. A black-speckled greyness clouded his sight, and nausea rose burning inside him. “Diana . . . sick . . .” He stumbled across the room and flung open the door. She slowly put her hands up to her face and drew shuddering breath. Letting her hands fall, she rose from the bed, running her palms over her dress, trying to smoothe away the creases. Suddenly she felt cold and she crossed to the fire, holding her hands to it. The clock on the mantelpiece said four.

She whirled as the door opened. Julian came into the room. His face was ivory-white, dark smudges under his eyes. He smiled weakly. “It’s all right, Diana. I’m all right—now.”

She went to him and, arm round his shoulders, led him to the arm-chair standing by the fire. He relaxed

into it and she remained standing looking down at him. Then she said, laughing shakily, "I think what we both need is coffee—hot, strong, coffee."

Rain spattered fitfully on the window and dawn was a grey light. On the low table between the chairs in front of a glowing fire stood two empty cups. Julian leaned forward and flicked his cigarette into the fire into which he stared unseeingly.

"More coffee, Julian?"

"Mmm."

"Coffee." She leaned forward and rattled the cup.

He turned to her. "No, not for me, thanks. Sorry, Diana, I was miles away just then."

She let a moment or two go by. "If you don't want to talk about it, I'll understand. But how did all this ever begin—your dream, I mean?"

He shook his head wearily. "I just don't know. These past years I've racked my brains thinking about why I should be haunted like this. . . ."

He lit a cigarette. "Diana, this morning, when I asked you to . . . to help me, you said you had no choice. You had, you know. You could have left. You had only my word that I wasn't going about the usual thing in a new way."

She shook her head. "No, Julian, I didn't have any choice." She looked at him steadily. "You said that innocence was supposed to defeat evil. Innocence—and love."

They stood up, and they were in each others' arms. "Diana, dear Diana. Maybe the dream was for this—to bring us together."

The insistent shrilling of the alarm made them both start. "Good lord. Eight already," she gasped. "Darling, my parents. They'll be wondering what's happened to me."

He indicated the outer room. "You can use my 'phone if you like." He watched her walk across to the door and into the room. Then he walked over to the window.

Rain squiggled down the panes. From the other room he heard the whirr-click of the 'phone. There was a silence. And then—"Mother? . . . yes, of course I'm all right . . . Julian's place. . . ." He opened both windows and leaned out into the cool, wet air. Five windows below, a dog was the only movement in the Sunday-morning street. He whistled to it and it stopped to look up inquiringly. Tail wagged, and then it went on its way. He drew back into the room, closing the windows as Diana came back. "All right?"

She nodded, smiling.

He looked at his watch. "There's a bus leaves the station at quarter-past. I'll go and get your coat."

When she had shrugged into it, they went together into the outer room. "Sure you don't want me to see you home?"

She shook her head. "No, darling. You've some rest to catch up on."

He laughed, ruefully surveying the aftermath of the party. "More like a good morning's work ahead of me."

They stopped by the door. "I told mother you'd be coming round for me tonight and that you had something very special to tell her. Seven?"

"Seven it is."

"And, Julian—many, many happy returns."

He crushed her to him, his lips hungry on hers. He released her. "Blast that bus." Laughing, she ruffled her fingers through his hair. A swift kiss and she was gone. He closed the door softly and, his heart pounding, his head curiously light, he went to work on the room.

NIGHT

Arm in arm they slowly rounded the corner and he was almost home. The block of flats rose before them across the street, its windows reflecting red and yellow of a flashing neon sign. As they slowly crossed the street, someone came to meet them. It was Mrs. Parkins, the occupant of the flat next to his own. "Mr. Marshall, at last. I've been waiting to see you."

He looked at her in surprise.

"My husband isn't home yet and there's no one else on the floor. I couldn't stay up there another minute." Her hand clutched his arm. "There's someone in your room. Someone keeps tapping on the wall!" A car whined by and the footsteps of someone click-clacked along the street. Paper swirled by whitely in the cold wind.

Her voice trembled. "All night, tap, tap, tap. Bobby, my cat, didn't make me feel any better. I can't get him from under the chair. Spitting and snarling all night."

Julian tried to reassure her. "Mrs. Parkins, there's no way into my flat except through the door. And that's locked. Maybe it was a mouse."

She leaned forward, her eyes blink-

ing behind shining glasses. "Can a mouse turn door handles? That's what made me come down here more than an hour ago. I'd rather freeze down here than stay up there. Once the tapping stopped and I plucked up courage to open my door and look along to yours. The handle on your door was twisting—up, down, up, down."

A shrilling bell in the distance grew louder and a car rounded the corner. "That'll be the police. I 'phoned for them."

The car stopped by them. Doors opened and shut and two men came to them.

"Mrs. Parkins?"

Julian spoke before she could reply. "I'm Julian Marshall. It's my flat that she 'phoned about."

"Well, then, sir, shall we go up and see what's going on."

Mrs. Parkins led the way, but at the head of the stairs on the sixth floor she fell back behind the group. Julian felt for his keys. They came to the door. He inserted and twisted the key. He flung the door wide and the policemen shouldered past. He felt for the switch and light flooded the room. Lights clicked on in the bedroom and kitchen. Diana stood by his side. Mrs. Parkins hovered in the background. He took Diana's hand and smiled at her. "A fine end to our night."

They came back into the room. "Well, there's no one here. All your windows are still fastened. Nothing seems to be disturbed. Except—your bed."

Julian's voice rose. "What about my bed?"

"Blankets all over the floor and—maybe it's none of my business, but there's cloth or something on the bed that stinks to high heaven."

He turned. "And now, Mrs. Parkins—"

Everyone jumped as Julian screamed in the bedroom. Diana was in first, the men close behind. "Julian, darling, what is it?"

He was sagging against the wall, his hands over his face. "On the bed, my God, on the bed." There was an odour in the room.

On the white sheet was a large piece of grey, dirty cloth. The constable who had been in the room took the poker from the fireplace and lifted up the cloth.

He spoke to Diana. "Better take him outside, miss."

He looked at his companion. "And what do we make of this?"

The other man shrugged. "I know one thing. Burn that stinking stuff before I'm sick."

He let it slide into the fireplace, stuffing a newspaper on top of it. He applied a match and flame roared briefly. It went out. The glass that Julian held rattled against his teeth.

"Are you all right, sir?"

Julian nodded weakly. Making an effort, he whispered, "Yes. I—don't know why I acted like that."

The policeman nodded. "I see." It was plain, from his tone, that he didn't. "Well, I don't see that there's anything we can do here. Mrs. Parkins, could we see you a minute?" He

looked at them. "Good night, sir, miss."

Mrs. Parkins turned at the door. "I'll be back in a minute."

Julian set the glass down and clutched frantically at Diana's hand. "Diana, Diana, help me, help me."

She drew his head on to her breast. "Darling, what frightened you?"

His voice was muffled against her. "That Thing on the bed. The bed itself. I left it made up. Mrs. Parkins was wrong. It wasn't someone she heard tonight—it was some Thing. You cheated it by waking me, and now it's here, looking for me."

Frightened, she looked down at him. She jumped as the door opened. Mrs. Parkins came in. She held out a glass. "Here, miss. Make him drink this."

She stood, her hands clasped in front of her. She sniffed. "Policemen. Trying to tell me I'd been hearing things. If they had heard what I . . ."

The glass shattered against the wall as Julian flung it from him. "Mrs. Parkins—for God's sake . . ." A shocked silence and he tried to recover himself. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry."

Diana stood up. "Julian, you're coming home with me tonight. I'll 'phone mother now and tell her you're staying. Then I'll 'phone for a taxi. I'm not letting you stay here tonight."

Mrs. Parkins spoke. "I'll 'phone for the taxi, my dear."

Diana smiled her thanks and turned to Julian. Slowly, he walked over to the closed door of his bedroom.

He opened it. The light was still on. He opened the door against the wall, making sure it would stay open. His mind was numb as he walked over to

the wardrobe and removed a traveling case from it. He placed the case on the floor near the foot of the bed.

The light above him dimmed, then went out.

"Huh?"

The door creaked, moved and slammed shut. He heard the 'phone crash into its cradle and Diana running across the room. The door knob rattled frantically. The room was lit red, yellow, red, yellow by the sign across the street. And the haunter of his dream stood at the foot of the bed, its face shifting and changing in the light and dark.

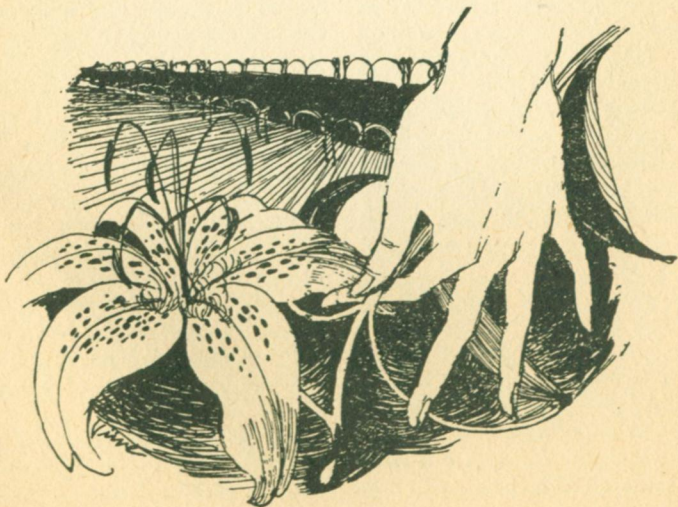
Diana's screams answered his as he stared at it. It moved, and he stumbled back, his foot hitting against the case. He stooped down and, lifting it high, flung it at the advancing horror. The case struck, carrying the figure back and on to the floor. He stumbled

to the door, wrenching on the handle. The door was stuck fast. He pounded on the panel. "Diana. Get help. Get anyone. Get me out—for God's sake get me out."

He heard her, sobbing, run from the door. Something touched his ankle. He looked down, yelling. It had crawled to him and was groping for his leg, its face upturned to his. He ran to the other side of the room.

His foot caught in something and, running, lost balance. His arms flailed. His head hit and smashed through the window. His chest slammed against the sill and a shard of cold glass sliced open his throat. He hung there, blood gushing from his straining mouth. Far away someone was knocking. Something felt for him—and he was falling through silent, velvet darkness.

J. MUNRO.



SEARCH FOR ARMANDO

JACK NORTH

Illustrated by Nicholas Wadley



LIEUTENANT STACEY traced circles with his glass as if it were the most vital duty that a U.S. police officer could perform.

"Luigi Cantorello," he announced, "is protected by the shrewdest crooked lawyer and the most impressive array of big-time politics in New Jersey."

The glass, half full of bourbon, described a precise ellipse, with an equally precise circle at each end.

"Tell you something else," volunteered the Lieutenant. "I'll stake a year's salary that Cantorello is behind the Milton snatch."

Stacey's companion, a private eye by the name of Jim Bagley, squirmed uncomfortably in the chair that was much too small for him.

"Look here, Stacey, where do I come in on this thing?" he asked.

The Lieutenant looked up and his steely grey eyes searched Bagley's face. When he started to speak, he bit off each word as if it were a mouthful of hard, bitter bread.

"I reckon I know nearly every private dick in Stanhope City, and if I'd been asked to compile a list of those who would be likely to handle Cantorello's affairs, your name would have been at the bottom."

There was a short silence, as if Bagley was thinking of something to say.

The Milton snatch was big news, and the Lieutenant was getting far more than his fair share of unwelcome publicity.

Twenty-two-year-old Harry Milton, popular only son of George and Margaret Milton, the electronics millionaires, had vanished three weeks before. One untraced telephone call had told them that their son would remain in good health, and would be returned to them when the kidnapper received one hundred thousand dollars in small bills.

The distraught parents had just one month to prepare this fantastic heap of cash. Evidently the kidnapper was not going to overplay his hand. At the end of the month, they had been told, the Miltons would receive further instructions.

Jim Bagley knew how serious this crime was becoming for Lieutenant Stacey. He also knew that Stacey's uncanny intuition very rarely failed, and that he was probably correct in assuming that Cantorello had added snatching to his other "enterprises." Private detectives have an almost primitive dislike for the word "impossible"; but if Bagley had ever used it, he would have applied it to the effective prosecution of Luigi Cantorello.

"Look here, Stacey," said Bagley, "I don't know anything about Cantorello's rackets. Honestly. I'm hand-

ling a private matter for him. A missing relative, that's all. They were separated fifteen years ago in Sardinia.

"Cantorello tried dozens of private dicks, and they all flopped out on him. Then he came to me. He doesn't confide any of his business to me. Apparently he was very fond of his young brother. About the only person he was fond of, I know. Excepting perhaps Luigi."

Stacey knew that the huge man sitting opposite to him was telling the truth. He pointed the index finger of his right hand at Bagley.

"So see to it that your transactions with Luigi stay on that basis." The index finger started to jab spasmodically. "And don't be surprised if your fee has red stains on it. I gotta go now."

Forty miles outside Stanhope City, in a disreputable shack which formed part of a shabby poultry farm, Luigi Cantorello stood over his victim.

Young Milton had no reason to be optimistic. He looked up at a pasty face, the most striking features of which were the small eyes, as shifty and uncompromising as those of a Himalayan bear. That face would have been unnerving even if Harry Milton had been standing on his feet, with his hands free, ready to fight. As it was, lying on the floor, with his hands and feet bound, and a lump of filthy rag locked into his mouth with adhesive tape, he could merely stare—and tremble.

"What right you got to be so pampered?" Luigi was asking. "Me, I got



separated from my brother when he was just a baby. We were orphans. He needed me. An' we got separated, I tell you."

Here he landed a vicious kick at Harry's ribs, and either ignored or enjoyed the look in those pain-drugged eyes.

"You. You are born into luxury.

You don't get separated from your folks. You get everything you want — until now." Another kick.

"Well, I'll turn educator now, Mr. Harry Clever Capitalist Milton. I'll tell you something. Those dumb hoodlums of mine forgot to tape your eyes when you came here. You know what that means, don't you? I got friends in politics, but there's certain things that go on here that might take a bit of explaining, even for me." He thumbed his large chest. "Luigi Cantorello, unofficial Mayor of Stanhope City.

"Yeah. You gotta go, bub. And I



ain't goin' into mourning. Those folks of your's will cough up that century grand, an' they'll think you're still alive."

Cantorello waddled outside the shack, where his mean eyes looked around for a promising-looking rock. He found one and returned to his victim. He lifted the rock above his head and struck. Nine times in all. Eight of them unnecessary.

He felt a curious sense of anticlimax as he looked down on that bloody pulp which had once been a handsome young head. Harry Milton was past all suffering now. And Luigi Cantorello envied him that, just as he had envied him his easy life.

When Luigi returned to his mansion in Stanhope City, the private eye was waiting for him. He hoped this guy had done better than the others. He seemed a bit of a dope, even for a dick. He had accepted, without question, Luigi's statement that he was in the amusement-park business. What had impressed Luigi most, though, was this bum's insistence on a retaining fee. Although he had mumbled curses in a mixture of Sarda and Italian, the gangster couldn't help admiring Bagley for that.

Bagley was saying something. "It ain't good, Mr. Cantorello. It sure ain't good. We got farther than anyone else, but we're sure up against it now.

"We traced Armando through three orphanages, the last one being the San Agricola children's home near Sassari.

"The next part was supposed to be kept secret, and that's where a good agency has the advantage. Organization, you see.

"Armando, being a very attractive youngster, was nominated for adoption. His photograph was circulated, and a copy got into the hands of a wealthy American couple who were on holiday in Italy. They couldn't have any children of their own, and officially they couldn't adopt a child from Sardinia. But you know what money is.

"Anyhow, this couple's name was Milton. Mr. and Mrs. George Milton —" There was a hissing sound as Luigi drew in a breath between clenched teeth.

"Ah! I see you heard the news. But the police are on the job. And if anyone can find Armando, the police can. You know, of course, that his name was changed to Harry."

As Bagley walked down the path, away from the massive house, the peace of the normally quiet area was shattered by a sharp crack. Could

have been an automobile backfiring. Could have been all sorts of things.

* * * * *

Lieutenant Stacey's glass was tracing frantic circles on the little bar-room table. Jim Bagley was doing all the talking.

"And although his Christian name remained the same, they altered his surname to Picozzi. At the orphanage, that was.

"Well, Armando Picozzi is a mechanical engineer in Milan. A real decent-living youngster. I wonder what his reaction will be when he finds out how Luigi's money was made. Perhaps he'll give it to charity. Maybe split it up between the orphanages. Who knows."

"Tell you something," said the Lieutenant. "All my life I've been baiting private dicks." He chuckled for a few seconds, a twinkle in the grey eyes that watched the gyration of his glass. "But you know something? Even private dicks have got their uses."



It costs a lot of money to die comfortably.

SAMUEL BUTLER.

TOO MANY QUESTIONS

CECIL F. S. HILL

EVERYONE IN Hesslington liked Mr. Marple. He was a pleasant little man with an obliging disposition, always ready for a chat and a little joke with his neighbours.

And in that quiet country town he was a kind of local hero, too, in a manner of speaking. Not many men would have stood up so well to the cruel blow Fate had dealt him.

One night, not long after his retirement from the railway, Mr. Marple had discovered his wife dead in the bathroom.

At the Coroner's inquiry he described calmly and simply what had happened.

His wife, he said, had been in the habit of taking a portable electric-fire with her into the bathroom during the cold weather. Hearing no sounds from the bathroom for a long time, something had prompted him to investigate.

He had knocked on the door and, receiving no answer, had entered the bathroom. He found her lying in the bath motionless, her mouth wide open as if transfixed in a soundless scream.

His first thought had been to run for help. The doctor had certified that Mrs. Marple had died from an electric shock, and neighbours had helped carry his wife's body into the bedroom.

Subsequent investigation had re-

vealed that the flex attached to the electric-fire was old and frayed in places and the switch was faulty. The flex was hanging over the edge of the bath, and this had evidently come into contact with some part of the woman's body. The water had helped to transmit the current quickly though her body.

The verdict was "Accidental Death." The Coroner, after expressing his sympathy to the husband, added a general warning about the dangers of frayed flex and the mishandling of electrical appliances, which he hoped would be duly noted in the Press.

Shortly after Mrs. Marple's death a stranger took up a temporary residence at The Blue Boar in Hesslington. Mr. Fenton was a tall, military-looking man with a neatly trimmed moustache and an easy, authoritative bearing. And in the bar-parlour, where Mr. Marple took his nightly couple of pints, the two men became friendly.

It was Mr. Fenton who made the first overtures, but afterwards it was Mr. Marple who led the conversation. He chatted on in his pleasant, gossiping way, and Mr. Fenton was content just to sit there and listen.

Occasionally, however, he would interrupt Mr. Marple's flow of words to ask a question. It was always a straightforward question and always a personal one.

One evening he interposed to ask

quite suddenly: "How long has your wife been dead, Marple?"

Mr. Marple was really taken by surprise. In fact, he received quite a distinct shock.

But his reply, "Just five weeks to be exact," came quietly and readily enough, following a rapid mental calculation.

"A most unfortunate accident," said Mr. Fenton.

Mr. Marple nodded in silent agreement. But he was puzzled, nevertheless. He had never mentioned his wife's death to Mr. Fenton, and he couldn't think how the man had heard of it, unless it had come by way of local gossip or through the medium of the newspapers.

After that the questions became more frequent, always on the circumstances surrounding Mrs. Marple's death. Mr. Marple found himself losing interest in his new-found friend. His wife's death was not a subject he cared to discuss night after night.

And so Mr. Marple stopped going to The Blue Boar for his nightly pint. But on his second visit to his club he met Mr. Fenton in the lounge, and discovered that the man had managed to become a member there, too.

The probing questions started anew. One afternoon, when Mr. Marple was sitting alone in the park, Fenton sat down beside him.

"Mind if I share your seat, Mr. Marple?" he began. "I'd like to ask you a few questions."

Mr. Marple resigned himself to the inevitable. It was no use, he told himself, he could not go on running away from the man's questions any longer.

He felt overpowered, tired and beaten.

Mr. Fenton wasted no time in coming to the point. "You know what I'm going to ask you, Marple, don't you?"

Mr. Marple inclined his head. "I think I do," he answered, his frail, bent body braced for the question he knew would follow.

"You did it, didn't you? You killed your wife?"

Mr. Marple groaned and buried his face in his hands.

"Why did you do it? Why?" Fenton asked quickly.

Mr. Marple was trembling, twisting his hands. At last he raised his head, abject misery in his eyes.

"If you knew the life she led me," he said passionately. "We quarrelled continually; she nagged me beyond human endurance. But nobody knew that—nobody. When I retired, it was worse. And then I knew that I couldn't live with her any longer."

He looked up at Fenton, tears of remorse streaming from his eyes. "But I shouldn't have done what I did—I shouldn't have done that."

"Bit late for regrets, isn't it?" Fenton regarded the cringing figure before him intently.

"Why are you questioning me like this? Who are you?" Mr. Marple was suddenly on the defensive.

"Never mind that now," Fenton's tone was brisk, confident. "You've admitted it, haven't you? Now, tell me *how* you did it."

Mr. Marple looked up pleadingly, spreading his hands in a gesture of appeal. But there was no pity in Fen-

ton's eyes, only a cold, calculating intentness.

"I planned it carefully. I borrowed some books from the library—books about electricity, and I studied them.

"First I had to insulate the bath by disconnecting the outlet pipe and fitting a short rubber tube between the pipe and the bath. I took up some floor-boards and worked a length of flex from the bedroom to the bathroom, and I wound some bare wire round the back leg of the bath. I had to do all this when I was alone in the house, of course.

"I made a hole in the lino, under the bed, and I could pull the flex through and connect it to the flex of the electric-fire any time I wished. I had one of those adapter things, you know."

"Yes, yes, I know," Fenton said eagerly. "Well, go on."

"The cold-water tap is not joined to the bath, and it was earthed. When my wife got into the bath—I could hear from the bedroom—I switched on. As soon as she touched the tap—well, you know the rest."

"What about all that flex?"

"I got rid of that before I went for help."

"Very neat." There was a note akin to admiration in Fenton's voice. "And no one suspected anything, eh?"

Mr. Marple shook his head.

"Very interesting." Mr. Fenton rose to his feet and stood looking down at Mr. Marple. "But you ought to be more careful, you know. You talk too much."

"What are you going to do now?"

Mr. Marple raised his eyes in piteous appeal.

"Do?" Mr. Fenton appeared to consider the question. "Oh, I'll have to think about that." He caressed his little moustache reflectively. "But you can expect to hear from me again, Marple." And with a curt nod Mr. Fenton hurried away.

That night was a sleepless one for Mr. Marple, and the days and nights which followed were filled with expectant fear. When he did manage to sleep for a few hours his dreams were nightmares from which he awoke in cold, shivering terror.

The judge with his black cap, the condemned cell, the execution notice on the prison gates—he saw them all.

He jumped in panic whenever a knock sounded on the front door, expecting to find the police waiting on the doorstep. Whenever he left the house he fancied that everyone he met eyed him with suspicion.

But the days passed into weeks and nothing happened. He saw no more of Mr. Fenton and no word came from him.

When at last he ventured to visit his club and The Blue Boar, he learned that Mr. Fenton had left Hesslington some time ago and had not returned.

Gradually Mr. Marple's fears were lulled into a state of unconscious subjection. He slept soundly and dreamlessly, and he began to renew his interest in the everyday things of life.

He never saw Mr. Fenton again. But he did see his photograph in the newspapers about two months later. The name was Clearly, but there was

no mistaking that face with its neatly trimmed moustache.

The trial of Maurice Clearly, an ex-police officer, for the murder of his wife, caused quite a sensation. A most ingenious, well-planned crime, the prosecution called it. The newspapers had another name for it. They called it "The Electric Bath Murder."

It appeared that the murderer made the fatal mistake of neglecting to dispose of a length of incriminating flex before calling the doctor.

He had nothing to say in his defence, and he went to his end without disclosing any details which led him to make such elaborate preparations for his wife's death.

The case had a saddening effect on Mr. Marple. He still lives at Hesslington, but he isn't so talkative now. He lives quietly, trying to forget. But sometimes, when he is alone in the parlour of The Blue Boar, he raises a glass in silent gratitude to the man who asked too many questions.



I sit beside my lonely fire
And pray for wisdom yet—
For calmness to remember
Or courage to forget.

CHARLES HAMILTON AIDE.

There is nothing makes a man suspect much, more than to know little.

FRANCIS BACON.

Agatha Christie

THE 4.50 FROM PADDINGTON

Once again Agatha Christie demonstrates the ingenuity and mastery which have made her the most famous of crime writers. *Crime Club Choice 12s 6d*

Paul Mansfield

FINAL EXPOSURE

An exciting and exotic first detective novel set in the author's native West Indies. 'A promising start, very lively.' *TIMES LIT. SUPP.* *Crime Club Choice 10s 6d*

E. C. R. Lorac

DANGEROUS DOMICILE

Keith Merril was positively discouraging about the flat his friends had rented. Nevertheless his friends thought they were lucky in finding such cheap accommodation—until a corpse was found . . . 'Mr Lorac is the best writer of *Roman Policier* in the country.' *BIRMINGHAM POST 10s 6d*

Joan Fleming

MAIDEN'S PRAYER

To Miss Maiden, who was no longer young, the sinister Mr Aladdin appeared like the answer to a prayer . . . Joan Fleming's exciting new novel ends in a surprising and macabre situation. *Crime Club Choice 10s 6d*

Miles Burton

MOTH-WATCH MURDER

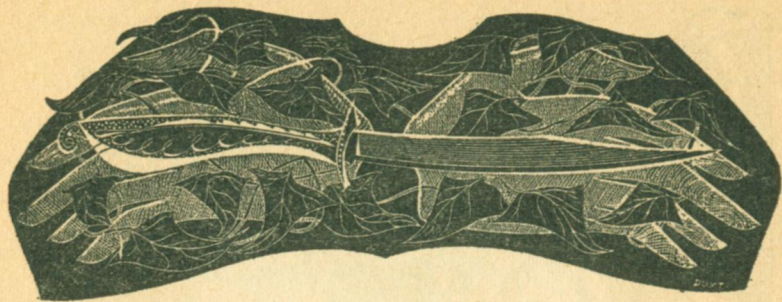
When a party of schoolboys assemble for a moth-watching party, the occasion proves to be fatal not only to the moths. 'Mr Burton keeps his readers agog with numerous alarms and several well-organised excursions.' *PUNCH 10s 6d*

Leslie Ford

THE GIRL FROM THE MIMOSA CLUB

Kerry O'Keefe, a night club hostess, was not good enough for her fiancé's family. Then a murder was committed. . . . 'Miss Ford conveys her motives delicately.' *NICHOLAS BLAKE*

10s 6d



CROOKS IN BOOKS

A review of some recent crime, mystery and detective books

ANTHONY SHAFFER

“MURDER IN THE MORNING,” by Colin Robinson (*John Long*, 11s. 6d.).

A little bit of tycoonicide with routine motives distributed around the dramatis personæ—fear, envy, greed and what have you. Why murder in the morning? Those hep to the ways of finance will tumble to it at once. Those not hep to finance will find themselves for a change in a position of advantage, that is if they are fond of suspense.

“MADE TO MURDER,” by John Courage (*John Long*, 11s. 6d.).

Five best-selling mystery story-writers attempting to uncover a murderer who is one of them, on pain of exposure themselves for various peccadilloes. Not only that, but they have undertaken to murder him when they find him. A lovely situation to gladden the fattest of fat detective-story-loving hearts. There should be more like this.

“HOUSE OF NUMBERS,” by Jack Finney (*Eyre & Spottiswoode*, 12s. 6d.).

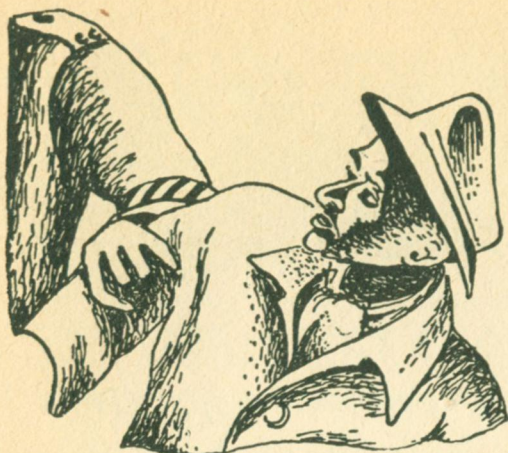
This is a very clever plot indeed, detailing a highly ingenious escape plan from Saint Quentin. As I believe the book has now been made into a movie, it would be invidious to reveal more, but suffice it to say that the film will have to be very good indeed to be more exciting than the book. Unfortunately, as usual, the retributive ending is pretty crummy.

“DEADLINE FOR A DREAM,” by Bill Knox (*John Long*, 10s. 6d.).

Painstaking account of a robbery and counter-action by the police. Comfortable.

“TO THIS FAVOUR,” by Susan Gilruth (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 10s. 6d.).

Blackmail and murder served in a depressingly familiar style — so familiar, in fact, that it would seem



The Mystery Book Guild

EACH MONTH the Guild sends its members a first-class Crime or Mystery novel, brim-full of thrills and suspense.

The selected titles were first published at 10s. 6d., 11s. 6d. and more, but members pay only 4s. (plus 8d. for post and packaging.)

MBG editions are unabridged, well bound and clearly printed — wonderful value for books that will bring you many hours of exciting reading regularly throughout the year.

To join, you simply undertake to accept at least six monthly selections. If you live in the U.K. you can pay for each book on receipt.

FUTURE ISSUES INCLUDE

The Second Man
The Long Night Through
The Paper Chase
Murder in Vienna
Time to Kill
The Benevent Treasure

Edward Grierson
Hugh McCutcheon
Julian Symons
E. C. R. Lorac
Gerald Ward
Patricia Wentworth

Hand this to your Bookseller or post it to:

The Mystery Book Guild

178-202 GREAT PORTLAND STREET, LONDON, W.1.

Please enrol me as a member of the Mystery Book Guild. I agree to accept at least 6 selections at 4s. each plus 8d. for postage and packing, and to give 4 weeks' notice if I wish to withdraw.

* I promise to pay 4s. 8d. for each book on receipt. (U.K. only).

* OR, I enclose 28s./55s. for 6/12 selections.

* *Cross out where necessary. (Overseas members must subscribe in advance)*

NAME _____
(MR., MRS., MISS)

ADDRESS _____
(BLOCK CAPITALS PLEASE)

L.M.M11.57

that the author, though in future she wrote "an inch thick, to this favour must she always come."

"MODEL FOR THE TOFF," by John Creasy (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 10s. 6d.).

The Toff in *haute couture* investigating disappearing models. Standard fair! In fact, the model for the toffee-nosed.

"TOLEDO SWORD," by Mabel L. Tyrroll (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 15s.).

This is one of those books which really masquerade as thrillers under the thinnest of disguises. In reality, it is a novel of character with a little unsatisfactory pinch of crime used to season the plot. (Who, if anyone, ran down Jerome Portehouse in a country lane, and why?) However, I have invariably noticed that this approach almost always allows the publishers to charge more for the book than they would if it were a straight detective story. This book costs fifteen shillings, and is the cruellest stab of the Toledo Sword.

"ALONG CAME A SPIDER," by Maude Parker (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 12s. 6d.).

Closed millionaire's family-circle murder with usual preposterous murder-inducing will, left by the old man himself. (No one to inherit until someone dead. Someone dies.) But no one, like Miss Muffet, need be frightened away by this, for the work-out and distribution of suspicion are both admirable.

"THE LONG OVERCOAT," by Pete Fry (*Boardman*, 10s. 6d.).

The Long Overcoat has not been tailored with that custom-built smoothness we have come to expect from Secret Service books. I suspect, in fact, that it is a first novel. Nevertheless, this tale of hidden agent and Communist pursuit has one or two touches which remove it from the routine.

"THE LISTENING EYE," by Patricia Wentworth (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 12s. 6d.).

Miss Silver is once again bumbling about with old-fashioned omniscience in a tale centering round the theft of a famous necklace from a famous necklace owner. The whole thing really is a famous bit of old *chapeau*, if you ask me.

"MIGHT AS WELL BE DEAD," by Rex Stout (*Crime Club*, 10s. 6d.).

The title certainly doesn't refer to the old firm of Nero Wolfe, Archie Goodwin, Saul Panzer, the orchids and Fritz. They're still all very much alive and camping it up like crazy in the little old Brownstone house in New York City. Even the "enemy," Inspector Cramer, and his side-kick, Sergeant Stebbins, are in vital form. It might, however, conceivably refer to Rex Stout himself, for this plot (missing persons, embezzlement and murder) is one of the most over-extended and pensionable of all time. Wolfe himself, after his Balkan capers (in *The Black Mountain*) has once again become completely sedentary;

PUBLISHER'S SPECIAL

Offer !!!

Well-bound books of 130 pages each

Latest Western Stories

Don't miss this special offer

80	OUTLAW RIVER	Bliss Lomax
81	TRAPPER OF RAT RIVER	Charles Stoddard
82	OWNER OF LOOP-END-Y	Tex Austin
83	SADDLE PALS	Will Watson
84	TRAIL OF FEAR	Garth Fawcett
85	LONGHORN LAW	Abel Scott
86	TRAIL DUST	Bliss Lomax
87	TUNDRA TRAIL	Charles Stoddard
88	THUNDER OF HOOFS	Tex Holt
89	RODEO COWBOY	Chuck Martin

2/9 each including post and packing. (40 cents U.S.A.)
Send your order now with your Banker's draft/Cheque/
Money Order.

To **WELLS GARDENER & CO. LTD.**,
49 Brighton Road, Redhill, Surrey
or your Bookseller

Send me Nos. 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, to:

Mr./Mrs.....

Enclosed Banker's Draft/Cheque/Money Order.....

in fact, the most dynamic thing he does is to empty an ash-tray. As for his master mind, it seems to have become a servant mind to his played-out eccentricities. A change of tempo, please, Mr. Stout.

"MEET THE PICAROON," by John Cassells (*John Long*, 11s. 6d.).

The Picaroon is described as "a buccaneer of crime," and all you readers who can pull your minds back to Bulldog D. will know exactly what that means. Six feet three inches of Saxon muscle, with laconic gait and 1935 slang, whose keen knowledge of the underworld is at once the envy of Scotland Yard, the terror of maldoers and the salvation of unfortunates. In fact, just strip off his pinstripe and call him Robin Hood. Here he is crossing lances (*sic*) with the usual selection of arch-criminals, arch-financiers and arch I don't know what. He defeats them all, laconically of course, by about page 190.

"THE BURNING QUESTION," by Carol Carnac (*Crime Club*, 10s. 6d.).

Another whodunit from the talented Carol Carnac, though somewhat less ingenious than *Impact of Evidence*. The setting is a fog-bound countryside with a corpse found on a lonely road. Shortly afterwards a church is burnt down, and a sinister connection is established between the two incidents. Miss Carnac gives us a bright new puppyish detective, but her "thing" about fog and cars is still with us. Personally I have no objection.

"DEATH WON'T WASH," by Norman Longmate (*Cassell*, 12s. 6d.).

It's always nice to welcome a newcomer to the thriller stakes, and Mr. Longmate has made a neat, if rather unexciting, job of this, his first attempt. The death of a beauty editor in her bath is not all it seems to be, and investigation discloses a sinister causality. The newspaper background—Longmate was a journalist—is good, but much of it, particularly much which is germane to the ingenuity of the book, is somewhat amateurishly handled.

"DEATH FOR SALE," by Nigel Morland (*Robert Hale*, 10s. 6d.).

A corpse selling daffodils on the steps of Eros. Such is the lovely beginning of Nigel Morland's new book. It gets better, too, with added part-of-a-pattern axe murders, which are always the cream off the milk of murder. (Dare one say the Neil Cream?) The denouement is improbably satisfying and the style as urbane as ever.

"THE FOREIGN MINISTER," by Leo Lania (*Peter Davies*, 13s. 6d.).

This is a thrilling, disturbing novel based unashamedly on the career of Jan Masaryk and the collapse of Czechoslovakia. It is, however, much more than a *roman à clef*—a novel in which actual persons are disguised as fictional. It is an attempt, in fact, to dramatize the plight of Liberalism today by using certain historic events by way of illustration. Powerfully and thoughtfully written, this book

Buy



COURIER

it's worth looking into

Britain's Finest Magazine is directed to appeal exclusively to those of taste and discrimination.

Courier publishes only the outstanding in fiction, fact, photographs, art and satire, using all that is finest in paper, printing and process engraving.

Courier is seen only in the best homes, hotels, clubs and ocean liners. It should be in your home.

As a special offer to every new reader who places a subscription to Courier, we are presenting a 437-page volume of MYSTERY—an Anthology of the best mystery and detection stories.

Norman Kark Publications Ltd., Courier House,
1 Blackfriars Road, London, S.E.1., England.

Please send me your Mystery Anthology and enter my name as a subscriber to COURIER for the next twelve months. I enclose £2. (U.S.A. \$6.00).

Name

Address

.....

should be read by a far wider audience than thriller readers.

"WAIT FOR DEATH," by Gordon Ashe (*John Long*, 11s. 6d.).

Blondes, disappearances and secret papers, with a man and wife team leading the parade, and surviving the inevitable holocaust. Pacy is the word that suggests itself.

"THE SUNSET HOUR," by Margaret Sumerton (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 12s. 6d.).

Wife probes three-year-old disappearance of husband with less than startling revelations.

"THE TIGHT CORNER," by Sam Ross (*Boardman*, 10s. 6d.).

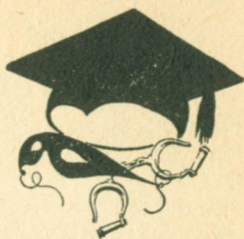
Man-hunt stuff with, just for a wee change, the cops after someone who hasn't committed the murder. This time he happens to be an ex-middle weight champion of the world who is trying to find himself.

"DEATH OF AN AMBASSADOR," by Manning Coles (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 12s. 6d.).

Another Tony Hambleton mish-mash of embassies, jewel thieves, murder and the French Resistance Movement. It's a most palatable one, however, for Mr. Coles is never at a loss for a neatly contrived incident, and it is spiced with deliciously named characters, like Jean Saucisse, Jacques Le Debicaff, Pepe L'Agneau and Eddie Le Chou, and of course Hambleton, about whom absolutely nothing more need be said at this stage.

College Harry

DAVID ELIAS



'Very good twinkling book about how to get on in the underworld . . . highly recommended, not only for lore about larceny . . . but for laughs, too.'

NANCY SPAIN, *Daily Express*, 16s. net

.....

Policeman's Lot

HARRY SODERMAN

The reminiscences and reflections by a detective of world-wide fame, who writes about crime, criminals and detection in many countries. 18s. net

LONGMANS

.....

The Road to Tyburn

The Story of Jack Sheppard and the 18th Century Underworld

CHRISTOPHER HIBBERT

'... period is vividly sketched by Mr. Hibbert.'—HESKETH PEARSON, *Listener*.

'The true interest of Mr. Hibbert's well-written book lies in its appalling picture of the London of the early 18th century. . . .'

—V. S. PRITCHETT, *Evening Standard*.

16s. net



A. A. FAIR

Beware the Curves

Bertha Cool and Donald Lam are in top gear from page one onwards in the catchiest plot ever dissected by the intrepid twosome. 12s. 6d.

ARTHUR UPFIELD

Bony Buys a Woman

"Upfield is as distinctive a writer as Simenon, and his well-constructed detective stories have a quality of atmosphere and background all their own."

CHRISTOPHER PYM, *The Spectator*.
13s. 6d.

COLIN WILLOCK

Death at Strike

There was something far fishier than carp in Caister House Lake—as Nathaniel Goss, Colin Willock's hero of *Death at Flight*, was soon to discover. 13s. 6d.

HERBERT BREAN

A Collar for a Killer

Only one man can save Harry Derby from the chair—and he was a detective with a guilty conscience. 13s. 6d.

HEINEMANN

"POISONERS BASE," by Belton Cobb
(*W. H. Allen, 10s. 6d.*).

Mr. Cobb is in his own way a really die-hard traditionalist. There are certain things which he believes should go into detective stories, and in they go—not all of them at once, mind you, but a fair sprinkling. In *Poisoners Base* we have the policeman whose long-anticipated holiday is interrupted by a crime; we have a tin of arsenical weed-killer; we have accidental overhearing of criminal activities as a motive for murder; and we even have tired old finger-prints used as a final proof. Never mind, there's a nice little twist in this tale of an escaped convict and who helped him, which will, as the blurb tells us, "Surprise even the most experienced of readers"—mainly, I suppose, because they would have thought it past resurrection.

"DOUBLE DOOM," by Josephine Bell (*Hodder & Stoughton, 12s. 6d.*).

Really beautifully involved whodunit (or rather whodunthem—three corpses, two of them twins), executed in the familiar, sinister Josephine Bell style. In her devotion to family suspects and skeletons in closets, Miss Bell reminds one strongly of certain Victorian thriller writers; whilst, in addition, she has mastered all there is to know about modern detective-story convolutions. *Double Doom* gives a double measure of family plotting and counter-plotting for the oldest (naturally) of murder motives. So draw your padded leather arm-chair up to the roaring fire, ignore

the storm raging outside and get on with it.

"THE JURYMAN," by Donald MacKenzie (*Elek*, 13s. 6d.).

This book is really a tense account of a bribed juryman's struggle with his conscience. The ending which is described on the dust jacket as "one of the most subtle and most surprising twists in criminal fiction" falls, alas, distinctly short of this, as it really leaves the central dilemma unresolved, but on the whole the book is honest enough to justify the most serious attention, and exciting enough to satisfy the most discerning crime reader.

"DEAD AND NOT BURIED," by H. F. M. Prescott (*Eyre & Spottiswoode*, 12s. 6d.).

Another amnesia job, with the victim, as usual, being framed for a murder he didn't commit—an idea, it would seem, that is dead and not buried. The plodding literary style is hardly of enormous benefit.

"THE SARACEN SHADOW," by Shane Martin (*Collins*, 10s. 6d.).

Quel drame in an old French château. Drunken libertines, babies born out of wedlock, a family curse and I don't know what else. Strictly for those who like a touch of the Gothic romance in their crime fiction.

"LANDED GENTLY," by Alan Hunter (*Cassell*, 11s. 6d.).

This is the fourth Gently book, and apart from its unforgivable title and beaten-to-death beginning (cop going off on what he hopes is to be an un-

'Ten stories which come consistently close to perfection. These are virtually flawless tales. Here is a permanent classic among short story collections.'

—Anthony Boucher, *N. Y. Times*.

MYSTERY STORIES

'Ten grand *guignol* stories of which one, "The Speciality of the House" . . . sets the pattern of highly skilled construction, surprise ending, touch of horror. Each story very, very good.' —Christopher Pym, *Spectator*

by

'Good crime stories are much rarer than good novels, and readers with a nose for them will some time ago have discovered the American writer Stanley Ellin . . . (who) . . . writes very well indeed. At least two of these stories are classics of their kind. But all Mr. Ellin's stories have their own distinctive flavour.'

—Julian Symons, *Books & Art*

Stanley Ellin

'I will stick my neck out and affirm that this is as brilliant a collection of stories by a single author as has been published during the last 25 years.'

—Francis Iles, *Manchester Guardian*

11s 6d net

BOARDMAN

NOVEMBER THRILLER OF THE MONTH

THE BLIND VILLAIN

Evelyn Berckman

A new thriller by the author of *The Beckoning Dream* and *The Strange Bedfellow*.

"A writer who can create an atmosphere of real horror."

THE LADY

12s 6d

SEPTEMBER THRILLER OF THE MONTH

SKIN TRAP

William Mole

"Absorbing from the stark beginning to the last surprising pages. . . Mr. Mole has done nothing better."

FRANCIS GRIERSON

12s 6d

AUGUST THRILLER OF THE MONTH

HOUSE OF NUMBERS

Jack Finney

"Detailed *Rififi*-like account of how an escape from San Quentin is manipulated . . . Mr. Finney has a rare hypnotic touch."

CHRISTOPHER PYM (SPECTATOR)

12s 6d

A VERY SPECIAL RE-ISSUE

DEAD AND NOT BURIED

H. F. M. Prescott 12s 6d

EYRE & SPOTTISWOODE

4 Good Thrillers

The Tyler Mystery

PAUL TEMPLE

Has all the "thrills, suspense and excitement which kept millions listening in week after week."—*Aberdeen Evening Express*. 12/6 net

Find Inspector West

JOHN CREASEY

A tough murder case for Roger West. "Mr. Creasey's excitements follow fast upon each other."—*The Daily Telegraph*. 11/6 net

Saint Around the World

LESLIE CHARTERIS

A collection of six brand-new excitements. "That happy inspiration."—*The Scotsman*. "That exhilarating character."—*The Liverpool Post*. 12/6 net

Double the Bluff

GERARD FAIRLIE

"His best yet, with Macall breaking his honeymoon in France to solve a deliciously complicated murder."—*Oxford Mail* 12/6 net

HODDER & STOUGHTON

disturbed holiday, and finds murder) is well up to standard. The really good thing about Gently is that he is so utterly believable, having just the right number of endearing affections to make him stand out of the ruck, and that is a very difficult detective indeed to create these days.

DO-IT-YOURSELF DEPARTMENT

Whether you are an accountant, an aeronautics engineer, an admass enthusiast, an aesthete or an accoucheur, if you read this magazine you enjoy the macabre, the mysterious and the murderous. Perhaps you would also like to write about them. If so, we repeat that we are always interested in good stories and good articles, however little known (and, of course, however famous) the author. Everything from whodunits to whatwasits, from criminology to (suitable) eschatology, can find a place within these covers. We cannot, alas, offer you the basis for a fortune, but then we do not compete with the Pools or with ERNI. We do, none the less, attempt to be courteous, and as prompt as we can, to those who submit manuscripts, and to those who are successful we offer the incomparable reward of seeing their work, suitably decorated, set out in this peer of magazines, and of maintaining—or perhaps raising—the standard of this kind of writing. Of course, for those concerned with the sordid and mundane, there is also the bore of having to explain away the extra few guineas to the tax inspector. . . .

THE BLOODHOUND



has a superb collection of
mysteries for the addict

*Put these titles on your must-be-read
list*

American BLOODHOUND choices :

NEEDLE IN THE HAYSTACK

George Joseph

A LONELY WALK

M. E. Chaber

THE GOLDEN WIDOW

Floyd Mahannah

**MARKED DOWN FOR
MURDER**

Spencer Dean

MARK THREE FOR MURDER

Robert Hansen

DIE LITTLE GOOSE

David Alexander

WEEP FOR A WANTON

Lawrence Treat

If you prefer a British setting try
these British BLOODHOUND choices :

NO HERO

Desmond Martin

CHASE THE SNOWMAN

Murdoch C. McDougall

THE MAN ON THE STAIRS

Carnaby Brown

From your BOOKSHOP or LIBRARY

BOARDMAN



LONDON
MYSTERY
MAGAZINE

Make sure that you receive regularly the LONDON MYSTERY MAGAZINE, fill in the form below, and send it with your cheque or money order to the address below, or hand it to your newsagent.

Yearly Subscription 11s. (\$1.75)

A NORMAN KARK PUBLICATION

COURIER HOUSE
BLACKFRIARS BRIDGE



LONDON, S.E.1
ENGLAND

Please send me LONDON MYSTERY MAGAZINE

- 4 issues for 1 year: 11/- (\$1.75)
 8 issues for 2 years: 22/- (\$3.50)

I enclose cheque/postal order for

NAME

ADDRESS

.....

.....



Another scan
by
cape1736

