



LONDON MYSTERY

No. 44



A quarterly anthology of the best
ORIGINAL WORKS IN MYSTERY

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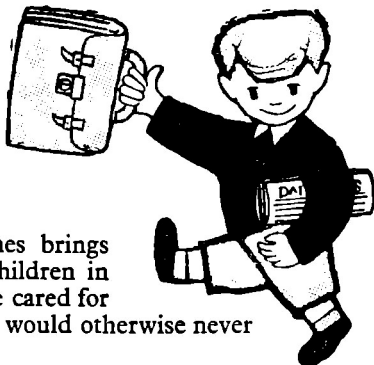
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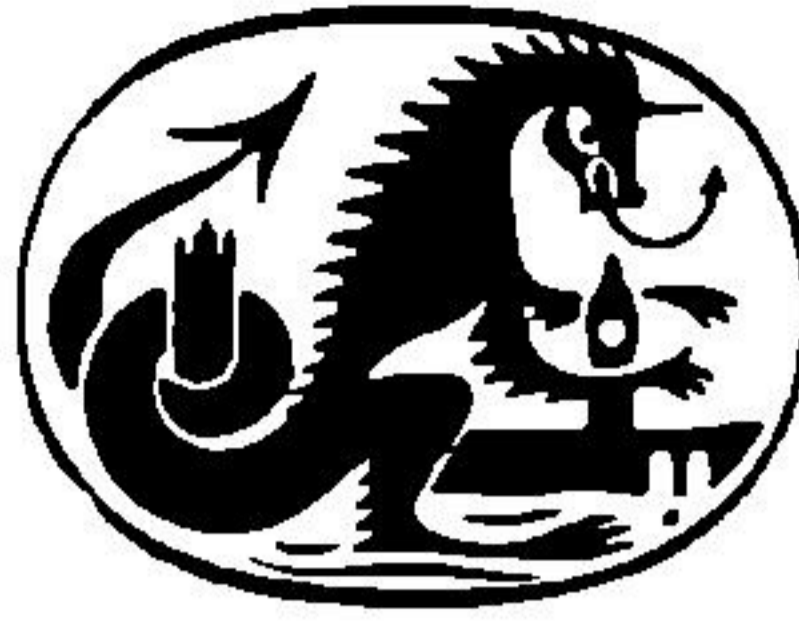


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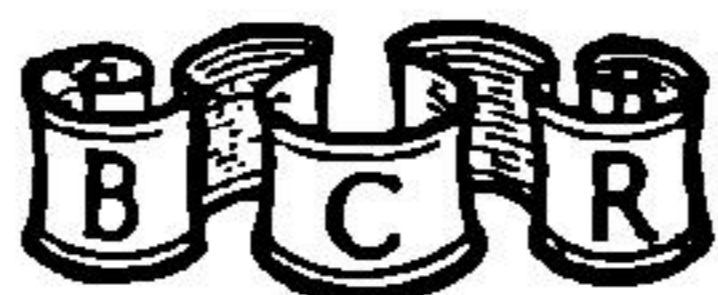
Crime, we know, does not pay, yet it is perennial; whether it be caused by the ambition of a Macbeth, the cold-blooded villainy of a Jonathan Wild or the barbarity of a Bluebeard, the conflict of passion and reason will, as Pope implies, always be with us—

*The ruling passion, be it what it will,
The ruling passion conquers reason still.*

But crime has its benefits: it provides, for instance, a living for policemen, insurance brokers and, of course, writers; and it gives us an opportunity to present these writers for your entertainment. But, as its title suggests, LONDON MYSTERY SELECTION records mystery as well as crime, and you will find a generous quota in this issue. There is L. P. Davies's rather frightening "The Prisoner", the science-fiction contribution by Art Fenna and "Sound Track" by Peggy Loosemore Jones. The lucidity of these writers lends their stories a feasibility which will leave you uncomfortable. Anyone who has any experience of the editorial side of our national Press will know that what happened to reporter Fisher in "The Grey Man" contains more than a little truth. As to the veracity of the remainder of our tales, we leave you, dear reader, to decide for yourself.

EDITOR.

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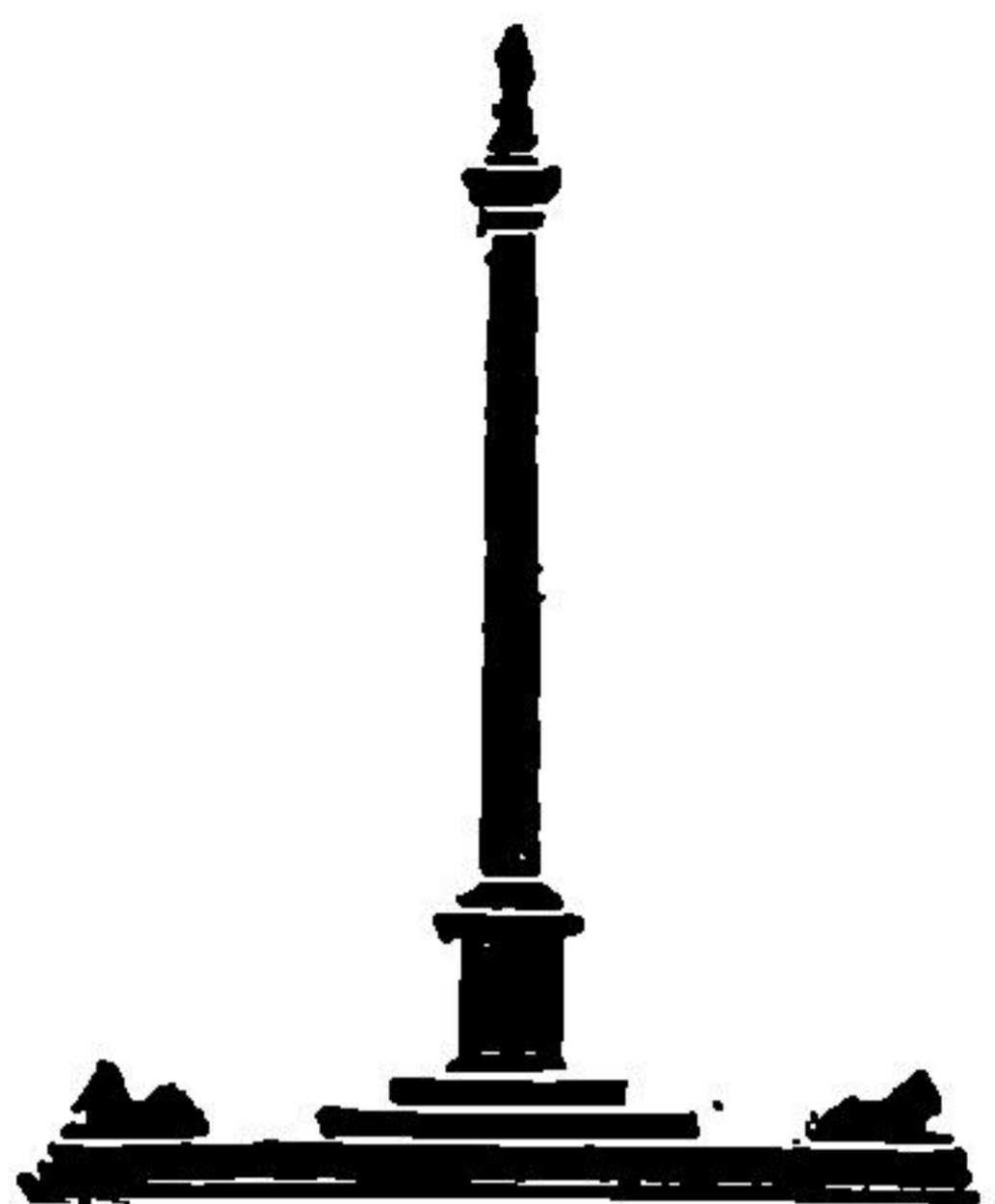
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(P2032A)



IN THE TOMB

ARTHUR PORGES

Illustrated by B. Herdson

STRETCHED out at full length in the damp tunnel, Bull gave the pick-mattock a savage thrust into the tough loam and left it there, dropping to his elbows.

"Gotta rest," he gasped. "I'm pooped."

Behind him the Professor groaned. "Again?" he protested. "You just had a break. We should be in the tomb by now."

"If you think diggin' lyin' down is easy, try it yourself," Bull growled. "I'll hold the light for a change. Thought you said there wasn't much more t' do. Damn stuff's like rubber an' full o' roots."

"That's right, there isn't. When Kavanaugh and I left it, there couldn't have been over eight feet to go. After all, I'm supplying the brains, so you can give with the strong back."

"You've got brains enough," Bull admitted grudgingly, "but also luck."

Suppose somebody'd found this here tunnel while you was doin' time."

"Still brains — not luck. Even though Kavanaugh and I were coming back the next night, I made him hide the opening very carefully. So when the cops picked me up on that old rap, I knew the tunnel would be safe. You've always got to think of every little thing ahead of time. That's how to stay on top."

"You've been down for five years, don't forget. Way down—in stir."

"A slip," the Professor said airily. "Everybody's entitled to just one. My first and last. With this haul, I'm through. Me for the straight and narrow. With a hundred grand or so, giving up crime is easy, right? May even become some kind of an engineer. I didn't waste those five years at Q. Always was good at figures."

"Specially women's."

"Sure, why not. And lucky for you. If I hadn't told you and Krause about my juicier love affairs, you guys would've gone stir-crazy that first year—when a man can't read, or think, or even look intelligent. One thing, Bull, I have to give you, though: you're a good listener. Too bad nothing ever sinks in. What's the time? You took your watch." He chuckled. "And it won't be worth much after wearing it through all this muck. That's why I didn't bring mine. Foresight again, Bull."

"Lemme see. Only two-thirty. An' I'm still waitin' t' find out the score. You ain't told me very much so far except how hard t' dig."

"Good idea. Better get going. I'll

fill you in meanwhile—in words of one syllable or less."

Bull sighed, but seized the pick again. As the Professor held the flashlight steady, the big man pecked away at the stringy soil, his great shoulder muscles flexing in rhythm.

"I dont see why we couldn't break into the vault above ground," he complained. "Where's a safer place t' work than a graveyard at night?"

"Not this one," the Professor said. "It's class. Got day and night watchmen, and a coupla tiger-sized Alsatian dogs. I know. Besides, there isn't any vault on the surface. They just built a big concrete box, like a deep basement, with stairs going down. Then, after he was in, they covered the whole business with a monument like the Hoover Dam. It would take the Army Engineers a week to get through from the top, believe me."

"Well, it's a rough job," Bull panted, wiping his forehead with a hairy wrist. "No room t' swing. Hey—suppose the old guy ain't even wearin' the stuff?"

"Don't worry; he is. Kavanaugh used to work for Ruhig; he knows the set-up. They definitely planted all his jewellery with him, and he had plenty, I can tell you. And it won't even be hot, because nobody will have any idea the stuff is gone. It's absolutely perfect. When you rob the dead, nobody loses; nobody knows."

"Musta been nuts, buryin' all that. Why'n't he leave it t' his family?"

"Don't cry about them," the Professor said sourly. "They split about four million bucks." He spat. "Some people sure get the breaks."

"They got a daughter?" Bull asked.
"You might still muscle in."

"No." The Professor was brusque. Was the big ox actually trying to rib him? That would be something new.

"Too bad. A ladies' man like you——"

"Dig, Bull; don't talk. I'll do that. Which reminds me—what's your real name, anyway? You never told me."

"You never asked. Seems like you done all the talkin'—about you. But it don't matter: I ain't used my real name in a long time. My family's had trouble enough wit'out hearin' about me." His pick rebounded with a loud click, and Bull swore. "If that's another damn rock——!"

"Rock? Let me see." The Professor squeezed his skinny body alongside. "That's it, Bull. The concrete. We've hit the vault. Good sighting job on my part. Me for engineering, all right."

"Hell! The vault, you say. I ain't sure that's anythin' t' cheer about. How thick is it?"

"Only about four inches, I think. You'll knock a hole through in no time."

"Easy for you t' talk. That flashlight strainin' your wrist yet?"

"Aw, quit griping. How else could you make ten grand in one night? They're not paying that kind of dough for beef without brains—and to ex-cons, too. I can picture you even going near a tomb at night by yourself! You've been lucky as it is. You saw where Kavanaugh and I had to shore-up about twenty feet back there with boards. That's real work. The only spot where a bad cave-in could

happen, perish the thought. We'd never get out. But here you've got easy digging, just like cheese."

Bull grunted sceptically, but continued to chip away at the stained concrete. "What d'ya figger his stuff's worth?"

"Well," the Professor said, "you must have heard about Ruhig. He liked to be called 'The Man Who Never Slept'. Stealing the old Edison line. Claimed he walked the floor all night out-guessing the stock market. Maybe he did; the money rolled in, that's for sure. He wore six rings on each hand, all loaded with big diamonds. Tie-pin with a ruby that set him back fifteen Gs, when that was real dough. Then he takes the super special wrist-watch his wife bought him—one of those water-proof, shock-proof, earthquake-proof, self-winding jobs: you know, the kind that keeps going for ever as long as you move your hand a few times a day—and has a fortune in extra gold and ice stuck on it. They buried him with all the jewellery, isn't that the damndest thing you ever heard? The family didn't let out a peep; he had 'em under his thumb dead or alive. Must have been a sight either way, the old——! How's the concrete?"

"Hole's almost big enough right now. What happens next?"

"What do you think, stupid? We go in. Then we grab all the fancy rings and stuff. Since I didn't bring a watch, I claim that. You'll get your cut from the rest."

"Ya mean you'd *wear* a dead man's stuff!"

"Damn right. I won't sell that. Everything else, yes."

"How's this? My hands're blistered t' hell."

The Professor peered at the black hole.

"That ought to about do it. Kavanaugh said the coffin's right in the middle of the mausoleum, on a sort of platform. Solid gold handles; we might as well take those, too."

"An' just how do we crash this here mauso—what d'ya call it?"

"You're doing that right now, musclehead."

"Oh, you mean the vault. Why'n't you say so, then?" He stopped swinging and wormed back a little. "Jeez! You mean right through this hole's the coffin?"

"It better be, or you've done a lot of digging for nothing. And me a lot of brainwork, which is harder."

"How long since the old man died?"

"Almost six years. If I hadn't drawn that fiver, I'd've cleaned this place out before he was cold."

"Look," Bull said gruffly, "the hole's wide enough for you already, an' I'd rather not——"

The Professor's laugh was insulting, and the other winced. "By God, you're scared!" he jeered. "Two hundred and twenty pounds of muscle, and he wants me to go first."

"I ain't exactly scared," Bull objected unconvincingly, "but like I always said, messin' with dead bodies is bad luck."

"Urrgh! You sound just like that Polack broad I told you about in stir. She was always sounding off about

omens, religion and such tripe. 'Cracked Kracowski', I used to call that dame. What did you say?"

"Nothin'," Bull mumbled. Then after a moment's silence: "That the little blonde girl you dumped in Chicago—without a dime?"

"That's the babe, all right. You listen better than I thought. Yeah, I hadn't any dough to spare. Did I tell you how she actually tried to pick me up two years later on West Madison Street? I swear you could hardly recognize her—she looked terrible. When she recognized me, I had a time getting away. She wanted money to go home. Ohio or somewhere. I made up a phone number fast and told her to give me a ring next day; that I'd get some dough. But keep after that concrete, will you, Bull? You can work and still listen, damn it. We've got to be away from here by dawn."

"First you tell me the hole's big enough, an' then you want more. Well, it's big enough for you, an' I ain't crawling into no vault wit' no dead body. I did all the diggin'; you can go in an' get the stuff."

"Suits me," the Professor grinned. "Here, take this light, and I'll see about squeezing through. After I'm in, give it to me; you won't need it out here. Wait, though; let me flash it around, and see how things look." He thrust the light into the ragged gap and peered down. "Yeah, floor about three feet below us, and there's the coffin, all right, just like Kavanaugh said. Careless job; look how off-centre it is on the platform. Big vault, sure enough. Plenty of room for Ruhig to walk the floor nights!

But I guess you're in no mood for humour right now, Bull. You act sick. What a superstitious mutt you are! Live men are the only dangerous ones; remember that. Well, here I go."

He handed back the flashlight and, grunting and squirming, forced his slight body half-way through. "Better chip out a little more while I'm down there," he ordered. "Damn tight fit; my belt's caught. Ah!" Finally his narrow shoulders scraped past, and he stood on the dusty floor. Bending, he turned a smeared face towards Bull, and snapped: "The light, stupid—give it here. What're you waiting for—Christmas?"

Bull's dark, heavy-jowelled face was framed in the opening. He looked down at the Professor, turning the beam on his sharp features.

"That Kracowski girl," he said thickly. "Her first name 'Stella'?"

The other gaped at him, blinking. "Yeah——" he said, and broke off. "What the devil you pestering me with silly questions now for?" His face whitened suddenly. "Bull!" he exclaimed. "You're not——?"

"My name's Kracowski," Bull grated, his jaw muscles knotting. "She was my kid sister. We never even knew she—and you—it killed my mother—my little Stella!" he groaned, half to himself.

"Bull!" the Professor cried, his voice shaking. "Let me explain. . . ."

The face was withdrawn; there were scuffling sounds. The Professor waited, teeth bared, one hand on his opened switch-blade knife. What was the big gorilla up to? For a second he'd expected to find those thick

hands reaching for him; but then he'd remembered that the opening was much too small for Bull's huge frame. Maybe the fool was going to yell copper; scuttle them both to have his revenge.

"Bull!" he hissed, unwilling to raise his voice again. "Your dough—ten grand! Come back, you crazy fool!"

Then he heard wood splintering and a low rumble. "My God!" he gulped. "He's collapsed the tunnel on me!"

For the first time, now, he became aware of the crushing blackness, the silence, the chill damp and, not five feet away, the platform with its burden. His quick mind was racing as he fought for self-control. "Take it easy," he muttered. "No panic. You're all right if you don't panic. Use those brains you've been bragging about." What were the angles? Dig out? Impossible; it would take days to get through the caved-in section with nothing but a lousy knife. Wait a minute. He couldn't get very far horizontally, but once in the uncollapsed part of the tunnel, right outside the vault, maybe by digging up to the surface of the ground. . . . But he was at least twelve feet down, and the soil might fall in on him; he'd be smothered in the narrow shaft. Besides, wasn't there an apron of concrete around the monument? Suppose he ran into that?

"Relax," he said aloud, his voice a little shrill. Its hollow sound startled him, and he spoke no more. He thought: "I'll hammer on the walls with something. The vibration will carry. There's the dogs—they'll hear

me and act up. In a day or two at most somebody's bound to catch on. The air should last that long; some must be filtering through the tunnel right now.

But it was awfully dark. He felt in his pockets. No matches; one penalty for being a non-smoker. The candy bars were there, though. Good. He'd ration them. So much every few hours, and—damn! Not even a way to tell time.

But the Professor would pull through; always had. He'd get a short term for grave-robbing—attempting, actually. They couldn't give you much for that. It would be a relief if the cops came. Maybe Bull was tipping them off anonymously. No, not much chance of that. Stupid as he was, he'd know that his enemy was trapped; would expect him to die down here. Ah, it was a bum break all round. If

he'd only kept his mouth shut about that Kracowski tramp—a hundred grand or more down the drain, and for what? Hell!

He looked about, trying to pierce the almost tangible blackness, but it pressed right up against his skin, making him fight the irrational urge to brush it aside like a gauzy obstruction.

Suddenly he heard something stir and stiffened. His lips worked stickily. It must be—had to be—a mouse. Or nothing; just nerves. How could a mouse get into a concrete vault? And then, standing there, on the knife-edge of hysteria, he heard, coming from the centre dais, a sound that seemed to fill the whole musty tomb. As it grew louder, he recognized a familiar rhythm.

It was the ticking of a watch.



Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air,
The extravagant and erring spirit hies
To his confine.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

THE TWENTY-SEVENTH MAN

A. E. MURCH

Illustrated by Vera Jarman

PARIS TOWARDS THE end of the seventeenth century was justly proud of her palaces and stately avenues with their magnificent fountains and triumphal arches, her fashionable boulevards and the finest public gardens in Europe; but much of the capital was still a maze of tortuous intersecting alleys too narrow for a vehicle to enter, swarming with filthy beggars, pickpockets, escaped convicts and the scum of the underworld. Here, in squalid cellars or notorious cafés, rival gangs of thieves and cut-throats had their headquarters, and any stranger venturing into these slums would be quickly robbed of all he had. He might well pay for his rashness with his life, as witness the mutilated bodies which, all too regularly, the police dragged from the Seine or discovered in the deserted streets at dawn.

But there could be no such explanation for a series of strange disappearances that shocked the social world of Paris in 1688. One after another, within a few months, twenty-six handsome young men of noble blood vanished in broad daylight from the most fashionable quarters of the city. One day they were chatting idly with groups of friends or strolling among the elegant crowds thronging the boulevards, the next they were miss-

ing, and the most searching inquiries could discover no clue to show where they had gone and whether they were dead or still alive.

The Head of the French Police at that time, M. de la Reynie, was at his wits' end. His cleverest *agents* had failed to find the least shred of evidence; his *espions* with their ear to the underworld grapevine gleaned not even a hint; and the families of the missing men were forcefully demanding an immediate explanation of the mystery. In this dilemma, M. de la Reynie recalled to mind an astute police agent of an earlier decade, long since retired and living in the depths of the country, but celebrated in his day for successfully solving cases that had baffled his colleagues. His name, like that of Gaboriau's fictional detective almost two hundred years later, was Lecoq.

* * *

Having studied all the known circumstances of these puzzling disappearances, Lecoq brought to Paris his own son, a tall, good-looking youth of nineteen, and set him to follow the way of life enjoyed by the gentlemen who had so unaccountably vanished. Just as they had done, the young Lecoq, richly dressed, mingled every day with the promenaders in the Jardin des Plantes or around the Louvre, apparently quite alone, but



always watched from a discreet distance by his father and a few specially chosen *agents de police*.

It was some time before this manœuvre produced any result, but old Lecoq was a patient man, content to bide his time, and confident that sooner or later there would be another disappearance that might provide him with a clue. At last, the lad heard himself addressed one morning in the public gardens by a respectful, neatly-clad maidservant, who begged leave to deliver a message from her mistress, Princess Jabouski. This lady, she said, had noticed him favourably and desired to make his better acquaintance. If he cared to follow the maid, not too closely and in a casual manner that would not attract attention, she would lead him to the home of the princess, which was not far away.

It was an attractive invitation, flattering to any young gallant. For months, the *salons* had been seething with gossip about this visiting celebrity, her royal birth, her beauty and fabulous riches, the suite of personal servants she had brought with her from Russia. Without a moment's hesitation young Lecoq strolled nonchalantly after the maid, shadowed in his turn by the police, who delayed only to call up their reserves in case this new move should be significant.

The servant led him through an arched gateway, across a courtyard and into a mansion, where a footman in resplendent livery ushered him into the presence of the most fascinating woman he had ever seen. She welcomed him with charming warmth,

offered him wine, invited him to sit beside her and dazzled him with her seductive smiles. But the young man, with more than dalliance on his mind, was perhaps less responsive than his hostess desired. Something in his manner roused her displeasure or possibly her suspicions, and swiftly she summoned her guards. Four armed assassins rushed in, seized the lad and raised their weapons to strike, but at that moment the police thundered at the doors. Hastily their captive was knocked senseless and thrust into a dark closet concealed in the thick panelling.

* * *

When old Lecoq and his men brushed past the protesting footman they found Princess Jabouski alone in her boudoir, languidly reclining on her *chaise longue*. She assured the intruders that no other visitor had disturbed her that morning and her servants bore out what their mistress had said. Lecoq remained with her while his men searched the quiet, apparently well-ordered house, but found nothing amiss. The shrewd old officer was still convinced that his son must be hidden somewhere within reach, and refused to withdraw his men, save one whom he sent out with an order to ensure that the residence would be surrounded. That done, he stood silent, awaiting developments.

Meanwhile the youth was regaining consciousness in his concealed prison, though slowly, for the air was foul. As his eyes began to pierce the gloom he saw, facing him upon a shelf, a severed human head! With

mounting horror he averted his gaze, only to catch sight of a second, a third, and still more beyond, till he realized that all around him stood the heads of the twenty-six missing men. Beyond all doubt they had each in turn responded as he had done to an intriguing invitation, and had paid with their lives for their brief enjoyment of Princess Jabouski's favour. Young Lecoq, more fortunate than his predecessors, was still alive, but in deadly peril, for his enemies could never let him live to tell the secret of their hidden charnel-house.

If only he could give a signal to his father! He was sure the police must have followed him to the house and gained admittance, but he had lain for some time unconscious and had no means of knowing whether they were still there, for no sound of voices reached him through the thick walls. He must risk everything upon one attempt to make himself heard by the only men who could help him. One of his father's instructions now stood him in good stead, for round his neck, under his shirt, hung a police whistle. With all his force he blew a piercing blast; old Lecoq and his men heard it, and within moments had rescued the lad, finding themselves at the same time in possession of the most unmistakeable evidence to explain the fate of the men who had disappeared.

The trial of the self-styled Russian princess and her servants was sensational, even for those times! She was, in fact, an English woman who had preyed on society in more than one European capital, borrowing impos-

ing titles to further her schemes and masquerading for some years as "Lady Guilford". She organized and controlled a gang that amassed great wealth in gold and jewels from cleverly planned blackmail, robbery and murder, and the full total of her victims was never ascertained. But the evidence obtained by Lecoq was more than enough to justify conviction of the prisoners.

Her accomplices were executed with all the barbarous cruelty decreed

by the penal code of the day. Death by torture was the sentence passed upon the "princess", and she was thrown into prison while the gruesome preparations were made. With such a woman, however, delay was dangerous. With superb aplomb she tricked her gaolers and escaped, but whether her subsequent career was blameless, or whether she resumed her evil ways with sufficient discretion to avoid recapture is a matter on which history is silent.





THE FAMILIAR FACE

C. V. TENCH

Illustrated by Michael Ricketts

IT HAPPENED FAST. The door of the station-wagon was jerked open and the driver said, "Excuse me." Edith Miller leaned forward. The man who had ranged up behind her on the pavement gave her a violent shove. He moved in beside her, the door slammed and the car got under way again. As the revolver muzzle pressed into her knee, Edith heard the man say, "Scream and you lose a leg."

At eight o'clock that night Reynolds made the telephone call. His face was dead-pan.

"Is that you, Miller? Okay, we've got news for you" He grabbed Edith Miller's arm and twisted it.

There was pain in her voice as she said into the mouthpiece. "I'm all right so far, dear, but you'd better obey their instructions. They'll kill me if you don't."

"Watch her, Red." Reynolds pushed her away. Into the phone he said, "Just because your wife's been snatched doesn't mean you won't be seeing her again. All you have to do is play along with us."

"What do you want?" came Harold Miller's unsteady voice.

"A hundred grand. We know

you've got it. A posh house, swimming-pool, two cars, a boat. Yeh, you can raise it okay."

"Why you dir——"

"Don't say it." Reynolds gestured to Red Conlon to bring Edith within reach. He grabbed and twisted her ear. Edith cried out in pain.

"That was your wife again," Reynolds said into the phone. "And that could only be the beginning. Well—do we talk business?"

When the call was finished, Reynolds said to Edith, "He needs three days to raise the money. For your sake, I hope he gets it."

Looking him in the eyes, Edith said, "You'll get the money. My husband knows how to make money fairly fast."

On the evening of the second day, Red Conlon reported back to Reynolds.

"No sign of a set-up, chief. Only routine callers. He hasn't left the house." He grinned at Edith. "The guy must be soft over you, baby. The light didn't go out in his room all night."

"All right. Enough of that." Reynolds eyed Conlon searchingly. "There's something else on your mind. What is it?"

Conlon scratched his head. "Somehow I feel I've seen this Miller character before. You know, a long time ago, before we planned this snatch."

"Maybe," Reynolds said. "But why should we let that worry us?"

* * *

The third evening Reynolds made the phone call. "Got the dough,

Miller?" To Conlon he whispered, "Bring her close."

Edith said into the phone, "Yes, honey, I'm fine. So far they haven't touched me. If you pay up, I don't think they will."

Pushing her away, Reynolds said into the phone, "Miller, put the money in a paper package. At ten o'clock start north on route fifteen. Go twenty miles straight north. Then you'll come to a town called Creston. Turn right on the dirt road that's just on the other side. Drive for six miles, then stop. And don't forget, Miller. Any tricks and you'll see your wife all right. But she won't look pretty and she won't be breathing."

* * *

The car purred softly along in the driving rain. Harold Miller glanced at the clock on the dashboard. It was ten-twenty p.m. Creston should be coming into view at any moment now.

Five minutes later, on the outskirts of the town, he stopped for a moment to check the mileage on his speedometer. Turning on to the lonely and untravelled dirt road, he drove for exactly six miles, then parked at the edge of the road as he had been instructed to do.

He made certain the package of money was on the seat beside him. After three nights without sleep, his eyes burned and ached intolerably.

Now headlights were coming up behind him. The station-wagon passed and continued on for twenty or thirty yards. Then it turned, came back and drew up alongside Miller's

car. Conlon, gun in hand, got out. Harold Miller handed him the package of money.

"Keep him covered while I check it," Reynolds said as Conlon returned with the ransom to the car. In the glow from the dashboard lights he hurriedly thumbed the thick wads of currency.

Presently Reynolds put the bag on the seat beside him and said through the open window, "You're a smart apple, Miller. It's all here."

Harold Miller hardly heard him, for Conlon was saying, "I've seen you some place before, punk."

Looking at him hard, Miller replied, "That's right. We have met before."

"Tie a kite to that social stuff," came impatiently from Reynolds. "We've got to keep moving."

"What about my wife?" Harold Miller asked sharply.

"Don't worry," Reynolds replied through the window. "We're not killers. We're not risking a murder rap. We just drugged her and left her on the bed. When she wakes up she'll

come home. By then we'll be a long, long way off."

The station-wagon drove away. Presently Harold Miller followed.

* * *

Harold and Edith Miller sat in the kitchen, spreading marmalade on toast and drinking hot coffee.

"It's lucky for me you didn't destroy your plates and equipment when I asked you to," Edith said.

"It was." Harold Miller ran his fingers through his thinning hair wearily. "But now I've destroyed everything. And, of course, Conlon has seen me before. When I was doing that stretch for counterfeiting he was in the next cell block.

"But I didn't do too good a job with the hundred thousand. They're sure to be picked up. And as kidnapping calls for a far heavier penalty than passing counterfeit bills, they won't dare to mention us or how and where they got the phoney money, so they won't be able to put up much of a defence."

Edith smiled tiredly and kissed him.

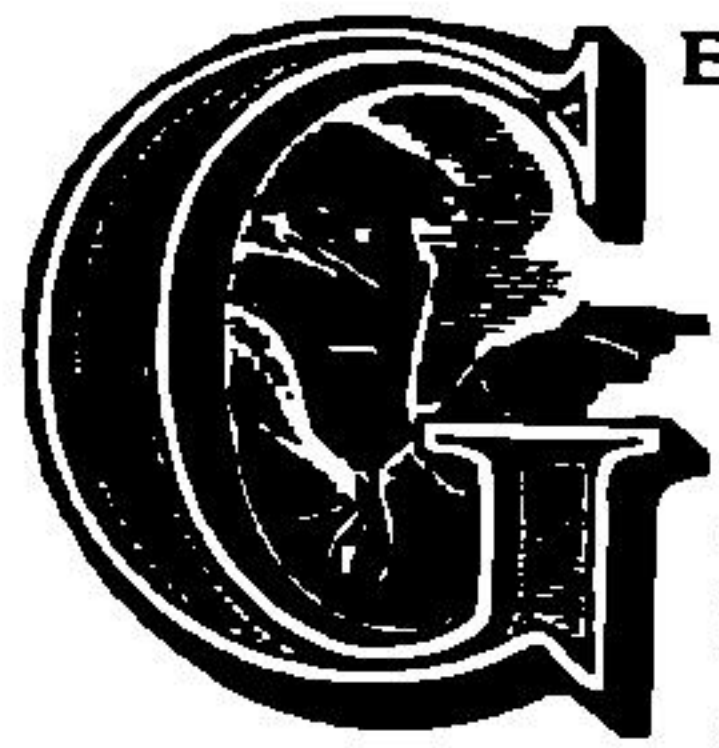


All human things are subject to decay,
And, when fate summons, monarchs must obey.

JOHN DRYDEN.

THE MANUSCRIPT

J. M. STEWART



GEORGE TALBOT walked out of the Scribe Club in Fleet Street and along to the Ink Blot, his other club in the Strand. There he cashed a cheque for fifty pounds, an advance on a boys' novel he had just turned in to his publisher.

The money was paid over the bar by Ivy, the manageress, in nice crisp five pound notes. She frowned severely at George as she watched him fold the bundle and stick it carelessly into one of his trouser pockets. He'd be lucky if he got home with it, she thought. Some bright girl would have her fingers on it before night. As soon as George had a few whiskeys in him and started talking about his long-dead wife and his days of greatness before the war when his name was transported from one end of London to the other on bus posters. Well, he wasn't going to get drunk here, Ivy resolved. She'd give him a few only, then tell him to be on his way.

George downed his first drink and asked for another. His bright eyes in his handsome face, handsome for a man of sixty that is, started roaming round the bar looking for someone he knew, but none of his cronies was in yet. A bit early for them, he supposed. But there were two fine-looking girls sitting along from him, real pretty they were, a treat to be seen

with, friendly-looking, too. One was eyeing him. Or maybe it was his tie she was admiring? George couldn't be sure. He'd soon find out, though. He raised his glass to her as soon as Ivy had refilled it.

The girl smiled at him.

"Have a drink," George said. "Your friend, too."

"Thank you. It's very kind of you," the girl replied.

"What'll it be?"

"Gin and tonics, please."

George gave the order to Ivy, who glowered at him, but business so early in the day couldn't be turned away.

"Move a stool down," George said to the girl. "Or will I move a stool up?"

"You move up," the girl smiled back, and George, lifting his glass, was soon perched next to her.

She had nice eyes, he saw, with smoke-coloured hair and a flawless skin, hardly powdered at all. No more than twenty, he'd say. The other one was about the same, and just as pretty. George introduced himself.

"I'm Karen," the girl said. "And this is Tina."

"Not Tina Onassis!" George laughed.

"Not so rich." The girl laughed too. She had a nice laugh, a bit trained maybe, but real nice on the ears. George felt great.

"I like your tie," Karen said. "A Scribe Club one, isn't it?"

"How do you know?" George asked.

"We've met reporters before," Karen answered. "We're stage girls."

"I'm not a reporter," George said. "No?"

George shook his head. "I write boys' stories."

"How interesting," said Tina.

"Not financially." George grimaced.

Karen laughed, then fingered George's tie, and looked back at Tina.

"Should I ask him?" she queried.

"Ask me what?" said George.

Karen turned to George again, her face gone a little shy now. "We've written a book," she said. "Tina and me. Our life story."

George looked into his glass and groaned. "Oh no!"

"We really have." Karen became very serious.

George felt sorry for groaning. The young should be encouraged instead of disillusioned.

"It's a tough game," he said. "Heartbreaking." He put on a solemn face.

"I think it's as good as anything we've read in the Sunday papers," said Tina.

"But will an editor?" George turned his head away.

"Couldn't you tell us that?" asked Karen.

George swung his head back. "Me?"

"You could read it and give us your opinion."

Another groan was oozing up to George's mouth, but he suppressed it. After all, he had only himself to blame for this. It was he who had sought their company. At his age,

too! He took another look at the girls. They were so young and eager, so full of hope. Maybe he should take a look at this manuscript of theirs. It would only take a minute or two to tell. The first few pages was all he needed to see, then if it had anything he'd take it along to his agent. Old Willie would find a place for it somewhere.

"All right," said George. "I'll have a look. Where've you got it?"

Karen grew excited. "At our hotel," she cried. "And, oh, thank you! You're ever so kind!" She was off her stool in a flash, forgetting to finish her drink. But George finished his.

They lived in a small hotel tucked away in a back street in Bayswater. George climbed the stairs behind them to a double room on the third floor. Karen brought out the manuscript, beautifully typed in a fancy, curly sort of type. German machine, thought George. He began reading, sitting comfortably in a low chair.

The first few pages surprised him. It was good. These girls had really been around and done things. He kept turning the pages over, anxious to know what was coming next.

Karen brought him a drink, placing it on the arm of his chair. George, a fast drinker, downed it with two swallows. A minute later he felt a numbness begin to creep over his mind. Those drinks maybe? He'd had quite a few in the Scribe Club, and he was getting old. Only last week he'd gone to sleep in Ivy's place, much to her annoyance. Still, it wasn't quite like this.

He fumbled in his pocket for his

pipe and tobacco pouch. A smoke would keep him awake. Carefully he began filling it, turning over the manuscript pages as he did so. But it was no good. The tiredness was swimming in his brain, and he could read no further, so closing the folder he managed to reach over and place it on a coffee-table in front of him before slipping quietly into sleep. His pipe and matches tumbled noiselessly at his feet.

"He's off," said Tina.

"Give him a minute," said Karen.

"You put plenty of that stuff in the drink, I hope?"

"Don't worry. He'll be out for a good hour."

"All right. Let's get the money and get away from here."

"Take it easy. What're you so nervous about? We've been pulling this manuscript trick for a year now, and none of the mugs have gone to the police yet. Too much loss of face for an author, I suppose."

"C'mon, Karen. Don't boast. Let's get it, and get out of here and back to our own flat."

Karen shrugged her shoulders. "All right, dear. Get it. It's in his left-hand trouser pocket."

"I know where it is," Tina snapped, then cautiously began sneaking her hand into George's pocket. In a moment, from a kneeling position, she looked up at Karen, her face puzzled.

"It isn't here!" she cried.

"What d'you mean, it isn't there? Of course it is."

"I tell you it isn't," Tina hissed.

"Let me see." Karen felt and met with the same result.

"See," said Tina.

Deftly Karen went through the other pockets, inside his shoes, down the legs of his socks, and down the sides of the chair cushion. Then she looked at Tina. "It isn't on him at all!" she almost shouted.

"Where the devil is it, then? He didn't leave the bar and he wasn't out of our sight for a minute."

Karen rose, frowning. "Do you think he twigged and stuck it in that tobacco pouch?" she said.

Tina snatched up the tobacco pouch, but there was no money in it either.

"Search him again," said Tina. "Put your hand inside his shirt."

George groaned as hands went over him. Hands that found nothing but a few odd shillings. Finally, Karen stood up, shaking her head. "No, it isn't on him."

"There isn't a hole in that pocket, is there?" Tina asked.

Karen shook her head some more. "Nope."

"Then there's only one other answer."

"What?"

"Some swine picked his pocket! The bus was crowded."

"What do we do now, then?"

"Get out of here. He'll blame us for it, anyway, when he comes round."

* * *

George didn't feel too bad when he recovered. His head didn't hurt half as much as it had after some binges he could remember. He looked around. Sure enough, the girls were gone. And

they'd nearly caught him. Nearly. He'd just recognized the type of that German machine in time, an "Optima," with the letters "F" and "T" changed to English pica—a machine that he'd once hired from Smart's Agency himself.

Groggily he got to his feet and went out to a phone, calling a C.I.D. man he knew. Half an hour later they met at the typewriter hire shop. The detective was big and ruddy-faced, a whiskey man, like George. They went into the shop and got a list of the people who had hired the "Optima" about a year ago. One of them was a girl, Karen McCardle, living at an address in Paddington.

George hoped she'd still be there. It would be nice to see her and Tina again when he walked in with the big sergeant and asked for his money back.

They were there all right, and when the door was opened and George saw the look on their faces he knew it was a sight he'd never forget. The detective followed him in.

"Well, girls," said George. "It wasn't too hard to find you."

"And what is it you want," said Karen.

George smiled. "My money, of course."

"We haven't got it."

"Oh, but you have."

"I tell you we haven't!" Karen was indignant. "Search if you like."

"I've brought a cop to do that,"

George told her, as his eyes began looking around the spacious flat. Tina looked nervous, he thought, a lot more than Karen did. Maybe for her sake he'd let them off. This scare might be a better cure than a cold jail.

At last he spotted what he was looking for, the manuscript, over on their dressing-table, guarded by a platoon of perfume bottles, he was thinking. Funny. Very funny indeed.

"There it is, Sergeant," he said. "If my little ruse worked, the money should still be flat between the pages."

"What?" cried Karen.

"Put there when I was filling my pipe," said George. "A long shot, I admit. But it's an old trick of mine. One of my schoolboy heroes once hid the secret plans from the villain in his exercise jotter."

The detective was shaking the manuscript; in a moment the money came to light.

George laughed. "But it's a good story, girls. Did you really write it yourselves?"

"No," said Tina, hanging her head. "We just typed it from a book."

"Really," said George. "I'd like to read that book. What's its title?"

"Adventures of the Harrison Sisters."

The detective laughed now. George looked at him. "Something funny?" he asked.

"Yeah. The authors of that book are doing a long stretch now."

THE SPECTRE

JEREMY BELL

Illustrated by Viive Scott



THE MAN in the blue, figured-silk dressing-gown stood before the window, hands in pockets, shoulders hunched; he was tall and superbly built, with curly black hair and a prize-fighter's face. Suddenly, he whirled around and growled at the man who sat at the breakfast-table.

"The notices."

Feldman looked up from his morning coffee, inwardly berating the fate that had selected him for the role of operatic impresario.

"Vittorio, please, eat your breakfast first. Or, at least, let me eat mine. The notices can wait."

Vittorio moved away from the window, moulding his features into a scowl.

"No. It is the breakfast that can wait. The notices . . . you have the papers there, read me the notices, but instantly, I demand it of you."

Feldman reached out and pushed the stack of morning newspapers across the table.

"Here. Read the damn things yourself."

The other shuddered.

"You know I have not the courage to read them myself. Read them to me. At once, I beg of you."

Feldman heaved a sigh. Oh well. He reached for the bundle of news-

papers, took up the top one and began to page through it.

"Just a moment; ah, here we are. . . ."

Vittorio tapped a foot impatiently on the floor.

Feldman read:

"The Covent Garden season opened last night in a blaze of glory, with a superb presentation of Verdi's *Otello*. The orchestra, under the direction of——"

Vittorio gesticulated furiously.

"Yes, yes, never mind that. The part about me, that is what I want to hear. Read it, read it to me quickly."

Feldman grinned wryly.

"All right, here it is . . . the tenor, Vittorio Ricardi, made a magnificent *Otello*. This reviewer regards his technical proficiency and emotional appeal as second only to those of the late Antonio Bucci, monarch of all *Otellos*. The audience acclaimed——"

"Enough, enough! Read me another notice."

Feldman leafed through the second newspaper and found the review he sought.

". . . was the ghost of the incomparable Bucci peeping from the wings last night? Perhaps, for in every intonation, every gesture, the splendid new *Otello*, Vittorio Ricardi, followed faithfully in the footsteps of the master——"

"Stop! Enough! Read me another, only one more. . . ."

Feldman obligingly lifted yet a third paper from the pile and read the operatic critique out loud:

"Shades of the immortal Bucci! Ricardi's munificent voice and impressive stage presence could not but put one in mind of the greatest, the most brilliant of all tenors. The reviewer——"

"Please, please," croaked Vittorio. "Read me no more. More I could not tolerate."

Feldman replaced the paper on the stack and reached for the coffee-pot, poured himself a second cup of the steaming, aromatic fluid.

"Right you are, you've had your notices, Vittorio, now sit down and eat your breakfast, will you?"

Vittorio had turned back to the window.

"Aaargh!" he rumbled. "Breakfast! I can eat no breakfast. I would choke on it."

Feldman shrugged and smeared marmalade on toast.

Vittorio half closed his eyes.

"Always," he muttered, "wherever I go, it is the same. Rome, Milan, Berlin, Paris, New York. And now London. Always the same. . . ."

Feldman crunched happily on his toast.

". . . always the same story, always this lunatic worshipping of the odious Bucci."

Feldman gulped down his coffee.

Vittorio suddenly spun around from the window and shouted:

"The voice of a frog he had, do you hear me? The voice of a pea-

cock! He was a clown! A clown? An imbecile, a fat and smelly pimp! And I, Vittorio Ricardi, I am the greatest tenor, the greatest Otello, that the world has ever known! How can they compare me, me Ricardi, to that voiceless moron? Eh?"

He's half-mad, thought Feldman. Three-quarters, maybe. But then, I never knew an opera star who wasn't.

He helped himself to more marmalade.

Vittorio was back at the window once more, wild-eyed and quivering.

That critic had been right, absolutely right. The ghost of Bucci had been peeping from the wings. The ghost of Bucci followed him, Vittorio Ricardi, everywhere, all over the world, sneering at him, mocking him, ruining his career. . .

* * *

There is no darkness more desolate, more inimical, than the darkness of an empty theatre during the day. Vittorio walked slowly along the aisle of the deserted opera-house. He was hunched into a heavy black overcoat, hair unkempt, cheeks sporting a two-day growth of stubble, eyes smouldering. He looked about him.

This, this was the place that should have been the venue of his most towering triumph. There was the stage on which he had brought Otello to life, to such vibrant and passionate life as neither the crowd nor the critics have ever before enjoyed. Oh, the soaring new heights to which he had raised the unhappy Moor! And what had been his reward? That he had been rated a mere mimic, a pallid

shadow, of the insufferable Bucci!

Vittorio's features twisted with rage and he spat.

He would show Bucci! Come back from the dead to haunt him, eh? Make a gibbering mockery of the voice of Ricardi, eh? Well, Ricardi would show him. . . .

Vittorio mounted the stage and moved to its centre. He glared about him.

"Come out," he muttered.

Once more he darted his glance all about the darkened, lifeless theatre.

Nothing moved, utter silence reigned.

Vittorio drew a breath, a deep, slow breath, then bellowed, with all the power of his lungs:

"Come out, come out, I say!"

Again his gaze flickered from the wings to the deserted seats, the empty boxes. The faint echo of his words had already faded, the silence held sway all about him, enormous and implacable.

Vittorio clasped his hands behind his back and strode about the stage, mumbling, cajoling, as he went:

"Come, come, show yourself to me, Bucci; come and stand before me on the stage here, then we shall soon see who is the greater Otello, who the greater singer."

He regained the centre of the stage and stood there, legs astraddle, hands on hips, chest heaving. Then he cupped his hands about his mouth and shrieked:

"Heh, Bucci, show yourself; I am waiting for you, I, Vittorio Ricardi, I am waiting for you!"

And yet again only the echo, the

faint and indifferent echo, made him quavering answer, then died away.

Vittorio scowled.

"Pig," he rumbled. "Are you afraid then?"

He stood there alone in the empty opera-house, a powerful, angry figure in his heavy overcoat, eyes shifting hither and yon. Then, infusing all the contempt of which he was capable into his tone:

"Afraid! Bucci, you are afraid! Afraid to match voices with Ricardi, eh? Ah, but you cannot hide from me, Bucci. I know how to lure you forth from whatever unimaginable place you may be skulking in, wind-bag without a voice that you are!"

He shrugged himself out of the overcoat and dropped it on the floorboards, revealing himself in his shirt-sleeves, as strong and symmetrical of physique as any ancient Greek athlete.

"Your last chance, Bucci," he thundered. "Come out now, wherever you may be, or—I sing!"

And still no reply. Vittorio sang.

He sang the final aria from Verdi's *Otello*, the extremely difficult and testing passage that culminates in the death of the Moor.

"Desdemona! Desdemona!

Ah, morta! Morta! Morta!"

His mind supplied the orchestral accompaniment; he listened to himself singing, as was his wont, and satisfaction suffused his being as his voice flowered into soaring beauty and sweeping profundity. Ah, this would show Bucci . . . this would put



an end, once and for all, to the haunting of Vittorio Ricardi. . . .

*“—nell’ ombra in cui mi glacio . . .
un bacio—
un bacio ancora—
un altro bacio.”*

He was on the floor now, Otello gasping his last, crumpling, dying . . . he rose to his feet, breathing heavily through his nose. That should fetch the spectre of Bucci into the open.

Vittorio bent forward and narrowed his eyes.

Yes! By Heaven, sure enough, there at the back, beside the last row of seats, a shadow moved.

“Come, come!” roared Vittorio.

The shadow came down the aisle, nearer and nearer. . . .

Vittorio’s shoulders sagged and he grunted disgustedly.

It was only a janitor with a pail and a mop. He was a little old man with greying hair and weary eyes, in a faded blue overall; now he stood before the stage and blinked up at Vittorio.

“Very nice, guvner, hif yer don’t mind me saying so. I’ve bin working ’ere twenty-nine year come December, and I’ve ’eard ’em all, but I ain’t ’ardly ever ’eard better. Put me in mind of old Bucci, so it did——”

Vittorio gave vent to a demented cry, rushed off the stage, pushed past the old man and went striding away down the aisle. . .

* * *

“A couple of days in bed,” said the doctor.

Vittorio sat bolt upright in his bed.

“A couple of days! You do not know what you are saying. Tomorrow, tomorrow night is the second performance of *Otello* and I——”

Feldman strolled over to the bedside and patted Vittorio’s shoulder soothingly.

“Now, now, take it easy, old man. Rinaldo Giannone will sing *Otello* tomorrow night. You must rest. You——”

Vittorio turned purple.

“Giannone! He has not the voice for *Otello*. Nor has he the feeling. I tell you that only I, Ricardi, can sing *Otello*. Therefore, tomorrow night, I shall——”

“Do what you like, old man,” said the doctor, shrugging, as he folded his stethoscope and closed up his case, “but I’m warning you that those headaches are due to nerves. You need a good rest.”

Vittorio shook his head vigorously.

“No, no, not nerves, Doctor. I have no trouble with my nerves. . . .”

After the doctor had gone, Feldman pursed his lips and looked curiously down at Vittorio.

“What is it, then, Vittorio? Not nerves, you say. . . . What is it, then?”

Vittorio looked up at him.

“I am haunted.”

Feldman’s eyebrows ascended.

“Haunted? What on earth——”

The man in the bed grinned up at him.

“Haunted, yes, but do not concern yourself over me, my friend. Tomorrow night, once again, I shall create *Otello* on the stage . . . and, I swear to you, I shall sing as I have never



sung before. The audience, they will see and hear Otello as they have never heard or seen him before—and the spectre that pursues me will be laid, once and for all time!”

Three-quarters crazy, hell, thought Feldman, the man’s as mad as a hatter. . .

* * *

*“E tu, come sei pallida!
e stanca, e muta, e bella . . .”*

As always, he listened to himself singing, listened with torment in his soul and with the remorseless, hypercritical ear of the perfectionist; he heard his voice, endowed with a sudden, ardent life of its own, mount a towering ladder of beauty and power until it transcended mere singing and became, truly, the death-plaint of Otello—vast, splendid and ineffably moving. Ah, this would surely exorcise the phantom of Antonio Bucci. Never before had the

role of Otello been hoisted to such heights, never would anyone dare to compare the feeble efforts of the late Bucci to this superhuman magnificence! Exultation seized Vittorio, his eyes blazed, as he grappled with the ghost of Bucci, and, step by tortuous step, forced the ghost into retreat. He was ten feet tall, no, a hundred feet tall. . .

*“Oh, Desdemona, Desdemona,
ah, dead, dead, dead!”*

Vittorio drew the rubber stage dagger from his doublet, bracing himself for the end of the performance.

*“. . . ho un arma ancor!
This still remains!”*

He went through the motions of stabbing himself, writhing in agony, slipping to his knees, while Cassio, Lodovico and Montano surged futilely about him.

"I kissed thee ere I killed thee,"
he sang,
"Now no way but this, killing
myself—
A kiss . . .
Another kiss . . .
And yet a kiss!

He crumpled to the boards and lay there unmoving. Unmoving while the curtain descended and the roof-shaking thunder of applause rose from the audience, unmoving while the curtain went up and the other singers, aghast, clustered about his form, unmoving while the stage manager, on the verge of hysteria, found a doctor, while the doctor came running, uselessly, coat-tails flapping, unmoving while the audience lapsed into shocked muttering. . .

* * *

The little old janitor came into the darkened theatre. Pity about that young feller last night. 'Orrible tragedy, so it were. 'Eart failure, the doc 'ad said. Struck down in the prime, 'e were. And just a few days ago, 'e'd been singing, right 'ere in

the theatre, that morning. Oh, well, such was life. . .

The janitor stopped in his tracks, and stood stock-still. Surely, but no, it couldn't be. And yet—it was! In the shadowed forlornness of the empty opera-house, incredibly, a voice, a voice of such silvery loveliness and impassioned emotion as no mortal ear had ever heard, was singing, singing the final sobbing passages from *Otello*.

"A kiss . . .
Another kiss . . .
And yet a kiss."

The voice died, and silence, velvety, reluctant silence, came back to the theatre. The little old janitor walked slowly down the aisle. There would be someone practising, rehearsing all alone on the stage. He strained his eyes through the darkness. Someone, yes, that was it, someone practising. There must be. There had to be.

But there was no one, no one at all in the opera-house, except the old man with his pail and mop, the frightened and uncomprehending old man in a faded blue overall.



Dear, beauteous death! the jewel of the just,
Shining nowhere but in the dark;
What mysteries do lie beyond thy dust,
Could man outlook that mark!

HENRY VAUGHAN.

BETWEEN GENTLEMEN

JOHN HYNAM



THE BAR OF the "Sanderson" was fairly crowded that evening. Marsham liked the place; he could not afford to stay there, but he often visited it. It reminded him of earlier, happier days. And with Margaret off to visit a sister in Poole, a journey on which he resolutely refused to accompany his wife, thereby causing yet another argument, he felt fairly safe for the moment. He hoped that he would feel safe after this evening, too.

He admired the tasteful decorations, the well-dressed crowd; there were some fine-looking women there. He was a young forty-five, he reflected, while Margaret—well, Margaret had given up hope. His was a wartime alliance, ill-considered, with one partner running to seed while the other, himself of course . . . And the arguments. Anything and everything added fuel to the consuming fire which burned in what Margaret called her mind. He ordered a whisky.

Why should she complain so? She had no children, there was a daily woman, and one would have thought that she would have been able to take an interest in his work and be fresh and cheerful at the end of the day. No, nothing of the sort. And look at her innuendoes about Betta Fortune, his secretary! He felt sure that Margaret was not bright enough to know

that they were true. Anyway, perhaps that didn't matter now.

"May I sit here?"

The speaker was thin and wiry, with a long, creased face, iron-grey hair and a full moustache. He was about Marsham's age and very erect. He wore a Guards' tie.

"Please do."

The newcomer sat, and scrutinized Marsham without being the least discourteous.

"We have met, I believe. At the golf club; you loaned me a ball. Marsham, isn't it?"

"Yes, and you're Grey."

"That's right. Won't forget that ball. See you there again, no doubt."

"I expect so." He glanced at the tie. "Guards, I see."

"Yes. I see you were a gunner."

They were off. This was the sort of conversation which Margaret could not stand and made no bones about showing her reactions to. They had both been in the Middle East, in Wavell's first advance; they had stayed at Shepherd's at about the same time, and so on. They talked enthusiastically.

Marsham bought Grey a whisky.

Grey bought Marsham a whisky.

And by and by the talk turned to more personal things.

"You're married?" remarked Grey. It didn't really sound like a question.

"Yes. Early '42. She was A.T.S."

"Oh. Coincidence. So was mine."

Grey gave Marsham another appraising glance. "Tell me, old man, do you think that the early acquisition of power *does* something to a woman?"

Marsham's opinion of Grey, already high, went higher. The man had feeling.

"How right you are, Grey."

They were sitting fairly close together, two men with the right background who understood each other.

"Always felt that her background had something to do with it," remarked Grey.

"To do with——?" very discreetly.

"The way things were."

"Were?"

"Yes. She died eight months ago."

"I'm sorry."

"H'm?" The way Grey looked, Marsham thought that the junior officers under him probably had to jump to it. "You're no more than conventionally sorry."

That flustered Marsham; he did not know what to say. Grey called for more whisky.

"You mustn't think that I wish to pry into your affairs, Marsham. But I said that because I once overheard—ah—you having some altercation with your lady. I felt quite a lot of sympathy. It was like listening to myself, just a few months back. We understand each other, don't we? I mean, you're not offended?"

"Certainly not."

"We seem to know what we're about. . . . I see the bar's closing. You're not staying here? Then you must be my guest."

Marsham acquiesced.

"Marsham. I want to help you. I'm

sure that you need help, quite sure. I'm pretty certain that the things which pass for arguments which your wife produces are the same as those which my men used."

A handsome woman of thirty came by the table, touched his hand in passing, and said, "See you again in a minute. You'd have enjoyed the film." She smiled and was gone.

"My secretary," said Grey levelly.

"Charming," said Marsham, thinking about Margaret.

"Now, my dear fellow. If I overstep the bounds of tact, shut me up, will you? But I think you'll really want to hear what I have to say." He glanced round. "Shall we take our drinks on to the terrace?"

They moved. A cool breeze blew from the land. Grey offered him a good cigar, and he accepted. The light was dim. They lit up.

"What I heard reminded me of former unhappy times in my own life. But, before I do say this—you will not repeat this conversation to anyone; promise?"

Warmed by the whisky and charmed by his companion, Marsham promised. But a tiny warning bell seemed to be ringing somewhere.

Grey leaned very close.

"Marsham. *Do you want to get rid of your wife?*"

"Strange that you should ask——"

"Answer the question!"

"Yes."

"You have considered the problem?"

"Deeply."

"So have I. Now, suppose there is

a way by which it looks completely like suicide?"

Marsham trembled. It might have been best if he had not come here, if he had simply taken a long walk. . . .

"You mean this?"

"Of course. I knew as soon as I heard . . . that I had to help you. We understand each other, eh?"

Marsham drained his whisky.

"Go on."

"You are pretty fit, I take it? You need to be strong. The poison does the rest."

"Forcible administration—"

"Suppose, Marsham, that you were given an 'L' pill, such as our agents used during the war to escape torture? You take a firm grip of the receiver's nostrils, force open the mouth, and the desire to breathe will enforce the swallowing of the pill, with a little persuasion." He flashed a small metal box. It contained two capsules. "For you. A clean job. It works; *I can recommend it.*"

Fascinated, Marsham gazed at the capsules.

"Go on, my dear fellow. Look at me—eight months ago I took the plunge, and here I am. What more proof do you want?"

The sound of the sea was gentle, caressing.

"There are other ways, naturally. There's the frightful one of wiring up the lavatory basin with the electric circuit of the building so that when use is made . . . Useful, when the subject has a weak heart. But they're on to that one now. Come, Marsham, why refuse this offer, made in friendship—I might even say brotherhood?"

Grey turned to see what Marsham was staring at. Two figures in rain-coats and soft hats had moved across the terrace and were close.

"Edmund Walter Grey?" asked one.

"Yes?"

"I am Detective Inspector Gissing of the Winchester Police. I arrest you on a charge of murdering your wife, Elvira Clarice Grey, on January ninth last. It is my duty to warn you that——"

They did not detain Marsham long. He was not implicated. But he would have to hurry, now, hurry! True, Margaret would probably be late back, but he must return to the hotel at once, and disconnect the wiring in the private bathroom, he must, he must. . . .



Death
Grinned horrible a ghastly smile, to hear
His famine should be filled.

JOHN MILTON.

THE SLAVE DETECTIVE

THE CASE OF JUSTICE SERVED

WALLACE NICHOLS

Illustrated by J. Ramsay Wherrett



SNAEUS POPILIUS, having dined with his fellow-senator Titius Sabinus, departed for his own mansion which was near by, so that he had come in a two-slaved *sella* and not in the more ceremonial four-slaved litter. It was a moonless night. His two bearers were waiting for him as Sabinus bade him farewell. He stepped into the *sella* and was borne away. The route between the two mansions on the Esquiline ran beside umbrageous gardens and was very dark. He regretted not having ordered a torch-bearer to attend him, but it was a very short distance and the two slaves were familiar with the way. He sighed as he sat back. Sabinus was an old bore, and had not seemed in the least interested in the large, almost unique emerald which he had recently acquired for his collection and which he had used the neighbourly courtesy of taking to show him.

Not very much later one of Sabinus's slaves rushed into the house, crying for Sollius.

"Two bodies are in the bushes by the gate!" he burst out, at which Sollius and three or four others rushed out to see, one of them carrying a torch.

"Why," said the one with the torch as soon as he saw the bodies, "they are the lord Popilius's bearers! Then where is the lord Popilius? Has he been attacked?"

They searched round about with the utmost diligence, but no sign of either Popilius's *sella* or of Popilius himself was found. Meanwhile, the two injured slaves had regained consciousness; but all they could tell was that they had been set upon and hit on the head by two men just as they emerged from Sabinus's house into the dark road. What had happened to their lord they did not know. They were taken inside, and had their wounds roughly dressed while Sollius reported to his master.

"Go to Popilius's house at once," Sabinus ordered. "See if he has returned. If not, take charge of everything. I owe it to the Gods of hospitality."

Taking Lucius with him, Sollius hastened to obey. At Popilius's mansion nothing had been heard of the catastrophe. They had supposed the master to be still the guest of Sabinus. It had been an informal supper, and not a dinner-party with the requisite eight guests, so no other man's slaves had been waiting. Popilius had departed alone in his *sella*, and from that moment had vanished.



"This is terrible!" cried Publius Albinus, the missing man's nephew. "You are the famous Slave Detective, aren't you? Find my uncle, I beseech you—I hire you."

"I've already been commanded by my master to make the investigation," replied Sollius primly.

Slaves with torches had already been sent out in all directions of the neighbourhood, but no sign of the *sella* or its occupant had been seen.

"This is a kidnapping for ransom," said Albinus. "Why *did* he take his fine new emerald to show your master? I told him to his face how foolish it was. It is worth a fortune. He has been robbed—and will be

held to ransom. You'll see, Slave Detective, that I'm right. Don't you agree, Vettius?" he asked, turning to a young man who had been standing beside him during the proceedings. "This is my friend Quintus Vettius," he went on, turning back to Sollius, "a fellow officer; we are both on the staff of the Legate in Pannonia and on leave together."

"If we had realized the danger," murmured Vettius, "we could have gone to fetch your uncle."

"While all we did was to play at chess," replied Albinus.

"All evening, lord?" asked Sollius.

"All evening," agreed Albinus and Vettius together. "Ask old Trinculus

here," added Albinus with a nod towards his uncle's head slave.

"That is so, O Sollius," replied Trinculus gravely.

"We must find my uncle quickly; our leave is up in a few days."

"How would an ordinary thief know that the lord Popilius had taken a valuable jewel to show my master?" Sollius asked.

Albinus and Vettius looked at one another.

"That is a thought," murmured Vettius.

"I trust all our slaves," roundly asserted Albinus. "They've all been with my uncle for years. He has no son to dishonour his old age," he added sardonically, "and no young wife to cheat him for a gladiator! Still, Slave Detective, question everyone in the house, and they who were out tonight will have to give a good account of themselves, aye, and under the whip. But we waste time, Vettius. Let us take horse, and scour farther afield."

Horses were saddled, and under the light of a rising moon the two young men set off. Sollius and Lucius remained to question the household. First they very quickly established that Trinculus had spoken the truth; and then were equally satisfied that no single slave had set foot out of the house. Certainly none were missing, and some witness or other could check every person's movements.

"The secret is not here," said Lucius. "Will it not be a case of ordinary theft by footpads—perhaps disbanded legionaries not settled on the land?"

Sollius answered by a shrug of the shoulders, and he was considering turning home when Albinus and Vettius returned at speed. In the arms of the former was the unconscious body of an old man.

"Found him!" cried Albinus as he carried his uncle through the atrium.

In the light of lamps Popilius was seen to have been cruelly beaten up. His clothes were in rags, with his back lacerated as though he had been thoroughly whipped. Great bustle ensued; the victim was put to bed, a physician was summoned, and while he was tending the stricken man the story of the rescue was told by Albinus.

"We were lucky to have a moon, and my uncle unlucky in that it had risen for him to see that his bearers were strangers and not his own slaves. Well, we rode around and saw nothing. But suddenly I remembered a gardener's hut on some dead orchard land behind the house of Torquatus Manlius—and there we found him as you see."

"Publius . . ." quavered a voice from the bed.

"Uncle?" answered Albinus. "You are conscious. All praise to the Gods!"

"Publius . . . the emerald?" murmured Popilius, his face working.

"That, too, uncle," said Albinus with a smile, "is safe. I have it here. It was clutched in your hand, still in its little leather bag."

Popilius returned praise to whatever God was his, and fell once more into unconsciousness.

"Were the villains interrupted?"

asked Albinus as he later accompanied Sollius and Lucius through the atrium at their departure. "Or was robbery not the real motive of the attack on my uncle? I am greatly puzzled."

"The lord Sabinus," said Sollius, "wishes me to solve the puzzle."

"So will my uncle—when he recovers," answered Albinus. "Remember: I have hired you already."

"When do you return to your headquarters in Pannonia, lord?"

"I can give you ten days for performing your magic," laughed Albinus.

As Sollius and Lucius returned home, Lucius remarked that it would be a very narrow circle which would have known that Popilius was carrying the emerald.

"It little matters who knew he carried the gem," returned Sollius impatiently, "for it was not stolen. It is a more personal crime than a theft. Who hated Popilius sufficiently to beat him up? And who did not hate him sufficiently to kill him outright? Tomorrow, Lucius, nose about among his slaves."

Next day, while Lucius began his nosing, Sollius himself visited his friend the Prefect of the City, who had at his disposal innumerable spies and hard-cored information.

"What can you tell me, Gratianus," he asked, "about a young man named Publius Albinus, the nephew of Popilius the Senator and on the staff of the Legate of Pannonia?"

"He is my wife's cousin," laughed Gratianus. "I can tell you all about Albinus, or as much as one man ever



knows about another."

"Need I ask if he is in good estimation?"

"I am an officer of justice," replied Gratianus with a smile, "and justice takes no account of relationships. But he has a good name. As a soldier he is considered brilliant, and he is marked out for promotion and command."

"That is his public life," smiled back Sollius.

"He is not in debt, if that is what you mean; but he has, on his mother's side, a rich uncle, a senator named—"

"I know: Gnaeus Popilius," said the Slave Detective. "He was attacked last night. These are the circum-

stances," he continued, and related them.

"I think you can strike Albinus off your list," commented Gratianus. "He would knock a man down in hot blood, I daresay, but not set about an old man deliberately. I am sure of that. Of course, intense provocation will bring out the unexpected in any man."

"And he was playing chess at the time," mused Sollius aloud.

"Is that proved?"

"I think so," Sollius cautiously allowed.

"Common thieves," suggested the Prefect. "There are only too many about—armed, too."

"But the emerald was not taken—nor his money."

"They were interrupted," smiled Gratianus.

"What can you tell me of Popilius himself?"

"A diligent public servant—but look out for angry husbands!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Sollius. "Are you giving me a lead?"

"Spies talk for less than you'd think," laughed Gratianus.

"At his age!" said Sollius.

"His goatishness is undoubted!" grinned the City Prefect. "Ask your master. He, as a senator, will know the high rumours."

Sollius thoughtfully returned home. Sabinus had visitors and was unapproachable. But presently Lucius came with a basketful of slaves' gossip from Popilius's house.

"As a master, Sollius, he is popular enough; exacting but just, and at times generous. He takes himself for

a younger man than he is, and they laugh at his unguents and perfumes. That means girls in his life, and some scandals, hushed up except beside the secret little lamp behind a curtain in the quarters of the slaves."

"What of the nephew? Is he on good terms with his uncle?"

"He takes care to keep himself so! Popilius has no wife living, and no son or daughter, so Albinus has the liveliest expectations. Who wouldn't keep on terms with such an uncle, rich and with such a cabinet of gems in his possession?"

"And Vettius?"

"An easy house-guest. Both are rather serious young men; Albinus, indeed, gloomy. But his favourite girl died while he was on the frontier. Justus, one of the slaves, told me she'd killed herself for shame after being falsely accused of theft. Both men are much liked—but not so were their soldier-servants, two convalescing legionaries who frightened the women slaves by the tales of how they got their wounds. They've now returned to their legion ahead of their masters, their leave shorter than theirs. They set out, in fact, early today, and Albinus and Vettius have still a ten-day stretch. Albinus swears he'll find his uncle's attackers before he has to go."

"I shall help him," said Sollius calmly, nodding his head. "It is a pity the two bearers of Popilius did not see their assailants. But they were set upon in the dark, and the moon rose only later. Ah, our master's visitors are going. Leave me now."

He waylaid Sabinus as the latter

walked through the atrium.

"How is poor Popilius? What have you found out?" asked Sabinus, pausing in his stride.

Sollius briefly related the little he knew.

"So it was not theft?" mused Sabinus.

"No, lord. I am wondering if you yourself can help me. I suspect some enemy saw a chance of a neat revenge; certainly it was neatly carried out. I have heard some gossip of the lord Popilius's reputation over women. Can you, lord, be more precise and perhaps name a recent . . . wronged husband, shall we say, or angered brother?"

"I would tell no one but you," answered Sabinus, pursing his lips, "and for your reason, but there has lately been much scrabrous talk about Julius Fronto's wife, Terentia, and our friend."

"Thank you, lord. I will be discreet—but I do suspect such a cause and background. I know a slave in Fronto's house. . . ." Suddenly he turned back as he was going. "Have you, lord, seen Julius Fronto in the last few days?"

"I met him in the Forum the day before yesterday."

"Did you happen to tell him of the lord Popilius's proposed visit to you?"

"I was sufficiently malicious to do so," laughed Sabinus.

"Again thank you, lord," said Sollius.

"We must have no open scandal," warned Sabinus. "The Emperor is annoyed by the many there are in Rome."

"The young man Albinus has hired me to find out the truth," returned Sollius. "That, lord, is all I am after. If truth has scandal for its tail, it is the lord Popilius must decide how it wags!"

Slave and master separated, and Sollius proceeded to visit his friend in Fronto's household, an elderly, cynical Greek slave named Phormio. They were soon at terms over cups of dark, Tanagran wine.

"Your master's wife" . . . led Sollius.

"This is an . . . uneasy house . . . at present," Phormio sighed.

"The lord Popilius?" whispered Sollius.

"His name here is a firebrand in the thatch!" leered Phormio.

"Tell me, was your master away from home last night?"

"That was a night!" Phormio cackled. "The thatch very nearly caught, I can tell you."

"Was the lord Fronto out?"

"Ah! After such a quarrel as you never heard. He rushed out as if distracted just before moonrise."

"And came back?"

"Drunk—this morning."

"Were all your slaves in last night, or two out?" asked Sollius.

"There was a full toll all evening," replied Phormio with a suspicious glance at Sollius.

When the Slave Detective reported this conversation to Lucius, that youth's comment was that Rome had numerous ruffians who could be hired, and Sollius cheerfully agreed.

"But how," Lucius asked, "did the



lord Fronto know that Popilius was visiting our master?"

"Our master had the malice to tell him," said Sollius. Any mention of Popilius was a challenge to Fronto."

It was not until the day following that the Slave Detective was admitted to the bed-chamber of the injured man. He found Albinus sitting with his uncle. Popilius still bore the signs of his misadventure, a puffed, bruised face, two black eyes and his arm in a sling.

"Are you near to discovering the villains?" he managed to mumble through a mouth that had lost a number of teeth.

The Slave Detective had to admit failure.

"They were probably a couple of ex-gladiators too old for the public shows. But it is their hirer, lord, I am seeking, a third man who may not even have been there."

"Find him," spluttered Popilius, "and if Rome has law I'll see I'm revenged!"

"I only wish, uncle," murmured Albinus, "I could extend my leave. It would give me a noble pleasure to anticipate the law."

"You're a good lad, Publius. I'll not forget your care of me these last few days. You might have been the tenderest of daughters."

"I am only sorry I have to return to the front so soon," replied Albinus.

"Can you think of no particular enemy, lord?" Sollius asked, turning to Popilius.

"I've many enemies," came the derisive answer, and Popilius tried to chuckle, but it hurt him, so he made

a grimace, and repeated "many enemies! When you find him I'll make him regret his mother's fertility. I'll——"

"Do not excite yourself, uncle. The physician said you were to keep calm."

"I leave it to the Slave Detective," muttered Popilius, venom in both eyes and voice. "Here, lad, take this emerald for yourself. It will command money anywhere. You may find it useful to have money on campaign."

Albinus withdrew his hand as if stung.

"No, uncle!" he cried. "Not one of your emeralds—I might be robbed before I reached headquarters, let alone stabbed in the back in a skirmish by one of my own men. Gems loosen all morality. A bag of money—but not one of your emeralds."

"As you will, boy," said the old man. "Money and emeralds, they'll all be yours one day."

Albinus saw the Slave Detective through the atrium.

"The lust for jewels can breed terrible qualities," he said. "My uncle will see a thief . . . in the most innocent person . . . quite without cause and beyond reason. It can bring utter tragedy. I will have none of his emeralds. Do you think you will find his attackers?"

"I think, lord," said Sollius deliber-

ately, "that this case will be one of my failures."

Albinus glanced at him sharply.

"I heard that you never failed," he said.

"I am human. 'It is human to err', says our Roman proverb. Sometimes, too, lord, it is wiser to err," Sollius added softly.

"I shall not," replied Albinus as though irrelevantly, "be back from the army for some time."

"No, lord. It will be as well."

"Shall you report . . . failure?"

"To everyone."

"So I shall not lose a fortune for having enjoyed a not unpleasant revenge? If you knew how I hated emeralds! He tempted her with one, and when she was faithful to me he contrived to prove her a thief. She poisoned herself. Ah well, it is life. . . . How did you know?"

"You were so quick in finding him, and your soldier servant—and your friend's—were so soon out of inquiry's way. And now your hatred of jewels; and I had nosed out about the girl. But there was no proof, lord."

"You are a good fellow, Slave Detective. Farewell! By rights I should have killed him!"

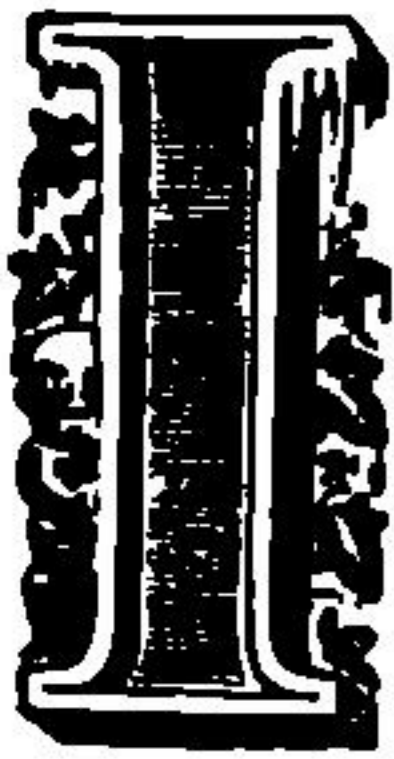
"Farewell," said Sollius, and ambled homewards well satisfied that justice had not been disserved.



THE PRISONER

L. P. DAVIES

Illustrated by Jennifer Gordon



HADN'T BEEN in Petchworth for more than a fortnight before I was told the strange story of Myra Evans.

The difference between being a doctor in a town and one in the country is that in a town the patients tend to become mere ciphers, just names in a filing-cabinet; whereas in the country they are just as likely to tote their personal problems into the surgery as they are their petty ailments.

I came to Petchworth about a month ago, and before the first week had passed had a potted biography of most of the villagers at my fingertips.

I knew of Mrs. Wrates's problem with Jennie, who wanted to work in the next village; I found out about old Mrs. Eaton, who farmed Long Meadow with the help of two ailing sons—and I heard the story of Miss Myra Evans, of Dally Cottage.

I had wondered about the green-roofed cottage with its prim and proper garden so neatly set out; its perfect square of surrounding, white-pointed palings, and the wrought-iron gate that led to a gravel path, free from weed, and trimmed with alternate box trees and lavender bushes.

I think it was on my second day in the village that I stopped my car in the lane and admired the late roses,

wondering who lived in such a perfect doll's-house, where everything was so orderly and tidy—where the curtains hung with geometrical precision and a bowl of flowers graced each window.

I guessed that it would be a maiden lady—everything pointed to that—and I pictured her dressed in pale lavender, with neat, shimmering silver hair.

But if I had been wrong in guessing her appearance, I was right in assuming she was unmarried.

“Miss Evans—and a great pity for the poor lady,” Jolby Dyke the postman informed me.

I hadn't asked him about the cottage, he had seen my car outside, and when I met him in front of the “Blue Horse”, he nodded, his small, black eyes peering up from brown wrinkled face beneath the peaked cap and wishing me the best of the evening. And, after having asked how I was getting on and if I had settled in nicely, he said:

“I wus seeing you a-visiting at Dally Cottage, which is a feather in your cap, and how wus she gettin' a message to you?”

I was puzzled, not knowing who or what he was talking about.

“The tidy little place on the brow of the hill,” he explained, “I wus seein' your car outside this mornin'.”



Then enlightenment dawned, and I explained that I had stopped to admire the garden.

He nodded sagely. "'Tis a nice enough garden, but too neat fer my way of thinkin'. Unnatural. There's a tale to tell you if you've not already heard it," he offered, one calculating eye over my shoulder to the open bar door behind.

We went in together, and I took him a drink to a little table in one corner. In exchange, he told me about Myra Evans.

She had come to the village some five years ago to be nurse to Ralph Gauge, a middle-aged consumptive who had come to cough his last years of life away in the small cottage on the brow of the hill.

Jolby described him to me, and I drew a vivid mental picture of a large ungainly man who was always complaining; a round, moon-like face, a loose mouth and flabby features.

"There was money," Jolby told me.

"He was never short of a thing, and old Doc. Peters up there most every day. Miss Evans, a fine lady, and as patient as they come, she did all the shopping, and many a time we've 'ad a chat in the village."

"He died?" I asked, knowing what the answer must be, for had he still been alive, then surely I would have been called upon to take over where Dr. Peters left off.

"Four years since," said he, "an' buried in the churchyard as large as you like. But Miss Evans, now, she's another way of thinkin' about it. To hear her talk, he's still alive. . . ."

"Poor lady, 'tis a failin' of course, and hard to figure in one who talks so sensible about other things, as no doubt you'll be a-findin' if you care to go to the cottage."

"But what makes you think that she's got this idea?" I asked.

He set down his glass, eyeing its emptiness.

"There's some who've been to the

cottage since Mr. Gauge died," he said, "an' they say as 'ow she keeps his chair in its usual place, an' that she talks to it. . . .

"Just as if he were a-sitting' in it," he added. "Pathetic, that's what it is, and nothin' to account for her changing like she 'as. Never left the place since he died; four years, and cooped up there all that time. I seen her workin' in the garden, and once she told me that he insisted that she take good care of it."

I tried to diagnose the case as Jolby talked, but the pieces didn't fit into place. I found myself intrigued about the tenant of Dally Cottage.

The next morning I had to visit old Mrs. Eaton at Long Meadow, and on the way back I stopped the car outside Dally Cottage.

The morning sun shone pleasantly on the gleaming diamond-panes, and the blue gingham curtains lifted with the gentle breeze.

I pushed open the wrought-iron gate and walked between the neat bushes to the front door.

Miss Evans seemed very pleased to see me; she stood in the sunlight, clasping her hands and smiling.

She was younger than I had imagined, in her middle-thirties I would say, and the overall impression I got was one of efficiency. She looked so like a professional nurse that I could almost hear the rustle of a white-starched uniform as she invited me inside.

Her face was long and unattractive, with a pale, yellowish tinge that I have learned to associate with the slum dwellers of overcrowded cities; her

eyes were dark and deep-set; her hair a fine glossy blackness, braided above each ear.

She was dressed simply enough in a green linen frock, and a wave of some elusive perfume wafted as I followed her into a small parlour.

"It was nice of you to come, Dr——?"

"Summers," I said. "I'm sorry to barge in on you like this, but I suppose you could call this a courtesy visit; I thought it might be a good idea if I were to get to know all my potential patients."

She was delighted and clasped her hands again.

"And so young," she exclaimed, "he'll like that."

"'He'?"

"Mr Gauge," she explained, smiling. "My employer. But there, they're bound to have told you all about me, down in the village; they think I'm a little—touched, you know?"

"They did mention it," I confessed, embarrassed, "but I couldn't make sense of what they said."

"I suppose it is difficult for a medical man to understand," said she, "especially when there's no obvious signs of insanity."

She smiled at my discomfort.

"It's simple enough, really; he died, I suppose, but he's still here."

I shifted on my chair, avoiding her amused eyes and looking round the room. A rocking-chair stood in the middle of the floor, and an open book, face downwards, was on a table nearby.

"His chair," she explained, following my gaze; "his book. . . ."



"Of course," I said, completely at a loss, and rose to my feet.

"Can I offer you tea?" she asked brightly.

"My rounds," I said, "I must be going."

"It's not too bad, really," she offered as we went together down the path. "I mean living here. But I do

wish I could get out once in a while; I'd love to walk down the village street again."

Her eyes were suddenly sad, filled with something hard to define.

"Well, why not?" I asked her, my hand on the gate.

"I'm a prisoner," she said simply. "He won't let me leave."

I opened the gate and stepped into the lane. The gate swung to with a sharp click behind me, as though poised on an invisible spring.

I pointed to my car.

"Let me run you down," I urged. "If you're so anxious to see the village."

She smiled pityingly at me, and laid her hands on the gate.

"See . . . ," she invited, lifting the latch and pushing with all her strength. "See . . . ?"

The gate had become immovable, as if cast in a solid piece with the posts. I leaned my weight on it, striving to move it, but it remained solid as a rock.

I left her then, getting into the car and waving as I drove away.

I thought about Miss Evans and her strange fancies as I drove back to the village. The gate that had jammed was easily explained; a can of oil would soon put that right as rain.

But the lady herself: now that was a different kettle of fish. I've never gone in for psychiatry, but I knew enough about the subject to attempt a tentative diagnosis. As I saw it, she had become so impregnated with her sense of duty and devotion to her late employer that even his death couldn't break that urge.

Clearly it was my duty as a doctor to smash the fabric of imagination that she had build around herself; and the obvious first step was to remove her from the compelling atmosphere of that prim cottage.

The solution came to me during evening surgery, and I put the small box of tablets in my pocket while the idea was fresh in my mind.

The next morning I got through my round as quickly as I could, and it must have been about eleven when I stopped the car outside Dally Cottage.

I remember that I rested my arms on the steering wheel, looked at the neat garden and wondered if I had the right idea.

I looked at the gate and then at the picket fence. Miss Evans came out and walked down the path, to lean over the gate and wish me "Good morning."

She looked happy enough and smiled cheerfully.

"Gate still jammed?" I asked, smiling back at her.

She nodded without speaking.

"The fence," I said. "Have you tried climbing over?"

The pitying look came back to her face.

"Of course," she retorted, "I've even tried to smash it . . . with an axe. . . ."

I had known that she would have an answer to my question, and I had only asked it to see what excuse her disordered mind would offer.

"I think I can help you escape," I said tentatively, and her face lit up.

"If only you could," she cried, clasping her hands.

I climbed from the car and took my case with me. Force of habit, I suppose, based on the fact that this was a professional rather than a social call.

The gate opened easily at my touch, and I surprised a sudden yearning in her eyes as they watched the easy-moving hinges.

I followed her up the path, and she

led me as before into the bright little front room.

"How . . .?" she asked, standing in the middle of the floor.

"You are a nurse," I told her, "so you must know something about this phobia of yours. The compulsion for you to stay here is so great that it prevents you leaving. All we——"

She broke in impatiently.

"I want to leave," she cried, "but he never liked being left alone. And just lately, it's worse than ever. . . . He doesn't like me spending too much time in the garden now."

"Of course," I soothed, "but I think we can—outwit him."

I produced my box of tablets.

"All we have to do," I said, "is to put you to sleep, then I carry you out to the car. What could be simpler?"

She clasped her hands in her gesture of delight.

"If only it'll work," she breathed, her eyes on the chair.

I put three tablets on her palm, then took a cup from the sideboard and brought it back half-filled with water.

It is only my imagination, of course, but as I came back into the room, I could have sworn that confounded rocking-chair was moving.

"Down with 'em," I ordered briskly, "and wash 'em down with this."

"How long?" she asked over the rim of the cup.

"Ten, fifteen minutes," I said. "Barbiturate, you know."

It took nearly half an hour before I was sure that she was soundly asleep.

Half an hour of inexplicably acute discomfort so far as I was concerned. I had to fight hard to stop my eyes from straying to the rocking-chair.

Despite the warm sunlight streaming in through the window, a cold dampness seemed to arise, chilling me to the very marrow. I paced restlessly up and down the carpet, and once I heard a sound—a sound that could have been anything, pipes or boards creaking, but which for the moment sounded like the echo of a laugh coming from that damnable chair.

I carried her down the path, through the gate, and deposited her carefully on the back seat of the car, making her comfortable with cushions and blankets. Then I returned for my case.

Unaccountably she was awake, and looking through the car window as I struggled with the gate.

"What's the matter?" she called, and she was smiling.

"Jammed," I panted back, fighting down a wave of panic.

I put the case on the path and fought with the gate.

After a while I gave up, and turned to scale the fence.

But each time I tried to put my leg over the spiked palings, the fence seemed to grow. Once I managed to haul myself up, but I was shaken off like a rat from a terrier's mouth. I distinctly felt hands on my shoulders, pulling. . . .

"I'll try to find a lever or a hammer," I called to her, "I'll soon get this gate open."

The cottage seemed to be waiting for me.

I found a hammer in a box under the sink. As I bore it down the path a branch of one of the box trees wrenched it from my grasp, so that it flew into the depths of the bushes.

Miss Evans had climbed into the driver's seat of my car.

"I told him you were a doctor," she called, "I said you were only

young. . . . He likes young people, you know."

She started the engine.

"Don't worry," she called above the noise, smiling still, "I'll tell them in the village . . . they'll look after you."

The car glided away.

Somewhere in the cottage behind me someone coughed.



A pretty sort of prison I have come to.

MAX BEERBOHM.

Oh eyes, no eyes, but fountains fraught with tears;
Oh life, no life, but lively form of death;
Oh world, no world, but mass of public wrongs.

THOMAS KYD.

The voice of the dead was a living voice.

LORD TENNYSON.



THE SPECTRESCOPE

ART FENNA

Illustrated by Del



ONLY ON MY occasional visits to Hamilton am I convinced of the accuracy of my recollections—that they remain undistorted by time. Constantly derided, as I have been, even a participant begins to wonder if he has exaggerated in his own mind. It's heart-breaking to think that given some willingness to believe a partial or even pretended acceptance of the theory

involved, there need never. . . And yet, I don't know. . .

To some extent Goddard and I, like Hamilton, were scientifically-minded philosophers. But whereas we were realists, Hamilton was fanatical in his views, for ever contemplating the hereafter, immortality of the soul and so on; sometimes he became so outrageously fervent it was nothing short of embarrassing, and one could almost excuse Goddard's references to his "graveness." However, I must

admit he often taunted Hamilton most unreasonably, and I think this resulted in an additional incentive for Hamilton to persist in his efforts. Anyhow, he proved his theory to my satisfaction—though that is hardly the word—and I feel Goddard, too, was convinced, though I have no way of knowing.

Hamilton and I were at the Amstead Atomic Plant, but being in a different department I knew nothing of his experiments. (I should explain here that we were all bachelors without near relatives; this is the only circumstance in which my conscience finds some rest.) My first information was received over the telephone after he had failed to get Goddard.

“I believe he’s gone to Bradford. Anything wrong, Harry?”

“Wrong? Listen to this, just listen.” I had to decipher the other words as they came tumbling over the wire. “I’m through to them, to *them*—no I can’t talk slowly—I told you it was possible, I knew it and now I’ve got proof—come over, of course, now! Believe me it’s the most—look, I’m too excited to discuss it over the phone, it’s beyond description—I’ll leave the door for you, but don’t make a noise coming in—’bye.” He was gone.

Them? Proof? Clearly, Hamilton was on another theory, but I’d never heard him so confident, almost triumphant; that he’d tried to call Goddard first could only mean he had discovered something in the face of which even his customary mockery would be futile.

As I entered, he was standing on

the first landing. Never had I seen him so happy, laughing silently as he pushed back his greying hair. He had not been near a razor for days, and his unkempt appearance was heightened by the open shirt, one side negligently occupied by a collar-stud. When he came down, he ignored my proffered cigarette, refused even to sit.

“Geoff, this is like a dream, a nightmare to you perhaps, but please don’t interrupt until I’ve finished. No matter how weird it may sound, just remember I intend to prove every word; you’ll see the evidence for yourself. Right?”

I nodded assent. For a moment he stared intently at the floor, lost for the opening words.

“For many years, long before we met, I have been fascinated—under some kind of compulsion—delving into the mystery of dying, of death and what follows. Always I’ve felt life to be a horizon, that after death came something, anything, but *something*. Perpetual sleep, eternal darkness, these ideas I dismissed because they make us so trivial, insignificant. This is not a religious approach; what I’ve done will make nonsense of all known religions.” He shrugged his shoulders. “In many ways I’m sorry it should be so, but even Church dogma must at times collapse. None of this is new to you, Geoff, but I’m trying to impress the fact that while you and Goddard are interested in such matters, I have always looked at the problem from a very different angle because instinctively I knew there was an explanation almost be-

fore I began to search. Let me put it this way: Goddard, yes, and yourself, will be horrified that definite contact has been established, whereas to me it was inevitable. I hate to use words like destiny, but in effect——.”

“Now wait a——.”

His sharp glance cut short my interruption. “Perhaps you were going to say I over-state the differences between us; but you know I don’t. If you switch now I must assume you’re afraid—or seeking part of the credit. Still, being first to know will be worth something to you: newspaper articles, etcetera. Candidly, I would have preferred Goddard to be first.” He was positively malevolent as he turned in the direction of the staircase. “Oh, to see the terror on the swine’s face!” He paused, regretting the satisfaction had been delayed. “I live here alone. But in this house, in that room, is life: not as you understand it, but life—after death!”

I was uneasy under his fixed stare, but something warned against easing the tension with a smile and I was relieved when he went on.

“I must explain a little more before I show you. For three years I’ve been taking materials from this plant—metals, radium. You may remember the inquiry about that—many things, a little at a time. The structure itself, the bridge if you like, I completed nearly a year ago; I needed only the windows. The lines of communication were laid, but I needed the windows!” He gripped my arm tightly. “You do understand that? To call them without first observing their world, without seeing—it would have been mad-

ness.” When he resumed it was obvious he had temporarily forgotten my presence, although he was now beside me on the settee.

“Then that special X-vision glass arrived for research on the audio-frequency amplifiers. Superb, beautiful stuff, diamond hard, strong enough to withstand twice the heat of hell. That heavenly tinkle, the response to the slightest touch—I trembled in anticipation. Here was surely the last link between two worlds; another three, four days’ work and The Unknown (he said it with capitals) would be no longer so described. Even now I can hardly—sometimes I doubt my sanity.” He smiled suddenly as though reading that thought in my head. “Oh, I’m all right, don’t worry.” The smile faded. “But if I did, this control might——” He shook his head, then continued more cheerfully. “D’you remember helping me get that X-V glass out, Geoff? Come to think, I suppose you’re entitled to share in all this, if you want to.” Hamilton couldn’t restrain a chuckle at this afterthought.

“Look, Harry, d’you mind if——”

“Of course, you want to see what I’ve been talking about.”

I was sure he had deliberately misunderstood what I had been about to say.

“Absolute silence, mind. We’re still in the early stages; many more tests to be made. Earlier this evening, taking an observation, I accidentally dropped a box of matches, and the resulting commotion suggests they can hear sounds emanating from the channel mouth. This strikes me as

odd, because (although facially they're without expression) I think they can see, yet they seem to ignore the instrument." He got to his feet. "Possibly the lenses are out of focus. I just don't know."

Following him upstairs, I decided Hamilton was nervous. Although he had invented this machine, knew its purposes and was proud of his achievement, he was afraid. He turned left at the landing, signalled me to follow quietly and eased the door open. The interior was suffused in an unholy purple glow, revealing masses of metal tubing, wires twisted in grotesque design. Curiosity succeeded fear as he motioned me to peer into a circle of shimmering glass. The light was at first too strong, but gradually, forming out of a mist, I detected movement: vague, small shadows struggling to combine in definite outline. I suspected Hamilton was grinning behind me as I felt the sweat freeze even as it broke out.

Slowly a figure, a form, took shape; two, four, a dozen, scores of them, like ants. I was looking at a planet teeming with insect life. The numbers multiplied, swimming in and out of vision. Yet each minute figure was quite distinct. Occasionally two or three approached each other, sometimes larger groups collected as though conversing, an impression strengthened by the loose, shaking heads. I was amazed, transfixed, as I tried to concentrate on one, then another, attempting to identify them—*identify?* Yes, I was actually trying to put names to these ghostly figures. I was looking at humans! Humans,

perfectly formed, in white flowing robes generating their own light. The purple haze filled the length of the 'scope, but for some reason the scene before me remained a dazzling whiteness.

Their activity was incredible, though they seemed to have no appointed task. Yet for all their apparent hurry, all movement was ineffably graceful—it was this which brought me to a horrifying conclusion. Numberless, they never avoided each other, but there was not the slightest suggestion of a collision. In astonishment I watched their feet, but robes hid them from view, so that my gaze was directed to the surface on which they stood. There was no surface, no ground or floor! They were gliding in space.

There was something else: those untold millions were miraculously identical *in every last detail*, that was why I couldn't select an individual to observe. Here was no endless production, repulsive in its perfection. The physical structure was such that had one exchanged garments with another, not a single fold would be displaced.

I gasped, and Hamilton urged me from the room.

Later, recovering with the aid of Hamilton's whisky, I listened to his theories and explanations, but I was in no condition to grasp the details. I had, he said, been looking into "The Hereafter". There was no life after death, no rebirth or resurrection; but there was another existence. The innumerable forms had no physical being (hence their passing, as it were, through each other), but a mere spark

of life-force. They were literally—to use a much-abused term—lost souls, without destination or knowledge of time. Their number increased with each human death, and as we entered into this later existence our life journey terminated in our again becoming, as we once were, an indivisible and integral part of the universe. Once this was recognized, fear lost all power over us, just as pain was defeated by the absence of the body.

I asked Hamilton why, if he found this so comforting, should he fear the consequences of being detected? This he could not answer satisfactorily, but I gathered that in the event of his investigations becoming known he had no means of explaining his intentions should the observed become—he groped for the word—hostile.

* * *

The following day I repeatedly phoned Goddard without reply. I had to warn him against adopting the wrong attitude with Hamilton, who would be impatient to confront him with the incredible evidence I was unable to reject. I was shocked when he rang from Hamilton's about nine—he had been met at the station.

"I'm told there is something I must see, apparently you know all about it."

Trying to sound calm, I asked him to give me a chance to hear his views on Hamilton's latest theory before looking at the instrument.

"Well, my God," he roared in disgusted mirth, "so he's got you at it now!"

In the background Hamilton was trying to quieten him as I begged for an opportunity of describing my own experience, but he sensed my real motive. It was useless. In despair I slammed down the phone and raced out, taking the shortest possible route.

Winded, in agony, I found the door open; breathlessly I launched myself up the stairs, only to be greeted by a bellow of derisive, uncontrolled laughter from the landing. "Space? Lost souls? Oh ho, ha, ha, ha—ooh, oh!—night-shirted puppets—what the butler saw! Roll up, the hereafter now! See the spectres, Oohaha——"

"For God's sake," came Hamilton's voice, "shut up you fool, you——"

"Ha, ha, ha—I know. We'll call it 'The Spectroscope'. Oooha! 'The Spectroscope', ha, ha, ha!" Suddenly, with a fall in the volume of laughter, came the sounds of a struggle. Again Hamilton's concern, "Goddard, Goddard, please, not here, I don't——"

I had almost reached the door when there came an echoing crack as of a monstrous lash, followed by the most dreadful scream. Then again and again, as though it would never cease. Like a child I collapsed on the staircase, arms about my head, eardrums threatening to revolt as the unearthly din erupted into an agonizing shriek of tearing metal; the door was hurled open, and amidst a great shower of blinding, gleaming glass Hamilton fell across my inert body to the foot of the stairs, where he lay whimpering, staring up with blank, unseeing eyes. All was still, and I thought the room to be lifeless.

I was wrong. Another form of life poured from the doorway, gigantic, misshapen phantoms hovering in the ghastly haze now red rather than purple. Ugly, brooding eyes accused me of complicity, as these lost souls, wantonly disturbed, massed above poor Hamilton as though for the final assault. With a supreme effort he pulled himself to his knees, hands raised in pitiful supplication, but I could make nothing of the hysterical babbling. With the entrance of some neighbours, I lost consciousness.

The police requested a statement when, some three weeks later, I was discharged from hospital after treatment for shock. They theorized that some stupid amateur experiment had taken place and Goddard accidentally had been electrocuted, but they wanted an explanation as to why his eyes should have been so badly burnt. Nor were they satisfied that he had died instantaneously, for his face bore a look of forceful evil such as a man would adopt only in a struggle for survival. But these points were

trivial, they said, compared to the inexplicable fact that while the innumerable small wounds sustained by my friends could be attributed to flying glass, not one splinter had been smeared with blood.

Had I provided details, they would never have been accepted. I therefore agreed their theory was substantially true, adding only that the experiment, concerned with space and time, was too involved for me, and my companions had not taken me into their confidence.

Hamilton? I'm told there's no hope, but I visit him at the asylum whenever possible. His means are sufficient for reasonable comfort, and he has no recollection of these events. But I'm somewhat alarmed by the superintendent's recent letter in which he says, "Mr. Hamilton appears to have access to matches, an attendant having noticed bluish fumes in his room on two occasions. As you are his only visitor, perhaps we could look into this when you next call."

His *only* visitor?



Still as he fled, his eye was backward cast,
As if his fear still followed him behind.

EDMUND SPENSER.

THE FOUR HORSEMEN AND THE LYONS MAIL

S. JOHN PESKETT

S. John Peskett returns again to French criminal archives to re-tell the story of the Lyons Mail. Though considered by many as one of the greatest judicial errors of all time, there still remains a doubt. What would your judgment have been at the time?



TOWARDS THE END of the eighteenth century, the mail from Paris to Lyons was carried in a two-wheeled waggon drawn by three horses, one of which was ridden by a postilion. The waggon was covered by a heavy canvas hood and was accessible from the front and back. On the evening of the 27th of April 1796 or, as it was then called in the revolutionary calendar, the 8th of Floréal, it had been waiting several hours for the mail from Brest. Finally it set off, rather late, from the rue Martin, carrying mail and a very large quantity of paper money for the army in Italy. Curiously enough, there was no escort for such a valuable load apart from the postilion and a post-office employee. There were one or two benches for passengers inside, who must have suffered great discomfort on the roads of those days. That evening there was one solitary traveller. He was dressed in a brown overcoat, below which the end of a sabre could be seen. We shall hear of him again.

The next morning some peasants going early to work between Lieu-

saint and Melun found the mail waggon abandoned at a place called La Closeaux. The dead bodies of the postilion and the post-office courier lay close by covered with blood. The postilion had been horribly mutilated. Two of the three horses were hitched to a tree. There was no sign of the passenger, but a broken sabre with its scabbard and a silver-plated spur were found on the spot. Of the contents of the waggon there was no sign.

The officers of the law were soon on their way from Melun. It was clear that the postilion had put up a fight for his life. His skull was split, he had three large wounds in the chest and one hand had almost been hacked off. The other man had been stabbed several times in the neck and in the body. Rigor mortis had set in, indicating that the crime had been committed late the night before or in the very early hours of that morning.

Inquiries were made throughout the district. One man had seen four horsemen on the previous evening going towards Lieusaint from Melun. Later, on his return, he had seen one of the men galloping while the other three trotted near by. The proprietress of an inn at Lieusaint had

served four men. One of them had come back to retrieve his sabre, which he had left behind. One had borrowed a piece of string to attach his broken spur. Another innkeeper had served them with dinner and was able to give a description. Several other locals testified to having seen the four horsemen. Two, who were to play a dramatic part in this case, were women



servants from Montgeron, a point between Lieusaint and Paris. In fact, the four horsemen seem to have been remarkably careless in allowing themselves to be seen by so many people near the scene of the crime.

The obvious question was—who was the mysterious passenger with the sabre? A guard at the Rambouillet gate of Paris had seen five horsemen early that morning arrive from the direction of Melun, their horses obviously tired out. Finally, a single horse was found wandering loose in Paris and recognized as the third one from the team drawing the mail. It was then found that a man had taken four horses at five that morning to an inn kept by a man named Aubry. They were taken away again at seven by the same man, whose name was believed to be Etienne. He was accompanied by one Bernard. Etienne's surname was found to be Couriol. He had slept out on the night of the crime. Since then he had disappeared. Normally he slept with his mistress at a house kept by a man named

Richard. Richard and his wife were arrested, and they gave the information that Couriol had left for Château-Thierry.

Thus the principal suspects were the unknown passenger with the sabre, Couriol and Bernard. Nothing was known of the first, except that he had paid his fare and had no baggage. He had dined with the courier before the mail left.

The first step was to get hold of Couriol, who was found at Château-Thierry at the house of a man called Gohier. Here the police found a bag containing part of the paper money missing from the Lyons mail. Couriol and his mistress were arrested and lodged in prison in Paris. Also found at the Gohier house was a man known as Guénot. He apparently knew nothing, but the police seized his papers and told him he would be required for questioning in Paris, when he would get his papers back.

Thus, a few days later, he was in Paris crossing the Pont-Neuf to retrieve his papers as instructed. Guénot was a native of Douai, and on the bridge he met an old neighbour of his from Douai, Joseph Lesurques. Now, the Richards, at whose house Couriol used to sleep, were also natives of Douai, and, in fact, Guénot had introduced the Richards to Lesurques, who had dinner with them a few days before the crime in company with Gohier, Guénot, Couriol and Couriol's mistress. On the bridge Guénot tells Lesurques about his little bother with the police at Château-Thierry, and suggests they walk to the Palais de Justice to get his papers.

In the waiting-room are two women, who appear to be very agitated when they see the two men come in. The women go in first. They are the two servants from Montgeron. They tell the *juge d'instruction* that on the afternoon of the 8th of Floreal, which you will remember was the date on which the Lyons mail stood waiting for the mail from Brest, they saw four men at Montgeron. One of the women deposed that the four had eaten at the inn where she worked, and had taken coffee at the house of a woman called Chatelain, leaving afterwards in the direction of Lieusaint. Both recognized the two men outside in the waiting-room as two of the men in question. Guénot is then called in and detained for questioning. They also detain Lesurques and search him. On him are two identity-cards, one in the name of a relative, André Lesurques, and the other blank. Thus begins what has come to be called the martyrdom of Joseph Lesurques.

* * *

One point which does not seem to have been raised in this case is that if Lesurques were guilty, why did he go and put his head in the lion's mouth? Surely a man with blood on his hands would keep away from the Palais de Justice. It might have been a point in his favour that he *did* go there that day or, of course, he might have gone out of bravado. Some criminals are made that way.

The general round-up finally produced six accused: Couriol, Guénot, Richard, Bernard, Lesurques and one

Bruer, who had been arrested at the same time as Richard. Of these, Bruer and Guénot were freed. Guénot had an excellent alibi, though he had been identified by the two servants from Montgeron. Richard was condemned to penal servitude for twenty-four years. Couriol, Bernard and Lesurques were found guilty and executed. At the trial Couriol stated *that Lesur-*



ques did not take part in the crime. On the way from the prison to the scaffold, he shouted continually, "I am guilty. Lesurques is innocent!"

According to Couriol, the other four guilty men were Dubosq, a well-known criminal; Vidal; an Italian called Roussi; and Durochat, the man with the sabre.

Durochat was found to be in prison on a charge of theft. He was recognized as the man with the sabre by a post-office official who saw him get into the Lyons mail waggon. Durochat admitted his guilt, and confirmed Couriol's account of the crime, naming the same men. *Durochat said that he had never known Lesurques.*

Vidal and Dubosq were arrested and confronted with Durochat, who recognized Vidal but was not sure about Dubosq. Durochat was executed. Dubosq escaped from custody after the confrontation with Durochat, and was not recaptured till December 1800. Vidal was tried alone, found guilty and executed.

Thus five so far had been guillotined for the crime.

* * *

When Dubosq was eventually caught, Richard was brought from prison as a witness. He told of a quarrel between Durochat, Roussi, Vidal and Dubosq at Couriol's, where they were disputing a share out of loot. He said that Couriol had told him that he (Couriol) and Dubosq had murdered the postilion. Roussi was not located until 1803. He was extradited from Madrid, tried, found guilty and executed. *Roussi said at his trial that Lesurques was innocent.* Thus the people executed for the crime now number seven.

It is clear that six of these were guilty in some measure or other. However, it is with Lesurques that we are concerned here. Before going into the details of his defence, we must anticipate and deal with the trial of Dubosq three years later. It was then becoming obvious that here was a case of mistaken identity. Lesurques had the misfortune to resemble Dubosq. At the trial of the latter, several of the witnesses from the first trial did not recognize Dubosq, and they confirmed their identification of Lesurques. Partisans of Lesurques had hoped that the trial and conviction of Dubosq would exonerate Lesurques, but witnesses persisted in their evidence and one recalled that he had been able to identify Lesurques because he was the man who had asked for a piece of string to tie his spur on. And you will remember the broken spur found at

the scene of the crime. Dubosq was even given a wig, made of hairs of the same colour as a lock given by Lesurques to his wife. The witnesses were called again, and all confirmed their former depositions, except one woman from Lieusaint, who announced dramatically, "At the trial of Lesurques, I identified him, but my conscience now tells me that I was mistaken. I know now that it was not Lesurques I saw, but Dubosq—that man there!" Unfortunately, Dubosq's condemnation did not clear Lesurques, because they were not charged with the same crime. Dubosq was charged with assisting in the crime and not of actually committing the murders.

* * *

Let us look at the case against Lesurques. He came of quite respectable people. He had done his military service after leaving college at the age of eighteen. He later married and had three children. By speculation he had made quite a sum of money, from which he enjoyed an income. However, he had come to find life in Douai rather dull, and had gone to Paris the year before the crime, leaving his family behind. He lived with his cousin, André, whose identity-card, you will recall, was found on him when he was arrested. He had made the acquaintance of a young woman Eugénie Dargence, and he lived with her occasionally. He was rather a lazy, careless young man. In all the time he was in Paris, he had not troubled to get himself an

identity-card, which was very necessary in those days. The two cards found on him brought him under suspicion at once. Asked about the blank one, he said it had been given to him by a man whose name he had forgotten. The police said that he had been living beyond his means, and that he was in need of funds for some of his financial transactions at the beginning of 1796.

His first alibi broke down disastrously. A jeweller gave evidence that Lesurques was in Paris at his office for several hours when he was alleged to be in the vicinity of Montgeron. He had bought some ear-rings and had sold a spoon. How could this be proved? The jeweller could produce his book in which these transactions were recorded on the fatal date. The book was put forward. Sensation! The date had been altered! Lesurques produced other quite convincing alibis from people who had seen him and spent time with him on the 8th and 9th of Floréal. But the altered date, which was never properly explained, though the witness was arrested for perjury, left a very bad impression. Then his mistress, Eugénie Dargence, gave evidence that he had visited her on the evening of the 8th. Under cross-examination she had to admit that she was not familiar with the revolutionary calendar, and could not give the name of the month preceding Floréal. Her evidence did not help at all.

Lesurques protested his innocence. Couriol, on trial with him, confirmed that he had no part in the affair.

Though the judge was uneasy about Couriol's affirmation of the innocence of Lesurques, it could not



weigh against the evidence of the two women and others and the faulty alibis. The judge was still uneasy when he confronted Durochat with Vidal and Dubosq. If Durochat had been able to recognize Dubosq definitely, it would have been in favour of Lesurques, even though he had been executed by then. It must also be remembered that Lesurques did not choose his company very carefully. He was known to be associated with Couriol and the Richards. This is not evidence that he committed the crime, but it does not help in conjunction with the other evidence against him. While one may point to the statements of Durochat and Couriol, is it not strange that Dubosq made no reference to Lesurques? It might be argued that he could have exonerated Lesurques, if not at his own trial at least at the foot of the scaffold when he knew that all was lost. But he said nothing.

If you were asked, many weeks later, to identify a man whom you saw talking to a little girl on a bus one day, how sure could you be? You would have no reason for taking any particular notice of him at the time. In this case we have a number of illiterate peasants, who were giving

evidence of identification at the trial of Dubosq three years later. How sure could *they* be?

The family of Lesurques sought to have his innocence established over a period of sixty years. The judge, who had been prejudiced against him at the trial, although taking into account Couriol's statement, addressed a memorandum to the Emperor Napoleon in 1806, urging the rehabilitation of Lesurques. The Emperor received Lesurques' children, but put off a plea for a retrial. His widow appealed to the Chamber of Deputies in 1821. The Procurator of Versailles was called upon for a report, and he concluded that Lesurques was innocent. But this was not enough. A further and more detailed report was ordered and the finding reversed. Then, in 1845, his daughter drowned herself in the Seine after another unsuccessful attempt. Her son later made an appeal to the Prince President, afterwards Napoleon III. Again in 1850, another examination of the case was ordered, but this came to nothing as

a result of a *coup d'état* at the end of that year. Several years after that, the son of Lesurques' daughter appealed to the Empress Eugénie, who was impressed, but this, too, failed.

In 1868, the authorities were still not convinced that Lesurques had been mistaken for Dubosq, and saw no reason why they could not have *both* been there on the fatal day.

There the matter rests. It is as well to remember that some of the evidence in favour of Lesurques was produced later than his trial. For those concerned with his trial and condemnation, there was the evidence of the eye-witnesses, the threadbare alibis, his acknowledged association with people known to have had a hand in the murder and robbery, his need of money and his general mode of life. Coupled with all this was a crime which cried out to heaven for vengeance.

It is clear that Dubosq was there near Lieusaint on the night of the 8th/9th Floréal—but was Lesurques there as well?





THE GREY MAN

G. E. FOX

Illustrated by Norman Battershill



MAN DIES on Monday, another on Tuesday, a woman on Wednesday, a child is killed in a road accident on Thursday, an old

lady dies of old age on Friday and on Saturday the village undertaker dies of a stroke. It was neither unusual nor unaccountable, for death has no day of rest; it was merely coincidence, but in a small village starkly significant, a vivid reminder that flesh is all too mortal.

There was no story, yet Williamson said, "Get a story!" What story? "Death stalks through a Sussex

village." And then what? Just six obituary notices on six ordinary mortal beings whose time had come.

There was no story, but he could not tell Williamson that, for Williamson was giving him this last chance to regain lost prestige. The paper existed on sensation—on straining credulity to the verge of incredulity, but no farther. Fisher had lost the trick of it. Imagination had dried up with the end of dreams, with the end of belief in himself, with the dry-rot of middle-aged cynicism eating away the fabric of the dreams in his mind. Without that image of dreams his stories failed. The germ of truth in them did not live and grow and bloom in the

sterile, thin soil of his careful composition.

When he stopped his car in the main street of the village of Wilmington he saw with utter dejection that children were playing and shouting on the green, men were quietly drinking outside the "Green Man", a Stuart relic of a pub at which he had arranged to stay, and half a dozen women were gossiping casually and happily outside the few shops. Indeed, there was no sign that Death was stalking through Wilmington. It was a quiet village, whimsically and variously tiled or thatched, irregular and crooked with age and the irresponsible individuality of long-dead builders, and it was also so apparently undisturbed by six deaths on six successive days of the week. Death came to Wilmington inauspiciously, as inauspiciously as summer rain whether it comes gently or in a deluge.

Fisher booked in at the "Green Man" and climbed a dozen crooked, age-blackened stairs to a raftered room with a strangely tilted floor and impeccable linen. He looked out of a deeply recessed window on to the muddled roofs of the village, and wondered bleakly how long it would be before the whole barely sanitary, twisted, inconvenient, colourful lovely muddle were compulsorily purchased and demolished for the erection of a neat, rectangular ten-storey block of flats. He looked into a spotted, grey-faced mirror, as old as the pub itself no doubt, and saw his disillusionment and cynicism reflected darkly like shadows in mist.

He had dinner in a room all awry

and dark with oak, but as intimate and friendly as six hundred years of human movement and talk can make a room. The room was indeed saturated with the warmth of the old days—of drinking, singing and talking, of a million pleasant sounds from the notes of a flute or violin to the tinkle of silver and glass. It was a room to be happy in. Fisher was not happy. He had seen the village doctor, a genial old G.P. of the pre-National Health days—a sort of vintage doctor, who held discretion a virtue, who had time to listen before diagnosing. He laughed at Fisher when Fisher told him his mission.

"Why, man, only the accident was unexpected," he said. "The whole village knew the others were on their last legs, and even little Betty Stevens being killed in Martin's Lane was something people down here had prophesied, though not actually Betty's death. You see, the road narrows at the bottom and children playing there are in some danger from traffic. Local people know the danger and go cautiously because of the children, but Betty was unlucky. She was killed by a car full of sightseeing Americans. They were very upset. Their holiday in Britain must surely have been totally ruined, but it was certainly not their fault. Betty just ran smack into the front wheel of the car. Over in a flash! Half a dozen witnesses to say Betty ran straight out of the house into the road as kiddies will, you know."

"I've got to make some sort of a story," said Fisher. "You know what editors are. . . ."

"No," said Dr. Larcombe, smiling. "I don't. The local paper has reported it, but it's not unusual, really. The same happens in Peckham or Salford or any big town all the time. It stands out in Wilmington, naturally. You wouldn't be popular here, you know, if your paper made a sensation of it."

"Perhaps not," murmured Fisher. "I don't suppose I shall either. Then I'll be out of a job."

He took his leave of the doctor, and wandered around the village to interview the bereaved families. What could he make of the mournful, commonplace answers to his circum-spect inquiries?

"No, Mr. Fisher, my husband had thrombosis bad. It was his third attack. They don't live after three." She plucked nervously at the honeysuckle around the white-trellised porchway, wanting to talk about it but shy of a strange face. There was nothing she could say that would help him in his dilemma. He walked down the street to a cottage with a thatched roof and an untidy medley of children all over its shady lawn. It was the same story of natural death, but from a different cause. And so it was all through the village, as he trudged from one cottage to another, listening to one pathetic story after another, knowing there was a painful pleasure in being able to talk, to relax a pent-up sorrow in a spate of words and half-understood medical terms in all these simple people who did not know the danger and treachery of words.

Even he did not yet see how their stories could be twisted into the sugar-sweet pathos of a newspaper

story or into a sentimental drama or a macabre dance of death through the village—until he met Sally Ann Bone.

Sally Ann came up to him in the street just after he had made his last call—the undertakers.

"Mister," said Sally Ann.

He saw a girl of about eighteen with a flamboyant shock of red hair, wide credulous eyes and thick ankles. She was heavily built and boyish, and Fisher thought she probably wished she had been born a boy. She wore jeans and a sweater, and swaggered like a boy with her hands tucked into the waistband of her jeans.

"Yes?" said Fisher impatiently. He was tired and wanted the quiet and comfortable oldness of the pub.

"You the reporter from London about the deaths in the village?"

"Yes," he said, wondering what this slatternly girl could tell him. Nothing, he presumed. She was just being inquisitive.

Then a sudden almost magical transformation came over the girl. The slatternly figure became tense, the silly face intent and mysterious. She was no longer ridiculous and gauche, but in a moment had become a person to notice and to listen to. Fisher was astonished at the difference in the girl's appearance.

"I've told no one in the village, you undertand?" she whispered in low, impressive tones. "They'd laugh."

"What is it you haven't told?" he asked curiously.

"About the grey man. Every time a person dies the grey man walks the village. I've seen him!"

Fisher's agile brain was racing

ahead of her. It might be all moonshine, all a desire to achieve notoriety, to have her name in the papers, and she looked the type—too plain to be a girl, too girlish to be a boy, being neither and aching with the intolerable desires of both sexes. But if he could build on her story, find corroboration somewhere. . . . He saw in his mind's eye the headlines: "Death Stalks a Sussex Village!" "Who is the Grey Man?" He could make the words sing—if there were a grey man.

"What's he like?" he asked carefully.

The girl's voice became sibilant and dramatic.

"Grey! Grey as dust, and he has no face! Just a blank!"

"You've actually seen him?"

"Yes. I've seen him."

"When?"

"He walks the village just before a death."

"Have others seen him?"

"You ask them? I won't. I don't want to be laughed at."

"Why did you tell me? Supposing I report what you've told me in my paper? Make a story of it, eh?"

Her eyes glistened greedily, but she shook her head. "No, mister. I'd like it all right, I admit, but only if others have seen him. You go and ask, and if they have then I'll give you my story; I promise."

"Shall I say you have seen the grey man?"

"If you do they'll say just what you're thinking."

"What's that?"

"She's crackers. You ask, and don't

you say anything about me. You'll see I'm right, though."

"All right. I'll do it. Where do you live so that I can find you?"

She told him and swaggered away, once more slatternly and brassy. He looked after her, slightly perplexed, but nevertheless experiencing a fleeting excitement. He knew she was unreliable, frustrated and imaginative. It was all so clearly imprinted on her plain heavy features and on her strange versatility of mood. She could have been an actress of some repute with training, he decided. She was clever, too. He knew her cleverness all right, but cynically he accepted the roll she had planned for him. He was aware that she intended him to make for her that notoriety she craved, to build up for her an importance she lacked.

That evening he waited until the drink and the talk in the bar of the "Green Man" had established geniality, confidence and perhaps that careless, cheerful indiscretion that is half the cause of the next morning's depression, then he broached the subject of the grey man. He had been discussing the supernatural with a group of villagers at the bar, carefully manipulating the conversation on to that particular subject, and when opinions had been contested, when stories had been told and when the voices had become urgent, he said casually: "Anybody seen a grey man hanging round the village?"

For a moment there was silence, then, Tom Longford, the local chemist, laughed: "A dozen. Most of us wear grey suits. Why?"

"I mean a stranger. Sort of nondescript type. Faceless you might say."

"Come to think of it——" began Bill Crane, the butcher, but the chemist with truculence demanded: "Why? We were talking of ghosts. Are you trying to say——?" and Fisher sensing antagonism interrupted: "I'm not saying anything. I'm asking a plain question that's all!"

He ordered a round of drinks and saw they were mollified by the gesture. He waited, knowing by their thoughtful faces that the idea was germinating in their slightly hazy minds. It was a subject that might give a moment's notoriety. Like Sally Ann Bone, though in a lesser degree, no doubt, they wanted that momentary importance of one who has seen or knows.

"I've seen a stranger around lately," said the barman, leaning across the conglomeration of glasses. "You might describe him as grey. I can't recall his face either. It's odd you should mention it. I was saying to the missus only the other day—the day young Betty was run over it was—I wonder who that bloke is that's been hanging around the streets?" He turned to his wife who was helping in the bar and asked her: "That's right, isn't it, love?"

"'Sright, Joe!" she said "Seed him myself. You can spot strangers round these parts easy enough."

They were off then like hounds at a "view hallo", streaming across the hedges and ditches of memory, hot on the scent of the grey man. Who was he? What did he want? Fisher led the

hunt into the dark woods of the unreal, into the green mysterious shades where his fox had gone to earth in a hole he had dug in fantasy. They had all seen a grey man, a vague shadow of a man, a man not noticed first time.

Had anybody seen him before those six deaths all in a row?

Pandemonium broke out. They were all talking at once. It was fascinating and terrifying, and just the notion for an evening's argument after the whiskies and the chasers had warmed the imagination. Fisher soon had his story all neatly arranged in his mind, and it only needed Sally Ann Bone's final touch of the esoteric and the mystic.

He got it late that night, and as she told him he wondered at her earnestness and the deep quality of her emotion. Was she indeed such a consummate little actress? Her story convinced. He almost believed her.

"I saw him three times!" she said. "Each time before the house of a person who was going to die—who did die before the day was out. He just stood looking, if you can look without a face. He hadn't a face. It was just a blank like a sheet of white paper under his grey hat. He was a grey man like a man in the shadow—just grey. I felt a queer, cold feeling when I saw him standing there just looking and waiting. And, mister, I know what he was waiting for. I know who he was too, all right! After three times I daren't look for him any more because I knew I'd see him. I was frightened stiff. That's why I told you to see if any of the other people had seen him. Well, they have, so now

you can write your story and tell 'em what I've seen."

He looked at her with admiration mingled with perplexity. She had gained what she had wanted. Tomorrow her story and her picture would be in a million homes throughout the land, and bitterly he knew also that the village would be crucified to give housewives and business-men, and women in buses and trains, a few minutes amused speculation, perhaps a tiny tremor of fear or more than likely a moment of incredulous amusement at the paper's suave insolence. But it would be a sensation. Yes, Sally Ann Bone would also be a sensation as the girl who had seen death as he stalked through a Sussex village.

Williamson phoned his congratulations: "Good stuff, Fisher," he said. "Can you keep it going? Any more deaths imminent? I'll send a photographer down to get pictures. Keep your Sally Ann Bone on the look-out for the grey man."

Williamson had a lot more to say, but Fisher was not listening; he was thinking about the village street. He remembered it as he had seen it on that first evening of the day of his arrival in Wilmington, and side by side with that pleasant, light-hearted picture he had the reality he could see through the open window by the phone. He could see no children playing in the street; women were talking quietly at their cottage doors, and some were looking apprehensively up and down the street. Under the trees outside the "Green Man", men were smoking sullenly and without

pleasure, and even they kept an anxious eye on the quiet shadows around them. There was no laughter in Wilmington any more. Fisher sighed. Of course, if they were stupid enough to believe Sally Ann Bone's story that was their look out. Still, he rather despised himself and his paper at that moment.

Men picked up their glasses from the bar and moved away when he entered. The barman did not return his greeting and took his order for a double Scotch without a word. Wryly Fisher knew that this was what he had expected.

"Well, Mr. Fisher, that was certainly a good story you wrote. Put Wilmington on the map, hasn't it?"

He recognised Tom Longford's dry, apothecary voice, and the heavy irony in the tones made him wince. He said nothing. He had nothing to say, no apology could be made without hypocrisy; yet he was sorry for their disillusionment and unhappiness. If only they could see it was plain catch-penny newspaper blurb. They couldn't, of course. There was fear in their unhappiness, and this killed their sense of humour. The grey man was in their minds. Had they not seen him? Had they not admitted seeing him?

"'Death Stalks a Sussex Village', Mr. Fisher," Longford went on bitterly. "Every kid in the village has seen the grey man now. There are two next door to me screaming their heads off in terror right now. What a story, eh? All the women scared and worried and looking over their shoulders! They've seen him, too,

and are wondering if it's husband or child he's come for. And the doctor's surgery is full this evening with people who have walked around for years without a thought for their indigestion pains or their headaches or their rheumatism. They all think they're dying now. All the old 'uns now believe they have cancer or thrombosis or some killing disease. I'm doing good business, Mr. Fisher, and do you know what the doctor's prescribing in every case—mild sleeping draughts, that's all. They'd write to the Medical Council if he didn't prescribe something. You see, they are all dangerously ill now. They're scared. There's death in the village. What have you got to say to that?"

"Ay, Fisher, what about it?"

Others had joined Longford now, and their faces were hard and unfriendly. Fisher stared at his whisky, unable to face their accusation and their despair.

"A coach load of sightseers has been through the village—gaping Londoners!"

"Sensation mongering, that's what it were."

"Scaring kids——"

"Frightening women——"

"Someone should write to the M.P. about it."

"I'm writing to *The Courier*—a decent paper. Telling 'em it's all a pack of lies built on an hysterical girl's silly story."

"Grey man my foot!"

Their voices dinning into his brain, their anger enveloping him like a hot blast from a kiln, their bewilderment hurting him because he understood.

"That damned silly Sally Ann Bone!"

"Who said that?"

And there was Sally Ann Bone screaming at them, her red hair flaunting and vivid, her eyes angry like a tormented cat's. Then she quietened as they all turned in silence towards her: "Well, let me tell you, I did see the grey man. It's true—every bit of it! And why did some of you say you'd seen him if you hadn't? Maybe you hadn't seen him. Maybe you only wanted your names in the paper. Well, so did I, but, I tell you, I saw him. Three times I saw him! Three times!"

"You're a lying bitch, Sally Ann Bone!"

She turned on the speaker like a hawk swooping. "Lying am I? Then let me tell you he's here in this bar right now! And I'm telling you he's been here ever since I came in, 'cos I followed him! And there he is!"

Dramatically she pointed to a dusty corner of the room where dark paneling augmented shadow. The room became deathly still as everybody turned, following with their eyes the direction of her quivering red-nailed finger. Fisher turned like the rest. The corner was full of shadow. Was there indeed a figure standing there—a grey insubstantial figure with a dead, empty, white, paper face like a badly-made Guy Fawkes? Then before derision or revelation or truth or denunciation could answer Sally Ann Bone, somebody screamed and gurgled, and there was turmoil in the press of men and women—a little cyclone of urgency in the quietness.

"It's old Ted Crocker!" said a



NORMAN
BATTERSHILL

voice. "He's fainted. Get some brandy!"

"No! He's dead!" screamed a woman's voice. "Look at his eyes. My God!"

"Dead! No! No!"

Voices and furtive movement, a great horror of people muttering and whispering. Fisher poured himself whisky from the unattended bottle, placed a ten shilling note on the bar and drained his glass. What a story! What a story! On top of the other, too! That was nothing compared with this. He climbed off his stool.

"Go on, Mr. Fisher. Write it up. This is better than Soviet rockets to the moon, isn't it?"

He looked at Longford's harshly sardonic face, resenting it, resenting everything, yet knowing he was a newspaperman with a story too good to forgo.

"Oh, go to hell!" he said, and staggered up the staircase to phone his story through to London.

* * *

"Try to get one more story, Fisher; then we must fade it out. The whole country's getting worried about your grey man. Oh yes, of course. We know it was only a coincidence. Sally Ann Bone is another case. Common enough. Wants to be talked about. You've done well. The old Fisher again. Yes, yes, of course I understand. Well, leave it then, if you feel like that. . . . Perhaps it's as well"

He did "feel like that". The thing he had done filled him with revulsion, and he was going back to London to try to forget Wilmington and its

whispering and despair. He would go that very evening, but first he would walk through the village as a penance. He would subject himself to the whispers and the stares and the unconcealed contempt as a penitent in the old days subjected himself to sackcloth and ashes and humiliation.

In the street Longford the chemist was waiting for him. Fisher anticipated the flagellation of the man's bitter tongue. He even welcomed it, but the sting of the chemist's words was sharper than he had expected.

"My God, Fisher, you and your rag have a lot to answer for! A hell of a lot tonight! You killed Old Crocker, and John Ennion's boy—seven he is—has taken a fit because he thought he saw the grey man in a field. A bloody scarecrow, that's all, but he's likely to die, I'm telling you! The doctor's there now! Go down to Ennion's and pray with 'em if you've any bloody conscience!"

Longford walked away with a gesture of infinite contempt.

Could it be true? Fisher felt sick, unutterably sick both in body and mind. He passed a hand helplessly across his mouth like a bewildered child unfairly reprimanded. Down the street he could see Ennion's the ironmongery shop, blazing with lights and a little crowd standing silently at the shop door. It was true, then? There was a little green opposite Ennion's, with a solitary seat on it and a yew whose branches swept low enough to give the seat the seclusion beloved of courting couples. Tonight it was vacant, and Fisher walked to the seat and, unnoticed by the watchers at

Ennion's door, sat down and waited also, but he was not sure what he was waiting for. His thoughts were a bitter chaos.

He watched the lights in Ennion's and the quiet people at the shop door intently, but without feeling. He tried to pray a little, but he felt embarrassed about it, as though he were asking an impossible favour from a powerful despot who rather despised him. Somebody sat beside him and, glancing sideways, he saw in the shadow of the tree a clerical collar, very white against the black background of leaves and branches.

"Shouldn't you be in there, padre?" he asked, pointing to Ennion's.

"No. I shan't be needed there yet awhile. The Ennion child won't die, Mr. Fisher," said a gentle, rather melancholy voice.

"How do you know?" said Fisher, taken aback somewhat by such assured tones. "The doctor told you?"

"I know," said the voice in the shadow.

"You know!" ejaculated Fisher.

The other seemed to be deep in thought, and Fisher waited. He suddenly felt constrained and at a loss for words. He felt he must listen to this extraordinary parson fellow who was so sure of himself.

"Death!" murmured the other at last very softly. "Aren't you frightened, Mr. Fisher? *Incertum est quo te loco mors expecta*, you know."

Trust a parson to quote Latin.

"No, I don't know, padre. What does it mean?"

"Seneca, my friend, 'It is uncertain

in what place death may be looking out for you'."

"You, too, padre?" said Fisher ironically, staring at the waiting people and the lighted windows. "You're all bitter against me."

There was a long silence.

"Here's Sally Ann Bone looking for me," said the other softly at last.

Fisher saw the clumsy, red-haired girl shambling towards the yew tree.

Sally Ann stood before the yew tree and peered into the shadows. "Mr. Fisher," she whispered. "I saw you come here. And I've got to talk to you."

She seemed agitated and fluttered her hands in a strangely childlike perplexity. Her face seemed contorted and tearful. She had not noticed that he was not alone on the seat, and he was embarrassed. He must tell her immediately before she made some indiscreet remark, but she spoke quickly and agitatedly before he could warn her. He gestured, but she did not understand or did not see.

"I'm going to drown myself in the river," she wept softly yet with deep emotion. "I can't stand it. They all hate me! They say I'm a liar and worse things! They say I'm ugly, and plain, and not right in the head. Oh God, it's unkind. Mr. Fisher! It's all not true! I did see him! Honest I did! Honest to God! But I can't—I just can't—live any longer. I'm too unhappy. They say I killed old Crocker surely as if I'd poisoned him. I'm going down to the river——"

He saw that her whole being was racked by some uncontrollable emotion of a deep and terrible nature.

She turned and ran. Fisher half rose, but some power beyond his will compelled him to sink back on to the seat. The man beside him stood up.

"Sally Ann Bone and I understand each other," he said softly. "I will walk with her to the river."

Fisher saw him swiftly catch her up and speak to her as she ran. She stopped. In the lighted street he saw

her pale face, tear-stained yet calm under the red tangle of hair, look up at the white featureless face of the grey mournful figure who stood beside her. Fisher trembled violently with a sudden icy and indescribable horror. Together he saw them walk towards the river as Ennion, the iron-monger smiling cheerfully, opened the shop door to let the doctor out.



Keep an equal mind whether fortune smiles or frowns . . . death comes at last, whether your life has been sad or merry. Drink then; here is shade of trees and murmur of running water; call for wine and perfumes and rose-garlands, while there is yet time, and the Fates spare you. You must leave some day your lands and palaces, and what you have heaped up your heir will possess. Rich or poor, noble or vile, death takes no account—to the same place we go: the same lot falls, the same ferry-boat carries us into the banishment of eternity.

FLACCUS QUINTUS HORATIUS.

When in the lonely stillness of the tomb
I voiceless lie and cold, omit not thou
To sing and dance as merrily as now;
Bring roses once a year in fullest bloom . . .

EVELYN DOUGLAS.

THE OTHER LITTLE BOY

ROSEMARY TIMPERLEY

Illustrated by Jennifer Gordon



PAUL CONWAY was worried about his wife. She was looking strained and ill, her face too white, shadows under her eyes. She still looked after David, their baby son, beautifully, and had done from the start, but she was neglecting her own appearance and the house was more messy and untidy than it had ever been before. Yet when he asked her if she was feeling all right, she said, "Of course. I'm absolutely fine." There was a defiance in her voice that brooked no argument. He became more and more certain that she was keeping something from him.

One night he said to her outright:

"Mollie, I don't like secrets. If there's something worrying you, you ought to tell me about it."

"Nothing's worrying me."

"Darling, I'm not blind. You're looking quite ill, yet I don't think there's anything physically wrong with you. You've got something on your mind. Can't you tell me?"

"There's nothing to tell. Just leave us alone," she said.

"Us? Who's *us*?"

"Me, I mean."

"But you said 'us'."

"That's my bad grammar." She gave a false little laugh.

"David's all right, isn't he?"

"Of course he's all right. Doesn't he look it?"

"Yes. You take care of him so well."

"Nothing's ever going to happen to David," she said grimly. "Nothing, ever."

"Nothing will happen to David," he said gently. "Mollie——" He hesitated now, not wanting to bring up this painful subject, yet feeling that he must: "Mollie, you aren't brooding about Ronald, are you?"

"What do you mean?" She looked wary.

"You took it so wonderfully at the time. You showed hardly any emotion. Yet I know how much Ronald meant to you. I know how much it must mean to any mother when her four-year-old son dies. Don't look so startled. I haven't spoken of it for months, have I? Neither of us has. Perhaps that's what's wrong. Darling, I think perhaps you're suffering from some sort of delayed shock. Tell me honestly, do you think about Ronald a lot? Does looking after David remind you of his brother who died? Is that it, Mollie?"

"David doesn't remind me of Ronald at all," his wife answered coldly, clearly. "They're quite different. David's like you. He has your dark hair and eyes, and that little cleft in his chin."

"And Ronald was fair like you," said Paul. "His features were like yours. He was very much *your* son."

"Yes. So you see David doesn't remind me of Ronald."

"But you have been thinking a lot about Ronald lately, haven't you?" he insisted. "You've been worrying, remembering, and you haven't said anything so as not to worry me. I want you to share things with me, Mollie. I can quite imagine that looking after any baby must remind a

mother of other babies she's looked after. It's natural, my love. You mustn't let it hurt you so much."

"Are you suggesting that it hurts me to look after David. I love looking after him. The children are my life!" she said violently.

He noticed that she said "children" not "child," and thought it strange. But she was in such a queer mood he made no comment. He didn't want to upset her further. But he'd never felt so far away from her as he did at this moment. He couldn't understand what had come between them.

"Mollie," he said, still striving after a solution, "are you perhaps thinking that because I've never talked of Ronald that I've forgotten him? Is that it?"



"I've never bothered to think about that, but now I do come to think of it, you don't often remember Ronald."

"Sometimes I do."

"Not often, Paul."

"Ronald is dead, darling," he said softly. "It's difficult for the living to keep remembering the dead."

She looked at him with contempt, and he felt guilty that Ronald hadn't been more often in his thoughts during the past twelve months. He could hardly even picture the child now. He'd loved him, been proud of him, but he'd been at work all day and Ronald was always in bed by the time he got home. So really he'd only seen his son at week-ends. He remembered Ronald's illness vividly, of course, the horror of taking him to hospital, of seeing him suffer, of hearing he was dead. He'd deliberately thrust those memories out of his mind so that he could concentrate on looking after Mollie, who had given birth to David soon after Ronald died. To Mollie and the new baby Paul had devoted all his thoughts, his care, his kindness. Yes, it was true that Ronald had become only a memory to him. And now Mollie was reproaching him for it.

"Try not to be angry because Ronald meant less to me than he did to you, darling," he said. "You were with him so much more than I was."

She said nothing. She looked not so much unforgiving as remote. And he was afraid.

* * *

On his way home from work next day he called to see the old Scottish

doctor who had attended his family for many years and knew all about Ronald's death. He told the doctor why he was worried about his wife.

"She's a wee bit nervous by the sound of it," said the doctor. "Tell her to call in some time and I'll give her a tonic. It's a terrible shock for a young mother when her wee laddie dies, you know. A terrible shock."

"I'd hoped that having the new baby to look after would help her get over it," said Paul miserably.

"So it has, I'm sure. Give her time to settle down again. And if she's a wee bit absent-minded, then pretend not to notice. Time really does heal most wounds, you know. Just be kind to her. Be kind to her."

Paul hurried home, rather reassured. That feeling was soon to be dispelled. As he let himself in quietly by the front door, he heard Mollie's voice:

"You can play here a little longer as Daddy's late, darling. It's fun, isn't it? Just you and me."

He went into the living-room, expecting to see Mollie playing with the baby. She was by herself.

"I thought you had David in here," he said.

"David? He was in bed hours ago."

"But I heard you talking to him."

"Don't be silly, Paul. How could I talk to him down here when he's upstairs in his cot? I'll get your supper."

Suddenly he felt very cold. He huddled over the fire without even removing his coat. When Mollie returned with his meal, he said:

"Who *were* you talking to when I came in?"

"No one."

"But I heard you."

"You're imagining things."

"Mollie, I heard your voice."

"Perhaps I was talking to myself, then. People who are alone often do."

Again he noticed a defiance about her, a defensiveness, as if she were afraid he was going to take something from her.

"I want you to see Dr. McDonald," he said. "You're in a highly nervous state, and he'll help you."

"I won't do anything of the sort. I'm quite all right. For God's sake leave me alone!"

"Mollie!"

"Well, I'm sick of being questioned and stared at and nagged," she blazed. "I have quite enough to do looking after the children without——" She stopped and put her hand to her lips.

"Children?"

"David, I mean."

There was a silence. At last he said:

"So that's it. You won't let Ronald die."

She shrank away from him as if he'd threatened her physically. Then she whispered: "All right, I'll tell you. It's not been easy keeping it to myself. Ronald isn't dead. He never died. That poor little body we saw wasn't the real Ronald. It was only a shell, a husk, a nothingness. The real Ronald is still here, in this house. With me. Because he loves me and I love him. You shan't take him away from me. He means more to me than David can ever mean. David's your favourite, Ronald's mine. That's fair

enough. I won't resent your favouring David so long as you don't resent my favouring Ronald."

"Stop talking as if Ronald were alive! You sound like a crazy woman!"

"Ronald *is* alive. He's always with me. We couldn't be separated. We'll never, never be separated. He's my son, my first-born. We belong together. And he'll never grow up like other women's sons. He'll stay the same, always, my little Ronald. You'll lose David as he grows older and wants to leave home. I shall never, never lose Ronald."

"Mollie, you're ill. My God, you're ill and I've been blind not to see it before."

"You've been blind all right," she mocked him. "Ronald's been in this house all the time, and you've never even sensed that he's here, let alone seen him. Yes, you're blind, Paul."

He didn't know what to say or do.

"Even David's more sensitive than you are," she went on. "He's grown to love Ronald very much. Ronald plays with him when I'm too busy."

"Mollie, no!" he cried in horror. "You mustn't play tricks like that with David."

"Tricks? Are you calling your elder son a *trick*?"

"My elder son is dead!"

"No!" she screamed, and she struck him hard across the face.

He caught her wrist in his hand and held her powerless.

She said softly, "It's all right, darling. Daddy won't hurt me."

Paul dropped her wrist as if it burnt him.

I must be calm, he thought. She's ill. I must look after her.

"You're tired, Mollie," he said. "Let's go to bed."

He didn't sleep that night. He lay there wondering what to do, and came to a decision. Next morning Mollie got up first as usual, prepared breakfast, attended to David, and the morning routine seemed so normal that Paul could hardly believe last night's fantastic scene had really taken place.

At breakfast he said matter-of-factly, "I think you should take a little holiday. A couple of weeks by the sea would do you a world of good. You're looking peaky. We'll arrange for David to stay with my mother while you're away."

She stared at him, then said: "So you're going to take the children away from me."

"Of course not. I just think a break would do you good."

"You shan't take them away from me! I won't let you!"

"We'll talk about it tonight. I want you to do as I ask, Mollie, for all our sakes. Try to trust me."

She turned her face away. She wouldn't kiss him goodbye. The last he saw of her, she was staring after him from the living-room window, her face white and bitter and unhappy. And instead of going to work he dashed straight to Dr. McDonald's and told him the whole story.

"A clear case of delusion," the doctor said. "Pretty serious, too. But don't look so worried. We'll cure her. I know a very good . . ." He went on talking a lot of psychiatric jargon

which Paul didn't fully understand. The doctor promised to call on Paul and Mollie that evening. Then Paul rang his office to say he wouldn't be in and went home again.

As soon as he walked up the path, he sensed that something was wrong. The sun was shining, the roses in the garden were fragrant, the house was peaceful—that was it, too peaceful, too quiet. He let himself in and shouted:

"Mollie!"

There was no reply. Somehow he'd known there wouldn't be. He ran up to the bathroom. David's cot was empty. On the draining-board in the kitchen he found a wildly scribbled note which told him Mollie had left—"with the children . . . I am sorry. I still love you but can't let you take them away from me."

Sick and cold and sweating in the warm, bright kitchen, Paul read the note again and again. Then he telephoned Mollie's parents. They hadn't seen her. He rang his own mother. No news there. So he rang the police, and was told they'd "keep a look out for her," but they sounded sceptical, as if "missing wives" were all in a day's work.

So Paul began to search for his wife and son.

He walked and walked through the labyrinth of streets round their home. He asked people he met if they'd seen "a pretty, fair-haired young mother with a baby in her arms." He got the impression that the neighbourhood was running over with such women! One of them might be Mollie. He



just didn't know. He followed several false trails.

It was evening when he reached the canal. Blue dusk was falling and the street-lamps burned gold. There was a group of people on the steps down to the water, and people were lined up along the edge. The water looked dark and thick.

"What's happened?" he asked a man in the crowd.

"Young woman threw herself in, with her kid."

"Have they found her?" His voice was calm. He felt numb.

"Yes. Pulled her out ten minutes ago. Too late though. She's a gonner."

"Where is she?"

The man pointed to a group of people at the top of the steps. Paul pushed his way to where a covered figure lay on the ground. A policeman was there.

"May I see her?" said Paul. "She may be my wife."

The blanket was thrown back. He saw Mollie.

"Steady, chum. Drink this." Someone was giving him a cup of tea, strong and very sweet. He gulped it down.

"My son," he whispered. "Is he still——" and he nodded towards the water. Then, suddenly, he heard a baby cry. To most people, crying babies sound the same, but when it's your own baby, there's a special sound about the crying, and you know it.

"David," said Paul. "That's David." He saw a thin, dark, white-faced girl with a baby in her arms and ran over to her.

"David! Oh, thank God! It's all right," he said quickly, as the girl drew back a little. "He's my son." He took the baby, felt the warm, small dependence of his child in his arms, and for a second nothing else mattered.

In a voice that was flat and toneless with shock and wonder, the dark girl said: "I was standing here, waiting for my boy friend, when *she* came along. She shoved the baby into my arms, then ran into the canal. I couldn't stop her. There was no one else here. I called for help and told the policeman when he came."

Something was still queer, puzzling, wrong. "Why are they still looking in the water?" Paul asked.

"They're still looking for the other little boy. A little fair-haired boy. She went into the canal—with him in her arms. It was so horrible! Was—was he your son, too?"

"Yes," said Paul quietly. "He was my son, too."



Death, in itself, is nothing; but we fear,
To be we know not what, we know not where.

JOHN DRYDEN.

THE SIGHT OF BLOOD

LESLIE VARDRE

Illustrated by John Wood

JALBY BRITSON was potting out his geraniums when he finally decided to murder his wife. He had often toyed with the idea of leaving, walking out on her and starting life again under another name in some other town. He had liked that idea at first, there seemed something romantic about it. . . .

But when he had weighed it up, there seemed too many complications. The most important being that Wanda would certainly do everything she could to find him; then there would be the difficulties of getting fresh work, insurance cards, and, of course, the chance of eventually being found. . . .

He could leave the country; but that would take money, lots of it; and Jalby hadn't very much money at all.

And then, working in the potting shed, busy with the new cuttings of geraniums, he overheard Wanda talking to Mrs. Watson over the broken fence that divided the two small back-gardens.

"An' I've 'ad about enough of 'im." He heard her voice raised, obviously intending him to hear, "For two pins I'd pack up an' leave."

He smiled ruefully. He knew that she didn't mean that. She'd got a husband who was well and truly under her thumb, and she'd stick to him. But it was an idea, her leaving him. . .

He rested his trowel on the bench, and thought about it. And the idea began to take shape.

Here was a witness who could testify that Wanda had threatened to leave. Testify. . . . If ever it came to that. And it probably would. The police were clever, didn't miss much.

Supposing, just supposing, something were to happen to Wanda? What if he were to—murder her?

He shuddered at the thought, but then, he was a peace-loving man, anything for a quiet life, which was, after all, the reason for his present unhappiness. Any other man in his shoes would stand up to her continual nagging and whining; her cry of "Pinchin' and scrapin', doin' the best for you I can, and you always complainin'. Look at me, not even enough money to dress meself prop'ly. . . ."

"Not enough money. . . ." That was the real cause of all the trouble. But, after all, he was only a lorry driver, and he did the best he could, working overtime all hours and putting every penny that he could into her grasping, avaricious hands. He found his knuckles suddenly tight against the trowel handle; a surge of rare anger swept through him, leaving him white and trembling.

He rested his hands on the bench while he peered through the half-open door to where she was leaning, arms folded, on the broken palings, her head jerking with the urgency of what

she was confiding into the welcoming ears of the stringy Mrs. Watson. He knew just what she must be saying, he had overheard too many similar conversations to be mistaken. "Don't know how I manage on the few measly quid a week; no use for anythin', my old man. . . ."

Watching her, he wondered how he could ever have brought himself to marry her in the first place; but once, seven years ago, she had been attractive in a pale, insipid way. That was before the likeable kittenish ways had changed to the continual whining and nagging; before the once neatly-shining blonde hair had turned into straggling washed-out tendrils, hanging down untidily from faded headscarf to hollowed cheeks; before the thin delicate features had hard-angled into shrewish contempt.

But then of course he'd changed himself. . . . Like Wanda, he supposed that he had been passably good-looking in those days. And now. . . ?

He peered over the piled empty seed-boxes into the sliver of tarnished mirror propped against the grimy window, taking stock of the narrow greyish face, the dull watery eyes, the loose sagging mouth and the thinning grey-brown hair. He felt that he must look older than his forty years. . . . "An' no wonder," he brooded, "that tongue of 'ers would put years on better men than me. Ruined my life," he added, and felt the scalding tears of self-pity bite at the backs of his lids.

"Look at 'er," he said aloud,

"standing there wearing that damned old red jumper. . . ."

He knew that she only wore it to annoy him. Tattered and roughly darned, pale beneath the armpits where the acrid sweat had bleached and rotted; dirty and unkempt.

"Any other wife," he complained bitterly, "would 'ave thrown it out years ago. . . . But not 'er."

"Can't afford new clothes," she had told him; "if you're ashamed to see your wife goin' round in rags, then that's your look-out."

"But she can go to the pub, drinkin'," he told the stack of flower-pots, "every blamed night. . . ."

And then, leaning against the shed door, he made up his mind. But there mustn't be any blood, that was certain; he couldn't stand the sight of blood, never had, made him feel faint. . . .

There was poison, of course, but how did a man like him go about getting poison? And he could strangle her. . . .

He pressed his hands together, feeling that these couldn't be his thoughts, so cold-blooded and deliberate; these sort of things weren't done by men like him, small, insignificant men who did ordinary jobs like driving a lorry; men who lived in small houses in dull suburbs. . . . He picked up the trowel and swung it viciously down on to the bench, so that the bright blade splintered the wood and his hand jarred with the impact.

Opportunity, he told himself—whenever the opportunity offered, then he would take it. But it must be

soon, while Mrs. Watson still remembered that Wanda had threatened to leave. . . .

* * *

He sat on the side of the bed and watched her preparing for the night. She unwrapped the scarf, and started to put curling-pins into the thinning, faded hair.

He watched her fingers at work, twisting and seeking the straggling strands, her face blank and expressionless.

The thin shoulders beneath the red jumper twitched and swung with the movements of her arms. His eyes dropped to that tattered loose-fitting jumper.

He flexed his hands, his eyes on the back of her neck, watching how the stringy muscles twitched beneath the pale dirt-engraved skin.

Her eyes met his in the mirror, and he rose hastily to his feet before she had time to speak.

In the bathroom, he took off his tie, scrubbed his teeth and rinsed his face and hands of the evening's grit. He had been on a short run with a load of cement, and the fine limey powder clung to his skin so that the soap scummed on the water without lathering.

Carrying his tie in his hand, he returned to the bedroom. She had finished undressing and had got into the bed, the sheets pulled well up under her chin.

The jumper had fallen from the brass bed-post to the floor, and his feet tangled with it as he crossed the room. He kicked it roughly to one

side, and then he found himself standing by the bed, the other pillow gripped tightly in his hands, poised over the sharp features. He brought it down quickly, enveloping, and then, using one hand to keep it in place, he reached for and grasped her arms as they threshed beneath the bedspread.

It took longer than he would have believed. Her wiry body writhed and turned beneath his hands, her knees raised, her heels kicking.

Bubbling, snoring sounds trickled from under the pillow, and he pressed down more firmly.

Quite suddenly she went limp, but still he kept the pillow in position, the full weight of his body pressed over her face, waiting while the seconds and minutes ticked away. Then, like a child peeling a transfer from the back of its wrist, he slowly lifted the pillow from her face.

It was done; it had been clean. There had been no blood.

She was most certainly dead; the eyes were open, staring at the ceiling, the mouth drooling, the thin lips peeled back from the rotting teeth.

He set the pillow back in its place, smoothing it mechanically, erasing the deep-etched shape, his thoughts racing ahead.

Suddenly, now that the thing was done, he found his mind clear and calm, crystal-clear, so that even as he stepped back from the bed, he had considered and rejected the garden, the cellar and the shed as possible temporary places of concealment.

And the body must be hidden, at least for the time being. When the hue



and cry, if there was any, had died down, then he could dispose of it in the garden; that should be easy. He could take his time over that, and nobody would be suspicious. But if freshly-turned soil appeared now. . .

But bodies rot. How long? he wondered. It was only March, a cold March. A week, perhaps?

He wandered out on to the landing, listening and thinking.

The house was quiet, waiting, it seemed, for his next move.

Where. . . ?

He stood at the top of the stairs and looked down into the dark square of the hall. The cellar he had rejected—concrete floor, and any tampering with that would be as obvious as newly-turned soil. No, it must be

somewhere out of sight, somewhere simple, just a temporary place.

He raised his head and looked at the small square in the ceiling, covered by the three-planked lid of whitewood. That was the way to the empty, draughty space beneath the tall roof; he called it the loft; it had never been used.

He went down the stairs and through the kitchen into the back-garden, seeking the small pair of steps that Wanda had used for cleaning the windows. Her dried wash-leather was on the top step, and he knocked it to the ground.

The night was clear, with a smell of frost; the stars all agleam and everywhere quiet. A thin strip of subdued light came from above the curtains of the house next door.

Mrs. Watson. She must be the first to be told that Wanda had packed and left. Packed. . . ? That was another job that must be done. A suitcase of clothes must also be hidden.

"Clever," he congratulated himself, "Clever. . . ."

The trapdoor gave easily at his touch, showering his head and shoulders with fragments of dried mortar. He wondered about the possibility of securing it after. . .

He rested his hands on the gritty ledge and peered round the cobwebbed, shadowy expanse beneath the roof.

A melancholy, dripping cistern in one corner was a gaunt, rusted square. Another and smaller tank was set at the opposite corner. The large tank, the old one, he knew provided the water for the bathroom, and the smaller and newer one, the water for the kitchen.

He couldn't leave her lying out in the open, beneath the huge rafters, but if she were put in the big tank, then, just for a week or so, he could avoid using the bathroom.

He wondered if there was anything he could put in the water with her; antiseptic perhaps . . . lime of any sort? or acid?

He climbed thoughtfully back to the landing and, after taking off his shirt, started work. . . .

Some time later he went into the back kitchen and washed his hands. He leaned against the chipped yellow sink, wiping his hands on the roller-towel and turned over in his mind the things he had done; checking and re-checking.

First the water. He had turned it off at the main, then half-emptied the tank before sliding the thin, drooping body into the dark depths. A suitcase, filled with roughly packed clothing . . . he had tried to imagine that he was Wanda, going away, thinking of what she would take—underclothes, a dress, her lipstick and face powder, shoes. . . .

Then the bulky case had followed Wanda into the cistern, lodging on her back, for he had pushed her in face downwards. For a horrible moment, she had supported the case, so that it had bobbed up and down with the slow rocking of the rust-covered water. Then it had gradually filled with water, and had sunk, pushing her down with its weight, slow bubbles rising and breaking on the turgid surface.

Then he had turned the water on again, waiting until the hollow gurgling, magnified by the raftered expanse, had ceased before returning to the bedroom.

The red jumper, half under the bed where he had earlier kicked it, had caught his eye, and he had picked it up with the tips of his fingers, and tossed it into the cistern with a gesture of finality, as though with its disposal he had ridded himself finally of all that it had stood for.

And now all that remained to be done was to break the news, the sad news, that Wanda had left him. . . .

Jalby sat back in his easy chair with his feet on the mantelpiece and read the evening paper. He spared a quick glance for the headlines then

turned to the back page for the sporting news and the pools forecasts.

When Wanda had been alive—he corrected himself, before Wanda had left him—he had never been able to spare a couple of bob for the pools. But now, like a lot of other things, that was different.

He lowered the paper and sighed contentedly. Things had gone very well. He felt no remorse for what had happened, only relief. It would be a week, tomorrow, since he had—since she had left. He had told Mrs. Watson the next morning about the quarrel. "Not a big one," he had explained, suitably upset, "but she's up an' left me; packed her things as bold as brass. Gone to her mother's, I s'pose."

He had sighed. "She's often said as she'd go, but I never dreamt she would. P'raps she'll come back."

"Of course she will!" a sympathetically excited Mrs. Watson had assured, "Only a tiff, surely she'll be back."

And that's all there'd been to it. . . . No questions, only the odd, inquisitive stares as he had gone about his work, and those had soon stopped. After all, in this part of the world it wasn't all that unusual for a wife to leave her husband.

A week. . . . He yawned and stretched, thinking absently. Give it a month before he started to make the new rockery in the back garden. He could picture how he would broach the subject.

"No, Mrs. Watson, not a sign of her yet, not even a letter"—his face suitably downcast—"but I know, I

feel, that she'll come back. In fact"—and here he would get confidential—"one of the last things she said before she went was that she wished she'd got a rockery, here in the garden. So just for a surprise, ready for when she gets back, I'm going to set to an' make one for her. . . ."

And the rest would be easy. Everyone knows that to make a proper rockery, you must dig a hole, a large, deep hole, for the drainage. Not a neat oblong, three by six, Oh no, that wasn't necessary, he was far too clever for that; but more of a circle, that would be the ticket. It would mean a hell of a lot of hard work, but it would be worth it.

He stretched again and looked at the clock. Only nine, still early, but it had been a hard day—two loads of lead piping. He turned to the couch with its pile of blankets and the pillow on top. He had slept there ever since that night. He just hadn't been able to bring himself to sleep upstairs, in that bed.

But he mustn't think about that; stifle the thoughts as they come without giving them time to take shape. Even thoughts can give a man away.

"She up an' left me," he told the slow-ticking clock. And then a knock came to the front door.

* * *

"Mr. Britson?" the taller of the two men asked, "Mr. Jalby Britson?"

"Yes," said Jalby, and opened the door wider.

"Police officers," the tall one explained, and flicked a small leather wallet from his pocket, holding it

briefly to the light." I wonder if we could have a word with you? Sorry it's late, but we shan't keep you long."

Jalby stepped aside, not conscious of any emotion. "Go straight through," he invited, his voice steady.

They stood just inside the door of the kitchen, each holding a soft hat in a loosely hanging hand. They both wore dark trench coats and highly polished brown shoes. Jalby looked from the thin dark features of the taller to the round and friendly, weather-beaten face of the other.

"Travers," the tall one introduced himself. "Detective-Inspector. And this is Sergeant Walters."

The sergeant smiled and nodded, and Jalby smiled in return, motioning silently to the chairs.

The Inspector folded his lanky body into Jalby's easy-chair, and the Sergeant, still smiling, leaned against the couch, took stock of the blankets, and let his eyes roam round the room.

"And what can I do for you?" Jalby asked, feeling that it was a stranger who was talking, that it couldn't be him, so calm. . . .

"We're making inquiries about a Mrs. Wanda Britson, she'll be your wife, I take it," the Inspector started. "Purely routine questions, you'll understand. I mean, there can't be anything wrong or you'd have been the first to know—not her mother."

"Her mother?" Jalby wondered.

"She seems a bit worried." The Inspector sighed. "Not that I can see any reason. . . . By the way, is your wife in, Mr. Britson?"

"No," said Jalby.

"Expecting her, perhaps?"

"She up an' left me," Jalby explained, "'bout a week ago."

He was conscious of a sudden tension in the room. The Inspector stroked his chin, and the Sergeant brought his eyes back from their tour of the room to stare at the carpet between his feet.

"Left you, did she?" the Inspector asked, "Any idea where she may have gone?"

"I don't know," Jalby told him, "I mean, I naturally thought as how she'd've gone to 'er old woman, 'er mother, you know."

The Sergeant opened his coat, produced a black leather notebook and a pencil, balanced the book on his palm, and tapped his teeth with the pencil.

"Her mother says she hasn't seen her for some time," the Inspector said. "And apparently she's had a letter from a Mrs. ——" —he took a slip of paper from his pocket—"a Mrs. Watson, who seems to be a friend of your wife, and who wants to know if Mrs. Britson's with her mother."

"A neighbour," Jalby said. "An' I can quite understand the wife's mother gettin' worried. If it comes to that, I'm beginning to feel a bit upset meself. I mean, I naturally assumed that that's where she'd gone, an' I was hoping that she'd soon be back."

"I'm sorry if I've brought you worrying news," the Inspector apologized, "I can quite understand how you must be feeling."

The Sergeant spoke for the first time. "You don't think there can be any suggestion of foul play?"

"Foul play?" Jalby repeated, and the Inspector frowned.

"You must forgive my sergeant," he excused. "Always jumps to his own conclusions. And, of course"—raising his brows—"there can't be any conclusion to jump to, can there?"

Jalby felt his first twinge of uneasiness. The little interchange had seemed to fit in so nicely, like the patter of cross-talk comedians; almost as though it had been rehearsed. He felt that these two must be used to working together, that perhaps they had had many similar interviews with husbands whose wives were missing, and that they knew all the answers.

The inspector sighed again and rose to his feet, obviously not expecting a reply to his question.

"Thanks for your help, Mr. Britson," he said, "We'll make a few more inquiries, stations and hospitals, you know. We'll probably find that your wife's staying at an hotel somewhere, just trying to teach you a lesson. It was a quarrel you had, I believe? That is what this Mrs. Watson suggested. . . ."

"A quarrel of sorts," Jalby admitted, "Only a little quarrel."

"Of course," the Inspector soothed, "happens in the best of circles. Well, thanks again for putting up with us. I think that's about all. Oh!"—apparently struck by a thought—"I wonder if you'd mind us having a quick look round the house? Routine, you know, and my sergeant here is a stickler for routine."

He smiled apologetically, and Jalby shook his head. "No objections

at all," he said. "Where d'you want to start?"

He clenched his hands by his sides. "There's nothing upstairs," he told himself, "Nothing. . . . I haven't been in the loft for years. . . ."

"Bedroom?" the Sergeant suggested briskly, returning book and pencil to his pocket. "See if there's any clothes missing. Can give an idea. . . ."

"She took a bag," Jalby said, leading the way up the stairs, "I stood and watched while she packed."

"Just so. . . ." The Inspector breathed close by his ear, and Jalby suddenly found it an effort to keep his eyes from straying to the three whitewood planks above his head, and the half-dozen three-inch screws that he had put through them, remembering afterwards to dab each bright head with a touch of brown paint.

"So this is the bedroom," the Inspector said, and sat on the bed, nodding slightly to the Sergeant, who started work on the dressing-table drawers.

"He's a tidy worker," the Inspector offered. "Bit stuffy in here."

Jalby watched the kneeling form busy among the jumble of clothes, wondering what meaning they could possibly have for him.

"It is stuffy," the Inspector repeated, his nose in the air.

"Bin closed up," Jalby explained. "Sleepin' downstairs, livin' by myself, less work."

"Of course," the Inspector agreed politely and leaned back, clasping his knees and whistling quietly.

Jalby dragged a chair to the door

and sat down. There was no doubt that there was a smell hanging about. Surely, not after only a week. . . ?

He fought hard to keep his eyes from the ceiling, but almost against his will he felt his gaze being drawn upwards. He tried to appear casual, looking first at the Sergeant, then letting his eyes drift round the walls, the bed, the stained ceiling. Stained?

Over the Inspector's head, directly above, and only waiting for his eyes to lift a fraction and see it, there was a stain, a fresh stain, still glistening, and red, shining red like blood. . . . Blood.

"No . . ." he cried silently, "there was no blood."

The room swam about him and he clenched his hands tightly, fighting back rising waves of nausea. Imagination, he told himself, staring at the faded carpet, and looked again.

But the stain was still there, and now it seemed to be gathering pendulously in the centre, as though it were just on the point of—it splashed across the Inspector's folded knuckles and trickled down his fingers. Red streaks, running, dripping. . . .

"No . . .!" Jalby shrieked, unaware that he cried aloud. "It isn't blood, there wasn't any. It was clean, I did

it with a pillow, just so's there'd be no blood. I can't stand blood," he sobbed. "Can't stand it. . . ."

* * *

"In a way," the Inspector said, standing at the foot of the stairs and lighting a cigarette. "I felt kind of sorry for the poor devil."

The Sergeant buttoned his coat. "What a hell of a place to put her," he brooded, searching for his belt. "I've dug them up, and I've taken 'em out of walls. . . . But dragging her out of that tank. . . ." He shuddered. "It'll be a while before I forget that."

"It wasn't blood, was it?" he asked over his shoulder.

The Inspector weighed his hat in his hands.

"Dye," he said briefly, without looking up, "There was an old red jumper, a rag of a thing. He must have thrown it in, and left one arm hanging out. . . . The water had soaked down it. Must have been dripping on the ceiling ever since he'd . . ."

"Funny," he added, turning to look back up the stairs. "Funny that it should choose just that moment to start coming through into the bedroom."



SOUND TRACK

PEGGY LOOSEMORE JONES

Illustrated by Patrick Sullivan



THE PAPERS are full of it, of course! Such a tragedy that a young man should die on the eve of his great success! I suppose no one would believe me if I said that I am the only person who knows exactly what happened to Vivian Lane. Yet that is the truth.

It all began a few weeks ago when my granddaughter, Candy, came to see me in my room.

"If you don't go to hear Van's choral symphony," she said, "I'll never forgive you! And I mean *you*, Gramps! Not one of your henchmen! Just imagine what a pæan of praise from Walter Eldman could do for the boy!"

I sighed.

"But, Candy, I am a little tired of all your clever young friends. They're beyond me, child! I can't think up enough things to say about them!"

"Nothing is beyond you, Gramps. You wouldn't be the *Globe's* chief music critic if it were! And, anyway, Van's different. He's a genius!"

Her face was very beautiful and very, very young.

"Is he from the School of Music?" I asked gently.

"Oh no, no! Gramps, you don't listen to a thing I say! He's from the provinces somewhere—nobody quite

knows where—and he's written this marvellous thing that he sent to Wendell. Wendell's taken him up—actually wants him to conduct it himself. It's such a chance at his age—he can't be much older than I am. And he's a darling—so ethereal! You will go, won't you, dear?"

"What's his name? Have I met him, Candy?"

"He came to tea the other day when you were out. Mummy adored him. And his name is Lane—Vivian Lane. We all call him Van."

Her voice went on, but it seemed to come from a great distance. Vivian Lane! I had hardly thought to hear that name from her lips, not the name that had haunted me and kept me fearful for fifty years. I stared at Candy, but I was really staring back into the past and she said:

"You're not listening to me again! Whatever is the matter with you, Gramps?"

I pulled myself into the present with an effort.

"It's just that," I said, "I must have known your young friend's grandfather. We were music students together."

"But that's wonderful! It will be a link between you!"

A link! It was more like a chain! Reluctantly I began to remember Vivian—my Vivian, as I had known him fifty years before. Margaret's

Vivian, too, although not at the very beginning. I went on staring at Candy, and although she is not really very much like her grandmother, it seemed to me that it was Margaret who stood there—beautiful, golden-haired Margaret—and that I was introducing her to Vivian again.

Vivian had a pale, oval face, rather like a saint's, with large, penetrating, light-coloured eyes. He never wore anything but black serge, winter and summer, and his eyes frequently had an abstracted expression which, I came to know, meant that he was listening to music in his head.

On the day I introduced him to Margaret, we were walking together beside the narrow river which twisted and bent through the countryside near the college. Vivian was being bitter as usual about the inability of all of us to understand his music, and he said in a hard voice, "I'm ahead of my time, Walter!"

He was breaking up a twig as he walked and throwing the pieces into the water.

"Not that I'm alone in that! Think of poor old Bach—writing works for the 'cello that couldn't be performed when he was alive because there wasn't an instrument good enough or a performer of the right calibre. Yet now—three hundred years afterwards—we've got both! D'you suppose he knew, guessed, somehow?"

The tide caught a piece of the twig, pulled it out into midstream and whirled it swiftly onwards. Vivian grabbed my arm.

"See that? Music is like this river—stretching right back into time and

on into the future. Sometimes we're lucky enough to toss something into it that gets carried right past us—something that will live! If I could just believe that will happen to my music."

"It will," I said.

"Yes. I do believe it! But I can't wait! Three hundred years is too long, Walter. Even fifty years—twenty! I want to be recognised now!"

Poor Vivian! I knew that he was working on a piece of choral writing for the college end-of-term concert, and I guessed that he was afraid it wouldn't be accepted. He had played some of it to me, and it was strange—barbaric somehow. Now I asked him to listen to my own string quartet, and we turned to go in together. Margaret met us just as we reached the gates.

I had only known her for a few days, but already I was sure that I wanted to marry her some day. She was the niece of one of the professors at the college, and I think she considered us all slightly mad. But the way she looked at Vivian when I brought him up to her made me wish she hadn't come along just then. He was polite but distant, and after a while we broke away and he came in to listen to my quartet. I could tell he thought it humdrum stuff, and he soon began talking again about music being a river. Then he said, right out of the blue:

"Who was that girl?"

I told him, and mentioned that I was taking her out to tea the next day.

"Good! I'll come to!" he said.



And that was the beginning of the end as far as Margaret and I were concerned. The most extraordinary thing was the way all the giving came from her right from the start. She told me that she knew Vivian would never really love her—he only loved music. I tried to reassure her, but I was afraid she was right. For Vivian had such a peculiar mind. He became obsessed with ideas, and wouldn't let them go.

This business of music being a river, for instance. He came to me with a book in his hand a few days after our original conversation, and he was very excited.

“Read this!” he demanded. “It explains everything!”

The book was by a fellow called Ouspensky, a Russian philosopher of

sorts who was trying to prove a far-fetched theory of his own about the nature of time.

“Don't you see?” said Vivian. “This follows on from what I was saying the other day. Time as we know it is an illusion. It is just another extension of ourselves, a kind of fourth dimension. If the mind could only be freed from three-dimensional thinking it could travel along the time track—back into the past, forward into the future. Why, great heavens, man, the possibilities are tremendous!”

His enthusiasm infected me, and we began to read parts of the book together.

“I said music was like a river,” said Vivian, “but it could be another dimension—another sort of track,

only of the spirit. I can feel it, can't you, Walter? Passing through us and onwards, back into the past to all the great composers. If I could just get on that track somehow! I would give everything I possess for that!"

"Even Margaret?" I asked dryly.

"Oh—Margaret!" He dismissed her as if she were completely unimportant, and that made me angry. Because I loved her myself, I could understand just how much Vivian meant to her. But for him it was all Ouspensky and his time theory. He talked of nothing else for the next few days. Then something happened to put it temporarily out of his head. The concert selection committee, conservative to a man, turned down his long choral work, "The Seasons".

Vivian took the blow very badly, especially when he heard that my string quartet had been accepted. He made me furious because he called it "puny rubbish." I knew it wasn't much, but nobody likes to have his creation pulled to pieces. There was quite a scene between us, and if I hadn't remembered Vivian had a wonky heart I really believe I'd have knocked him down. As it was, things were very cool between us for some days.

Then one evening he came and knocked at the door of my room.

"I'm sorry, Walter," was all he said.

He sat down on the edge of my bed and stared at the wall.

"I'm sorry, too, Viv."

He was quiet for a long time, and then he began walking up and down

the room, crossing and recrossing my faded patch of carpet.

"Something fantastic happened to me last night, Walter," he said. "I had a dream! Only it wasn't a dream, I swear it. I was lying in bed thinking about 'The Seasons'—most especially about one part of it I wasn't satisfied with. I was hearing the music in my head. And then, suddenly, I wasn't in my own room at all, but in a large hall—such a hall, Walter! You could tell it had been built specially for music. There was a choir singing, and they were singing 'The Seasons'. Not only that, I was conducting. But the way they sang—it was perfect; just the way I'd always known my music could sound properly presented. There was something strange about the choir though, something alien, distant. And then I knew what it was. This concert wasn't happening in *our* time, Walter, but somewhere in the future!"

I laughed.

"You've got Ouspensky on the brain!"

"Don't laugh, Walter! There's more to it than that. You see, although these people were singing my music, they were singing it differently from the way I'd written it. This new way was absolutely right—it was what I'd been searching for all these weeks. I altered my score this morning."

"But," I said, "that doesn't prove anything at all. The music was on your mind—the problem resolved itself. That sort of thing used to happen to me when I was at school, algebra worked itself out in my head overnight! There's nothing new in that."

"I can't make you see," he said. "But I know, Walter. There was something in that hall that drew and fascinated me. This was my future—my moment of triumph. And yet here I am, unknown, unheard of, not even represented at a college concert."

I said that if he'd really seen his future, all he had to do was to wait. But that only made him flare up.

"I tell you, Walter, there was only one thing I wanted when I heard those people sing, and that was to be there with them—now! When I am young enough to appreciate success."

"Vivian," I said, "you have such a lot. You must know that one day everyone will realize your worth. Why can't you take it easy. You've got Margaret—surely that means something?"

"What?" said Vivian. "Margaret and I have been lovers for a week. What more is there?"

The utter callousness of this made me tremble.

"Get out!" I said. "Get out before I kill you!"

I began shouting when he didn't move. Several people passing in the corridor opened the door and looked in to see what all the noise was about.

"I'll kill you!" I was shouting. "I'll knock you down! I don't give a damn for your weak heart. Get out."

Eventually he went. The others took him with them, and gradually I stopped shaking. I couldn't remember when I'd been so angry.

After a bit I began to calm down and to feel sorry. Margaret was right when she said that Vivian was different from the rest of us. This complete

absorption of his in music, cruel in itself, made him what he was. He could no more help his abstraction than I could help loving Margaret.

I decided I'd go and look for him, he was depressed enough without me turning against him, too; and so obsessed with his time theory, I wondered what he might do.

He wasn't in his room and he wasn't in the library. Then I met a fellow we both knew, and he said he'd seen Vivian walking towards the college hall where we held our concerts. So I made my way there.

As I reached the hall I was held back for a moment outside, with my hand actually on the handle of the door. For I could have sworn I heard singing. It seemed to be in the air, all around and about me, strange, leaping melodies with a dream-like familiarity about them. Vivian's music! I hesitated no longer, but flung the door open and stepped inside. As I did so the music seemed to retreat from me, to press itself back, somehow, into the shadows, and there was only Vivian, standing in the half-light with his arms upraised, conducting a silence.

I watched. In the half-light the shadows of Vivian's beautiful hands made grotesque patterns on the walls. He seemed to be in an ecstasy, and when he reached the final climax he quivered somehow on tiptoe, arms upstretched like a taut string. Then his hands fell to his sides and he stood with bowed head. After a moment he straightened, turned with great pride, and bowed.

I moved forward then, and I think

he saw me. But he turned deliberately and walked towards the back of the stage. I felt like an interloper, so I crept out of the hall and closed the door quietly behind me.

I waited outside for a long time, and he certainly didn't pass me—and there was no back way out of the hall. I assumed after a bit that he was staying in to avoid me, and that he would come back to the college after I'd gone to bed.

But he never went back to the college. His bed was untouched the next morning.

After a few days, when he still didn't put in an appearance, the questions began—and the innuendoes. Too many people had heard our quarrel, and when the police were brought in I knew that there was plenty of whispering going on behind my back. It was most difficult of all to explain things to Margaret. I told her that I supposed his disappointment over the college concert had made Vivian decide to give it all up, though why he should have walked out on her, too, was past my comprehension. She said she had never expected him to consider her, anyway.

All in all, the next few months were just about the most distressing of my life. Margaret's misery and everybody's suspicions were almost too much to bear. But you can't have a murder without a body, and as nothing at all was ever traced of Vivian things eventually began to get a bit better. It took a long time to persuade Margaret to marry me, and when at last I did I knew that I would always be second best. I was never

free of the fear that one day Vivian would walk back into our lives and disrupt our happiness. For years afterwards I watched for his name on concert programmes, certain that one day it would be there. But I never heard of him again.

After Margaret died a year ago, his name began gradually to fade from my memory. Until this day, when Candy told me about the boy who was going to conduct his own work in the Festival Hall.

I wanted to go, and yet something held me back. If this was Vivian's grandson, might not Vivian be at the concert, too? And would he still be bitter, and perhaps jealous of my own small success as a critic? Margaret was dead, so he couldn't upset her any more. But his ghost had stood between us two for years, and I didn't want to resurrect it.

Yet when I sat in the Festival Hall last night, I spent all my time before the concert looking round me to see if Vivian was there. Candy sat beside me, strung-up, nervous, with her pretty little face burning with colour.

"You must like it, Gramps," she said. "For Van's sake!"

I began to see that this boy really meant something to her. She had been interested in plenty of young hopefuls before this, but I never remembered seeing her quite so intense. It worried me that she might be falling in love with the grandson of a man I hated and feared.

"This Van——" I began.

"He's a darling! Oh, Gramps, don't you just love this place?"

I had been to the Festival Hall

many times before, but suddenly, almost as clearly as if I was hearing him say it, the echo of Vivian's voice came back to me . . . "Such a hall Walter. It was made for music."

I stared around and shifted in my seat uneasily. A curious, dreamlike feeling began to come over me, and increased as the choir and orchestra began taking their places. Candy leaned forward, her hands clasped, as a tall young man, dressed completely in black, made his way towards the conductor's desk.

"Van!" she breathed.

The pale hands lifted. There was silence. Then the music began.

It was Vivian's, unmistakably. I had not heard those curious, barbaric melodies for fifty years, but they were seared for ever on my memory.

After the sheer disbelief of it, there came anger. That this young rogue should be passing off his grandfather's work as his own. Tricking everybody, persuading my Candy into thinking him a genius—even, perhaps, into loving him. I could have jumped up then and there and denounced the fellow for a charlatan.

But I waited. I heard the thing through. I watched the young conductor turn and bow to the cheering crowd. And as he turned he seemed to look straight at me.

I was still sitting in my seat when Candy asked me to come and meet her Van. Somehow, it seemed that the concert was over and everybody was going home. She took me by the hand and led me to the back of the hall.

She drew me into a crowd of people who surrounded the com-

poser, congratulating him, and it was curious how they all seemed to draw back, fall away even, until he and I were standing face to face.

I had meant to condemn him, but all I said was:

"Vivian!"

He stared back at me, and what I hadn't expected was the terrible look of age in the eyes looking out of that young face. It was as beautiful as ever, as saint-like, but all I could think of was the way he had cheated life, me, Margaret and even Candy herself. He could have his success, his youth as well if he must have it; but he wasn't going to take possession of Candy as he had of Margaret.

"It's Walter, Vivian," I said.

It was terrible to see the way his face crumpled, as if the mind behind it was struggling to see back, to remember. After all, wherever Vivian had been these fifty years, the past must have fallen away from him as from the rest of us. And if he had been living, suspended, as it were, in an everlasting present, waiting for the rest of us to catch up with him, who can say what kind of hell it might have been?

"Walter," he said at last. "Walter—Eldman!"

A blinding flash of memory leapt out of his eyes and his hand caught at his chest. Candy gave a little cry and ran towards him, too late.

She is a child and will forget. But I never will. For I suppose you could say that I killed him. I was the only one who knew that he had a weak heart, and he was an old man.

A TOUCH OF MURDER

LEO BERNE

Illustrated by Norman Battershill



TOUCHING IN THE shadow of the trees, Clerky peered out at the dark, silent road. The whisky in his stomach warmed and gave false courage.

"I'll show 'em," he told the surrounding bushes.

"Feelin' sorry for me, that crowd," he said bitterly. "Good as them any day."

Old Larson had been the worst, leaning over the bar and sniggering through his long nose. Larson was always trying to take the micky. He was the one who'd first laid the name on him; that'd been quite a while ago, now.

"Look at 'im," he wheezed, "dressed up to the nines in posh blue suit an' white starched collar . . . Looks like a ruddy clerk in 'is white collar. Clerky . . ." he'd cackled into a fit of coughing, "old Clerky Furnace . . ."

And the name had stuck. Not that he cared, it was something to have a name like that, made him different from the others. And he still wore his blue suit and changed his stiff, white collar twice a week.

In the distance a clock struck midnight.

"'Nother ten minutes or so," he told himself, looking at the tall house. "Give 'em time to get well bedded down."

"I'll show 'em," he brooded.

"Thinkin' I 'aven't the guts."

There'd been five of them in the "Crosskeys" earlier that evening, including Larson and himself. And then the tall, swanky bloke had come in.

"This round's on me," the stranger had offered, flashing a bulging wallet.

"In funds?" old Larson had wheezed, approving the gesture with a rubbing of his hands.

"'Ouse out 'Olborn way," the newcomer had replied, winking. "'Ard cash."

"Now that's the racket, Clerky-boy," Larson had said over his shoulder. "Pick yerself a nice easy crib fer a start, better'n all this small stuff; pickin' pockets is no use to nobody these days."

Clerky had rested his elbows on the battered zinc counter and had stared at his own face in the bottle-flanked, tarnished mirror. Pale, watery eyes in a wrinkled face; blue cloth cap set square on patchy brown hair; thin ropey neck stemming into the stiffly-shining white collar.

"S'easy," he'd boasted, "breakin' in: anyone can do it."

The whisky talking, he knew, but he had committed himself.

And so he left their jeering faces and, taking a late 'bus, rode with it to the terminus, heedless of where he was going, but only seeking the darker suburbs.

Then he left the bright lights of the

main road and, lured by the promise of tall chimneys and steeply gabled roofs, had turned into this dark avenue of trees. He had selected the largest of the houses, and hidden himself in the bushes that lined the footpath.

The clock chimed the quarter hour.

Clerky straightened his back and pushed farther into the bushes until he reached the fence. He pulled himself up and over, dropping to a deadening cushion of dried leaves and twigs. Then he crouched, listening and watching. The dark shape of the house reared up almost on top of him. For a moment he fancied that a glimmer of light flickered in one of the ground-floor windows, but he put it down to a trick of his eyes.

A soft-footed crouching run brought him across grass verge and gravel drive to stand tight-pressed against a rough stone wall, windows to either hand.

Long windows, right down to the floor; what did they call them? . . . french windows? He passed a questing hand up and down their length, seeking the catch.

And as he pressed, so the window gave at his touch, opening silently on well-oiled hinges.

The room was a sea of blackness, heavy with the smell of old furniture and stale tobacco smoke. He stood just inside the window, holding back the curtain, trying to pierce the velvety darkness. He held his breath, listening, then stepped lightly into the room, the curtains falling back behind him.

His ears caught a whisper of sound

and he stopped, his pulse suddenly racing.

And then a light flicked into being; a small wall light close by his head. It bathed him in a pool of subdued radiance, only faintly illuminating the rest of the room. Dark, wavering shapes of furniture loomed up against the darker background; high shadowy squares hinted at heavy-framed pictures.

In the far corner, a huge crouching monster of a desk, and standing by it, a shape, one arm raised to the wall, the hand still apparently resting on the switch.

And then the voice, a woman's voice, quiet but tense.

"Stay where you are, don't move."

He could see her more distinctly now, tall and slender, but the face still a featureless pale oval.

"Only a little man . . . No," as he made to step back, "I told you to stay still. I'm not defenceless, but I don't intend you any harm."

It was the voice of an educated woman; it was fearless and self-assured. But still there was the undercurrent of tenseness.

Clerky felt himself to be at a disadvantage. He was bathed in the glow of the light: she was safe and secure in the darkness.

"'Ere," he said, swallowing. "What's the game?"

"That's better," she told him. "I was afraid for one moment you were going to make a break for it. And that would have been foolish. You are a burglar, I suppose?" There was only polite interest in the words.

Clerky found himself shivering.



Norman
Baffershill

There was something wrong about this. Something very wrong indeed . . . People whose houses were broken into didn't behave like this. So calmly, unless . . .

She was just playing with him, probably already sent for the coppers; just keeping him here until . . .

"You wus waitin'," he accused. "You saw me comin'."

"I saw you coming," she admitted. "I stood by the window and I saw you climb the fence. You looked as if you weren't used to that sort of thing. I felt sorry for you—so I opened the windows . . ."

"You opened the winder just so's I could get in?"

"Of course"—and now there was a hint of mockery in the voice. "But you wouldn't understand. I don't suppose you expected to have help . . . ?"

"What's the catch?" Clerky muttered. "What d'you want?"

There was something unreal about the whole thing, a dreamlike quality. He almost wished that she would behave differently, send for the cops, act scared. Not just stand there speaking so calmly . . .

"There's no catch," she told him. "You broke in here to steal . . . Well, go ahead," she laughed, "steal!"

"I don't get it," he said sullenly.

"I said you wouldn't understand," and now there was impatience in her words. "Just let's say that I'm prepared to help you take some of my husband's treasures. Why should you worry if I've got sick of the sight of seeing him play with his watches? Every day he comes in here, hovering over them like a—a vulture."

"Watches . . . ?" Clerky wondered.

"Isn't that what you came for? You mean you just picked this house without having any idea of what you'd find?"

"I've never bin on this lark before," he told her. "I din't know there was anythin' special 'ere."

"First time lucky," the voice insinuated. "Can you see the cabinet against the wall, towards your left? That's where the best ones are; the pride of his collection," bitterly, "gold and jewelled ones."

"Gold," she told him. "Some are solid gold. Some are inlaid with diamonds and rubies . . ."

"Take them," she ordered. "Fill your pockets with them."

Clerky laid a trembling hand on the cold glass. He didn't want the watches, even if they were gold; he didn't want to take anything. All he wanted to do was to get out of the room, get out in the open, and then run . . .

"It's locked," he told her, barely above a whisper.

"Did you expect it to be open?" she mocked. "Smash the glass—here . . ."

She moved silently across the floor and was by his side. A wave of perfume drifted as she moved, and he could hear the rustle of her clothes. She thrust something hard into his unresisting fingers.

"It's a poker," she breathed in his ear, and then was away to the far side of the room again.

He clenched his fist round the short stump of heavy metal that glistened blackly in the soft glow. It felt

warm and sticky to the touch.

A wave of panic swept through him, and almost involuntarily he lifted the poker above his head to bring it down on the glass top of the cabinet with a splintering crash.

"Fill your pockets," she ordered sharply.

He groped through the star of broken glass, feeling the cold, heavy shapes, weighing down his pockets with them.

"There," her voice reached him, "and just because you've helped me . . ."

She was back at his side again, her hands about his neck, her lips pressed against his cheek. For a brief moment her body, soft and warm, was tight against his, then she stepped back, and he could see her grey shape gliding noiselessly back to the desk.

And then the lights blazed with sudden brilliance, so that the room sprang to life as if beneath the glare of floodlights.

The woman stood by the desk, blinking in the sudden light. She was wearing a red silk dressing-gown, tightly belted, and her hair was a cloud of dark curls framing the delicate oval of her face.

She had one hand on the telephone, and in the other, a gun; a stubby, vicious gleam of metal that pointed steadily towards him.

She kept her gaze on his face while she dialled.

"Police," she called into the receiver. "Get me the police, quickly!"

"'Ere!" Clerky protested, alarmed, and she raised the gun a fraction.

"Don't move," she warned, then

spoke urgently into the 'phone.

"Police? Come quickly . . ." Her voice faltered but her eyes remained cold and steady. "It's my husband—he's been murdered. Mrs. Willoughby, Dove House . . . Yes, that's the one. And please, please hurry!"

She replaced the receiver.

Clerky clenched his hand even more tightly about the poker, trying to muster his thoughts, trying to understand what was happening. Wave after wave of unreasoning fear swept through him, leaving him cold and trembling.

"So far, so good," the woman said calmly, and reached over to lay her finger on the bell-push by the door.

"I feel rather sorry for you," she told him, smiling a little. "You seem quite a nice little man . . ."

Clerky found his voice.

"'Ere!" he cried. "Wot's goin' on? Wot's your game?"

"There's blood on your coat," she said simply. "I know, I put it there. The poker you used to kill him is still in your hand, and your pockets are filled with the things you stole . . ."

"My hands are red, too"—inspecting her open palm—"but that's because I cradled his head on my sorrowing bosom . . ."

"You killed him!" he accused, suddenly understanding.

"Of course," she sighed. "The old fool deserved it. But who will take your word against mine?"

Behind her the door opened, and a grey-haired man blinked in the light. He wore an overcoat draped over striped pyjamas.

"Wilson," the woman gasped.

"Thank heaven you've come." She swayed, one hand to her forehead, "I—I think I'm going to faint. I've 'phoned the police—it's the Master, he's been murdered."

She staggered from the desk, and collapsed into a chair. And as she stepped aside, Clerky's horrified eyes fell on the huddled shape that lay by the door. Blood-stained pyjamas, matted hair, outflung arms, legs awkwardly doubled beneath the broken body.

There was blood, too; a dull stain that had spread from the pathetic white hair. Only that wasn't really white now, it was . . .

And then his eyes left the shattered head to look at the poker clutched so tightly in his hand. There was blood on that, too; and hair. And flecks of glistening white marble . . .

* * *

The Inspector stroked his chin.

"Well," he told the room, "Clerky Furnace. Who would have thought it?"

He stood squarely in the centre of the room, a big man looking even larger in the blue overcoat that hung loosely from broad shoulders.

The woman was sobbing quietly, sitting hunched in a chair, a handkerchief pressed to her mouth. A uniformed sergeant stood behind, his face a mixture of compassion and horror.

A curtain had been taken from the window and used to cover the body.

Clerky leaned forward, hands hanging loosely between his knees.

"I din't do it," he said dully.

"And that story you've told me," the Inspector continued, ignoring the interruption. "In all my experience with the Force . . ."

He broke off, shrugging.

"I din't touch the old buffer," Clerky told the carpet. "It all 'appened like I said. He must've bin dead when I came in."

"And the poker in your hand?" the Inspector hinted gently. "Not to mention the blood on your coat. And I suppose you just backed into the cabinet and smashed it, and the watches floated into your pockets?"

"She put the poker in me 'and," Clerky said. "She told me to take the watches." His voice was expressionless; he was just stating a fact. "Take it or leave it," he seemed to be saying.

He lifted his face and looked at the woman.

"She did it," he said, pointing. "She said she 'ad. Ask 'er; make 'er tell you the truth . . ."

The woman raised her face to the Inspector, mutely imploring him to put an end to the farce. "Leave me with my sorrow," her eyes begged.

"And the blood on your coat?" the Inspector wondered.

"That wus when she put 'er arms round me neck—that wus the only reason she did it . . ."

The Inspector studied the white anguished face and the blood-smears down the front of the jacket. He came to stand behind the chair, resting his hands on its polished back and looking thoughtfully down on Clerky's blue cloth cap.

"I've known you for a long time," he told the cap, "and I've pinched you a few times, too. I thought I was a good judge of men, and I'd never have believed that you would . . ."

He looked at the woman.

"You deny this story of his?" he asked her.

"We heard a noise," she whispered, the tears streaking her blotched face, "and my husband came down, and I followed as soon as I had put this gown on. As I came through the hall, I heard the sound of a struggle, and my husband's voice, shouting something . . ."

"When I came in the room, he—my husband, was lying there, and this man was just going through the window. He still had the poker in his hand."

She pressed her hands to her forehead.

"The rest was like a nightmare. I know I took the gun from my husband's hand, and I pointed it at . . . Then I knelt by—by—but he was dead. And there was blood, everywhere. I got some on my hands."

She broke off, shuddering, and the sergeant rested a comforting hand on her shoulder.

"It must have been most unpleasant," the Inspector said apologetically. "I'm only sorry that we have to keep pestering you with these questions at such a time . . . But I think the whole picture is clear now."

"Just for the record," he asked her, "you say you never touched this man?"

"With my husband's blood on his hands?" she wondered, her eyes fill-

ing again with tears. "I never went near him."

"And the finger-prints on the back of his starched collar?" the Inspector wondered gently. "Two very fine prints?"

He put his head on one side, admiring them with professional interest.

"Now I wonder," he mused, "just whose prints they will turn out to be . . . ?"

* * *

"I know her sort," the Inspector told the sergeant, "hard as nails while everything's going their way. But the moment something goes wrong," he shrugged, "they go all to pieces."

He sighed, drawing on his gloves. The room seemed very large and empty.

"She'll confess," he assured himself, nodding gently. "I think we'll find that they spotted our friend while he was plucking up courage to climb the fence—I noticed that it had been wired into the alarm system. Obviously all precautions had been taken to protect this valuable collection."

"I imagine that Clerky set off the alarm quite a while before he actually climbed over and the old man came down to 'phone the police. She followed, grasping what she thought to be the ideal opportunity."

He smiled a little.

"A near shave for Clerky. If he hadn't been wearing that stiff, white collar, he wouldn't have stood much chance."

THE SHERLOCK HOLMES OF BABYLON

JACK GRIFFITH

IT IS OF THE highest importance in the art of detection," Sherlock Holmes says, "to be able to recognize out of a number of facts those which are essential and those which are vital."

As a rule, it needs only one fact to be out of place, and to be observed by the very observant, to provide the vital clue. The hard-worked story of Sherlock Holmes and the dog at night is a classic example:

"I would call your attention to the curious incident of the dog at night-time.

"The dog did nothing at night-time.

"That is the curious incident . . ."

In one of his cases, *The Golden Pince-nez*, Holmes was faced with a similar situation. Food was disappearing far too rapidly for the needs of a studious professor who smoked so many Alexandrian cigarettes that he must have been losing his appetite. The dog did not bark. Someone knew the dog; someone must know the professor.

Sherlock Holmes had considerable knowledge of tobacco ash. "I have, as you know . . ." he told Dr. Watson in *The Boscombe Valley Mystery*, "written a little monograph on the ashes of one hundred and forty dif-

ferent varieties of pipe, cigar and cigarette tobacco . . ."

In *The Golden Pince-nez* he put tobacco ash to an unexpected use. He, like the professor, began smoking large quantities of Alexandrian cigarettes, walking up and down and scattering the ash liberally over the carpet of the room in which the professor had his food.

Although the room seemed empty apart from its normal occupants, and there was no trapdoor, Holmes decided that the unknown murderer—for there had been a murder—had access to it.

The scattered ash provided the final and essential clue. When Holmes examined the ash after the next meal he saw footprints upon it, leading from and to a high book-case large enough to hold a man or, as in this case, a woman. She was the killer.

It was a similar method of detection which put the prophet Daniel firmly among the great detectives of all time. The apocryphal *The History of Bel* relates how Daniel had an argument with the King of Babylon, who wanted him to worship the god Bel. Daniel refused, declaring that he would not worship an idol made with hands, but only the living God who created heaven and earth.

Then the king asked if Daniel did not consider Bel also a living God,

seeing that he ate and drank every day. With a smile Daniel replied: "O king, be not deceived, for Bel is but clay within and brass without, and never did eat or drink anything."

Annoyed, the king summoned his priests and told them that if they could not say who ate the food placed before Bel he would kill them. But if they could prove that Bel ate it, Daniel should die.

The priests replied: "Lo, we go out, but you, O king, place meat and wine before Bel, then shut the door fast and seal it with your own signet. Then, tomorrow, if he has not eaten it all, we expect to be killed. Otherwise we shall know that Daniel has borne false witness against us."

The king agreed, but before the doors were shut, and without the knowledge of the priests, Daniel gave orders that, in the presence of the king, ashes were to be sprinkled throughout the temple. Then it was locked and sealed with the king's signet.

During the night the priests, with their wives and children, did what they always did: they crept up through a trapdoor under the table in the temple and ate the food.

On the following morning the king, taking Daniel with him, went to examine the seals. They were intact. Opening the door the king looked and saw the table with the food all gone. In a loud voice he cried: "You are great, O Bel, and there is no deceit in you."

Daniel, however, laughed and restrained the king from going inside. "Look at the pavement," he sug-

gested, "and tell me whose footsteps these are."

"I see the footsteps of men, women and children," the king replied. He was very angry—as the priests soon discovered . . .

It is possible that Conan Doyle got his idea of footprints in ash from this story.

In another case, one of perjury, Daniel anticipated the modern police officer's command of, "Shove 'em into separate cells." He did this, we understand, about twenty-six hundred years ago.

In the famous case of *The History of Susanna*, two elders made a practice of watching the beautiful Susanna, wife of a great and rich man named Joacim, go for a walk in her husband's private garden every day. Finally, inflamed with desire and wanting to enjoy the spectacle alone, each suggested to the other that it was time to go home. They went their separate ways only to steal back singly in order to obtain another voluptuous look. Finding themselves together again they admitted to each other why they were there, arranging to meet again at a time when Susanna would be without her maids and alone.

When they did go again they found her taking a bath, the result of which was that they were so filled with desire that they went to her and made improper suggestions. And if she did not satisfy their demands, they threatened, they would swear that they had discovered her in a compromising position with an attractive young man who escaped before they could catch him. This meant, one way or the

other, that Susanna was in danger of being condemned to death.

Thereupon Susanna fell back upon one of the chief weapons of her sex: she screamed.

The two elders tried to run away, but the scream attracted a servant who came into the garden through a private door. To save themselves the two elders swore they had seen Susanna lying under a tree with a handsome young man.

The case was tried in public, and Susanna was found guilty and condemned to death. But as they led her away, Daniel, who was present, cried out, "Take her back. These men have lied."

Although still young, Daniel was greatly respected. He was asked to conduct the case for the defence at a fresh trial.

He agreed. His first stipulation was that the two prisoners be kept apart and out of earshot of each other. They were separated.

When the first witness was called he asked: "What sort of tree was it under which you saw the two lovers?"

"A mastick-tree!" was the prompt reply.

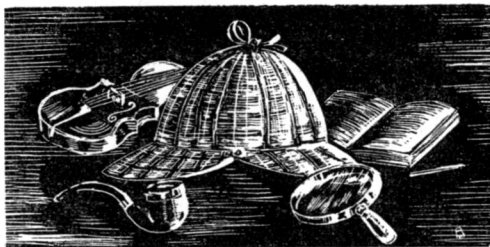
He asked the other witness the same question.

"Under a holm-tree," came the answer.

It was as simple as that. Perjury was obvious, although no one in authority had previously considered it. Susanna was released and respected. The two elders were put to death.

It is not known how many other cases of detection Daniel performed during his lifetime, but his subsequent fame suggests there were many. If all his solutions were as simple as those of which we know, it is pretty safe to assume that he probably thought what Sherlock Holmes said: "Every problem becomes childish when once it is explained to you."

I wonder if Daniel had a Watson!



HONEYMOON FOR ONE

BENTLEY SCOTT



AFTER THE LONG drive through the desert's chill night air, the roadside diner had that warm, friendly look. Paul Tarren knuckled tired eyes and rubbed a hand across the thin, dark stubble on his cheeks as he looked over the rough, clapboard building with its king-size neon sign that read "All-Nite Desert Diner" in bold, red letters.

Its lighted windows spelt food and the opportunity to ease his cramped muscles. He slid out from behind the wheel and stretched. The aroma of cooking coming from somewhere out back reminded him that he had not eaten since early the night before. The border was near, but not near enough, and he felt it was worth taking the risk.

He went up on to the ramshackle veranda and peered through the clouded windows. The place was empty except for a tired-looking blonde in a soiled white apron, who was sitting at one end of the counter, idly wiping glasses and looking extremely bored. Satisfied by the deserted look of the place, he pushed his way into the diner's steamy warmth. The girl started at his entry and eyed him thoughtfully as he approached the counter.

"If you're wanting to eat," she said, in a flat metallic voice, "we got nothing on right now. If you want to

wait, guess Nick'll be able to fix you up with ham-and-eggs."

"Sounds okay." He stifled a yawn. "How about some coffee right now?"

"Coffee coming up." She filled a cup and pushed it across to him, then turned and poked her head through a tiny hatchway and said something. There was a grunt of acknowledgement from the other side of the hatch.

She turned back and gave him a tired smile. "You come a long way, mister?"

"Uh-uh," he grunted. At that moment he was in no mood for small talk.

"You going south?"

He looked hard at her. "Why?"

She shrugged. "No reason." She lowered her voice and jerked a thumb in the direction of the kitchen. "It's Nick's idea. What with business being like it is these days, he figures we got to try and make the customer feel at home. Keep a smile on my face, he says, and make with the polite conversation." She sniffed. "Not that there's much chance for conversation this time in the morning. You're the first customer since the patrol boys stopped off here a while ago."

"The police?" He looked up sharply.

She nodded. "Yeah. Guess they must be looking for someone. If you're heading south you'll probably run into them. Said they was setting up a road block a mile or so outside the next town."

He gave no answer. Picking up his coffee, he headed for one of the partitioned booths at the far end of the room. He sat himself down, picked up a newspaper, and stared at it uncomprehendingly. He was trying to tell himself there was no reason to be scared; that the police could in no way connect him with the woman he had left lying by the roadside a long way back. He wanted to think about the money, all in brand-new currency, in his suitcase, and he had plenty of ideas about that money.

* * *

A long time ago Tarren had found that he possessed a strange attraction for rich, middle-aged women, and he had gladly made use of this asset. Julia had been no pushover. There had been other times and other places, but this time it had been different. It had taken a lot of time and a lot of persuasion to get her to draw the money out of the bank. This time he had been forced to go through with the marriage, and that sort of thing was bad for his ego.

The wedding had been on a grand scale; he had not realized that Julia possessed so many friends. Then when a naïve and starry-eyed Julia had suggested that they steal away on a quiet honeymoon, keeping their destination secret from everyone, she had unwittingly signed her own death warrant.

He had tried hard to make it look like a hit-and-run accident. It had been a messy job, but he had made

sure that the body would not be easily recognizable; at least, until he had time to be over the border. He saw no reason to worry about any road-checks he might run into, because the road was a main highway and carried a lot of traffic. That meant that the body would be found almost right away, but as long as there was no means of identification, there was no way they could connect him with the affair.

The coffee was warming him now, and he was feeling more at ease, when all at once the voice of the girl broke in on his thoughts. He stole a glance at her. She was listening, her head canted to one side.

"Looks like we got another customer," she said.

He pricked up his ears. From a long way off came the sound of a fast-approaching car. The sound became louder and suddenly light splashed on the windows as the car slowed and turned off the highway on to the parking lot. He waited, eyes riveted on the doorway, scarcely daring to breathe.

For a long moment there was silence, then footsteps clattered on the boardwalk, the door was thrown open and two state troopers appeared. Under cover of the newspaper, he watched them as they went over to the counter and spoke in low tones to the blonde. Once or twice they glanced his way, then finally one of the troopers came over to the booth.

Hard, expressionless eyes stared down at him. "Mabel tells us you're travelling south."

He put down the newspaper. "That's right, officer. Something wrong?"

"We got a hit-and-run report a while back," said the trooper. "We're just checking. That your car outside?"

Tarren nodded. "I've been driving all night," he volunteered; "but I've seen nothing of any accident."

The trooper looked steadily at Tarren for a moment, then shrugged and walked slowly back to the counter. Tarren breathed a sigh of relief.

He took a deep breath, and got to his feet. "Hope you catch the guy." He headed past them for the door.

The one with the menu laid it down slowly. "We'll catch him all right." The other nodded in silent agreement.

"Hey, mister." Tarren had almost reached the door. The blonde had stopped wiping and was staring after him. "What about your ham-and-eggs?"

"Guess I'll take a raincheck on that," he muttered, and went out into the night.

As his feet crunched on the rough gravel, he heard the door swing open behind him. The troopers were following him out. Silently he reassured himself that he had nothing to fear, but he felt beads of sweat on his forehead. He had got the car door half open as they came abreast of him.

One of them leant casually against the car door, closing it again. "That hit-and-run we mentioned back there," he said quietly. "It could have been more than just an accident. The

woman's injuries were pretty extensive. She hasn't been identified yet, but they'll get around to it."

"You sure you're travelling alone?" interrupted the bigger of the two.

Tarren turned angrily to face them. "Look, what is this? You heard what I said in there."

The big trooper gave a grim smile. "Maybe it would be as well if you drove in to headquarters with us. Our orders are to bring in anyone looking at all suspicious."

Tarren snorted. "What d'you mean—suspicious?"

The other eyed him stoically. "A brief description of the victim has been circulated," he murmured. "Seems as if she was wearing a brand-new wedding ring."

Tarren felt strangely uneasy as he stared silently at them.

"Seen the back of your car lately?" asked one of them quietly.

He looked from one to the other, then walked round to the back of the car. They went with him, one on either side.

They were both crowding him now. The big trooper hauled out a flashlight and snapped it on. "Looks as though you're the one guy on the road who's got no good reason for travelling alone."

Tarren's eyes were fixed on the rear of his car. Hanging from the fender were two pairs of old shoes, and above them on the back of the boot, daubed there, no doubt, by one of Julia's over-enthusiastic wedding guests, were the words "JUST MARRIED".

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DETECTIVE NOVEL

A. E. MURCH

A further excerpt from a recent book published by Peter Owen Ltd.



AMONG THE FEW writers who can successfully combine an historical setting with a detective plot, we must include Lillian de la

Torre, an American author who reproduces the life and times of a great Englishman with remarkable effect in her *Dr. Sam. Johnson, detector* (1946), with James Boswell as the Watson-like biographer who relates the investigations performed by his illustrious companion. Notable among her other novels are *Villainy Detected* (1947) and *Heir of Douglas* (1952).

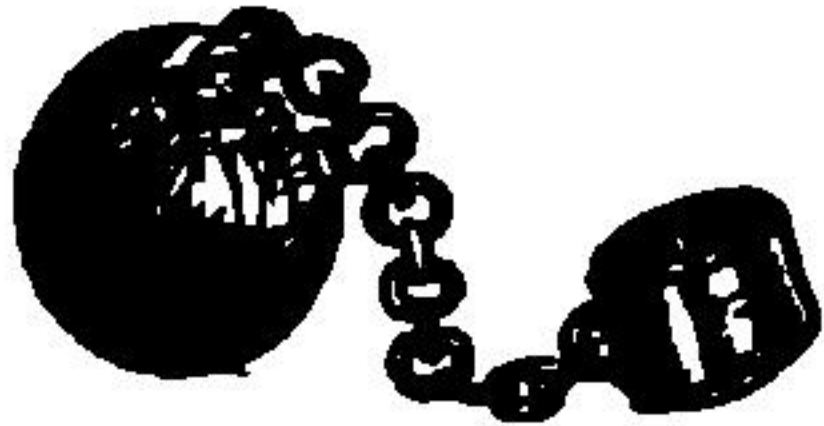
Ngaio Marsh (1899–), born in New Zealand of an English family, worked between 1928 and 1932 in London, where she wrote her first detective novel, *A Man Lay Dead*, not published until 1934. Many of her stories have an English setting, often, as in *Enter A Murderer* (1935), *Overture to Death* (1939), *Final Curtain* (1947) and *Opening Night* (1951), linked with the world of the theatre which she knows so well from her experience as an actress and, latterly, as a producer. Her detective, Inspector Roderick Alleyn, “Lady Alleyn’s son”, singularly fortunate in the way his official and social activities complement and occasionally overlap

each other, is an essentially English figure, a “gentleman policeman”, efficient, unobtrusive, given to understatement, conventional in that his successes depend upon routine police methods. In Miss Marsh’s work the detective theme sometimes tends to slip into second place, eclipsed by the interest of the “slice of life” the novel portrays. This is noticeable in *Died In The Wool* (1945), which gives a vivid picture of life, work and death on a New Zealand sheep farm, and the ramifications of the wool trade, with the local vernacular perhaps a little too much in evidence, but adding its quota to the verisimilitude of the whole. Some of Miss Marsh’s other novels are better known, notably *Artists in Crime* (1938), which made her name in America as well as in England, but *Died In The Wool* has the merit of bringing a new setting to a *genre* in which such novelty is rare.

Originality of setting and treatment also distinguishes the work of A. E. Martin, an Australian writer whose reputation is growing in America and England. His remarkable short story, *The Power of The Leaf* (1948), tells of aboriginal tribes living in the Bush more than a century ago, with “Ooloo of the Narranyeri” exercising his natural talent for observation and de-

duction on a puzzle that baffles the medicine man. Mr. Martin's *The Chinese Bed Mysteries* (1955) has another unconventional setting, a Freak Show touring Australia in more modern times.

Among the English writers who began producing detective fiction in the 1930s we must notice Gladys Mitchell



for her authentic pictures of middle-class suburban life in such novels as *The Mystery of a Butcher's Shop* (1929) and *The Saltmarsh Murders* (1932), and for creating at least one unforgettable character, Mrs. Bradley. Georgette Heyer, now perhaps better known for her many light historical romances, has written entertaining detective novels, from *Merely Murder* (1935) to *Detection Unlimited* (1953). *A Blunt Instrument* (1938) with its well-differentiated character drawing and an unorthodox murderer in its Bible-quoting police constable, is one of her most popular stories.

Margery Allingham, born in London in 1904, began writing in 1928, but her success in the *genre* dates from the first appearance of her mild-seeming amateur detective, Albert Campion, in *Death of a Ghost* (1934). Mr. Campion, bespectacled, unobtrusive, quietly aware of his own intelligence, is a master of the casual conversational phrase that carries a shattering implication. Margery Allingham's novels, especially those

written in the 'thirties when social satire had its own vogue, are largely *romans de moeurs*, and her writing is more studied, more "precious", than in detective fiction generally, but the detective interest is so well-contrived, so subtly maintained and developed, that they must be included in this category. From the world of artists and critics in *Death of a Ghost*, the scene moves to a London publishing house in *Flowers For The Judge* (1936), and in *The Fashion in Shrouds* (1938) to a Mayfair dressmaking business. In *Black Plumes* (1940) Miss Allingham created a new detective, Inspector Bridie, as canny a Scot as Dr. James Bell himself, but less popular than her earlier hero, who, in *Traitor's Purse* (1941) returned to undertake counter-espionage in wartime London and continue his career on the same lines as before.

John Creasey, a sound, prolific writer, uses three conventional types of investigator: an amateur, "The Toff"; a policeman, Inspector West; and a "scientist", Dr. Palfrey; each with a long series of cases to his credit.

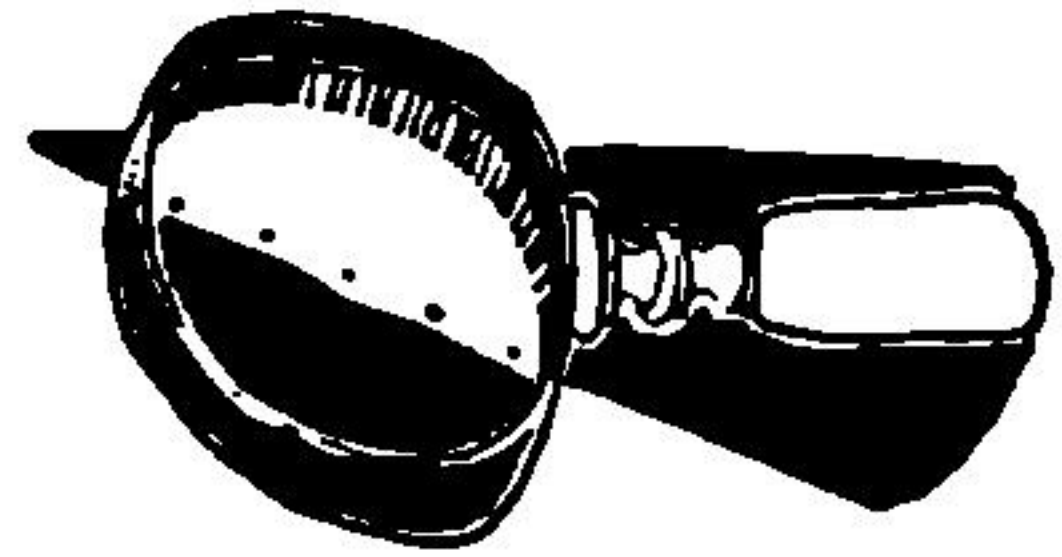
"Anthony Gilbert's" (Lucy Malle-son's) first detective heroes, Scott Egerton and M. Dupuy, have been eclipsed by her most popular character, Arthur Crook, the jaunty, chatty lawyer whose highly original detective methods are particularly successful in *Something Nasty in the Woodshed* (1942) and *A Nice Cup of Tea* (1951). "Anthony Gilbert" is still adding to her laurels with *And Death Came Too* (1956), notable for its skilful handling of an unusually gripping

theme, a threat to a child, and with *Give Death a Name* (1957).

"Josephine Bell" (Dr. Doris Bell Ball) struck a new note in her early novels, writing refreshingly and with an atmosphere of authenticity about hospital procedure, discussions in medical lecture rooms, or the daily routine of a busy East End doctor as in *The Port of London Murders* (1938). Her amateur detective, Dr. David Wintringham, first interrupted his professional duties to investigate a mysterious crime in *Murder in Hospital* (1937) and was called in again to other cases, notably *Fall Over Cliff* (1938) and *From Natural Causes* (1939). The war understandably caused a break in "Josephine Bell's" literary work, but she returned to popularity with *Summer School Mystery* (1950) and continues to gain prestige with *China Roundabout* (1956) and *Double Doom* (1957).

Christopher Bush, one of the many schoolmasters who have left that profession to write detective fiction, gained wide recognition for his first book, *The Perfect Murder Case* (1929), and has added to his reputation with a long series, notably *The Case of the Platinum Blonde* (1944). His speciality (as it was Freeman Wills Crofts') is breaking the "unbreakable alibi", and his frequent subject is murder on a seaside holiday, though *The Case of the Dead Shepherd* (1934) has an entirely convincing background in a secondary grammar school. Mr. Bush has a light, flowing narrative style and his plots are credible as well as intricate, qualities that are especially apparent

in *The Case of the Seven Bells* (1949), well-received on both sides of the Atlantic. His later novels, in particular *The Case of the Extra Man* (1957) and *The Case of the Flowery Corpse* (1957), are equally pleasing. "Richard Hull", (Richard Henry Sampson, 1896-) writes from a very different stand-point, usually relating in the



first person the story behind a murder, as planned in the mind of the murderer, a modification of the technique adopted by "Frances Iles", whom "Richard Hull" greatly admired. The first of his many novels in this vein, *Murder of My Aunt* (1935), was an immediate success and remains one of his best.

Edward Grierson reaches an unusually high literary level in his *Reputation for a Song* (1952), which builds up slowly and by natural degrees into a crescendo of violence and crime, and in *The Second Man* (1956), in which a woman barrister, defending a difficult, reticent client charged with murder, succeeds in penetrating the deceits of a lying witness. Particularly well-presented are the court scenes and the interplay of professional jealousy and loyalty, written with the inside knowledge at Mr. Grierson's command.

Accuracy in legal matters also distinguishes the detective novels of Michael Gilbert, a London solicitor,

whose stories range over a wide variety of subjects and settings. His first, *Close Quarters* (1947), deals with a "sealed room" problem in the precincts of a cathedral. Organized crime in London, routine police work and judicial procedure are the subjects of *They Never Looked Inside* (1947) and *The Doors Open* (1949). *Smallbone Deceased* (1950), set in the office of a London lawyer, is less striking, but *Death in Captivity* (1952) shows originality in its presentation of a murder mystery in an Italian prisoner-of-war camp. His next novel, *Fear To Tread* (1953), is outstanding and gives an alarming, authentic-seeming picture of the gangster violence behind large-scale pilfering on the railways. Mr. Gilbert has not yet surpassed this



achievement, and of his later works perhaps the most entertaining is *The Claimant* (1957), an ingenious reconstruction of the Tichborne Case.

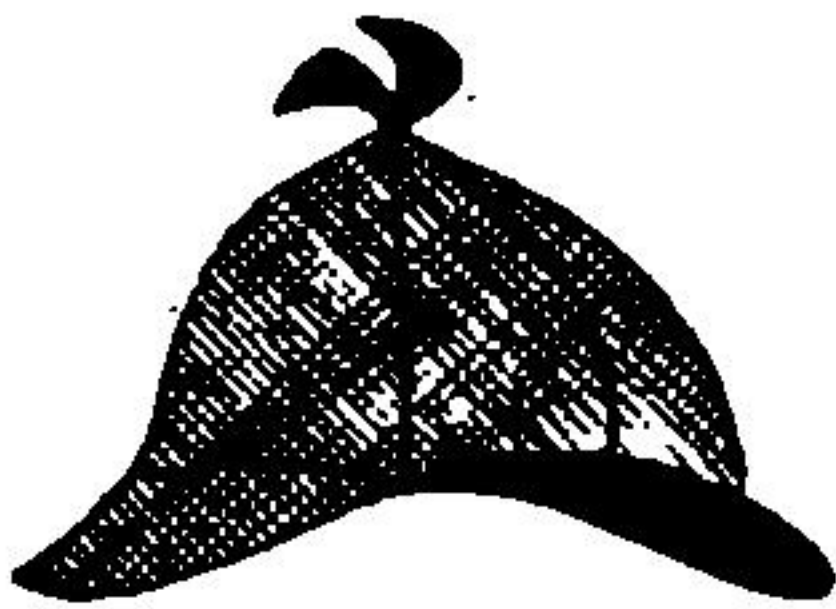
John Innes Mackintosh Stewart, born near Edinburgh in 1906, distinguished himself in the world of letters while still at Oxford, and after a period as lecturer at Leeds University accepted an appointment in Australia, as Professor of English at Adelaide University. As "Michael Innes" he has written many novels and short stories of his Scotland Yard detective, Inspector John Appleby

(later Sir John), a scholarly sleuth with a "weakness for cultivated reverie" and a habit of over-frequent conversational references to the classics and the lesser-known poets.

The first in the series, *Death at the President's Lodging* (1936), with its very complicated plot, is set in a provincial university, described with satirical humour and a wealth of detail. *Hamlet, Revenge!* (1937) brings a detective drama to complicate an amateur Shakespearean performance in an English country house. In his third novel, *Lament For A Maker* (1938), Michael Innes came to full stature in the genre, and produced one of the most memorable detective novels of recent years. The title itself is derived from a fifteenth-century historical poem, William Dunbar's *Lament For The Makaris*, the setting is Scotland, gloriously portrayed, while the method of presentation and the plot itself are cleverly modernized from Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*. The literary quality of this novel has not been reached again in Michael Innes's later work, though his popular detective, erudite as ever, has continued to appear in a long series of slight tales, with his name in the title of each volume, and has regained something of his former stature in *The Long Farewell* (1958), which shows Sir John grappling with a complicated mystery that calls for his own special blend of scholarship and detective skill.

A younger author belonging to this same donnish school of detective story-writers is "Edmund Crispin" (Robert Bruce Montgomery), also an

Oxford man and an educationalist, as devoted as Michael Innes to the polysyllabic adjective, the abstruse noun and whimsical proper names. His amateur investigator, Dr. Gervase Fen, is himself an Oxford don who writes detective stories, when not distracted from his literary labours by mysterious crimes affecting his personal friends, the headmaster of a public school, for instance, in *Love Lies Bleeding* (1948), where the plot turns on the discovery of the original manuscript of a "lost" Shakespeare play. To offset his somewhat "precious" literary style, "Edmund Crispin" has a vein of original humour, a talent for vivid description, unusual settings and intriguing titles—*Frequent Hearses*, *The Moving Toyshop*, *Beware of the Trains*—and is one of the most promising English writers of the *genre* to come to the fore in recent years.



The early crime novels of Julian Symons, historian, biographer, poet and literary critic, have somewhat the same scholarly atmosphere, though to a less marked degree, as in *The Immaterial Murder Case* (1945) and *A Man Called Jones* (1947). But a change towards realism became apparent in *The Thirty-first of February* (1950) and reached completion in *The Narrowing Circle* (1954), a terse

account of crime and personal relationships in a third-rate publishing business, with ruthlessly factual descriptions of London night life and of the chief characters. His latest, *The Colour of Murder* (1957), is exceptionally entertaining, despite the somewhat arbitrary solution to the detective problem, and has received the Crime Writers' Association's special award as the best crime novel of the year.

A contrasting "realistic" or "naturalistic" school is well represented by Raymond Postgate (brother of Mrs. M. I. Cole whom we have noticed earlier) who, in addition to his works on economics and social studies, has written three murder mysteries, *Verdict of Twelve* (1940), *Somebody at the Door* (1943) and *The Ledger is Kept* (1953). In them the detective interest, though well sustained, is less convincing than his sharply-etched settings and his analysis of the psychological causes of the crime.

Another exponent of straightforward detection, Roy Vickers, shines in short stories, grouped in volume form. His *Department of Dead Ends* (1949) adopts an interesting inverse technique, somewhat in the manner of J. Austin Freeman's *The Singing Bone*, giving the reader full information as the crime is committed, and then showing how "dead ends", odd items of rubbish, trifles disregarded by the criminal or left behind by the victim, eventually lead the police to the truth. His *Eight Murders in the Suburbs* (1956) is in the same vein.

In his many detective novels, "Nicholas Blake" makes no parade of

erudition, but everything he writes shows the same sense of drama in everyday life, the same sensitive choice of language, which distinguishes the poetry he has published under his own name of Cecil Day Lewis. His first novel as "Nicholas



Blake", *A Question of Proof* (1935), set in a preparatory school, was followed by *Thou Shell of Death* (1936) which made his name known in America. His detective, Nigel Strangeways, first appeared in *The Beast Must Die* (1938), a gripping study of criminal psychology. *Malice in Wonderland* (1940), set in a popular seaside summer holiday camp, shows acute observation in its varied characterization, and his more recent novels, *The Dreadful Hollow* (1953) and *The Whisper in the Gloom* (1954) display a masterful handling of tension and suspense. Margaret Erskine shows her grasp of the same technique in *The Whispering House* (1947), in which her Scotland Yard detective, Inspector Septimus Finch, finds himself in a rambling mansion on a lonely moor where violent storms rage and murder follows murder. Similar themes are exploited in a sequence of tales such as *Give Up*

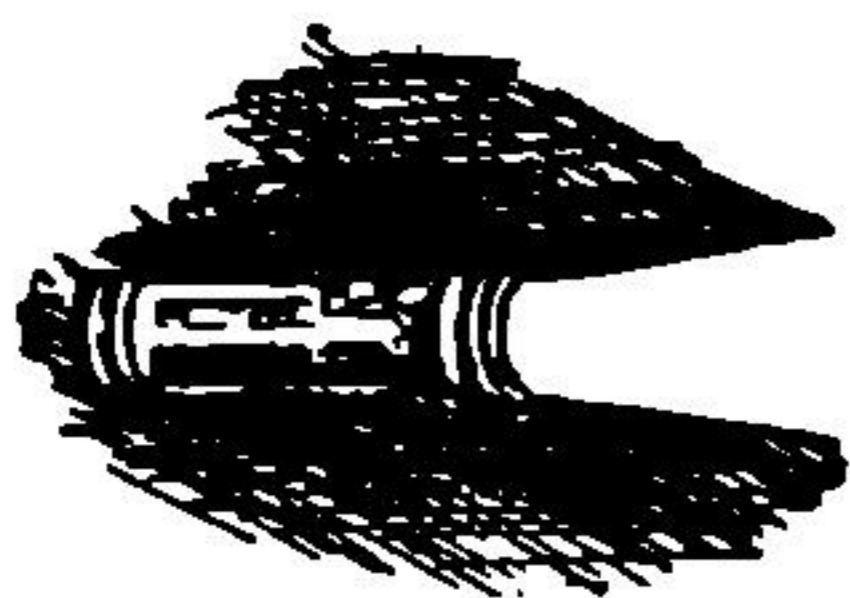
The Ghost (1949) and *The Voice of Murder* (1956).

Suspense is also the keynote of Christianna Brand's novels, but shorn of such theatrical trappings. *Death in High Heels* (1941) is set in a dress shop, with murder no less terrifying in a prosaic background. *Cat and Mouse* (1955), and *The Three-Cornered Halo* (1957) display Miss Brand's increasing skill in this technique.

Quite a different atmosphere characterizes the novels of C. E. Vulliamy, biographer, archæologist, and historian, one of the very few English writers who can, without offence, blend humour with a detective theme, as in *Body in the Boudoir* (1956). For originality of setting and treatment we must notice an American writer, Clayton Rawson, whose detective, Merlini, is a professional conjurer, and employs his art as an illusionist in three novels, *Footprints on the Ceiling* (1939), *Death From a Top Hat* (1940) and *The Headless Lady* (1941), all of them fantastic, but remarkably entertaining. An equally original idea, but much less bizarre, inspired Leonard Gribble, who began writing detective stories as long ago as 1928 and now has an immense range of literary interests in addition to a prolific output under several pseudonyms. In *The Arsenal Stadium Mystery* (1939), he introduced the world of professional football as the setting for a detective mystery, continuing the same pattern with an additional topical twist in *They Kidnapped Stanley Matthews* (1950).

William Wiegand has to his credit

one really clever detective mystery with an original technique; *At Last Mr. Tolliver* (1950) immediately attracted attention not only in the States but also in Great Britain. The setting is convincing, the characters typically American. It is the mystery which is so unusual, and concerns the motive for the crime, not the crime itself. Murder takes place quite early in the story, and the detection, or, rather, the assembling and interpretation of clues, is concerned with discovering the hidden reasons for the apparently inexplicable "Why?" not "How?" or "By Whom?" the crime was committed.



An English writer of unusual promise, Winston Graham, has adopted the technique of presenting an absorbing detective problem in the form of a personal problem urgently affecting the chief character in the story. In *The Little Walls* (1955) the hero, investigating the alleged suicide of his brother, finds himself involved in a net of mystery and danger that stretches from Amsterdam to Italy. In *The Sleeping Partner* (1956) a husband hunts for the murderer of his estranged wife. This method of presentation dispenses with any advantage to be gained from the over-sized personality of a recurring detective-hero, and has instead the force of

genuine delineation of character. *The Little Walls* has the additional merit of richly-varied geographical backgrounds, and it is not surprising that this English novel at once attracted interest in the States.

For years there has been a quick interchange of fiction of this type across the Atlantic. There are, and will probably remain, certain national differences between English and American detective stories, but to an increasing extent writers find readers in both countries. Publishers' organizations, such as the "Crime Club", here and in the States, keep the public directly informed of the best work currently produced in the *genre*. Periodicals devote considerable space to reviews of new detective novels, and in England, particularly, the standard of reviewing is remarkably high, the work of specialists in this field. The Detection Club of London, the Mystery Writers of America and Crime Writers Associations in England and America, exist to maintain and improve standards of writing, plot construction and technical accuracy, stimulating new writers who seek the prestige of membership. The writing of detective fiction, in contrast to all other literary *genres*, has in fact now become an intensively-organized, highly competitive business.

The ultimate effect of these developments cannot yet be foreseen. Will the detective novel become stereotyped, like so many other forms of entertainment in modern times, ingeniously devised, cleverly produced, its mechanism functioning with pol-

ished precision, but still a stereotype? Or will it find ways to retain its individuality, remembering that its ancient roots lie not in puzzles merely, but in puzzles as they affect people, and drawing from that original source the vitality to make new growth? At the moment these probabilities seem evenly balanced.

* * *

It is difficult to determine exactly when the term "detective novel" first came into general use. It was recognized in France, earlier than elsewhere, that such stories required a new descriptive phrase, and when Gaboriau produced his novels of Monsieur Lecoq his publisher, Dentu, gave them the name of *romans judiciaires*. Public usage quickly modified this into the more apt *romans policiers*, which has been used ever since for French tales of crime and detection, whether with a police hero or not.

When the novels of Gaboriau and his successors became popular in English translation the French description was retained, no English equivalent having as yet been devised. America, however, coined the term "detective story", a description which Anna Katharine Green used in 1878 on the title page of *The Leavenworth Case*. Though this novel became as popular here as in America, England was slow to adopt the descriptive term, and current periodicals, the *Athenæum* for instance, still continued to employ such cumbersome phrases as "a sensational novel in the Gaboriau style", or "a tale of crime and detection of

the school of Du Boisgobey" By 1888 the description "police novel" had become generally accepted—Stevenson used it freely in *The Wrong Box* and *The Wrecker*—and as soon as that great amateur, Sherlock Holmes, began to dominate the field in the 1890s, the term "detective novel" or "detective story" came into use in England as well as in America.

It must be recognized that in France the *roman policier*, notwithstanding its profuse growth and its influence on detective fiction generally, has never attained the status that the detective novel enjoys in England and America. The causes for this wide divergence of opinion lie partly in the general historical and social backgrounds of these countries, and partly in their national differences in questions of literary taste. Detective fiction, from its very nature, is so largely affected by the way in which each country regards its police, and by its system of retributive justice, that some consideration of these matters seems called for, before going on to discuss certain qualities that French, American and English readers, respectively, find congenial in fiction.

An essential feature of detective fiction in any language is that the sympathy of writer and reader lies with the investigator. If, as is generally the case, the plot deals with a crime that would normally call for police action, the reader, enjoying in imagination the search for the criminal or for the evidence that proves him guilty, is to that extent sharing the function of the police. Even when the detective is an amateur, police organization is in the

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offing, ready to play its part at the appropriate moment, and Sherlock Holmes spoke for others beside himself when he said: "I go into a case to help the ends of justice and the work of the police." Because of the very different relations between police and public in France and England (leaving for a moment the American attitude to this question) it was far more difficult for a Frenchman than for an Englishman to ally himself, even only in imagination, with the affairs of the police during the years when detective fiction was coming into existence as a separate *genre*.

When Buonaparte reorganized the French police in the early nineteenth century, his purpose was to create a powerful instrument of internal government, and the first duty of the men who composed this force, from Fouché downwards, was not so much to protect the public from criminals as to keep close watch on any subversive factions that might threaten the newly established *régime*. In so far as they concerned themselves with trying to catch thieves or murderers, they delegated the investigations to *agents*, who, more often than not, were ex-convicts, as Vidocq himself was, for the plausible reason that such men were familiar with the ways of criminals, and thus more likely to bring in dependable information. This long-continued practice gave the

public good cause for further misgiving and distrust, and the scathing comments that occur so frequently in French literature throughout the nineteenth century, particularly in the novels of Balzac and Victor Hugo, leave no doubt as to what Frenchmen of the times thought of their police.

Even Gaboriau, much as he admired the efficiency of police organization, described the typical *agent* of the 1860s as a shady customer, treacherous and cunning, as false as his flashy jewellery, hated by the common people even while they poked fun at his shabby overcoat. Monsieur Lecoq, of course, was a vastly different figure whose personal elegance, theatrical successes and masterly command of logic made him a popular hero of fiction, *policier* though he was, without, however, overcoming the people's mistrust of the police in real life.

In the next, and final chapter of *THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DETECTIVE NOVEL*, A. E. Murch will deal further with the relations of police and public and the detective story in France, America and England.

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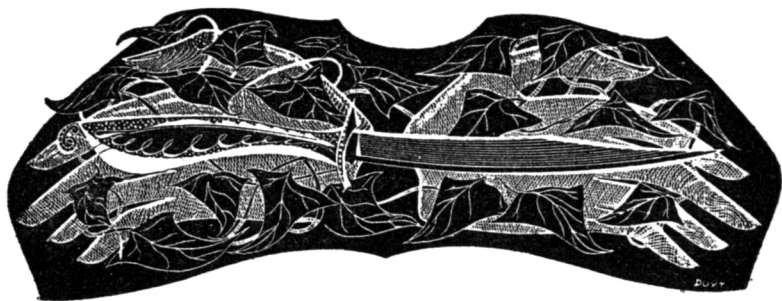
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CROOKS IN BOOKS

A review of some recent crime, mystery and detective books

ANTHONY SHAFFER and STEVE AUSTEN

"THE SEEDS OF HATE", by Harry Carmichael (*Crime Club*, 10s. 6d.).

Competent towpath crime who-did-it, with twists, convolutions and tail-stings. Also Shakespeare-quoting C.I.D. Superintendent, insurance investigator, cancer-ridden Nanny and convincing lower middle-class (and still lower I.Q.) housewife. No sparkle but ingenious and craftsmanlike.

"DEAD MEN'S FINGERS", by Peter Helm (*John Long*, 11s. 6d.).

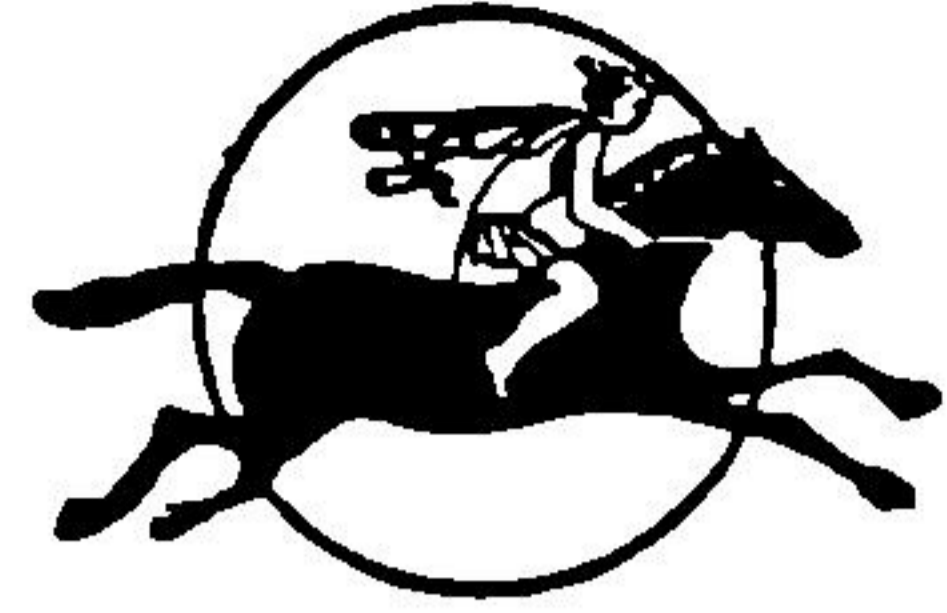
A chase thriller in which a Redbrick semantics don becomes the unenviable centre of criminal attention in the West Country. Crooks with sophisticated techniques and expensive equipment, all surprisingly located in Cornwall, are pitted in succession of nightmare sequences against battered egg-head hovering on

the brink of brain-washed disorientation, though he's always up there quoting with the best of them. A good, highly literate, first attempt with admirably frightening touches. Characters weaker than plot and narrative; and some confusing changes of narrator and gear-shifts from first to third person. Worth sampling.

"THE CASE OF THE BOUNCING BETTY", by Michael Avallone (*W. H. Allen*, 11s. 6d.).

New York private eye with usual equipment—shabby office, self-depreciation, almost off-beat wisecracks, well-oiled gun, good reflexes, assorted whiskies and not quite tarnished heart of gold—in complex murder tale of hoods, dolls and cops, with chopsticks and the best overweight female in years added for kicks. A slick beta for Betty. *Continued overleaf*

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Slightly more than a cosy, gripping domestic suspense story. A terrified but loyal wife is faced with all the usual paraphernalia of creaking doors, night prowlers and a husband's mysterious behaviour, but the standard is well above average.

"DON'T LIE TO THE POLICE", by Belton Cobb (*W. H. Allen*, 11s. 6d.).

You can be sure Belton Cobb's technical details are correct and his clues painstakingly worked out. Just like a police report. Cheviot Burmann is a likable if pedestrian detective. Just like a real policeman. Somehow it makes dull reading.

"THE TOFF AND THE KIDNAPPED CHILD", by John Creasey (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 12s. 6d.).

Mr. Creasey and the Toff do it again. Crisp, neat setting-out of plot; quietly beautiful Mama, erring, vanishing husband, kidnapped, good-looking, 'teen-age daughter, plus cop and robber extras. To pay or not to pay? Etcetera. Halfway through, concentration and ingenuity seem to flag but, competent as ever, all ends smoothly in the book and the Toff is content to see beautiful and tempting (but nothing nasty, you understand) Mama return to inglorious Hubby.

"THE ABANDONED DOLL", by Laurence Meynell (*Collins*, 10s. 6d.).

Elegant, stylistic impersonation of mature girl-about-town involved in

affaires de cœur (unsuccessful) and mysterious disappearance of flat-mate (successful). Nice character vignettes, intermittent suspense, but amusing and readable throughout. Recommended for insomniacs.

"THE HANGMAN NEVER WAITS", by Maurice Dekobra (*W. H. Allen*, 12s. 6d.).

American gangster's beautiful and innocent daughter captured by his rival in the "protection" racket. Thrills as conventional as the butler in a country-house murder. The publishers claim "moments of high comedy". Some of it is unintentional, viz. "Despite your millions, you're just a miserably unhappy man."

"MISS PINKERTON", by Mary Roberts Rinehart (*Cassell*, 18s.).

This self-styled omnibus of detection, featuring four splendidly macabre stories by the granddam of the detective story, is well worth the money. The four are: "The Buckled Bag", "Locked Doors", "Miss Pinkerton" and "Haunted Lady", and show Miss Rinehart in brilliant vein. For those who have never read the doings of that starched, formidable detective Nurse Pinkerton with her stoic insistence on "Doctor's Orders first, and my own judgment next", this present volume can only be an unmitigated delight in no way diminished by the truly fearful situations in which the good lady continually discovers herself, for although, as the

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publishers remind us, Miss Pinkerton puts her patients first, she never forgets that crime is one of the most dangerous illnesses in the body of society.

"SUBTERFUGE", by Charles Eric Maine (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 12s. 6d.).

Return of Mike Delaney (*The Isotope Man*) but more murder than SF this time. Well-written, taut, clever, with frightening combination of psychopaths, cybernetics and the strange demi-monde morality of national security. *Doesn't* quite come off, but worth an *alpha-minus* none-the-less.

"PAYROLL", by Derek Bickerton (*Eyre & Spottiswoode*, 12s. 6d.).

First-rate, granite-hard, acid-etched account of a payroll hoist and its aftermath told in a style at once perceptive and taut enough to be foreign to an Englishman, and yet it is an Englishman who wrote this book. A superb thriller which will doubtless in the fullness of time make an exciting action-filled film, for such appears these days to be the nature of creative osmosis.

"BITTER FORTUNE", by John Boland (*Boardman*, 10s. 6d.).

Knockabout run-of-the-shelves tale of a man who finds a bank robber (yes another of them) dead on his doorstep, clutching the swag in his cold

little hand. He takes the money, and, to use a technical term of ageless authority, goes on the lam. He is traced by the gang, rather uninspired complications follow, but with the help of the sympathetic British police force there is a kiss, or rather a sob of relief, at the end.

"THE FACE OF THE TIGER", by Ursula Curtiss (*Eyre & Spottiswoode*, 12s. 6d.).

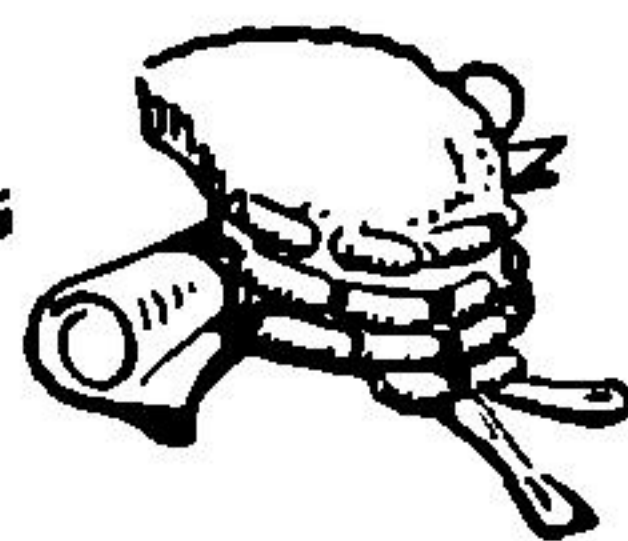
An above-average whodunit set in a posh country club, the exact locale of which remains obscure, for no very good reason, for some time. The characters are delineated with greater care than is customary in these frolics, the motives are all you would expect and the fatal errors a bit more.

"THE LATE LAMENTED", by Frederic Brown (*Boardman*, 10s. 6d.).

Embezzlement and death are the threads which are used to weave this extremely competent story which heralds the re-emergence of Ed and Am Hunter, Mr. Brown's celebrated nephew-uncle team. Belief in a lovely lady's father's innocence drives them on; guess whether they find him innocent or guilty?

"THE WATCHER", by Dolores Hitchens (*Boardman*, 10s. 6d.).

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murder of three children, waits to select his fourth victim while the police, *comme d'habitude*, work feverishly to uncover his identity. As everyone likes playing God in California, this is rather more difficult than usual, but all comes hunky dory in the end.

"ANSWER IN THE NEGATIVE", by Henrietta Hamilton (*Hodder & Stoughton, 12s. 6d.*).

Another female detective story of cunning construction and relentless improbability. A poison-pen letter in a Fleet Street Press library starts the ball rolling and it is chased and kicked into an unlikely goal by Sally and Johnny Helder, probably two of the least tough 'tecs in the business. Cosy cross-word puzzle.

"DEALS WITH THE DEVIL", by Basil Davenport (*Faber, 18s. 6d.*).

A really splendid collection of stories thematically linked by people who tried to get something for nothing out of the devil. Doctor Faustus is with us, of course, and we have some wonderful old favourites like Max Beerbohm's "Enoch Soames", Lond Dunsany's "A Deal with the Devil", "The Devil" and "Samuel Webster", by Stephen Vincent Benet, and a story by one of my favourite short-story writers, John Collier, called "The Devil, George and Rosie". Fantasy and science fiction are added for good measure and who could ask for more for less than a quid?

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"THE SLEEPING BRIDE", by Dorothy Eden (*Macdonald*, 12s. 6d.).

Pretty feeble fare with a disappearing bride ending up as a sort of suburban sleeping beauty. This seems to me to be one of those books where the heroes and heroines are so profligate with their niceness that the heart of the reader aches to see them chilled by some inhuman and preferably sexual agency.

"A TIME OF DAY", by Francis Durbridge (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 12s. 6d.).

Flaccid tale of kidnapping and recovery which brings a parting couple together again, as if it mattered. The thrills are shamelessly routine and the dénouement about as imaginative as a steamed pudding and a good deal less satisfying. If this is the best Francis Durbridge can do, he might as well become a real hack and stop signing his stuff.

"THE DOOM MAKER", by B. X. Sanborn (*Boardman*, 10s. 6d.).

A sinister tale of one Marcolf, a prophet who brings fortune to others and, it seems, death. A suicide, a mugging and a heart attack all happen swiftly in a house over which he has sway and his link with the corpses seems more than fortuitous. The occult and the logical have been better wed, notably by Dickson Carr, but this will do for beginners.

"DIE, DARLING, DIE", by Eric Bruton (*Boardman*, 10s. 6d.).

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sion of the old sermon that it's not so easy to give your wife the chop and get away with it. Mr. Bruton has given this one a pleasant little twist in the tail, however, and the whole thing is really very compact and readable.

"NIRVANA CAN ALSO MEAN DEATH", by Henry Kane (*Boardman*, 10s. 6d.).

More law and disorder with P.I. Peter Chambers as liaison man. Slick, hard-boiled investigator has another rousing session with blackmail, dope and, of course, chillings with Number One suspect as retainer. Eventually, after the usual sequence of apparently unconnected events, something clicks and everything slots into place—for Chambers, anyway, and the real cops seem satisfied, too. I suppose it was all correct, as well. We have the inevitable siren and the hard-eyed nymphomaniac, and Chambers comes out of it more disillusioned than ever—if that is possible.

The writing goes smoothly and here and there is a whiff of Wodehouse. All good Kane fun.

F. B.

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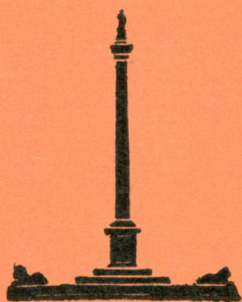
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