No. 49

LONDON MYSTERY SELECTION

A quarterly anthology of the best
ORIGINAL WORKS IN MYSTERY
• FACT & FICTION •

A Norman Kark Publication

FIFTY CENTS QUARTERLY

© LONDON MYSTERY SELECTION ©

Second Class Postage Paid
at New York, N.Y.

MEN

Slick, shaved and all spruced up-ready to face a fresh new day

Lazy-Shave. No brush. No fuss. Press-button foam lather for the smoothest shave of your life. 6/3

After-Shave Lotion. A skin-smoothing conditioner for an invigorated wide-awake freshness. 6/6

Deodorant Cologne. Discreet deodorant cologne for men, refreshes and protects. 7/6

Cream Hair Dressing. Tames the wildest hair, keeps it healthy and groomed with no trace of grease. 4/9

Shampoo for Men. Foams faster, cleans more thoroughly, leaves scalp free from dandruff. 4/3

MAX FACTOR FOR MEN

THE LONDON MYSTERY SELECTION

Occasionally in real life there occur those mysterious happenings and adventures which, were we to read of them in fiction, we would class as fantasy.

Only the other day we heard of just such an occurrence which might have come straight from the imagination of one of our writers. Two people travelling together on an express train left their compartment for about an hour to have a meal in the dining car. On the return journey to their compartment they were surprised to see—since the train had not stopped at all—that the carriages were now full, crowded with passengers who certainly had not been there at the beginning of the journey; they were even more surprised when they were unable to find either their seats or their luggage.

Bewildered, they returned to the dining car to have a drink and to consider the phenomenon. Eventually they decided to make another attempt to find their luggage; they left the dining car once more and walked along the corridors past half-empty compartments until they reached one in which they recognized their suitcases in the rack above two empty seats. The train had, throughout this time, continued on its non-stop journey.

We cannot give any explanation of this occurrence; maybe our readers can find a solution to the mystery. The only comment we make is that perhaps some of the things you read in LONDON MYSTERY aren't so fantastic and improbable, after all.

There is certainly much of the strange and supernatural in the stories we have selected for this issue. Death, ghosts, black magic, tribal talismans, creatures from worlds other than ours—all these can be found lurking among our pages, just waiting for you to turn the leaf and read on....

EDITOR.

NORMAN KARK PUBLICATIONS, 77 BROOK STREET, LONDON, W.1.

THE LONDON MYSTERY SELECTION

NUMBER FORTY-NINE MAY 1961

THE LONDON MYSTERY SELECTION IS PUBLISHED QUARTERLY BY NORMAN KARK PUBLICATIONS LTD., 77 BROOK STREET, LONDON, W.1.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES

U.K. and Sterling Area 11s. U.S.A. and Canada $2

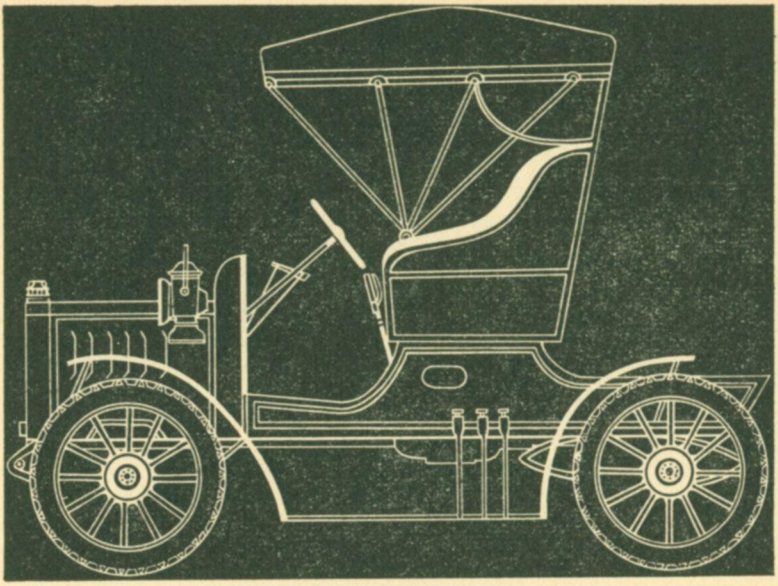
LONDON MYSTERY SELECTION published QUARTERLY

1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor and business manager are: Publisher, Norman Kark; Editor, Norman Kark; Managing Editor, Hilary Walker; Business Manager, Noel E. Williams, all of 77 Brook Street, London, W.1.

2. The owner is Norman Kark, 77 Brook Street, London, W.1.

3. There are no mortgagees, bondholders or other security holders.

Printed in England by HAZELL WATSON & VINEY LTD., Aylesbury and Slough.



YESTERDAY ...IT WAS MAGIC

Today you take a car for granted. But your grand-parents didn't. To them it had something of magic about it. And the same goes for so many facets of modern life . . . so many activities in which Philips are pre-eminent. Today's car, for instance, has Philips car bulbs for safer night driving and a Philips car radio. Similarly, in industry, medicine, entertainment, communications, and in the home, Philips make the means that turn magic for the few into better living for the many.

RADIO & TELEVISION RECEIVERS · RADIOGRAMS & RECORD PLAYERS · STEREO & HI-FI EQUIPMENT · TAPE RECORDERS & MAGNETIC TAPE · DICTATION MACHINES · GRAMOPHONE RECORDS · TUNGSTEN, FLUORESCENT, BLENDED & DISCHARGE LAMPS & LIGHTING EQUIPMENT · "PHOTOFLUX" FLASH BULBS · "PHILISHAVE" ELECTRIC SHAVERS HEALTH LAMPS · HEARING AIDS · ELECTRIC BLANKETS DOMESTIC ELECTRICAL APPLIANCES · X-RAY EQUIPMENT HIGH FREQUENCY HEATING GENERATORS · ELECTRO-MEDICAL APPARATUS · ARC WELDING PLANT & ELECTRODES · ELECTRONIC MEASURING INSTRUMENTS MAGNETIC FILTERS · SOUND AMPLIFYING INSTALLATIONS CINEMA PROJECTORS

PHILIPS PHILIPS ELECTRICAL LTD · CENTURY HOUSE · SHAFTESBURY AVE · LONDON WC2

(PR3755A)

THE JU-JU

L. P. DAVIES

Illustrated by Norman Battershill

THE WOMAN HAD walked all night, the precious ju-ju in its sack-cloth wrapping clutched to her breast. With the coming of dawn she found herself on rising ground with tumbled rocks and pockets of sand as far as the eye could see. There were no signs of her pursuers. She sat in a cleft of sandstone rock and waited for the strength to flow back to weary legs.

Her name was Minai and she was barely twenty-one. Her home lay in ruins far behind, close to the border between Kenya and Abyssinia. She had watched the smoke rising from house and barn; she had seen the tribesmen take her husband, Kilara.

She was the daughter of a chief of the Kalanga. Once her people had been warriors, but with the coming of the White Man, many years ago, the men had put aside their white war-plumes. She knew that there were factories and towns to the south, but she had never seen them. Her father had worked in the White Man's mines until he had become too old, returning to the village to spend his last years in comfort. But he had reckoned without Kulassi.

The Kalanga were the northernmost tribe of the province, their territory bordering Abyssinia from where the white-robed raiders came, led always by the fierce-eyed, black-bearded Kulassi.

From the time when she had been a girl Minai knew that Kulassi had marked her for his wife. She was slender and moved like the gazelle; a rich dowry would go with her hand.

And then she had met Kilara, tall and straight, one of the Somali who had worn the khaki uniform of the Kenya Camel Corps, the border patrol. They had fallen in love and together had gone to her father, receiving his blessing. They had not spoken of Kulassi; for almost a year the border villages had been free of his marauding tribesmen.

They married, leaving the village to seek a place in which to make a home. They found it in a hollow of rich red soil surrounded by sandstone crags, some fifteen miles from the border.

Half a year later, with a house and barns to show for the industry of Kilara's hands, with the coming of evening, a bleeding and dusty man of the Kalanga staggered into the compound. Kilara was still in the fields. Minai heard from the traveller how Kulassi had found out about her marriage and had swept down in revenge on the village, putting the torch to the huts, slaughtering the cattle, killing many of the people and dispersing the rest.

And when Minai, weeping, had asked about her father, the wounded man had put the sack-covered ju-ju into her hands, saying that her father had sent it for safe-keeping. Minai wept still more, for although she had never seen it, she knew that the ju-ju was her father's most prized possession, and that for him to let it out of his hands showed that he knew his time was come. He had brought it back with him from the White Man's lands. He had told how it was all-powerful: against thunder and lightning, the roaring waters, the avalanche.

Knowing that her husband set little store by such things, and afraid that he might laugh, Minai had first hidden it away before ministering to the wounded man. But he had died with his head in her lap. When Kilara came back from the fields he took a spade and buried the body. Afterwards he had tried to comfort her, saying that her father was an old man with a rich store of memories and no regrets.

That night she cried herself to sleep, filled with pity for her people and fear that Kulassi would come to find her and take her away. With the dawn she begged Kilara to move the home, but he stood proudly, saying that the Somali had never run before the renegade. He spoke too of the patrol, telling her that they would look after them.

But later that same day, standing in the door of the hut she had seen the far flutter of white robes as the tribesmen had weaved down through the rocks, surrounding and taking her husband while she had stood powerless to warn him. Stopping only long enough to gather up the ju-ju she had fled southwards to seek help from the only ones who could stand up to the raiders, the Camel Corps.

Their headquarters were at Subi, three days' journey away. There was more than just the thought of revenge at the back of her mind. Knowing the way of Kulassi's mind she felt sure that Kilara would be kept alive for future bargaining. If the tribesmen were to catch up with her she would be offered her husband's life in exchange for her agreement to go unquestioningly with Kulassi.

After a while, with the fast-rising sun warming the rock at her back, she pulled herself to her feet. Her blue robe was torn and stained; her feet bleeding; her once-braided hair hanging loosely to her shoulders. She searched the horizon for any signs of pursuit. Somewhere behind the towering crags they would be coming relentlessly. Kulassi would drive his men until they had found her trail. He might even guess that she would be making for Subi; in that case he would try to cut her off before she could get there.

Fighting down the rising panic, and with the bundle clutched tightly to her breast, she turned to resume the journey. The rocks now were more scattered, giving way in parts to narrow stretches of loose sand marking the fringe of the desert. One minute she would be scrambling, panting and half-sobbing, up some steep cleft; the next, searching for a foothold in the shifting sand. The stones burned with


NB

sun-heat, scorching her bare feet. At the top of a rise, with the sun full in the sky, she turned and saw how a thin spiral of smoke rose barely half a mile away. Then she knew that Kulassi was not far behind, for that was the sign they were at food.

Turning then, driven by a surge of fear, she half-ran, half-slid down the other side of the slope, coming into a narrow valley with rocks towering on either hand. With her face to the ground, seeking out footholds, she was almost on top of the camels before she realized they were there. Then she was lying on the ground with one of the soldiers holding a water-bottle to her parched lips and the others gathered round watching.

There were five of them: a white officer, a Somali sergeant and three patrolmen. Their camels were gathered in a group in the shade of the rocks. A smouldering fire showed where they had eaten. Rising on one elbow she pointed back from where she had come, trying to speak but finding her mouth still too dry and swollen. The officer, speaking in Somali, said, "Drink with care, O woman. You have come far?"

Her voice returned; the sergeant helped her to her feet. The words poured out as she told her story. "But now all will be well," she finished happily. "You will make Kulassi give up my husband."

The officer stroked his chin. "How many are there?" he asked.

Minai considered, holding out her hands, fingers extended, twice.

"Twenty," the officer said, catching the sergeant's eye.

Minai fingered the khaki material of the sergeant's shirt. "My Kilara wore one such as this," she said proudly. "He has told me that there will never be fear as long as the patrol is here to take care of us."

"Kilara?" the sergeant repeated. "I remember him. He was a good soldier." He smiled suddenly with a wide gleam of white teeth. Minai smiled in return, making a futile effort to straighten her hair, her bundle falling to the ground. She almost snatched it from the sergeant's hands as he bent to pick it up for her.

"What have you there?" the officer wondered.

"It is the ju-ju of my people," she told him, clutching it fiercely. "There is power in it, but I know not the means of unlocking. There is a secret in it, a white man's secret."

The officer smiled a little. "We could use its power now." He turned to the sergeant. "Four to one, Bimbassi; how do those odds suit you?"

The woman held out the ju-ju. "Take it," she cried fiercely. "It will help. My father always said that one day it show its power."

"What is it?" the officer asked, his eyes searching the rocks ahead.

The sergeant took it from her in careful fingers, unwrapping the sacking. At the sight of the contents the officer whistled between his teeth. "How long have you had this?" he asked, his voice suddenly sharp.

She closed her eyes in concentration. "Two years and a part," she told him after a time spent in converting the seasons into time as Kilara had taught her.

"And where was it kept?"

That was easy! "In my father's hut; always wrapped, and on a high shelf."

The officer stepped away from her then, turning and seeming to measure the length of the valley through narrowed eyes. He called to one of his men. "Batumo; see you that level rock at the far entrance to the valley? Take this and set it upright so that we may clearly see it from here." He turned to the sergeant. "You are the best shot, Bimbassi; how are your eyes this morning? Could you place a shot within an inch at that distance?"

The sergeant stood with legs apart, grinning with a great show of flashing teeth. "Perhaps one, perhaps two, certainly in three," he said. "I could hit such a target in three shots."

At the far end of the valley the soldier set the ju-ju on the rock and came running back, one hand gripping the bayonet at his hip. Minai watched as the officer grouped his men behind cover, standing himself in the open, the holster of his revolver unbuttoned. He looked at her with gently smiling eyes. "Now you are to play your part," he told her. "You will have to be brave and do exactly as I say. You think that this Kulassi will offer to trade your husband's life for you?"

"He will do that," she said, eyes downcast. She had thought that there would have been more soldiers than just five. How could they stand up to the twenty rifles and more that Kulassi would bring? They were brave men, but the odds were too great. Unless the ju-ju could help. It stood upright on the rock, glinting a little in the sun. Perhaps it had been set there to strike fear into the hearts of the tribesmen? But placed as it was they wouldn't see it. . . . She was aware that the officer was still speaking. "And you also fear that once Kulassi has taken you he will try to kill your husband?"

"He will kill all of you," she said with certainty. "That is how Kulassi works."

He nodded, then stiffened. A flutter of white had shown itself amongst the rocks ahead. Minai put her hand to her mouth. Now there were more of them, coming down quickly through the clefts.

The sergeant lay full-length, his rifle steadied in front of him on a flat rock. Only the officer and the woman and the five camels were in view of the on-coming tribesmen. They were coming fearlessly into the open, filling the far end of the valley, white turbanned heads nodding to the canter of wiry mountain horses, rifles held across high pommels. In the lead was one who even from the distance was taller than the rest, with a black beard and a scarlet sash about his waist.

"That is the one?" the officer asked.

"Kulassi," said Minai, trembling with fear both for herself and the five soldiers. He laid his arm on her shoulders for a moment, talking to the sergeant.

"In three shots, Bimbassi," he said softly. "Take care with your aim."

"Don't be afraid," he said to the woman as Kulassi came forward along the valley. Behind him came two of his men, one of them trailing a fourth horse with a bound figure thrown face downwards across the saddle.

A dozen paces away, Kulassi reined to a stop. His eyes assessed coldly, his lips, above the beard, smiling without amusement. "I have come for the woman," he said.

The officer took his arm from Minai's shoulders. "I have heard how you have attacked a village of the White Queen," he said bleakly. "There is talk of many killed. This woman has told how you burned her home, taking her husband prisoner. These are wrongs which must be punished."

Kulassi sat his horse easily, mimicking the other's tone. "I have heard that one white man and four black pigs stand in my way. There is talk that there are no other soldiers to help you. It is an easy thing for five men to disappear without trace in this country."

At the end of the valley the waiting tribesmen inched their way forward imperceptibly.

"What do you want?" asked the officer.

"I have no fight with you or your men," said the other. "I want only that which is mine. And because I am a generous man having no love of bloodshed I will make a trade with you. This man for that woman." He clasped his hands on his rifle, secure in his mastery of the situation.

"Don't trust him," Minai whispered fearfully.

"It seems I have no choice," said the white man. He was watching the horsemen who were now trotting openly into the valley, obviously waiting some pre-arranged signal. He could see the smile on Kulassi's swarthy face; he could see the other's assessment of the Somali rifles.

"Cut the bonds," Kulassi ordered without turning. A knife flashed and the prisoner rolled to the ground. Minai exclaimed, the back of one hand pressed to her mouth. Kilara staggered to his feet and the one who had cut him free thrust his spurred boot into the small of his back, urging him forward.

"Now the woman," said Kulassi.

The officer spoke under his breath. "Be ready, sergeant." Then loudly to the woman, "Step forward. . . ."

With faltering steps, unable to take her eyes from her husband as he stumbled forward, Minai moved towards the waiting horsemen. The white man had failed her; he had set his own safety above that of herself and Kilara. And it wouldn't help him, for Kulassi would certainly kill all of them once she was safe in his possession. As she neared him he leaned from his saddle ready to receive her, at the same time calling out to his men.

"Now!" the officer shouted, and the sergeant's rifle spoke once, and then again. And with the second shot the end of the valley erupted with a shattering roar into a sheet of scarlet flame and hurtling rock that flung

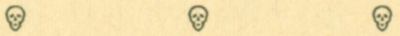
the tribesmen in all directions in a mêlée of tumbled kicking horses and outflung limbs.

Kulassi's mount reared, sending him crashing to the ground. Kilara was on him before he had stopped rolling. Two rapid Somali shots sent the two followers pitching from their horses. When the officer reached the struggling men he was too late. Kulassi was dead, his own knife driven deep into his throat. Kilara rose panting and breathless to take Minai into his arms.

"My father spoke the truth when he said that the ju-ju was all-powerful," Minai said happily as the Somalis escorted them to Subi.

"Your father was a wise man," the officer told her gently.

He wondered as he rode at the head of the column if the old chieftain had known that his ju-ju was a stick of dynamite.



The wretch, concentred all in self,
Living, shall forfeit fair renown,
And, doubly dying, shall go down
To the vile dust, from whence he sprung,
Unwept, unhonour'd and unsung.

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

Then Old Age, and Experience, hand in hand,
Lead him to Death, and make him understand,
After a search so painful, and so long,
That all his life he has been in the wrong.
Huddled in dirt the reasoning engine lies,
Who was so proud, so witty and so wise.

JOHN WILMOT.

NO SCHOOL ON FRIDAY

LESLIE VARDRE

Illustrated by Jennifer Gordon

ROWLAND PETHER was alone in the house. He stood in the hall and stared at the telephone. Twice he made to pick up the receiver and each time he drew back, frowning and biting his lip and wondering what he could say.

What could you say to a headmaster when you wanted to warn him there was something wrong, terribly wrong, going on in his school? And not only the one school, but others in the town, perhaps all the others, in every town in the country, in every country in the world?

He didn't know for sure, of course, but that was the way it all pointed. The result of organization. Just one boy in each school, that's the way it seemed. And unless something was done about it, now, this very moment, it would be too late.

How could he put it all into words so that the urgency could be understood?

"Mr. Somerville," he could start, "there isn't going to be any school on Friday. . . ."

No school on Friday. Or ever again.

Three days left; only a day since it all started.

But it must have been going on much longer than just a day. It must have started when the children came back after the Easter holiday. A new term and a new face in the classroom: Martin Seers. The boy who had no parents, no home. That's when it all must have started.

A fortnight ago had been the first intimation that things were wrong. He hadn't realized it at the time, but that was the evening when Peter had been nearly two hours late coming home from school and had lied about the reason he was so late. The first time they had ever found him out in a lie.

He said that he had been kept in late with the rest of the class as a punishment. A rather drastic punishment, Rowland had thought at the time; two hours just because they had been talking in class.

But that same evening, just by chance, he had dropped in at the "Blue Boar" earlier than usual to hand in the counterfoils of the Darts Raffle tickets. And Mr. Thomas had been there, bent on the same errand; old Tommy Thomas, who was Peter's form master and had years ago been his, Rowland's, teacher. Grey-haired and bumbling, old Tommy Thomas, well over sixty but with eyes as bright and keen as ever, the best classics teacher the school had ever had.

"Like father, like son," Rowland grinned. "I remember how you kept me in late times without number. But

two hours for the entire class; what had the little devils been up to to merit such punishment?"

Mr. Thomas was puzzled. The class hadn't been kept in. There had been no talking, no punishment.

"We don't usually fall back on such an imposition," he said. "That only means that we suffer as well. Not that they don't deserve it often enough. Children haven't changed all that much since your day, Pether. But now they are inclined to be more, what shall I say?—sophisticated. They're more organized when it comes to taking a rise out of a teacher. There is one boy I could mention . . ."

He broke off. "But there, that's my problem. No, Pether, I don't know where Peter got to, but he certainly wasn't in school."

Peter became unaccountably silent

and resentful when the lie was set in front of him. He stood with his hands behind his back refusing to meet his father's eye, surly and unrepentant, his face flushed, his eyes hot.

"That's not my Peter," Mary told him gently, her forehead creased. The boy still stayed silent and mutinous. Rowland took it a step farther.

"You're eleven," he said. "You're old enough to know the difference between a lie and the truth. Now, why did you lie to us both?"

Peter refused to answer. A slender boy in blue pullover and white shirt, twisting his hands in front of him, peering up occasionally from under the lock of flaxen hair that fell over one eye, still refusing to open his mouth.

A momentary lapse they consoled themselves later; best forgiven and forgotten. No need to get worried about it.

Then yesterday morning, Monday, when he had come down to breakfast Peter had announced, "No school on Friday, Dad." He sat to the table with his face still scrub-red from washing.

"What, another holiday?" Rowland asked jovially. "My goodness, I wish that I'd taken up teaching. What is it this time, old son, half-term?'

"Can I have some more toast, Mum?" Peter asked with his mouth full and one eye on the clock.

"Now it's rude to talk with your mouth full," Mary remonstrated. "And there's no need to bolt your food like that; there's plenty of time."

"I want to be early this morning," the boy said mysteriously. "There are things to do. . . ."

Rowland ate his breakfast thinking that, joking apart, teachers did seem to have a lot of holidays. From teachers in general his thoughts turned to Mr. Thomas in particular. He had heard at the golf-club yesterday that the old man had been away from school for over a week; an accident of some kind. Peter hadn't mentioned it at all, but that wasn't so strange. In the eyes of the young, teachers aren't people.

He felt sorry for Thomas, a bachelor living alone in an old house with only a housekeeper to look after him. It would be a nice gesture if he were to drop in and have a few words with him on the way from the station that night. He felt a glow of self-righteousness at the idea; he could take him some magazines.

"I'll drop in on Mr. Thomas tonight," he called to Mary. "He must be bored stiff, stuck in that house all by himself."

She came through from the kitchen, her face flushed from bending over the stove, her soft eyes agreeing with his intention. "Ask him if there's anything I can do," said she.

Then Peter stopped eating to stare at his father with narrow cold eyes. "What do you want to call on old Thomas for?" he asked.

Rowland was thrown off his stroke by the way the question had been rapiered at him. "It's only good manners," he found himself explaining. "You'll understand why when you grow up. After all, he was my formmaster once."

"No need to go talkin' to him," the boy said sullenly.

"Why, Peter," Mary was aghast. "What a thing to say!"

Rowland remembered the conversation in the train going up to the city. He was thinking about it when Mr. Ransome, sitting opposite to him, blew mightily and wiped his forehead. "I can think of better things to do than spend a day like today in a stuffy office," he said.

"You're right at that," Rowland agreed. "I was only thinking over breakfast that I'd chosen the wrong job. Take the teaching profession. Long holidays and the odd days thrown in. My son tells me there's another on Friday. Half-term, most likely."

"They do all right," said the other. "Half-term? No, I don't think it'll be that. That's not due until the end of the month; my boy Roger was saying that he would like to go fishing on that Monday."

Rowland rubbed the side of his nose thoughtfully.

"Being a teacher isn't roses all the way," said Mr. Ransome, obviously launched into a subject that would last the remaining half-hour of the journey. "They do a lot of work after school and some of them have to work in the holidays. Keeping a bunch of the modern kids in hand is no joke. Not these days. I was talking to one of Roger's teachers only a while ago. He said that he's got his hands full; he said there was one boy in his form who was really a handful. A born organizer of trouble, he called him. . . ."

Rowland listened with only half an ear. Peter had definitely said that there was a holiday on Friday. But, he thought, half-term was always on a Monday. It sounded very much as though Peter were preparing the way for playing truant. And he had told another lie. Mary would have to know and then she'd be upset again. . . Whatever was coming over the boy?

Now he came to think about it, Peter had been different during the past few weeks, even before he had told that first lie; right from the beginning of term. He never seemed to play in the garden in the evenings or at week-ends; he was always going off somewhere. And he never spoke of his friends, never brought other boys to play in the garden as he had the previous term.

He seemed older and more reserved. The model aeroplane that had been his pride lay untouched in his bedroom; he never pored over his stamp collection. He came in for meals and that was about all. Even when it rained he still wandered off somewhere each evening.

Rowland brought himself back to the present with a jerk. The train was slowing and rattling across points; warehouse walls were rearing up to cut off the sun.

"——you get one boy like that in a class and he upsets all the others," Mr. Ransome was saying, folding his paper. "No, teachers are welcome to their job for me."

"One boy in a class." Thomas had started to say something along those lines. Now what had it been? He wondered if there could be a connection between the two; two boys, two classes. Quite a coincidence. He

thrust the idea aside as being ridiculous. But remembering Thomas also reminded him of his intention. He dropped off the train, and instead of hurrying through the gates went instead to the kiosk and came away with his arms loaded with magazines.

* * *

Mr. Thomas, one arm in a sling, was almost pathetically pleased to see him when he called in that evening.

"Why, Pether, how very nice of you. Well, I must say—— Come on in and sit down.

"My arm?" in reply to Rowland's inquiry. "Coming along nicely. But it's my shoulder, actually. I was very lucky; another few inches and it would have been my head.

"It was strange how it happened. I was on my way to the other side of town, to Merton Street, and I took the short cut through the old quarry. A stone must have worked loose and chose that very moment to come down."

"And how long before you're back in harness?"

"Not until next term, I'm afraid. It's shaken me up rather badly." He smiled. "I'm not so young as I used to be. No doubt Peter will have told you that Mr. Satchwell has taken my form over?"

"Merton Street?" Rowland asked, to prolong a conversation that was beginning to flag. "That's a little off the beaten track? I mean," hastily "—it's not a very salubrious district."

"I was on my way to see the parents of a new pupil," said Mr. Thomas, the smile gone. "Perhaps Peter has mentioned his name to you? Seers, Martin Seers?"

"Peter hasn't had much to say for himself at all these last few weeks," Rowland said with some bitterness. The other nodded, his eyes grave.

"In a way I'm not surprised to hear you say that. I've noticed a change in him myself. Not only Peter, but the rest of the class. The whole school, if it comes to that. The others don't seem to have noticed it; I spoke to the Head, but he laughed it off.

"I've spent all my life in that school; if it comes to that, I'm by far the oldest teacher there. One gets to know the feel of a place, you know?

"I felt the change within a few days of the boys coming back after the holiday. It was as if I had lost touch with them, lost my grip on the class. At first I put it down to my imagination, but as time went on I knew that I wasn't mistaken. Not that they were openly naughty, it was something much more subtle than that, a kind of underhand rebellion. I watched them from my study window when they were having their break. No games, nothing like that. They gathered in a group, talking without smiling. Unnatural, unwholesome.

"There was just the one new pupil, this boy Seers. He seemed to be the centre of the unrest, if I can call it that. I'm afraid that I took an instant dislike to him—regrettable, unforgivable in a teacher. A clever child; too clever by half. Almost a Latin in appearance: olive-brown face, deep eyes, black curls.

"One day, shortly after term had started, we were having a maths lesson. I had my back to the class, looking out of a window. An old trick that; reflections, you know? I asked one boy a question and he stood up to answer. But first he looked at Seers, and Seers nodded back to him, almost as if he were giving him permission to reply.

"That got me thinking. I remembered how I had seen Seers the centre of the group that gathered in the playground. So I paid particular attention to him. But there was a shell that refused to be broken. He would answer when spoken to but never volunteered information about himself. He was obstructive without being obvious about it. There was an essay he turned in once, a remarkable effort. I tried to get through to him by complimenting him upon it. He listened without speaking, looking down his nose with a half smile on his thick lips. He sneered at me.

"That rather got my back up and I discussed the matter with the Head. I wanted to find out something about his background. The Head told me that he knew nothing about the boy apart from the obvious fact that he was new to the district. He told me that his parents lived in Merton Street.

"I could think of no excuse for visiting them apart from the gesture of a teacher wanting to get to know the parents of a promising pupil. I was on my way to see them when this," touching his shoulder, "happened."

"A bit of bad luck," Rowland sympathized. Then, as a thought struck him. "Did the boy know what your intentions were?"

Thomas eyed him with his head on one side. "No," he replied. "Strangely enough I wondered that myself. But he couldn't have known. Unless he had been following me. But that is unthinkable."

Rowland looked worried. "Peter has certainly changed," he mused. "You feel that this boy Seers may have some influence?"

"I've been talking too much," said the other. "The penalty of having been on my own for a week. You mustn't pay too much attention to my fancies."

Offering the excuse that his tea would be waiting, Rowland took his leave a few minutes later. At the door he asked: "Is there a holiday on Friday, by the way?"

Thomas shook his head. "There's no holiday until half-term. That's a month away."

The door closed behind him and Rowland walked thoughtfully down the long path to the gate. A movement in the bushes beneath the open window caught his eye and he turned quickly, but there was nothing to see. Latching the gate he looked up again. The bushes swung into place, but not before he was sure he had seen a face peering out from the branches. The face of a boy with dark pools for eyes and hair that was tight and black and curly.

He wavered, undecided whether or not to call out. A boy playing in the garden, that was all. He turned and walked along the street.

Peter was having tea when he reached home. Rowland said sternly: "Mr. Thomas tells me that there isn't a holiday on Friday. Now what's this all about?"

Mary put her hand to her mouth in a fluttering gesture. "Oh no, Rowland. He hasn't told another lie?"

Peter rose from the table and stood by the door.

"I didn't say there was a holiday," he said sullenly.

"I think you had better go straight to bed," Rowland told him. "This is the second time within a few weeks."

"I didn't lie," the boy told the floor.

"Who told you that there was no school on Friday?"

Peter tucked his hands into his pullover and refused to answer.

"Was it Martin Seers?" Rowland asked sharply.

The boy looked up at the mention of the name and Rowland was shocked and startled at the expression that came to the thin features. He

had never seen that look on his son's face before; fear mingled with resentment, obstinacy with hidden knowledge. It was the face of a man on a child's shoulders.

"Go to your room," he ordered sternly when Peter stared at him without speaking.

"Well?" he shouted, when the boy still made no move to obey.

Peter said: "You can't send me to bed. I've got to go out this evening. You'll be sorry——"

"Peter!" Mary cried as if unable to believe her ears.

"We'll see about that," Rowland said grimly and took the thin shoulder in his hand, urging the boy upstairs.

When he came down again with the bedroom key in his hand he found Mary in tears.

"Whatever has come over him?" she asked between sobs.

"I don't know," he said through set lips. "But I aim to find out."

The next morning the postman brought the news that Mr. Thomas was dead. " 'Appened some time las' night," he said. "Fell downstairs they say and broke 'is neck. A great pity; as nice a gentleman as you could 'ope to meet."

The news drove all other thoughts from Rowland's mind until he was in the train. Then he remembered the face he had seen peering from the bushes below the open window. A face with black curly hair topping a narrow olive oval. That's how Thomas had described Martin Seers. First an accident that could easily have been fatal. Now another accident which had killed.

When he reached the office, he went straight to his desk and picked up the phone. He rang Mrs. Stedman, a neighbour whose two sons attended Peter's school.

"Why, yes," she said with some surprise. "Stanley and Michael have both said that they have a holiday on Friday."

"Did they actually say that it was a holiday?" he asked then.

She kept him waiting while she considered. She didn't think they'd said it was a holiday; well, not in so many words. They'd just told her that there would be no school that day. But her two boys could be trusted. Well, Mr. Pether knew what good boys they were, although she had to say that just lately they—— But there, that was her worry. . . ."

Then Rowland rang Mrs. Tompkins, whose husband kept the florist's shop. Her son also had a holiday on Friday. He rang off without pursuing the matter further. He had learned enough.

So they all had told the same story. Now for the other side of the picture. He picked up the phone again and rang the school. The Headmaster informed him that there was most certainly no holiday on the coming Friday.

The children themselves had made their own holiday. There could be no doubt but that they had become organized. Somebody was at the bottom of all this. But why pick on Friday? And why go to all the trouble of warning their parents? A trial run perhaps; a testing of their strength. What they do once they can

do again. But the next time it will be every school and the holiday will be permanent. No more school.

But people wouldn't take that sitting down. Parents would drag their children to school. But you can take a horse to the water and then not be able to make it drink. A strike, that's what it was. No more lessons ever again. But what purpose lay behind it all and who was responsible?

Rowland rested his forehead in his hands.

A new boy to the school; a boy who was clever at lessons and other things too if Thomas had been right. And Mr. Ransome had spoken about a similar boy in his son's school. If two schools had this . . . this canker, then most probably there were others too. Perhaps every school in the town. More than that, every school in the country, in the world.

Thomas had got on to something. A man who had spent a lifetime with children, getting to know them inside out. He had known that there was something wrong. And what had happened to him? First an accident when he was on his way to Merton Street where the boy Seers was supposed to live. Then another accident, only this time fatal. And a boy with an olive-brown face who had been hidden in the bushes by an open window.

Take away teaching and what is left? Men and women who can neither read nor write. No more doctors; no more engineers or technicians or scientists. The complete breakdown of civilization.

Who would want such a thing to happen? Who would most likely benefit from a world filled with ignorant people fighting amongst themselves for an existence?

Whoever they were, their representatives were already at work. Striking where it would hurt the most; right at the heart of everything mankind had built up throughout the centuries.

An alien planted in each school, trained for one purpose. To organize the children against teaching.

"School is a bad thing. If we go the right way about it, we can abolish going to school. If we all stand together, they can't do anything about it. Then every day will be a holiday; there'll be no more school, ever.

"On Friday we will show you how easy it is. Then you will know."

"Am I going mad?" Rowland asked himself.

If he were right, then the alien in Peter's school was Martin Seers: the boy who was "different". Thomas had suspected, but he was dead.

The rest of the day was a nightmare. One moment he would be telling himself that the whole idea was madness; the next moment that the pieces were all fitting together. And the crux of the matter was one boy.

That night, instead of going straight home when he left the station, he turned his face towards the other side of town. And instead of taking the short cut through the quarry, he went the long way round, past the football ground and the radio factory. It was many years since he had walked this way, but he dimly remembered that Merton Street was on the fringe of the town.

A slag heap towered to one side, a slow-moving scum-surfaced canal on the other. Merton Street consisted of some twenty small grey-stone houses. The doors swung open, the windows were smashed. All the houses were patently unoccupied.

A woman with arms folded under a sack apron came out of a public house at the corner. She told him that the street was scheduled for demolition, that nobody had lived in the houses for years.

* * *

It was nearly seven o'clock when he reached home. The house was empty, a note in Mary's handwriting on the hall table telling him that she had taken Peter to see a doctor.

"When he came in from school," he read, "he said that he had been ill in class and the teacher said he ought to see a doctor as soon as possible."

He was alone in the house; Peter had arranged it that way. A stirring of unreasoning fear came to replace the worry that had gnawed all day at his thoughts.

He went into the lounge and stood by the window looking out over the garden. Beyond the lawn the bushes stirred and parted and a boy with an olive-brown face and tight black curls came out into the open. Behind him more figures were pushing their way through the raspberry canes and the blackcurrant bushes.

The fear tightening into a hard knot in his throat, Rowland first went into the kitchen to make sure the back door was locked, then went back into the hall. He had to warn them; he had to get in touch with the headmaster.

It was no use 'phoning the police. They would only laugh. It had to be someone used to dealing with children. Twice he made to pick up the receiver and each time he drew back. What words could he use to impress the urgency, the danger? How could he make them realize that there was so little time left?

At least he could try. He picked up the receiver. The phone was dead.

Somewhere in the house he heard the sharp crash of breaking glass.

An orphan's curse would drag to hell
A spirit from on high;
But oh! more horrible than that
Is the curse in a dead man's eye.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE.

THE TANK

B. J. BAYLEY

IMON KENNEDY floated safely in his artificial womb. In his induced fœtus-state, he dreamed all the delights of the ante-natal world. He knew the thoughts of flowers, of forests and beasts, and the sluggish stirrings of the ocean's deeps.

Vaguely, he knew the wideawake industry and strife of human civilization: manufacturing organizations engaged in savage competition; armies deployed; and the thoughts of war attempting to sprawl themselves across the face of the planet. But to these things Simon Kennedy paid little heed. His lank body closely curled, his arms folded across his chest, were nothing but dense matter that need not have existed. He had recovered that paradise from which he had long ago been torn.

Then the scientists controlling the tank in which he lay cut off his supply of nutrients and brought about his rebirth. "No!" he screamed. But it was an inward scream: there was no way he could make himself heard.

Gradually the fluid was drained from the tank and Kennedy felt himself being sucked from the world of pure thought, into the dangers and horrors of human life. He remembered how he had struggled and protested on that first occasion, when they had dragged him out, slapping and bullying him to breathe for himself, and his first experience of such terrible pain. . . .

The agony was not quite so bad this time, but it was supplemented by his greater knowledge of what it was all about. "No!" his mind shrieked. "Leave me!" For birth was worse than being burned alive.

The fluid gone, he lay on the floor of the tank, and the universe of delight had vanished. He was aware that his flaccid body was uncoiling, and that soon its muscles would be forced to work. He felt the first thrills of sensation as hands were drawn across his now-delicate skin, and still he tried to scream. They detached the wires from his skull.

Someone said: "He's not breathing."

"Slap him."

And so he had it all over again, the kicking and the beating, until he was goaded into admitting a swelling of air into his lungs, and he was a man again, crying like an infant. He quickly controlled his bawling, for he realized that he was being watched, and they would take note of everything. He would have to be careful.

When he opened his eyes and could see, they were there staring at him—Wylie, Cooper and Gwimm. They seemed fictitious, as did the walls of the laboratory, the windows with the desert sunlight streaming through.

"How do you feel?" Wylie asked anxiously.

"All right," he managed to answer.

His voice emerged, an incredible baritone. He couldn't believe that it had issued from himself.

"No," he thought, "it's not my voice. A fœtus has no voice. It's an invention."

"Can you stand?"

Kennedy pushed himself up from the floor of the tank, staggered, then balanced his body precariously on its two legs. They had to help him to walk across the room.

"I'll be okay," he said. "Just out of practice. My muscles seem a bit weak."

"That won't last long," Wylie told him. They laid him on a couch and checked his pulse.

"Feel like talking?"

He nodded. "Sure. There's nothing wrong with me. Just have to get readjusted."

Wylie sat down and took out a notebook. "Well, what was it like?"

They all waited eagerly for his answer. For them, this was the culmination of an achievement as great as the first atom bomb or the first engine to take spaceships beyond the solar system to the stars, disastrous though both those innovations had been. Experiments had been conducted for months to perfect the technique they were working on.

"I don't remember much," he lied.

All three were openly disappointed. "Why is that?" Wylie asked. "Birth trauma?"

Kennedy shuddered inwardly at the mention of the experience. He could easily understand how birth could blot out all previous memory for an infant. But for him it hadn't been strong enough, reduced as it was by repetition.

"Boy," Cooper put in, "you should have seen the brain graphs when we brought you out! You never saw such a jump!"

"It's not pleasant," he said, "being born. But I don't think it's that. It's more that——" His mind worked with primitive cunning. "Well, I don't think I was there for long enough. After all, it was only a few days. I can remember some, but it seems . . . mindless. It got clearer as time went on, but you pulled me out too soon. Now it's like trying to remember a dream."

The discussion went on for an hour. Kennedy gave a blurred account of his ante-natal experiences, omitting large areas. He was not really interested in talking to them; he was not really interested in anything . . . except thoughts of his lost paradise. It was those thoughts that urged him on, goaded his brain into action, his tongue into speaking.

When Kennedy had decided to say no more, Wylie looked at his notes, worried. "We'd hoped to learn more," he commented.

"There's time yet," Kennedy said. "We can carry on with it."

"That's the trouble," Gwimm told him. "There may not be much time. The Sirian fleet is sweeping through the solar system: in a month they'll reach the Earth. The government's carrying out emergency conscription and we're too valuable to be left out here in the desert."

"That's right," Cooper said. "We're expecting to be recalled any day."

Kennedy was shocked. "But surely the project . . ."

Wylie shook his head. "Remember how we had to fight for backing in the first place. Our research has no military value—and if Sirius gets the better of us, we'll be finished anyway."

Kennedy licked his lips. "Then let's work fast."

"Okay!" Wylie laughed. "But not today. You take it easy for a while. Tomorrow we'll set up the tank again."

Once he was alone, Kennedy let loose the tears he had been fighting to hold back. "It's so beautiful in there!" he thought. "So beautiful."

He lay down on his bed, curled himself up and tried to find simulation in sleep. But he was discovering all the time that human life is treacherous. In sleep he found only uneasy oblivion.

Next day he awoke still wanting to weep. But he quickly geared himself for the bright artificiality necessary for conversing with his fellows.

As he crawled out of bed, his mask nearly cracked. He suddenly saw his long adult body, naked, unprotected. He shivered with fright, and whimpered. The air was *cold*.

"No, no," he whispered. "I don't like it here."

Everything about him seemed hard, uncaring, capable of hurting. He didn't want a world like this. He wanted a safe place, warm, with no thought of pain, and endless, timeless delight. . . .

He nearly shrieked when the door opened and a figure clumped in.

It was Wylie. "Feeling healthy?" he asked cheerfully.

"Yes." Wylie's face looked like a grinning monster.

"Good. Come and have breakfast."

During the meal the other three talked about the war news. The fleet of the Sirians had destroyed the outposts on the Jovian moons and now was in the act of reducing the Martian colonies. It would be only a few weeks before the war was waged on the Earth itself, and humanity's mood was of crisis.

But Simon Kennedy remained silent. He was thinking of a glass tank, warm fluid around him, contemplation of the world of pure thought. Thinking of what the day promised made him happy.

Gwimm noticed his silence. "Are you worried about going back in the tank?" he queried as he pushed his plate away.

"No."

"I thought perhaps the idea of another birth might be a bit . . . er . . . scaring."

"No. It wasn't all that bad. Besides, you don't get scared of something you're interested in."

The half-lies slid out of Kennedy with dull, automatic ease.

"Okay," Wylie said. "Let's get started."

It took only a few hours to prepare the apparatus. The chemicals were measured out, the regulators set and the supply of nutrients connected. Everything was checked over. Kennedy adored the tank like a mother.

At midday Cooper came in from

the radio room. "Just got a 'gram," he said. "This is it."

Kennedy went cold. "Recall? When do they want us?"

"It says immediately."

Wylie grunted. "Never mind, we'll take a few hours off before moving out. The tank's all fixed now."

"A few hours?" wailed Kennedy, "what good is that?"

"Not much, I suppose, but we might as well get what we can."

Cooper interrupted thoughtfully: "Since we've such a short time left, perhaps we should try someone else as subject. We might get a fresh angle on it."

"But I'll be better!" Kennedy protested. "I've been there before!"

"Perhaps, but from what you told us, you're unlikely to learn anything new. Another of us might. Let's face it, this is probably the last chance we'll ever get to explore the fœtus-state, so we might as well gather what scraps of information we can.

"Besides," he added with a grin, "I wouldn't mind having a go at this thing myself."

As they stood there, three scientists bent on pure research and one man who had found a greater joy, Kennedy realized that he would never persuade them.

"I knew it," he groaned to himself. "I knew their world was bad."

The decision was made with no further voice from him. He fell back as they discussed which one of them it should be, until he found the surgical blade to serve as a weapon.

His attack was swift and savage, and unbelievably skilful. Wylie was disembowelled before he knew it. Gwimm then had the knife pushed up under his ribs.

That gave Cooper time to escape. Kennedy ran after him into the desert, too fast for the man to have time to start up the sandcar, and then he himself took to the vehicle in pursuit. The chase was wild and frantic, sweeping the vicinity in loops and skids, but finally he trapped Cooper on one side of the laboratory building and ground him against the length of the wall. Then he left the sandcar and went back into the building.

Making all the arrangements by himself was difficult. But he inspected the sun-powered accumulators to ensure that they would continue to supply electricity, switched on the apparatus, and poured the laboratory's entire stock of nutrients into one feed-tank. He inserted the feeding tubes into his arteries and attached all the other paraphernalia to his body. The brain-graph pick-ups he didn't bother with. By now he was standing in the tank, and he had only to administer the necessary injections and submerse himself in the heavy fluid until his bodily processes sank to the level of an unborn babe. . . .

And Simon Kennedy floated safely in his artificial womb. He knew the thoughts of flowers, of forests and beasts, and the sluggish stirrings of the ocean's deeps. War came to his planet, but he paid it little heed. Humanity came to the verge of annihilation, but he gave little interest.

When the supply of nutrients was exhausted he would die. But that was better than being born.

DICE WITH THE DEVIL

OLIVER TAYLOR

Illustrated by Roy Jackson

THE TWO DETECTIVES appeared strangely unabashed by the sharp ring of their footfalls on the gleaming white-tiled corridors of the hospital. A trim little nurse almost ran to keep up with them as she directed them to a door at the end of one of the glassy-floored passages.

"There—last on the left," she whispered. "Knock and walk in. Sir Peter should be awake, and his next injection is not for half an hour."

The taller, older detective led his dumpy associate to the door, where they paused and read the cardboard insert: "Sir Peter Edmonds, age 47, entered Dec. 22nd." Attached to this card was a depressing graph of the patient's temperature, pulse and blood pressure which made death appear inevitable and near at hand.

"Poor devil. Doesn't look as if he's got long. Just in time, eh, Phelps?" murmured the tall detective as he removed his glove and knocked.

"Come in. Come in."

Sir Peter Edmonds was sitting up, ramrod straight, in bed, looking remarkably healthy for a man in his condition.

"Good afternoon, sir," began the tall, gaunt detective. "I'm Inspector Harrison of Scotland Yard, and this is Sergeant Phelps of the local constabulary." Bowing slightly, Harrison surveyed the room with sharp green eyes, while Phelps stood staring vacantly at Sir Peter. "We've come here to ask a few questions about . . ."

"My dear fellow, my dear, dear fellow," said Sir Peter warmly, "I know exactly why you've come; knew the moment I heard your voice on the telephone. Do sit down—you look like Don Quixote and Sancho Panza standing there—and when I've strengthened myself with a whisky, I shall be ready, as I believe they now say, to spill the beans. Haw!" Chuckling, he stretched his long thin arm from under the covers and poured himself a drink from the decanter on the bedside table.

Unamused by his drollery, Harrison and Phelps found themselves carefully watching, and even admiring the patient. Sir Peter Edmonds not only had charm, he had a charm that was immediately apparent, the kind that held his listeners in hypnotic attention. His face, handsome and wrinkle-free, was surmounted by flaming red hair that belied his forty-seven years and gave him a debonair quality which had often been the envy of those half his age.

"Ah, that's better. A long confession, Inspector, should never be told with a dry throat." Blue eyes sparkling, Sir Peter put back his glass, straightened his coverlet, plumped his

pillow and seemed ready to begin. Suddenly he glanced at his watch. Then, pouting in mock displeasure, he placed a finger over his lips.

"S-s-sh!"

Phelps quietly put down his pad and pencil.

Harrison, not so easily commanded, gripped his chair arms tightly as if to rise, and began again: "We want to question you ab—" His words were lost in the mounting roar of an aeroplane climbing over the hospital building.

"Seven o'clock, DC 6, taking off for Istanbul!" Sir Peter shouted above the din. "End of the runway here . . . obsolete building in an obsolete place . . . these monsters take off . . . damned nuisance, but if one knows when to expect them, the annoyance is halved . . . passes the time, though, checking times and destinations."

The noise subsided as the plane, like a distant wasp, buzzed on its way through the gathering dusk.

"However, back to the subject, Inspector. Your subject, that is." The policemen's subject, it seemed, though not distasteful, required condescension.

"Yes, sir," Harrison said dryly. "If you don't mind."

Sir Peter looked oddly at him.

"As I think you already know, Inspector, I am a dying man. A month ago I was given a month to live. I expect to go in my next attack. My last was three days ago, and I usually have an attack about twice a week. You can see, therefore, that I have no reason for holding back the truth, since I will be dead long before any court can prosecute me. I have nothing to lose, nothing at all."

Sir Peter sighed, and then continued: "You two black shrouds are my last audience. I shall take advantage of you."

The detectives exchanged helpless shrugs.

"You will be given the full story of my crime—if such it was—and I will begin at the beginning." He smiled disdainfully at his captive audience. "That is to say, in the year 1536."

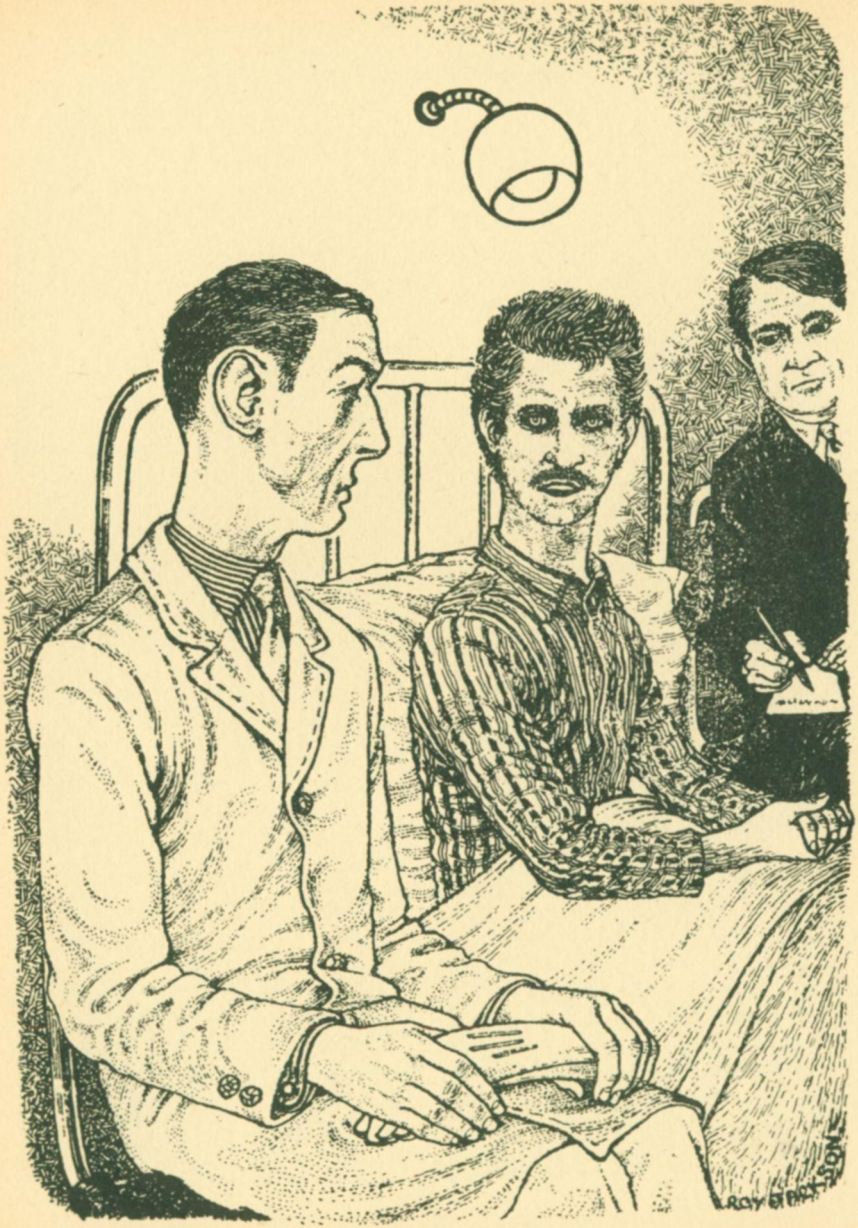
"One moment, sir," broke in the Inspector. "I don't think these preliminaries will be necessary, or that they are at all pertinent in the case. I should like——"

With an imperious frown the man in bed ignored the Inspector and addressed his words to Phelps, who was embarrassed by this sudden importance which Sir Peter appeared to confer upon him.

"As I was saying, the beginning is in 1536. It was in that year that an ancestor of mine, whose name I bear, was granted both land and title by King Henry VIII. At his monarch's request old Peter Edmonds came from Buckinghamshire with his beautiful young wife, Katherine, and stayed with their red-haired King at Hampton Court. The exact services which Sir Peter—for such he now was—rendered the Crown were never specified in the grant of title.

"As you can see," Sir Peter pointed to his carroty thatch of hair, "the mark of Cain was on me at my birth.

"Generations passed. Our family fell back into the obscurity from which Katherine Edmonds had lifted



us, until, during the reign of Charles II, our womenfolk once again found Royal favour . . ." His statement was punctuated by the starting roar of an aeroplane engine.

". . . Sir Roger Edmonds, who was then eighty-two, took to wife the daughter of a local yeoman, and moved, to the amusement of his friends, to the Court of the Stuarts. His new wife, Rachel, although a country girl of only nineteen, enjoyed Court life to the fullest; how well became apparent when, some short time later, she gave birth to a child whose dark, saturnine features surprised no one, not even those who knew the blond Sir Roger well. Sir Roger's pleasure at this first child, born so late in his life, was increased when he was given more lands by his grateful monarch." The patient winked.

"The distaff side had rescued us again. My family returned to its familiar creed of high living and low principles. This way of life could be sustained as long as our women cultivated their beauty and our men permitted their scruples to languish in limbo. But during the last century there were some quite lamentable Edmondses." Sir Peter spoke with real pain in his voice. "Among these were an eminent botanist who married the daughter of a vicar, and, most trying of all, a pioneer vegetarian. Ghastly. Once again the Edmondses were destitute, and I was last of the line. You see the terrible, terrible problem."

The detectives nodded mechanically, as if caught up in a spell.

Sir Peter stared for a moment at the green coverlet of his bed, playing with its tasselled edges. His face was grave.

"I was a bachelor. Although I shared the tastes of my notable forbears, I could not emulate their lack of honour, for I had no wife to offer the Court. Besides, times had changed, and the Court was no longer patronizing the lesser nobility."

"But, sir, to come to the point. . . ."

Weakly raising his hand to interrupt the detective, Sir Peter caught his breath and then said: "The point is, Inspector, that you are my guest, though invited by yourself, and I shall come to the point as soon as I give you the complete background of my crime." His face bore the patient smile which is assumed by some upon meeting a tedious friend.

"It was while pondering my family's ruin that I sank into employment as clerk in a well-known national bank: the first legitimate employment in my family in four hundred years. I need not tell you with what shame I accepted my monthly pittance. The wolf, however, was kept from the door, and later on, as my breeding became apparent, advancement came my way. . . ."

Sir Peter paused irritably until the drone of a plane died in the distance.

". . . Mrs. Elaine Roscoe, as I knew from the evidence of her bankbook, was a wealthy woman. She was the widow of Humphrey Roscoe, whose grocer's shops had spread like a rash over the district in which I lived. Elaine was then fifty-two years old, plain, and very susceptible to the attentions of a man of quality—even

were they to come to her from the teller's window in her bank.

"The time came when I wrote 'Will you marry me?' on the front of a new cheque-book I had just handed her. And she replied with 'Yes, thank you', written hurriedly on a deposit slip."

Sergeant Phelps tried to smother an unprofessional chuckle, but Sir Peter's gaze was directed at Harrison, who watched him sombrely. "You knew her, I believe."

The Inspector was silent for a moment, watching him.

"I did not know her. I admired her for what I had heard of her. Her charities were many; though these ceased at the time of her involvement with yourself."

"They did not cease," Sir Peter said, "they simply were directed toward a new recipient: myself." He smiled. "And you have wanted very badly to connect me with her death for a long while."

The Inspector said nothing. Certainly the look in his eyes, which did not waver, did nothing to contradict this statement. Sir Peter chuckled.

"Well, never mind, you shall connect me with it. You shall, my dear fellow. But this is my generosity to you: you would never have done it of yourself."

The detective's expression was inscrutable.

"We were quickly married," continued Sir Peter, frowning. "And I

settled in her mansion for a life of mixed bliss and tedium. Bliss for her, tedium for me.

"One night when she unwisely quibbled over my gambling losses, the plan came to me." Sir Peter paused thoughtfully. "I had to kill her."

Harrison watched him with a grim smile. "Then you admit . . ."

"Of course I admit, you oaf!" shouted Sir Peter. "You didn't think I permitted you to invaded my privacy so that we might have tea together, did you? I knew all along what you wanted, though it appears that I overestimated you in assuming that you *knew* I knew." Harrison was silent for a space.

"The plan?" he asked finally.

"It was the simplest thing I have ever done. That night, after my wife retired, I distributed a half-dozen glass marbles on the landing at the head of the stairs. Then I slipped out, spent the night with a friend, and arose early the next morning to telephone my wife, who was still asleep in the master bedroom upstairs. When she awoke and got up to answer the telephone, which is at the foot of the stairs, she inadvertently launched herself at breakneck speed down two long flights. *Finis.*"

He smiled. "Of course, I am cognizant of the fact that luck was with me. The fall could very well not have been fatal; she could have noticed the marbles or have missed stepping on them. However, I am a gambler—I have already admitted that—and I was gambling now, with very little to lose if the gamble didn't come off. If I failed, I could always try again, and in some other way. The point is that she did die." With a great effort he leaned forward, staring intently at the two detectives. "Now, tell me, gentlemen: of what crime am I guilty? Criminal negligence. Do you seriously believe that you could hang a charge of murder on me—assuming, that is, that I were not to die in any case?" His smile was mocking, sepulchral.

"We might not hang you"—the inspector was looking at the ceiling—"but we could make life very unpleasant for you. Certainly we could imprison you for a very long while."

"Ah, well, it doesn't matter now, does it?" Suddenly the little room was filled with the screeching of tyres from the landing of a prop-jet, and the patient grimaced as he raised his voice above the noise. "After a decent interval with my friend I returned home, picked up the marbles, and rang for a doctor. Neither he nor the coroner had the least clue before them to suggest foul play. Until you black shrouds heard my confession, I had, in fact, committed the perfect crime." The plane's engines were cut off and the room became quiet again.

Sir Peter uttered a sigh of exhaustion, then resumed in a lower voice. "Having inherited all of dear Elaine's property, I saw the Edmonds family restored to its former grandeur. I embarked upon a life of such luxury as even Sir Roger would have envied. I journeyed to the Indies, the Americas, and the East. I gambled, wined, dined, loved and found sport in every city which I consider civilized and some which I knew were not. Now nothing can surprise me, not even

death. With my own passing both the Edmonds family and the Roscoe fortune come to an end."

He lay back in his bed and took another whisky from the decanter. Then, glancing at his watch, he bared his arm for his next injection.

Inspector Harrison sighed and cleared his throat. "I see, sir. And you are quite correct in pointing out that a last-minute confession is not very useful unless it incriminates someone other than the . . ."

"Dying," Sir Peter supplied with a mirthless chuckle. "You need not waste diplomacy on me, Inspector. I am fully aware of my condition."

"Yes, sir," said Inspector Harrison, relieved. "Still, as you probably realize, there is a certain satisfaction in having one's suspicions confirmed." He arose. "And now we shall leave you to your . . ."

"Dying," Sir Peter said again. "The word will suffice in this case as well."

His sudden laughter was cut short by the arrival of a doctor and a young nurse, the latter carrying a tray of needles and a hypodermic syringe. The doctor gave the injection. As soon as his arm was free, Sir Peter reached out to pinch the nurse, who took quick evasive action.

"Damned prudish Florence Nighting—" he began. and then sank into the deep sleep of the drugged, a look of cherubic innocence on his face.

Inspector Harrison beckoned to Phelps, and they left the room.

In the corridor the young doctor turned to them and smiled. "You know, Sir Peter may complain about the planes, but he's got a lot to thank them for. They've brought him the most pleasant surprise of all. . . ."

"What's that?" asked Harrison, indifferently.

"Life—perhaps. The new serum which was flown from Vienna has proved singularly effective in arresting the progress of his particular malady. Of course, it's not foolproof, and it's too soon really for one to say, but Sir Peter Edmonds, when he awakes, should be delighted to learn that he may live to see many a new year."

The Inspector thought about this. It didn't appear to make much impression on him.

He turned to his subordinate, suddenly weary. "His last gamble," he said. The other man smiled thinly. "It's extraordinary, in its way. He's gambling again—though he doesn't know it, and the house rules are different this time. If the serum fails to cure him, the law will be spared a nasty task. If it does cure him . . ." He shrugged, and the men turned a corner. "It's a little like rolling dice with the devil: not only are the dice rigged, but there is nothing to be won in any case. What would you give for his chances?"

Sergeant Phelps considered this, feeling in his pockets. "Have you got a shilling?" he said as he produced from his pocket the chip of a glass marble.

Harrison laughed. They walked down the long hallway, the echo of their heels remaining audible in the air for an appropriate period after the two of them had gone.

THE BURNING BABE

PHILIP SPRING

Illustrated by Vera Jasman

[In his *Brief Lives*, the antiquarian John Aubrey has left for us many a curious glimpse of seventeenth-century England. Nothing in his pages, however, is more macabre than this story of the murder of a new-born child at midnight. This incident of *ca.* 1605, briefly recorded in fifteen lines, is surely one of the earliest stories of detection in our literature. Yet Aubrey, not realizing its significance, gives us only a fragment of the story, and shows us nothing of the deductive methods used. It is fascinating to conjecture what he left untold, speculating how a simple woman could have discovered the identity of the murderer, as in actual truth she did. Aubrey's part of the story is in italics.]

"MISTRESS LATYMER?"

The woman bobbed a curtsey, half frightened by this cloaked stranger in the night.

"My master sends for you in great need. He bids you come with me, to a lying-in, some distance from here. I have horses ready. The lady is reaching her hour of travail."

"And who is your master, sir?" asked the midwife.

"That I cannot reveal. But here is money for you. When you have performed your service, my master will requite you further. But this rests on one condition. *I am bidden to bring you hood-winked.*"

Margaret Latymer was used to strange happenings, but nothing quite so strange as this. Grumbling, she collected her gear and stowed all in a linen poke. But curiosity, which is every woman's inheritance, was strong in her.

A boy was outside her door, holding two horses. She was mounted side-saddle behind the boy and told to hold fast. "You will permit me," said the manservant, holding up a silken stole. Coming stirrup to stirrup he bound it round her eyes. Her horse was then turned about and about, to confuse her sense of direction.

"Do not attempt to remove your covering, good dame," said the man. "I shall be riding close behind to see that you do not. I fear to displease my master, and for you, it would be wise to take his money and see nothing."

The midwife was silent. She was trying to guess their direction as the horses now set off. She had noticed that the wind was blowing on the right side of her face as she had stood

outside her door. Now, as she turned towards the horse's head, it was full in her face. But these facts conveyed nothing to her.

"Here's a pretty affair," she thought, as she began to recover her composure. "This is some great gentleman gotten under the wrong sheets. Not 'my lady', mark you: 'the lady'. And this is all done hugger-mugger to keep 'my' lady out of the know. A casual mart, indeed. Well, I've no eyes, but the good God sent me mother wit. Now it can work for me."

Soon after the horses moved off she heard the barking of a dog. She recognized this as a fierce Irish wolfhound belonging to Humphrey Foad, a tallow candle maker. As this was always kept chained up at night, she knew she must be passing Foad's cottage, and thus leaving the village by what she always thought of as the sunset end.

"Yet this is scant help to me," she thought. "The further we go from the village, the more lost I shall be."

The manservant, who had at first allowed the horses to walk so that she could accustom herself to the blindfold and her side-saddle position, now stirred the horses to a jog-trot. "Hold fast to the boy, mistress, and you need have no fear," he assured her from behind.

She now had no ears for him. She was listening intently for other things. She knew that as they had left the village by the sunset end they must soon come to a ford. No matter how severely the horses were reined she was bound to hear their hooves in the water.

But the minutes passed and she heard no splashing of hooves. "Now I am sorely puzzled," she thought, dismayed. "So, either the ford was dry, or before coming to it we turned away down the by-road beside the spinney."

"Goodman blue-coat," she called to the servant behind her, "pray let me have this bandage off now. It hurts my eyes, and you would not have me gaping when it comes to the labour."

"Be content, mistress. 'Tis moonlight, and things may easily be seen by shrewd eyes. My order is to bring you privily, as this, and further that you should be *sent blinfold away*." She sighed, and the horses continued with unslackened pace. She noticed that their hooves had first struck on a flinty road, and then on turf, and this second surface had further confused her.

Provoked and a little angry, it then occurred to her to defeat this dark intent by cunning of her own. She began to estimate the time already taken on the journey. By breaking it into five-minute intervals she reckoned they had already taken some half-hour. She began to mark off with doubled-up fingers every additional five minutes, as narrowly as she could estimate.

Soon she had the sensation of moving between trees or along a lane bordered by woods. Suddenly the man whispered hoarsely, "Stand to. Draw into the shade here, Ned." They waited silently. Several horsemen

were heard approaching from the opposite direction.

As they stood there, a tree bough brushed the midwife's face. She felt it carefully and with a gentle movement fractured it so that it hung brokenly without being totally severed. "Let that tell my tale if it can," she thought. As the horsemen went by they were talking with some animation, and when they had gone past the trio resumed their own journey.

She had already reckoned by doubled-up fingers that they had ridden an hour when they began a steep ascent. The horses' pace slackened. She felt her own horse straining a little, and her position in the side-saddle caused her to cant away from Ned, so that she had to grasp him more tightly.

It was quite soon after this when she sensed their approach to a house. First had come a closed-in dank smell of trees, then a sudden release from this and a crunch on gravel.

The midwife was dismounted and led into the house, still blindfolded. As she was guided upstairs she remembered again her reckoning of time. Her rough and ready method suggested that the journey had lasted a full hour and some odd minutes.

Her silken bandage was removed in the lady's bedchamber. A huge log fire burnt in an iron fire basket in the hearth. At one end of the rush-strewn bedchamber stood a heavy bed under a canopy, and from this canopy was suspended a blue lockram drape which shrouded the bed. In one wall was a small oriel window with a gilt lantern suspended within it.

Mistress Latymer *was brought* to the bedside and *layd the woman.* At the first cry of the new-born child, a muffled man hastily entered the bedchamber.

The midwife, hardly knowing whether to beam or frown, turned away from the bed, now *having donne her businesse.* She heard whisperings from the shrouded bed. Then suddenly the mother gave a cry of anguish. The midwife, turning quickly, fell back in horror.

She sawe the man take the child and murther it, and burn it in the fire in the chamber.

The man silenced her cries of horror. "Here," he said coldly, putting a purse in her hand, "is your requital. You are *extraordinarily rewarded for your paines.* Now go. My servant will take you back home. And remember," he added with menace, "you have seen and heard nothing this night."

* * *

When she returned, still blindfold and escorted, to her home, it was early morning. But there was to be no rest for her. *This horrid action did much run in her mind, and she had a desire to discover it, but knew not where 'twas.*

Racked all day with the problem, she went at night to her neighbour's cottage. This man was Ralph Okeshott, an old friend, a waggoner with a small trade in fetching and carrying. Without telling him her secret she considered him for a while, her face in anguish. "Ralph," she then said, "you must help me. Which way was the wind blowing last night?"

The carter thought a moment. "I don't remember at a jump."

"Then think. As I stood looking out from my threshold, and the wind on my right cheek, which way would it be blowing?"

"Why, from the west."

"Then, when I ride side-saddle, but look over the horse's head, and the wind is full in my face, which way do I ride?"

The carter stared at her, mystified. "You ride west."

"The sunset end. Even so. That is proved by Humphrey Foad's dog."

"Lord, Meg, what is this?"

"God o' mercy. The black ox has trodden on my foot. Well, tell me this. The west wind was boisterous last night, and 'twould be gone eleven of the clock when it was blowing full on my face, side-saddle mark you, and me no longer looking between the horse's ears. So, which way was I riding gone eleven of the clock?"

The carter pondered this heavily. "Why, you were travelling north," he said at length.

She resisted his further mystified questions. *She considered with herselfe the time that she was riding, and how many miles might be rode at that rate in that time.*

"Now tell me this. Carrying me, and a youngling in front, amble for five minutes, jig-jog for nigh on an hour, stop two minutes, and then a space uphill, how far would a horse travel?"

The carter scratched his jaw, and after a repetition of the terms, he said, "On a night like last, and not cledgy underfoot, say nine mile with a jade under you, but happen eleven-twelve on a high, willing mare."

"Alack, there was no ho with it. And Long Chase ford? Is that dried up?"

"Why, no. I came through it yesternoon. 'Tis quite up."

"Then if you take the by-road beside the spinney, before you come to the ford, which way does that lead?"

"It goes all which ways. But to the north, in the main."

"Aië. Now all's at hazard again. But ask me no more."

Still burdened with the horror of what she had seen, she went early next day to the parson, a good man who rode far, often with a book in his hand. Her good sense told her that he knew the outlying parts better than she did, and there was village gossip that he pored over maps. But it was chiefly her desire to expose this murder so much against nature which took her to him. She told him everything, including her own deductions.

He listened with stricken face. Then when she had finished he said, "Margaret Latymer, good soul, we have something on our consciences which nothing will expunge till we have proved who this man was, and laid information against him. Have you no idea who it was?"

"*It must be some great person's house*," she replied, "*for the roome was twelve foot high.*"

"But did you not see the house itself?"

"No. But I *could knowe the chamber if I sawe it* again."

"And you are not afraid to accuse those in high places?"

"Not so. My mind is seared. I see that babe burning yet."

The vicar took out and consulted strip maps of the county, rudimentary topographical drawings in which all the roads were depicted as running straightly from top to bottom of each strip.

"It is certain," he said, "that you did not ride between east and south, for the hills just beyond the village would have made you immediately aware of that direction. Then again, riding between east and north, you would have felt that rough west wind on your back. Almost the same thing applies if you rode between south and west; for if you had ridden southerly you would not have felt that wind full on your face, as you did.

"Also, more towards the west you would have been riding over common and heath. But you say you travelled at first on flinty road. And that you forked off before coming to Long Chase ford. This means we must look somewhere in a quarter segment, between north and west. And that supports what you say about the wind in your face. We must look perhaps more to the north, and perhaps nine to twelve miles from your home."

"I am a little afeared, now that you come so close."

"We must come closer, so that justice is done, and this unchristened child have us as god-parents before that awful Throne."

"So let it be. But this is some great lord's house."

"Not necessarily. A room twelve foot high would be a smaller sized room in a great man's house. In a house of the landed families it would be average. In the lesser gentry's houses this could be quite a large room. So I fear we have a wide choice."

"But you are not forgetting that this would be some lady-in-waiting? In a smaller room than her lady's? But even so in a larger room than one of the gentry's servants would be?"

"That is shrewd, Margaret. I fear you may be right."

"And you are not forgetting that just before we came to the house we travelled uphill?"

"No. The house we seek, according to your testimony, is large, near the top of a hill, with an avenue and a gravelled forecourt. I do not want to put either fear or false understanding in your mind, but I can think of three several houses which might answer this description, one more than the others. Now, think carefully. Did anything else occur on that ride which might help us?"

"Only a foolish thing. How can it help us? But as these gentlemen rode past, as I have told you, about ten minutes from our journey's end, I broke a tree bough lightly to show where we hid. It hangs brokenly. 'Twas a chestnut. I mind its large rough leaves. But, mercy be, how can we find a lamed chestnut bough about ten miles north from here?"

"Why, good mistress, I will go riding to seek it myself," said the vicar eagerly. "You said this was in a path between trees, or a lane bordered by woods. It will be easy to see, hanging brokenly like that. And now I know, within a fairly narrow cast, where to

seek. Did you overhear what the horsemen were saying?"

"Only a snatch." She pursed her lips, trying to remember. "One gentleman said something like this: 'Noll Brayshaw has gotten a fine sun dial out of Italy, of white marble. I advised him to back it up against his dark yews . . .' That was all I heard."

"He would be speaking of Mr Brayshaw of Selveston Manor. If Mr Brayshaw can remember who thus advised him about his sun dial, that will be the horseman who was speaking. He, in turn, will remember from whence he was riding with companions two nights ago. Alas, Margaret, this begins to confirm my worst fears. Go now, say nothing to a living soul. Be brave. Remember two of us share this dark burden. And soon I may want you to go and lay information with Mr. Warriner, who is a Justice of the Peace."

But Margaret Latymer, unable to rest until she herself had got to the heart of this mystery, induced Ralph the carrier to take her with him to three villages towards the west and north.

Here she made subtle inquiries of women she had attended in childbirth, all of whom knew the current gossip of their localities.

In two villages she drew blank. In the third, the lord of the manor, *Sir John Dayrell*, was known as something of a rake-hell. His wife was but rarely seen and kept herself close in her own apartments. There was another mystery. It was whispered that the knight had *gott his ladie's waiting woman with child.*

Margaret Latymer commanded Ralph to hire a horse and take her pillion to this large manor house. "Set me on the road to it, Ralph. I shall close my eyes. I want to hear the horse's hooves."

The puzzled carter, now aware that something was afoot and long acquainted with Margaret Latymer's common sense, without questioning did as she bade him.

The uphill approach to the manor gave her the same sensations as before. She felt the extra straining of the horse, heard its more laboured breathing. She could even say with certainty that her body tilted the same way in the side-saddle. There also came to her nose the same dank wet smell of elms in the avenue leading up to the house.

"Stop, Ralph. Help me dismount."

Alone, she walked timidly up the avenue. The house had a gravelled forecourt, and an oriel window on each of three sides. Within the smallest of these windows she saw a gilt lantern suspended.

"Well-a-day," she sighed. "A pretty work indeed. The poor unchristom babe." She returned slowly down the avenue. "Turn back, Ralph," she said wearily. "I now know all I want to know."

With a heart filled with dread she sought out the vicar again, telling him of her discoveries. These came as less surprise to him. Meanwhile, he told her, he had been able to support her own testimonies. He had found the wayside chestnut with the fractured bough. And the horsemen had in fact

passed this spot, coming that night from that village, though not from the manor itself. "What you alone have proved by these things," he told her, "puts truth and law into your hands."

"Tell me what to do now," said Margaret Latymer simply. The vicar instructed her. *She went to a Justice of the Peace, and search was made. The very chamber found.*

She was confronted by Sir John Dayrell himself. "This is the man I accuse," she said stoutly. "Here, in this chamber, the babe was slain. And there, in those very ashes it may be, without spot or blemish it was burnt to death."

The knight was brought to his try-all; and, to be short, this judge [i.e. Sir John Popham, Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench] *had this noble howse, parke, and mannor, and (I thinke) more, for a bribe to save his* [i.e. Dayrell's] *life. Sir John Popham gave sentence according to lawe; but* [Dayrell] *being a great person and a favourite, he procured a* noli prosequi.

See my lips tremble, and my eye-balls roll,
Suck my last breath, and catch my flying soul!

ALEXANDER POPE.

I have a rendezvous with Death
At some disputed barricade.

ALAN SEEGER.

Long is the way
And hard, that out of hell leads up to light.

JOHN MILTON

NOT PRETTY

ROBERT SKULL

Illustrated by I. Herdson

IT WAS NOT A PRETTY SIGHT. The young ape sat in the corner of the courtyard gibbering with fear and rage, surrounded by the remains of a large tabby cat.

This scene was surveyed with a rather complacent smile by Miss Martha Kemp-Taylor from a first-floor window.

Miss Kemp-Taylor was a figure well known and well liked in the district. She was a pleasant-faced spinster of around fifty-five years of age, friendly to all the children and especially to the animals. Her neighbours thought her a happy and patient person; they knew that she was a life member of the Zoological Society and also that she was the younger sister of the wealthy, but eccentric, Lady Audrey Smythe.

There were other facts about her nature that were not generally known: she was extremely patient and capable in the training of all animals; she had a passion for entering Newspaper Competitions, and keenly desired to travel, especially to Africa. She kept entirely to herself the fact that she was determined to possess herself of the fortune promised to her under Lady Audrey's will at the earliest possible moment.

Miss Martha, as she was known to her neighbours, lived in one of those tall old houses on the north side of a square off the Euston end of Gray's Inn Road.

The houses were packed closely together, almost back to back with the houses of the next road. Their only back gardens were the small courtyards which were well-planned secluded havens or just plain ugly dumps of rubbish. The courtyard attached to Miss Martha's house was delightful and could not be overlooked from ground-level by reason of the high walls surrounding it.

Miss Martha had given a considerable amount of thought to the early demise of Lady Audrey, seeking for some way of making certain that the money came to her in time for her to enjoy it. She recalled all her sister's little whims and habits, her fads about clothes, food.

Habits. Ah! Lady Audrey's three months every spring on the Riviera and that much-hated visit immediately on her return, when her Rolls drew up in the square to allow Lady Audrey, fur-coated in high midsummer, to make her grand entry.

"I had to wear the old thing; cannot get used to the cold here at home," she would say. She said it every year.

"How I wish *I* could win some furs," thought Martha.

Miss Martha continued with her efforts to win cars, yachts, furs, in newspaper competitions, spending the maximum her budget would allow.

"Even this can only be done because of the pittance that woman gives me," she thought. "I must get all that money; but how? The day I do, I'll smother myself in furs, furs." This last thought was said aloud.

As she said it an idea was born. Yes, she could see the way; it would take some time, maybe a year, but it could be done.

Her mind was made up. She must forego competitions for a whole month, and must concentrate on visits to the Zoological Gardens, especially the Ape-House. Contact must be made with the head keeper, arrangements must be made. She must have a young ape to look after; once she had, all would be plain sailing.

After six visits to the Ape-House and a deal of gentle pestering Martha extracted a promise from the head keeper that he would recommend that she should be given the next young ape born to look after, if the Committee were happy about the idea.

Miss Martha spent lunch time for two days out of each of the next two weeks at the Fellows' Restaurant, eating well but expensively.

"It will be worth it," she thought. With more than her usual charm and with much tact she sought out all available Committee-men and gradually enlisted their help. Yes, they promised as soon as there was a baby available, they would suggest she be given custody for, say, two years.

Three weeks later, there was a happy event in the Ape-House: Annie had a son. All the staff were interested and everything possible was done for the welfare of the mother and the new arrival; but in spite of the combined efforts of the Ape-House staff and the veterinary advisers the English climate was too much for the mother, and she died of pneumonia.

Most of the Society members were sorry to hear the news; Miss Martha, however, rejoiced and quickly presented her case to act as personal nurse to the baby ape. The staff were delighted with an offer which would relieve them of so much work, and pressed the point with the Committee. Miss Martha's own lobbying with the Committee clinched the deal and the necessary arrangements were made for the ape to be taken to her home.

She lavished care and attention on the little fellow from the moment she took over. The ape thrived and was eventually christened "Jacko".

Miss Martha took stock of the position. Jacko was two weeks old. It was November. The ape must be about eighteen months old to be capable physically of performing the task she had in mind. "No," she thought. "It cannot be next year, I must wait patiently for the following early summer. Never mind, I shall have plenty to do with my Jacko."

Miss Martha started training Jacko as soon as he was three weeks old. Little things to form habits that would be useful. On warm days she played with him in that nice quiet courtyard, smiled upon indulgently by the next-door neighbours from their upper windows.

As the year progressed Miss Martha commenced his education for the event. Very patiently and at first once every two days, then daily, she

introduced the subject of soft fine fur. She had a moleskin hat which she took from her wardrobe and cut into strips. At the sides of the strip she made little nicks so they could be torn easily. Daily she put a piece on the polished table in her lounge and then fetched the ape. She stroked the coarse hair of the ape and made a fuss of him. Then she picked up the piece of soft fur from the table, touched it with her fingers and simulated a violent horror by facial expression, angry sounds and actions which ended with her tearing the piece of skin in small pieces and throwing it on the floor.

The young ape completely ignored this action; but with patience, never-ending patience, Martha continued this act for three weeks. Then, at last, he responded to her petting and imitated as closely as he could the noises and expressions of his mistress's performance, but still he would not pick up the piece of moleskin. Martha realized that Jacko was now scared of the moleskin piece and would not touch it.

"I must try another approach. Time goes so fast," she thought. So, after the next daily act instead of tearing the moleskin strip in pieces she tossed the strip to Jacko. The result of this manoeuvre was eminently satisfactory to Miss Martha. The ape grabbed it fiercely and, jabbering, tore it apart with a rage which seemed born out of sheer dread.

Martha's eyes gleamed as she threw her arms around the ape and murmured, "Another step forward to freedom for you and me, Jacko. Now let's slow down the process so that my little fellow won't get bored with it," she said. Thereafter this dramatic little game was enacted once a week.

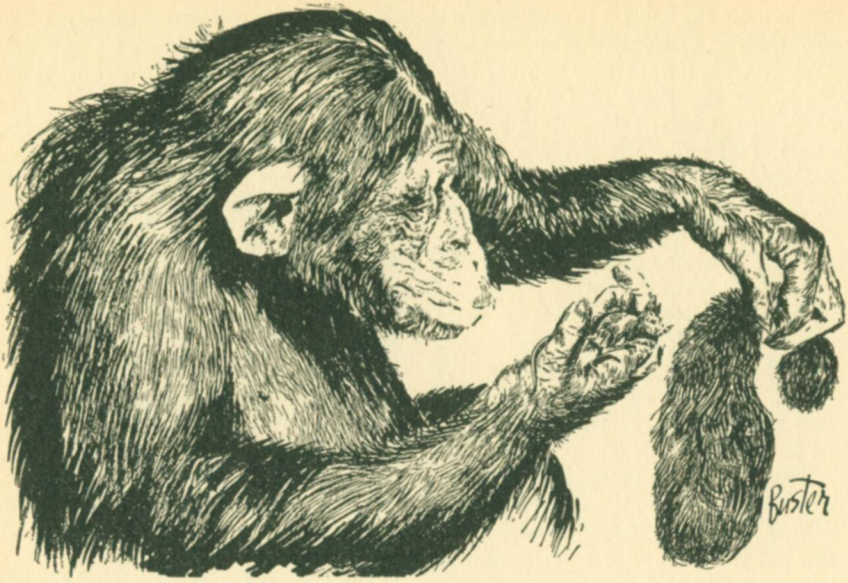
In the meantime, Miss Martha, exerting her charm, gathered information from her neighbours about their holidays, carefully noting when they coincided. To her satisfaction, she found that on May 18th they would all be away. "That," she thought, "will be my courtyard test day for darling Jacko."

As the last of the February rain turned to March winds, she introduced a live mouse to Jacko just as she had the moleskin. Jacko's reaction was as brutal and quick as with the strips of skin; a little messy, which meant an afternoon's clearing up of small spots of blood and fur.

Time passed quietly. Miss Martha again relaxed to her competitions; the sight of her trotting gaily to the post-box with Jacko at her side became familiar to all the neighbours.

At the end of March the mouse experiment was repeated, and in the middle of April Martha held the last test before May 18th. For this, she bought a small rabbit, black and sleek. This time the test was to be in the small kitchen, which she cleared with Jacko still at her side. Then she locked him in her bedroom while she let out the rabbit on the kitchen floor.

She led the ape down to the kitchen door and, hesitating slightly, pushed it open. Jacko saw the rabbit and slowly went towards it, putting out his hand to touch it in quite a friendly way. Martha's heart sank, but as he touched the soft sleek shape, he



changed to a savage, snarling beast; he snatched the rabbit and what followed only one so obsessed with a passion as Miss Martha could bear to witness.

"Not pretty, but effective," she murmured.

The ape received his rewarding embraces and Miss Martha scoured the kitchen.

Satisfied that Jacko was well conditioned, Martha applied herself to her competitions. What a welcome relaxation they were after the grim planning that was now filling most of her thoughts. One very intriguing competition on the judgment of fur coats had interested her for a long time: the first prize was £1,000 and there were many consolation prizes. Miss Martha applied herself to this problem with great thoroughness and after many series of eliminations prepared three entries that she felt must win. She carefully filled in the coupon, placed it in an envelope which she put behind the clock for posting. The closing date, she noted, was the 20th May.

On the morning of the 14th one of her neighbours placed another trump card in her hand. "Oh, Miss Martha," she said. "Would you be a dear and look after my Tibby?" Tibby was a large tabby cat.

"Of course I will, dear," was the very prompt reply. "I'll put his food on your verandah as usual and see that he goes in through the window hole, too."

"Don't fuss him, dear Miss Martha; he must fend for himself. He's a big boy. Just leave his food out." A welcome reply for Miss Martha.

Early on the evening of the 17th Martha trotted next door with Tibby's bowl. Letting herself in, she went through to the verandah and placed the bowl on the floor. The cat saw her and entered through the hole, which Miss Martha promptly and firmly closed.

She went back to her own house, collected her letter and set out, with the ape as usual at her heels, to post her competition form.

Her thoughts dwelt on the return of her sister Audrey in three weeks' time. "What a welcome she's got waiting for her!" she thought. Then, freedom for herself and Jacko. She would plead that as a fierce animal he should be returned to the jungle and she would accompany him, sorrowfully of course, because of the dear sister who so kindly left her a fortune.

But caution took over. "Martha, my dear," she said to herself with a smirk, "don't count your chickens before they are hatched. But there couldn't be a slip-up; Jacko is bound to react to the cat. That's the dress rehearsal."

Next morning after breakfast Martha put Jacko in the courtyard for his exercise and went again to the next-door house, with a jug of milk and a basket of flowers which served to hide the strong paper sack she carried. Once inside the house she arranged the flowers delightfully, while Tibby rubbed himself in welcome against her legs. She eventually presented him with the saucer of milk; as the cat started to drink she bundled it into the sack and tightly screwed the top. Stepping on to the verandah she called to Jacko. The ape looked up. Gently, she dropped the sack into the courtyard below. It landed quite lightly; Jacko, intrigued by the movement inside it, started to undo the twisted top. The frantic cat tried to jump out and its fur touched Jacko's hands.

The young ape's expression changed as, with a snarl, he grabbed the cat. Martha turned quickly away, re-entered the house, opened the window-hole and hurried out, collecting her basket on the way. When she reached home, she looked silently at the scene in the courtyard. Not a pretty sight.

She waited an hour before approaching the ape again; by that time he had quietened down, and was ready for her greeting. Miss Martha did not enjoy washing and cleaning the courtyard, but consoled herself that it was the last time. Jacko was fully trained now; they need only to await the return of Lady Audrey.

The next weeks passed slowly. Her neighbour returned from holiday, and thanked Miss Martha for the care she had obviously shown Tibby, blaming herself bitterly for going away and so upsetting poor Tibby that he had left home.

As Miss Martha had anticipated, a letter arrived in the morning from Lady Audrey, telling her to expect the usual visit the next day. She was especially nice to Jacko that morning and hummed most of the time. Just after

lunch time a surprising event took place at the house in the square: the postman called bearing an expensive-looking box addressed to Miss Martha Kemp-Taylor.

With great excitement Miss Martha proceeded to untie the parcel. First there was a note of congratulations: at last she had won a prize in a competition. Thrilled as she had never been before, she unpacked the box, talking hard to an interested Jacko.

"Yes, Jacko, I believe it is. It's a mink stole!" Delightedly she draped it around her shoulders. Jacko stretched his hand out to touch it. Martha remembered, but it was too late. The ape's expression changed.

The detective sergeant met Lady Audrey at the door next morning and explained. "It was not a pretty sight, Ma'am," he finished gravely.

THE SLAVE DETECTIVE

THE CASE OF THE MISSING BABY

WALLACE NICHOLS

Illustrated by Juliette Palmer

ALBIUS FLACCUS was probably the richest of the Roman merchants of the time, dealing in a number of commodities fetched from overseas. He had a wife named Terentia, and a single child; a daughter two months old, Albia. One day she was missing from the garden of his villa just outside Rome, and three days later was still missing. Flaccus, beside himself with anxiety and despair, joined the clients who thronged the audience hall of Titius Sabinus the Senator, and begged to be allowed to use of his famous slave Sollius, known as the Slave Detective.

"He is my last hope, Illustrious," he said, spreading out his hands.

Having bargained shrewdly for his slave's use, Sabinus let Sollius depart with Flaccus for the latter's villa, not far out along the Appian Way. As Flaccus drove there in his two-horsed basket chariot he outlined, desperately and stammeringly, what had happened.

"She was asleep in the garden—under an arbour—on a Persian cushion—and then . . . she was no longer there! We've not found a trace of her since. And that is all that I can tell you; all, all. . . ."

"Was there nobody with the child?"

"A nurse—a slave-girl—who left her to gossip with a young gardener, and when she returned Albia was gone. That slave-girl, I assure you, has been well whipped!"

"No doubt," said Sollius, "an extensive search was made."

"As soon as the babe was missed; but how long its stupid nurse stood gossiping is any man's guess. She says only a few moments. But I am convinced she lies and is covering up a longer time than she dares admit."

"And your wife, lord?" asked Sollius.

"Was asleep. She is still delicate after the birth."

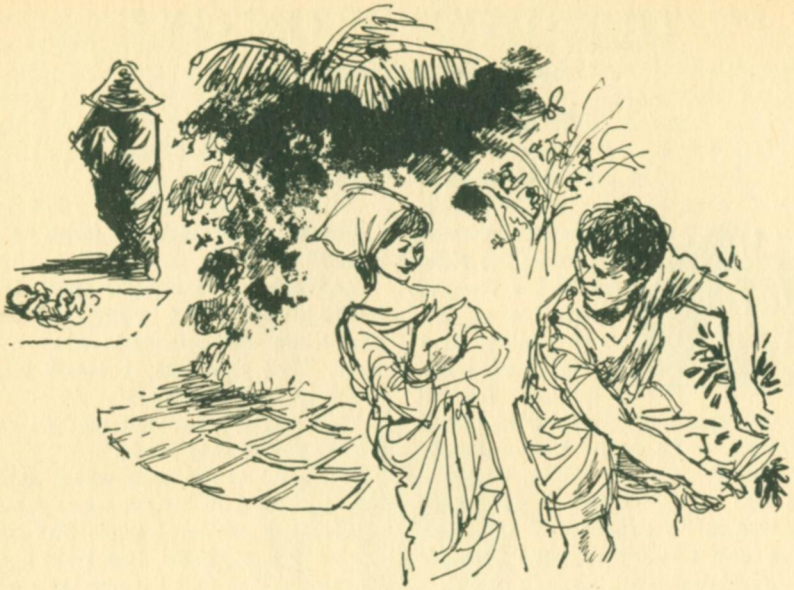
"You searched, I imagine, more than the garden?"

"My whole household has searched the countryside, and every villa about has been questioned. It is as if one of the Goddesses had taken a fancy to the child and had rapt it upward to Olympus. We have found no trace. I pray Jupiter that your wits, Slave Detective, may be inspired."

When they arrived at the villa, Sollius asked to see the slave-girl first. She was a beautiful young woman, but now pale and very frightened.

"What is your name?"

"Panthea," she murmured, and



flung herself at his feet. "You, O Sollius, are a slave, too; help me as a slave. I'm innocent! I know nothing. I am as amazed as anyone."

"Just tell me all you do know," he asked gently, raising her to her feet. "I am here to help."

"She was asleep on her cushion in the Shade. Sextus—one of the gardeners—was pruning. I went . . . to talk with him. He was only just beyond a turn in the path—within yards. When I ran back, the little Albia was . . . gone," and Panthea broke into sobs.

"You heard nothing?"

"Only the birds."

"Did you see anyone—anyone at all—enter the garden?"

"No one."

"Could someone have entered the garden unseen? You were beyond a turn in the path, remember."

"I suppose so," she answered, staring at him dully.

"How long were you really with the gardener Sextus? Speak the truth, girl!"

"Well, some little time," she admitted with a fearful look at her maser, upon which Sollius dismissed her. She fled weeping, and as she passed him, Flaccus slapped her across the face.

"I shall sell that girl to a Syrian slave-dealer," he said, his face working.

"She is guilty of negligence, no more," murmured Sollius.

"Negligence is guilt enough!"

Flaccus retorted. "Who bribed her to be out of the way?"

"None, lord, I think. Have you an enemy?'

"You think it an act of enmity?"

"A child of that age would not stray. She was clearly taken."

"That is so," Flaccus agreed. "But I cannot think of any such enemy. I have rivals in business, of course; but not such a wretch as to snatch a child.

"You have had no demand for ransom?"

"That is what chiefly puzzles me, O Sollius. Who would steal a child except for money?"

"Who is your nearest neighbour?"

"A former Provincial Governor, Titus Manilius—a man of the utmost probity. He and his wife Cornelia are quite elderly, and live a very retired life."

"I should like to see them," said Sollius.

"I will take you along myself," replied Flaccus. "It is barely a quarter of a mile away. But they and their household have already been questioned."

"Nevertheless. . . ." Sollius murmured, and adapted his limp as well as he could to the other's strides.

Both Manilius and his wife were straight and unbowed by their years, yet grey and lined, Romans of the old habit and even of a former natural cast of countenance. They would have fitted well into the old republican days. Sollius expected little from the interrogation, yet persisted. But, one and all, they and their slaves denied seeing or hearing anything unusual on the day in question.

"I do feel so much for Terentia," quavered Cornelia. "Our own little great-grandchild, the last of our race, died a year ago, and life has not really been the same for us since. Poor little Melissa! I hope," she continued, "that some woman is with dear Terentia in her trouble."

"Perilla, her brother's wife, has come to see her today," replied Flaccus. "Terentius Verus is sailing from Alexandria the day after tomorrow; he cannot, alas, spare his wife for longer than a day, and she is going with him."

As Flaccus and he left the villa of Manilius, Sollius stared back over the gardens. A small and exquisite Greek pavilion stood in the middle of an equally small and exquisite space of lawn, with a statue of Aesculapius within, and farther on, in a line from it, he saw a ruined dovecote in red brick. He turned away, and followed his companion home to the latter's villa. He felt he had learned nothing.

"Do Terentius Verus and his wife," he asked, breaking a long silence, "dwell near at hand?"

"Oh, no," answered Flaccus. "They have a flat in Rome. As myself, he is a merchant. He has considerable interests in North Africa, and journeys to Alexandria frequently. Perilla—a jealous woman, I fear, and without children to keep her at home—insists this time upon accompanying her husband. She has come today as much to bid farewell as to try to comfort my wife."

"I should like to see them both," said Sollius.

"My wife is too ill from anxiety," temporized Flaccus, "but Perilla, no doubt, can pass on any questions you wish."

"Then let me see the lady Perilla," Sollius answered.

Perilla was a tall young woman, exceedingly thin, with high cheek-bones, and curiously handsome, though rather at second sight than at first, and she had a low-toned, husky voice. She was somewhat flushed and excited.

"I can tell you nothing," she said at once. "I was in Rome the whole day. And certainly poor Terentia knows nothing at all. Do you think she would not have revealed it already if she knew anything?"

"Nobody knows anything!" sighed Flaccus in exasperated tones.

"Was there a visitor to the villa that day?" Sollius asked.

"One," replied Flaccus, "but you shall hear for yourself," and he clapped his hands loudly until his head slave ran into the atrium where they were. "Describe that woman," ordered his maser.

"It was an old beggarwoman," was the answer. "She came, not to the door, but I found her staring into the garden. As soon as she saw me she begged an alms. I gave her a few coins, and saw her off."

"What do you mean," asked Sollius, "by you 'saw her off'?"

"I led her to the gate and watched her depart down the Way."

"Was she carrying a bundle?"

"She was not, Slave Detective. I should have reported that," he added huffily.

"Can you describe her?"

"She wore a large sun-hat of straw which hid her face. She stooped—but rather as though leaning from the waist forward, not, if you know what I mean, as though hunched."

"Could she have been a younger woman pretending to be old?"

The house-slave shrugged as though he could answer either way.

"Had you ever seen her before?"

"Never. I thought she was a little out of her wits, a true vagrant."

"Have you anything else to tell us?"

"Only this, Slave Detective, that I saw the babe on her cushion after I had seen the old woman away from the gate."

"She could have doubled back when you were again indoors," murmured Sollius.

"If only," cried Flaccus through clenched teeth, "someone would demand ransom! It makes me fear that my little Albia is dead," and he covered his face with his hands.

"This trouble, lady," continued Sollius, turning again to Perilla, "will perhaps prevent you from travelling with your husband to Alexandria."

"Oh, no!" she answered quickly and decisively. "We sail the day after tomorrow," she added, her lean face almost fanatical.

"I told you that," murmured Flaccus.

"I can do little more here, lord," said Sollius. "I'll return to Rome and speak with the City Prefect."

At Flaccus's command a slave drove him back into the City. Outside the villa when he set out waited

Perilla's elegant litter with its two African bearers. He asked the slave to put him down at the barracks of the City Cohorts, and he went in to see his friend, Gratianus, their Prefect.

"Albius Flaccus came to see me," Gratianus told him. "I've had informers out, but they've come back with nothing. Why isn't there any demand for ransom?"

"That is my question, too," said Sollius. "Someone wants the child—as a child."

"What's in your wily brain?"

"Just the shadow of a notion," replied Sollius, and then he laughed. "Don't have me arrested if I loiter near Terentius Verus's flat here in Rome."

"That would be a tale!" grinned the City Prefect.

Pot-bellied and limping and in his slave's dress, Sollius made himself as inconspicuous as he could when, the next day, he began making inquiries in the vicinity of the flat of Terentius Verus. That hungry look in Perilla's eyes had haunted him. She was surely a woman with an unsatisfying background. He got easily into conversation with one of Verus's household slaves, luckily a garrulous and perceptive fellow with a grievance.

"Verus is a hard man, but just; the lady Perilla a sharp-tongued shrew. She should have had a covey of children to keep her quiet. She is kind only to her maid, young Sosia, a wanton piece, as we all know, but the favourite can do no wrong. Perilla is even taking her—and her ill-begotten babe—to Alexandria with her. I'd send her to the slave-market to be bought for a brothel. Not so the mistress—but, then, Sosia flatters her and knows her ways."

"How old is this Sosia's baby?" asked Sollius quietly, but eager for the answer.

"Oh, a month or two. Sosia has been to the family's country villa—and came back this week with her baby. Venus alone knows the father! She's a pretty enough wench, but mightily stuck-up as her mistress's favourite. A pity it isn't Perilla's own child! She's bitter over being a barren woman, say I."

"I wish to speak with her," said Sollius. "Take her this message: the Slave Detective has a question to ask of her."

"The Slave Detective—you?" gaped the other, staring. "I go . . . but she'll bite my head off!"

"And *I* will have you taken before the City Prefect to be whipped if you don't," promised Sollius.

"It's a whipping either way," sighed the other. "Follow me in."

The flat was capacious and luxurious, and was on the first floor above a whole row of food shops in the heart of Rome, Sollius was left in a marble-panelled vestibule which served the purpose of an atrium, but no fountain spiralled there. Doorways, covered by heavy, dark hangings, led away into various rooms. From one of them came the brief, hushed whimper of a baby.

It was not the slave who returned to him, but Perilla who came out into the vestibule herself, carrying a baby in her arms. Her hungry look was

gone; in spite of her burden she was light of foot.

"What do you want of me, Slave Detective?" she asked calmly. "Has Albia been found?"

"Perhaps," he said, and stared at the child in her arms.

"Slave Detective," she flashed out angrily, "I shall report you to your master for insolence!"

"My master, lady, knows me," said Sollius mildly. Then he added in a sterner tone: "Whose is that child?"

"Sosia's—my maid's," she answered haughtily. "But my husband and I are adopting the little thing."

Glance rasped against glance, and suddenly, with a haughty, angry gesture, she lifted the clothing from about the body of the babe in her arms.

"The missing Albia," she said with a contemptuous laugh, "is a girl, Slave Detective, and this is a manchild!"

Sollius returned to his master's house to think anew.

A day passed. Terentia had fallen seriously ill from anxiety and grief, and Albius Flaccus was beside himself with anger and despair. There was still no demand for ransom.

Three men of the Urban Cohort under a Decurion named Servius were sent to assist the Slave Detective in searching all over again the countryside, but no poor, lifeless little body was found anywhere.

"I suppose," said Sollius to Flaccus after one of the vain searches, "that you have no nephew, or cousin, who might have expectations upon the death of your only child?"

"I have a nephew. He is in my business. But such a suspicion is unthinkable!" Flaccus burst out.

But Sollius knew that he would have to nose around the young man, and promptly did so. To his discouragement he found that he had to clear him from all suspicion.

Disconsolate, Sollius returned to Flaccus's villa, but, instead of entering to speak to its master, he went and sat on a low wall in the garden, laying his head in his hands and giving himself up to a bout of serious thinking. He did not like the sudden picture which his intuition, or his imagination, had presented to him.

His cogitations were abruptly interrupted by the appearance of Servius the Decurion saluting before him.

"Is it of use to search the neighbourhood further, Slave Detective?" he asked. "We have scoured every track, looked in every ditch: not a sign. There remain only the villas."

"Their slaves have all been questioned."

"That is not a search," said the Decurion.

"Have we the authority to enter?" asked Sollius.

The Decurion tapped his sword. "Plenty of authority here," he answered with a grin. "Slaves have been known to lie for their masters."

"I will ask Albius Flaccus," sighed Sollius, rose, and limped indoors for that purpose.

"You must not offend my neighbours," said Flaccus dubiously. "Some of them are important people, and they have all been approached, and have denied all knowledge of my poor little lass. Go easy, Slave Detective—yet, by the Furies, if one of them is the villain I'll appeal to the Emperor for his utmost punishment. There can be no mercy for such."

With the Decurion and his men to second him Sollius searched the nearer villas, but without success.

"They've taken the little one, whoever they are," said Servius, "into Rome itself, the best place to hide her. We shan't find her here."

They had just, most apologetically, searched the villa of Manilius, and since it was a very hot morning they strolled across the gardens towards the shade of the dovecote.

"I searched this," growled Servius. "It's a ruin, and filled with old, rank straw."

"I like dovecotes," said Sollius. "Let me look inside."

He opened the door. It was as Servius had described: ruinous, and littered with mildewed straw. Its very smell was one of long disuse. It was stuffy and hot inside, and Sollius came out almost at once. Standing in the doorway, he stared across towards the villa. In between, in a straight line from the dovecote, stood the beautiful little Greek pavilion.

"I could live very pleasantly in a villa like that," said the Decurion, "but I never shall."

"So could I," breathed Sollius, "and equally never shall—unless I buy my

freedom and come into riches. The dream of all slaves!"

The Decurion looked at Sollius. Was he dreaming, or thinking? His gaze was far away, and he seemed hardly conscious any longer of their task. Suddenly he tautened, and gave a crisp command.

"Set that straw alight. Don't stare at me, Decurion: do as I tell you!"

The means of making fire being in his equipment, Servius set to work at once, and soon clouds of smoke were streaming out from the dove-holes. With all the strength of his lungs Sollius cried out "Fire! Fire! Fire!" and at his gesture the three soldiers with the Decurion added their voices to his. Sollius kept his eyes upon the Greek pavilion—and the villa beyond. Presently the figure he had expected to see hurried out of the villa towards the pavilion.

"You can put out the fire, Servius!" he called, and he ambled forward towards the pavilion himself. He arrived in time to see the figure frenziedly pushing at the statue of Aesculapius.

"Help me, help me! Oh, it'll be too late!"

He entered the pavilion and added his strength. The statue turned as on a pivot, and a flight of descending steps became visible in the marble floor. The figure was stiffly and clumsily preparing to go down when a middle-aged woman surged up, carrying a baby.

"Oh, is she safe? My precious little Melissa!"

"Quite safe, lady. But I cannot understand how the fire happened. The lower chamber was filling with smoke. I thought it best to come up."

In that moment Manilius, erect and stern, stepped into the pavilion.

"O Slave Detective," he said, "be merciful to my tragedy in your report. Poor Cornelia is mad. The death of our little Melissa turned her brain. I should have watched her better. Let *me* be punished, not her. I should not have condoned—but have you ever seen an unhappy woman suddenly made happy? Well, it is over. Take the little Albia back to the noble Flaccus. My sorrow and shame are past words. . . ."

"Did no one in your household know—except this woman holding the child?"

"Our few slaves are very faithful," murmured Manilius.

"When were this passage and the chamber under the dovecote built?" asked Sollius.

"In the last days of the republic," Manilius answered. "An ancestor built them to hide in during the civil wars of Marius and Sulla; indeed, he saved his life so during the Sullan prescriptions. Come into the house, Cornelia. Hand back the child to the nurse."

"The pretty Melissa. . . ." murmured the old woman, kissed her and obeyed.

Her aged husband took her by the hand, and they tottered away together.

"Give me the babe," said Sollius gruffly, and he took it from the woman.

AT NIGHT ALL CATS ARE GREY

ERNEST DUDLEY

Illustrated by Derek Herdson

TONIGHT, WHEN THE traffic-lights wink at empty cross-roads, and the cats take over the streets, there'll be men on the prowl. You see, a smart operator can earn himself up to twenty quid a week at twenty-five bob a cat.

That's what the sallow-faced, soft-spoken owner of the dark, smelly back street pet-shop, with its jaded-looking rabbits and scraggy canaries, paid Charlie. Charlie would grumble privately that the pet-shop boss must make at least ten bob profit per cat, which considering they didn't stay at the back of the shop long enough even for a saucer of milk, wasn't bad pickings.

Still, Charlie wasn't doing so badly, either. The night before last, for instance, he'd made himself a useful five quid for just a couple of hours' work.

Easy come, easy go, though—most of it went playing the dogs. Which always amused Charlie. "Leads a cat and dog life, I do," he used to crack to his pals.

It was about the only joke that made him smile; he hadn't got much sense of humour. The little grin he would give in the darkness when he shoved a cat with expert dexterity into the long sack wasn't so humorous.

The long sack was Charlie's own brilliant idea. You see, as he shoved in each one he caught, he'd tie the sack just above the cat so he could carry as many as six at a time and they couldn't fight each other. Like carrying a string of sausages.

Mind you, one or two suffocated at first, and there'd been a bit of an ugly scene back at the pet-shop, when the sallow-faced man hadn't even coughed up half-price. But Charlie watched out for that now, and it hardly ever happened. I mean, a dead cat was no good. It had to be a live, healthy cat. Docile, home-loving, who liked and trusted people. No suspicious, half-wild mangey stray, all skin and bone, with half an ear missing. No, Charlie only had eyes for a well-fed, sleek-furred cat.

So last night he was out, as usual. A warm night and still, the sort of night a cat likes for taking a stroll and meeting up with other cats. Charlie arrived at the scene of operations in his shabby black van. This was a neighbourhood he hadn't worked before, though he'd given it the once-over a couple of nights running, in his usual professional way.

A classy part, and he noticed the cats from the well-off-looking houses, slipping in and out of the railings round the big square. He had taken a careful note of the cops on their beat: where they were at certain times. He had it all worked out.

He parked his van where it would hardly be noticed, in a dark side-street near the big square. He cut the engine and sat there, and he lit a cigarette, the light from his match showing his thin-lipped bony face under the shadow of his hat and his glinting, mean eyes. He didn't have very nice eyes, Charlie.

He enjoyed a quiet smoke and then stubbed it out and, putting a thin torch in his pocket, he took his sack and went along to the square. He reached the square and now he moved casually, slowly, his mean eyes darting from side to side. He saw a vague shape slip out through some railings a few yards ahead. He followed quietly, and then held his breath.

It was about the handsomest cat he'd seen, a big smoke-grey one. Charlie's thin lips tightened as he moved in—and the cat moved away.

"Come on, pretty cat," Charlie said softly. "There's a pretty cat."

He put quite a persuasive tone into his voice. But once more it moved away.

Charlie was the patient type; you need to be in his racket. He concentrated on the smoky-grey shape, always just ahead of him. He forgot all about the time, while the cat weaved among the shadows, became part of them sometimes, so that Charlie's eyes began to play him tricks. Sometimes the cat was only a teasing inch away from his outstretched fingers—and the next second it would be a yard away.

"Blimey, must be losing me grip," he muttered to himself. He had to duck out of sight once, when he nearly ran into a cop, and he cursed viciously under his breath as he waited until the flipping bogey had gone. He was sure he'd never set eyes on the smoke-grey cat again. It would have gone, for sure.

But it hadn't: he suddenly saw it. There it was, almost as if it had waited for him. His nerves tingled with excited anticipation. He could almost feel the soft furry neck in his sure, swift grip.

He could feel himself sweating a little with the suspense. Little drops of perspiration were running down his upper lip.

He went after the cat, determined to nab it. He realized he was out of the quiet square with the posh houses, and ahead lay some dark, derelict buildings. The cat suddenly disappeared into one of them. Charlie slipped after it, through a rotting doorway, and down some stairs. At the bottom of the stairs a door stood open. Charlie clicked on his torch and went in. The door slammed behind him; he jumped and dropped the torch. In the darkness he saw the gleam of the cat's eyes. Then, beyond them, another pair of eyes lit up—and another pair of eyes, and another, until wherever Charlie looked, he encountered the same implacable stare.

Hundreds of eyes glowed and pulsed in the darkness, some round, golden eyes, some almond, greenish eyes. Now they seemed to be closing in on him, circling round, nearer and nearer. He backed towards the door, panic catching him by the throat, but found himself against the damp wall.

"Stop watching me," he heard him-


Del

self telling the eyes. "Stop—I'm very fond of dumb animals."

It was as if what he'd said was a signal. Something soft and furry, yet like coiled steel landed on Charlie's shoulder, he felt razor-sharp claws on his neck. Now all round him the eyes flashed upwards, as the things launched themselves at him, and clawed and clung. Charlie screamed and then, overpowered by the striking, clawing shapes that bore him down, collapsed beneath them.

The policeman Charlie had dodged earlier was chatting to another cop on the corner of the street of derelict houses, when they heard the screams.

"Cripes, did you hear that?" the first cop said, and a shiver started down the nape of his neck.

The other cop's eyes bulged; it sounded like someone was being stabbed to death. He gave a gulp and began moving. Fast.

As they dashed down to the cellar, Charlie yelled for the last time. It was a horrid, blood-chilling noise. They found him in the light of their torches.

He was dead, all right. But what, they asked each other, had made him holler out? The place was empty, and they'd seen no one come out. What had he been yelling for? Why had he died?

You see, they couldn't see a mark on him. Not a scratch.

To Lethe's gloom, but not its quiet,
The pain without the peace of death!

THOMAS CAMPBELL.

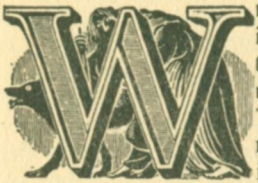
From his brimstone bed at break of day
  A walking the Devil is gone,
To visit his snug little farm the earth,
  And see how his stock goes on.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE.

BEGGARS ON HORSEBACK

LEE GIFFORD

Illustrated by Nicholas Wadley



HY NOT FACE it? He'd got to make more money. Though business was good, it needed a boost.

They'd both bounced up in life, him and Deb—née Lily Smith. Deb from Court of Angels, Islington, him from Gold's back-street grocery shop with Pop, unshaven, scraping mould off cheese; Mam sloshing water as, red-armed, she scrubbed down the counters.

Deb was tops, mind you: a wife who'd give any man a lift. A real blue-blooder, you'd have thought. For all his being a high-class store proprietor he, Jacob Gold, needed that lift. He wasn't nimble-minded like Deb: not that kind of way. Aping folk he'd been taught to consider his betters just wasn't his tipple.

Take twenty-four off fifty-seven; he could have been her dad one and a half times over. You wouldn't have thought that a man at his time of life could have felt so warmly about anyone: but that's how he felt about Deb. Hot-blooded Jacob, that was him, all right.

Come Thursday, she'd be back from visiting her friend Lois. He'd missed her like hell; he felt lonely, and God forsaken, without even Cuth at the week-end. Mind you, Deb was cool—priced herself high. Sometimes it'd take furs, or a diamond ring, to melt the ice out of those baby-blue eyes.

Molly now—twenty-nine years they'd been married—had been an old-fashioned body. Contented. Ought to have had half a dozen kids; but it hadn't happened that way. There was only Cuthbert. Maybe they deserved the trouble he'd been, giving him a name like that.

With Cuth and Deb the business had had a job coping, for all it was a sizeable top notcher, and he'd spent his life building it up. The flat he'd fixed above—the love nest—was top notcher, too. Seated at his office table its gleaming fitments took life, and Jacob whistled softly, making Miss Trimble glance up from her ledger.

He pictured Molly inspecting the kitchen with all its gadgets. Poor Molly had never asked for anything: like mother, like son, didn't apply to Cuth. He thought of a couple of young birds, their vast mouths perpetually open.

Those mouths needed a helluva lot of filling. There was the car bought recently for Cuth, and the bills he'd settled for the young rascal. And if Deb's ravenous hunger wasn't satisfied with her youth and her gilded looks mightn't she find someone else? The thought stabbed like a

knife, and he grunted, again disturbing Miss Trimble.

"Did you know there'd been a fire at Bragg's, Mr. Gold?" Cutting his thoughts, the girl spoke suddenly.

Fire! A word can act like a match: no one could say he wasn't quick off the mark. Miss Trimble talked on, but he only half listened.

The fire, his fire, must be strictly limited. Rosy dreams blacked out Miss Trimble's voice. He visualized queueing crowds at his salvage sale; did another kind of arithmetic than that contained in his open ledger. His dark eyes rounded and bright, he nervously twisted a coat button. Once again he startled Miss Trimble by rising and pacing the office.

The sooner he started things the better. Tomorrow, Tuesday night, would do: it would give him enough time to plan and prepare, yet cut down the jellifying your guts, waiting period. That way, when Deb got back, it'd be all over; but for collecting the insurance. His sleeping opposite at Ma Nicholson's during Deb's absence was providential.

Next day snailed past: Jacob had spent a wakeful night, planning. Early in the morning he arranged for a display of chiffons and muslins at a selected spot. Next, he visited the flat. His intention was not to involve his home in the coming adventure, and this was aided by the ample proportions of his business, and the sweeping length of its frontage. However, as Mam used to say: "Better to be sure than sorry."

He kept a sizeable amount of liquid cash on the pemises—a habit Inland Revenue methods fostered—and just now the notes had piled high in readiness for a business transaction. The safe was behind his bed's quilted satin headboard, and he emptied it into a suitcase.

By tea-time his inside squirmed like a tin of live bait waiting for the hook, and he found himself snapping at the assistants, and wanting to bash Miss Trimble. Determinedly, he clamped down on his nerves, and forced his thick features into a smile.

That evening Jacob couldn't stop talking—as if he'd been on the bottle, almost—and he thought plump Ma Nicholson watched him oddly. There was a daft play on telly. He was a peaceful, law-abiding chap at heart, and this breaking and looting gangster stuff dug under his toenails.

He excused himself early, and sat at his window looking at the long, low frontage opposite, with "GOLD'S" on the fascia: gold letters on a white ground. To the left: that's where the flames'd start flickering—he could see them already. His glance went farther left still, to the corner of the building, and the windows of the flat.

His brightened fancy saw light there, too. The reflection of a street lamp: momentarily, he'd thought it was a light shining through an open door. He rose and paced the room, then flung himself on the bed fully dressed. He heard the clock pound out the hours.

Two o'clock. In daylight, a bedroom door opened soundlessly; not with a nerve-splitting crack. At night, even your breathing echoed. A stair creaked, tweaking his hair, and turn-

ing his bowels to worms writhing in water. The front door showed a special night-time cussedness.

The few yards of road seemed like an endless London street, and though his fingers turned and twisted, his key boggled at the lock. Approaching footsteps sounded, and his heart tore madly at his throat, plunged and raced on as if chased by devils. The key went in.

A couple returning from a dance. He felt almost sure they hadn't seen him, or heard the door groan as he pushed it open. Breathless, he nearly fell inside. He'd got to go through with things now. Or had he? Wasn't there still time to draw back? Nit-wit that he was. Cash! CASH! C-A-S-H! The words came alive, seeming to pour from a metal throat in blasts of ever-rising sound. Hysteria got him. Hands to ears, he tried to shut out the din.

Cash was the world's laurel wreath, wasn't it? Cash bought you luxury flats—and wives like Deb. When the years had worn you out, cash brought respect. His self-control salvaged, he turned left through the archway.

No need to use his torch: the street lamp would serve. It picked out the display of inflammable materials half shrouding in ghostly fashion the wooden stairway leading to the showroom. No need to slosh them with petrol: they'd act as paper to his blaze. Sop the wood: here; here; and here. Now pools of it—beneath, and on the stairs. His lighter now. Or would a match serve better?

The match spluttered, and jerked off its head. He struck another, and it scorched his fingers. Breathing noisily, he struck again. The match flared up, and burned steadily. He jabbed it forward, and with a "woof", the fire was born, singeing his hair, and forcing him into premature retreat. Masses of petrol-fevered flames had appeared. Clutching his matches, Jacob ran.

At the door of his temporary lodgings realization of the loss of his lighter and the petrol bottle came at him like a prize-fighter's fist. If the fire didn't eliminate all traces. . . . Doggedly, he kicked the supposition aside. A flickering showed across the street. He must get upstairs. . . . Quickly. Pain seared his chest; and his teeth were chattering.

What was that? The harsh sound was a cosh battering his nerves, a wrench forcing the bones of his skull apart before pressing them inward. His moist hands clung to the banister. His breath came out whistling. Suddenly he wanted to slash old man Nicholson: to razor the guts out of all those who coughed loudly, hackingly, at night.

At last. The bedroom door handle rattled under his hand like pebbles on a tin roof. Somehow he got inside the room. Waves of sensation chased each other up and down the back of his neck. Gasping, he shut the door.

* * *

How long had he been lying on the bed? What business had he pandering to a thumping heart, and yellow nerves? This wasn't the time to give in.

As he struggled up, the room

seemed filled with an orange glow. No time, or need for caution now! He must get downstairs! Give the alarm! . . .

"Operator," the phone might have been dead; only he knew it wasn't. He reckoned those perishers were asleep! He'd kick up merry hell tomorrow. Tomorrow, he wouldn't half. . . .

"Operator. Give me the police, the —the——" what was he saying? "Operator—the fire brigade. Yes. It's urgent. . . . Gold's. Jacob Gold speaking. . . ."

Hell! If they didn't get a move on his whole business would be gutted out! He fumed, holding on to the phone. Nicholson appeared at the stair-head, Mrs. Nicholson, in curling pins and minus her false teeth, peering over his shoulder.

"It's okay, Mr. Gold: don't fash yourself," Mrs. Nicholson said. He felt her glance run over his body. "I declare! You've got dressed pretty sharp."

Clothes half off had been his plan: the remembrance misted over. There were more important things. . . . He heard a bell clanging.

Old man Nicholson was at his elbow. Small, and balding. Carroty. In a puce dressing-gown.

"It's okay, Mr. Gold, like she said." He felt a mouse under those sharp green eyes. "Someone outside's got through."

"There isn't half a flare!" Mrs. Nicholson controlled her excitement, and Jacob wondered absently why she didn't fetch her teeth. "You'll be heavily insured I'm thinking, Mr. Gold?"

"There's nothing you can do 'cept be thankful you and Mrs. Gold's out of it." Gently, Nicholson took over the receiver. "For all you might never feel a thing, it's no fun being kippered in your sleep."

Hell! The flat! He'd never reckoned. . . . Their things—Deb's things! The things he'd bought her. . . .

Somehow, he was outside. Already the firemen had forced an entrance. The street seemed chock-a-block: full of noise, and people, and smoke that tickled his nose, and fastened upon his throat. Because of the smoke he coughed. Why, oh why hadn't he brandied himself up, and been first to give the alarm? He would have, too, if he'd dreamed of the fire catching on so fast—for all the pain in his chest, and the way his breathing seemed to have got stuck.

Water; the coldness of fear, and the night; muck; a sinuous shape threatening to trip him up. People. So many clattering, swaying, shoving people: you'd think it was their business, their pockets. He tried to push through them, but couldn't. Maybe he didn't feel good. Maybe at heart he preferred to prod feebly, and so keep out of that glare of light and play of water. Maybe the acrid stench of smoke had upset him.

An ambulance drove up. People scattered.

"It's the flat," a woman in front said. She pointed to the east corner of the premises. "Mr. and Mrs. Gold are trapped up there."

Being short, Jacob could see noth-

ing but bodies and heads. He dug his fingers into an adjacent back.

"What the hell?" The man switched round angrily.

"Let me past, will you?" Sweat ran off Jacob's sallow face. "I'm Gold, Jacob Gold." His voice rose to a squeak.

The crowd turned friendly, and pressed his thick body forward. Voices hummed with interest, and curiosity. Jacob found himself at the foot of a ladder close to a young fireman who was handling the hose from outside. There were sparks at the flat's window, and billowing smoke. He'd never meant to involve their home. Through the dry summer everything must have been ready to catch, even without his petrol dousings. The bottle, and his lighter, wouldn't tell tales now.

What would Deb say? Her pretty-pretties eaten by those cruel—if blessed—flames. Yet, maybe a thorough job was best, and as comfort she should have a whopping cheque. He visualized the Insurance Company's payment—saw the narrow, paper slip. . . .

"I'm Jacob Gold," he told the fireman. His voice was normal, high, but not unpleasantly so. "The flat's empty: see?"

A blessing: that's what his leaving others to get cracking had turned out. If he hadn't plonked down on the bed his nerves might have prodded him into hasty action. He'd always been a philosophically minded sort of cove, and now he reflected that life and fishing worked on similar lines. The thing was to jerk the hook right. Too soon, and the fish had second thoughts. Too late, and he'd got wise. Opportunity's present fish had had the right treatment. Though the flat had been gutted, he wasn't grumbling.

Except for one bobby, everyone had left, and all was quiet and squelchingly black. Even the Nicholsons had gone home, and no one questioned his desire to stay and take stock of the damage. He felt calm. For all his taut nerves, there wasn't a tremor about him. He'd got second wind, he reckoned, and was ready to keep going.

The west end of the premises, adjoining a garage and furniture showrooms, was unharmed. Suppose the fire had spread. He pictured furniture crackling up in flames, cars and petrol exploding. No salvage sale then. Human life might even have been lost. He kicked the thought aside. It hadn't happened: so what? And tomorrow—or maybe the day after—Gold's would be open as usual.

There was an anthracite stove still burning, and he raked it, and lifted the damper. He'd have to work by candle-light; but no one could see him from the street. The bobby's job was sentry-go outside. While waiting for the fire to draw up he hauled rolls of materials out of the fixtures, and piled them nearby. At fifty-seven, it was back-breaking work. His sweat glands had got active again, and the old heart was pounding. He looked round, wishing he had something on wheels.

He dumped more rolls. The stove

had begun roaring, and the sound made him shiver.

He opened the fire, and thrust folded ends—two or three rolls at a time—against its red-hot bars. The pain was back in his chest, and he paused, and let out his breath. His hair dripped sweat, and his face was scorched dull red. The place, so recently purged of fire, was filled with pungent smoke.

That would about do it. The singed ends would make those pieces first-class sale fodder. He'd had enough though, and it was time to clear up.

He dragged out a few more rolls, and pressed them down endways in the wet.

Sam King—a friend of Jacob's—was the Buoy Insurance Company's valuation man. Jacob received him on the following afternoon.

"Some to-do, Jacob boy." Sam's voice was tuned sympathetically as his watchful dark eyes swivelled round. "Lucky you and the missis were sleeping out."

He walked over to some piled materials, and gently fingered a piece. "Nice bit of stuff. It'd just suit my Ruth."

"That lot wasn't touched: have a dekko through, Sam," Jacob said. "There's one there'd look well against your Reba's dark colouring. Our Miss Pearce could make it up."

The men's eyes met expressionlessly. Sam selected several rolls, and put them aside. Others he contrived to knock over into a pool of blackened water, on which he cursed himself for a clumsy clot. Ruth and Reba could do with some dresses, he agreed. They needed nylons, and lingerie too. He thought Ruth might fancy a grey squirrel coat.

They moved on to the lingerie, and a pile of that toppled over also. "Bumble-armed Sam: that's me," Sam commented ruefully. His foot splayed, and spread across the frothy pile which he stepped over quickly, leaving black marks on silk and nylon surfaces. He frowned, clicking his tongue.

"The floor's in such a state you've only to drop a thing to muck it up," he remarked.

He bunched the lingerie, and flung it on to a counter. Somehow his boots had become reinvolved, and some lace was ripped off. Nonchalantly, he made entries in his notebook.

Sam was a real help; and Deb would be home tomorrow. Jacob almost wanted to shout the words. The reaction from stress had made him a little drunk, but he trod down his exhilaration.

"That's about all here." He met Sam's quick, hot little eyes. "We'll take furs next, don't you think? There's a dyed musquash'd suit your Reba tops. . . ."

That evening Jacob inspected the burnt-out flat, mounting the outside concrete stairway slowly. He felt exhausted, and his heart protested grumpily after its too many leaps through the hoop. He decided to have a check-up, and perhaps a holiday—just him and Deb—when the fire business was all cleaned up.

He thought about Deb: the little rogue had twisted him endways, danced rock 'n' roll on his nerves.

Funny: but wasn't life a helluva scream? All those years he'd been what you'd call happily married to Molly. If it hadn't been for Cuthbert. . . .

Cuth was a bind still—wouldn't ever be anything else, he reckoned. Tall and big; like Molly's folk. Dark. Those liquid, flashing eyes. To think him and dumpy Molly had produced such a showy, handsome beggar. His son. Molly's son. For all the trouble and—and disappointment the boy had been, he was damn'd proud. . . .

Molly was milk: Deb Angels on Horseback. Angels on horseback rode to the devil—no! Beggars. He was that weary, he was mixing it up.

He picked his way to the kitchen that was, that had been tops: Molly wouldn't half have been flabbergasted! Gleaming chromium, vivid contemporary colours, every dodge you could look for. Though he'd

wangled out of the war himself, momentarily he saw the Blitz as others, bombed out, had seen it.

Now for the bedroom: his and Deb's. He remembered that time he'd bought her the diamond pendant—Cuth hadn't been demanding just then. How she'd flung her arms round his neck. . . .

The bedroom was a blackened mess. The safe was a hole in the wall: good job he'd had the foresight to empty it. All Deb's beautiful things gone to ashes; but the poor kid should have her pick of model gowns. Maybe he'd even sport her a mink stole or a coat.

He turned to go, and trod on something small and hard. Stooping, he picked it up.

A wedding ring: it couldn't be hers! His glasses! Where in Hell's name had his glasses got to? He tore them out of the case, dropped them and scrabbled among the ashes.

"Jacob to Deborah". Clasped hands; then: "Till death". Sentimental old thing Deb had called him, reading the inscription.

Why wasn't Deb wearing her ring? He'd noticed it when seeing her off at the station, was it really only last Saturday? Her wedding ring, and the large half-hoop of diamonds. He'd thought how well the jewellery suited her pretty hand.

Deb must have come back. Last night. He'd fancied a light was burning. Unaware of his plans, she had preferred not to disturb him at that late hour. She must have been lying in her first relaxed sleep, when . . .

Hardly sane, he began feverishly searching. Charred bits and pieces everywhere: a burnt mirror; the top of a brush; a bit of the warped outside frame of the safe. His mouth was leather. His throat had closed over. Ashes lay thick. Disturbed, they fluttered about; whispering. Part of the floor had collapsed into the showroom beneath.

Among scraps of partly burned materials he found a piece of her coat. She'd looked grand in that—his angel. He remembered seeing her face at the train window: thinking how ducky her blue eyes were against the blue speckled cloth. . . .

"That's where he fell," Deb said, peering through the hole in the floor. "Heart attack, supposed to be." She glanced round the blackened bedroom, and shuddered. "I can't believe I was here just before it happened, packing up, and scribbling that note."

Cuthbert reached out, and pulled her away. "It beats me, darling, why you left the note and your wedding ring after finding the safe empty."

"I was wound up, and kept going," she tried to explain. "That empty safe bashed me head on—looked almost as if he'd suspected."

"Good job I kept my wits, and we missed the boat."

She nodded slowly. "Your dad could be rather sweet, Cuthbert. 'Till death'—silly old stodge: still it's worked out." She jerked back her head as if throwing something off, and lifted her blue eyes, and looked at him. "Now let's go, shall we?" her breath came out softly. "That new place in Moray Street, don't you think? I could eat a horse."

SHED IN ANGER

ROBERT TURNBULL

Illustrated by R. A. H. Neave

TAKE: OF POWDERED unicorn's horn; one squiggle." That was a pity. He had no unicorn's horn. Still, powdered sugar would do. More nutritious, in fact. And why couldn't witches write their quantities in grammes and kilos instead of these weird squiggles? He would just have to guess the amounts.

"Of the liver of an animal killed in the act of Love; three double squiggles." He reached for the liver. He couldn't guarantee that it had been killed at the critical moment, but it was a rabbit liver so there was an odds-on chance that it would be all right.

"Of the hair of the dead person; twelve strands, cut with a steel." Yes, he had those. Cut with scissors, but that could hardly matter.

"Of tears, shed not in sorrow but in anger; twenty." A pinch of salt in the mixture would do for that. Oh! No salt left and too late to get any. Well, never mind. Omit that item. Probably not important, anyway.

"Add them slowly to dew gathered before dawn on Midwinter's Day. Let your fire be of dried nightshade leaves and boil the potion in the skull-bone of a mule."

He threw the ingredients into a saucepan, ran in a little water from the tap and turned on the gas-ring. There was a bubbling as the sugar dissolved and the liver wrinkled up, staining the water red-brown. Suddenly, to his surprise, he noticed that the hairs also were dissolving. Not simultaneously, but one after the other with a definite constant interval between each. The first ones made the fluid clearer, the later ones slowly turned it blue. Finally, the mixture stopped boiling and, despite the blazing gas-ring beneath it, became quite cold. He decided that it was ready.

Now he must get the body.

He drew the curtain aside. A clear night, moonless and dry. Ideal! He picked up his spade and a sack; he pocketed a screwdriver and his torch.

The streets were deserted and silent. An occasional watchman's brazier flickered a little life into the air, but otherwise the town was dead. He passed the doctor's house. Doctors—what did they know of life and death? If they had spent less time on penicillin and more on learning the tested secrets of the past he would have been spared this journey. They—and this doctor in particular—must be taught a lesson. He would do the teaching. His wisdom was more than the sum of theirs. Didn't the ancients themselves throw thoughts into his mind? Doctors had deprived him of all he had; the ancients would make good his loss.

He reached the boundary of the cemetery. The gate was somewhere on the north side. He walked cautiously beside the north wall, listening. A pair of feet were distant, were nearer, were here.

"Looking for a body, sir?" A policeman, lonely on his beat, anxious for a joke to break the boredom.

"Yes, as a matter of fact, I am. Shall I get one in here?"

"I wouldn't have anything to do with bodies if I was you. Nasty unsociable things they are. Sit for hours and never move nor say a word. Sooner have a cat myself. Good night, sir."

"Good night, officer." What fools they were, ordinary men, not to know the truth when they heard it!

He crossed the wall and rapidly found the grave beside which, yesterday, in the rain they had stood. "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust"? No. Not for this one. The loose, newly-dug earth was soon removed, exposing the coffin. Half an hour's warm work. The next stage was a little trickier. To undo each screw, he had to move the torch and refocus it, balancing it precariously on mounds of earth. Often it fell and he had to start again. At length he got the lid off. His brother's pale face ignored him; he slept on undisturbed.

It was a struggle, half in the grave

and half out, to lift the body up, but a struggle made easier by the fact that *rigor mortis* had almost completely passed ofl.

"Paul, Paul, I have you. You shouldn't have died. You shouldn't. But don't worry; I can help you. I can make you live again."

For a moment he held the corpse in what was almost an embrace and then, remembering the time, he folded the body and drew the sack over it, head and feet first.

He moved cautiously out of the cemetery, leaving behind him a disturbed grave; no time to tidy it up. He listened for the policeman. A joke once was a joke, but a joke twice, especially now that the sack was full, would make anyone suspicious. No sound. He slipped along the north wall and back to the deserted streets. Not moving as fast now as when he had come. The load, even on the shoulders of a strong man, was heavy. He paused for breath, resting the sack-clad corpse on the doctor's doorstep. It seemed a pleasantly ironical gesture.

With a final effort he strode almost home and then, at the last moment, turned off into the empty garage where he propped the body in a sitting position against the work-bench.

"Good night, Paul. You'll be happy here among your tools and things. I'm sorry your motor-bike isn't back yet, but possibly you hate it for killing you. Don't worry. I'll come tomorrow and bring you back to life. Good night."

Back in the house he gave a last suspicious glance at the potion. It was still blue and cold. Then he settled down in his armchair in front of the fire and waited, partly for sleep and partly for his voices. They always came when he slept like this, yet they weren't dreams; he was awake when he heard them. Tonight he needed them in particular; the last page of the recipe—how to use the potion—was missing. But when they came they were most unhelpful.

"Necrophile!"

"Stupid man. Brother-snatcher."

"You don't expect it to work, do you?"

"No. He expects us to do the work."

They were in a jovial, teasing mood. No advice given.

In the morning he woke with an uneasy feeling of something to do. Oh, yes. Paul to be brought back to life. The voices hadn't been any use, but he was clever enough to stand alone, to do it without their help. Of course it would work.

He poured the potion into a jug, picked up a cup and went out to the garage. The body was just where he had left it, but he walked round it to see if the familiar surroundings had stimulated a return to life. No sign.

"Well, Paul, I'm back. In a few minutes you will be quite all right again."

He knelt down and, cradling the corpse in his left arm, steadying its head with his chin and shoulder, held the cup to its lips.

"Drink this. It will give you life again."

But the corpse didn't drink.

"Please drink it. You must."

But the lips didn't move and the fluid trickled, drop by precious drop, down on to the grave-clothes.

"Perhaps you can't swallow."

He looked anxiously round the garage. Sack? Vice? Spanners? Piston rings? Oil-can? Oil-can! That would do. It was one of the type which supply either single drops or, if squeezed, gushes of a millilitre or two. He filled it with the potion, forced the nozzle over the corpse's tongue to the back of its throat, and squeezed several times.

"You'll begin to feel better as soon as that trickles down into your stomach."

He stood back to watch. One minute . . . two minutes . . . three minutes . . . four minutes . . . five minutes. Still no movement. Give him some more. Ten minutes. Still no movement. "Paul, you must be feeling better." Fifteen. "Paul. It's good for you. It's better than anything you got in hospital."

Hospital! Transfusion! Perhaps that was the way to give it. He picked up the can again and pushed the nozzle under the skin of the body's right forearm. He squeezed and waited. Squeezed and waited. Nothing happened.

"You're not trying. I'm doing everything I can to help you, but you must try to help yourself as well."

Still no movement.

Perhaps the whole potion had to be given before it would work. He emptied the oil-can into the arm, refilled it from the jug and emptied it again. A large blister was forming under the skin. He massaged it gently to spread the fluid right up the arm. When the blister had been dispersed, he filled the can with what remained of the potion and injected it urgently.

"Come on, Paul. You've had it all now. You must be feeling some changes. Try to wriggle a finger or a toe. Anything to show me you're beginning to revive."

But the corpse remained still.

"You're not trying. I've worked hard for you and you repay me by not trying."

He kicked his brother's body and it slipped sideways, sprawling in a pool of oil, with an arm outstretched as if pointing. At the electric drill. Of course, electricity. In that other hospital hadn't he himself had electricity pushed through him and hadn't he twitched and wriggled? He could remember that despite the anæsthetic.

The voices congratulated him.

"Well done. Well done."

"We knew you wouldn't let us down."

He seized the drill and ripped the flex off it. The voices guided him.

"One wire to each arm. That way the current crosses the base of the heart."

"And the earth to his nose, to keep his brain cool."

The wires were in place. This would work. It must. It must. Nervously he fingered the switch, afraid that his last hope would fail him also. With an anxious twitch he pulled the switch on.

There was a knocking at the door.

"All right. All right. I'm coming."

He took a pace towards the door. Arms flapping, head bobbing, the

corpse slithered across the floor after him. He turned in ecstasy.

"I've done it. I told you I would, Paul. I haven't failed you. Stay there while I get rid of these people."

He took another step and again the corpse followed him.

"No, wait here. It wouldn't do for you to be seen alive just yet."

Another step, Another wriggle.

"I must go out there alone. You—wait—here—and . . ."

He looked down at his feet. The flex was tangled round his left ankle. He undid it and stepped tentatively towards the door. The corpse did not follow. He turned back to it sobbing.

The door opened behind him.

"Excuse me, sir. We're investigating the question of a disturbed grave up in the Paradise Cemetery and we have reason to believe that you can help us."

Kneeling on the floor he clasped his brother, still unmoving, to him. He put his face close to the dead face. "You've let me down. I don't think you want to live. I've done everything I could for you. You've done nothing. Nothing. You haven't tried."

He pummelled the corpse's back and, in his rage and frustration, began to cry. Tears, shed not in sorrow but in anger, trickled down his face and dropped, one by one, on to the pale eyelids.

"Make a note that when cautioned the prisoner said, 'He was my brother and I naturally wanted to help him. If he had also made an effort, I would have succeeded.'" The sergeant turned to the constable and muttered confidingly, "We have to note these things down, but of course he's as daft as anything. Yes; as daft . . . as . . . No! No! Don't! Get away! Get aw . . ." His dying words were strangled into silence.

Afterwards, two men standing up looked down at two lying on the floor. One, oil-stained, said:

"I really don't know how to begin to thank you, James. You've done so much for me, that to say I'm very grateful only scratches the surface of what I ought to say. By the way, don't you think we were perhaps a little abrupt in our dealings with these gentlemen?" He nudged a uniformed body with his toe. "Is there any more of that blue stuff? I wonder if it would work on them?"

THE INTERLUDE

CONSTANCE OLLE

FOR A MOMENT MY landlady's ample figure was framed in the soft orange glow of the doorway. Then she was gone; the door closed, sealing in the cosy warmth and leaving me alone on the path with only the wind for company.

The sky was densely black with no promise of relief, just the kind of night Mother must have meant when she'd wondered if I'd ever be able to stick night duty. I remembered her anxious voice and father's terse reply, "We all have to begin by pounding the beat." Dear old Dad, lucky old Dad with his nice safe job at County Headquarters.

My mother had wanted a musical career for me. She played well herself and always insisted that mine were pianist's hands with their long slender fingers. Maybe: but as my fingers had grown, so had my feet! "Creditable size twelves," Dad had argued; "the lad's a natural copper." He was right, I was happy in the force, except on a night like this.

I'd come a long way from my "digs", through lonely tree-lined roads, past large bleak houses, when the police box loomed up out of the misty wetness, a welcome haven for a few minutes while I checked with the station. Outside again I was greeted by a slow rumble of thunder followed by a bright flash. "Why worry?" I thought. "It can't get much worse." But I was wrong.

When the storm reached its full height I was in a small, muddy lane where the trees, growing thickly overhead, gave a certain protection. But the rain was relentless and I doubted if even my waterproof clothing would stand up to much more of it. Then I remembered an empty house nearby with a large front porch. I could stay there during the worst of the storm and quicken my pace to make up for lost time afterwards.

Lightning revealed the creeper-covered gate as I unlatched it and followed the steadily flooding path to the house, and while I sheltered in the porch a long column of water gushed through a hole in its roof, forcing me back against the door, which groaned at my weight as the rusty lock gave way. Pushing into the hall I stood for a moment enjoying the dryness inside and listening to the thunder and to the swirling wind buffeting at the old cracked windows.

Then I became aware of another sound: the compelling music of a piano, played slowly with forceful precision, vying, it seemed, with the storm itself; and then more quietly, powerful still, yet soothing as if to tame nature's wildness into submission. I recognized my mother's favourite Rachmaninov. Strange to hear it in these unlikely surroundings.

I was puzzled, knowing the place to be listed as empty war-damaged

property. Could some unauthorized person be hiding here? Some fugitive from justice perhaps. I knew that the back windows looked out on to dense woodland and there need be no fear of discovery for weeks. I flashed my torch round the hall. The floor was thickly carpeted though dusty and uncared for; it creaked a little as I made my way towards the back rooms. Something touched my face and I started, but it was only a cobweb. A mouse scuttled across my path and disappeared into the skirting. The music was closer now, it was all round me, echoing through the hall, its melancholy strains merging with the sad old house. There was only one door immediately in front of me and I paused, listening; never had I heard this second concerto more beautifully rendered on a single instrument. It seemed almost a sin to interrupt. Then, hardening my heart, I burst suddenly into the room.

Complete darkness met me, broken only by the beam from my own torch. I directed it round the room, revealing luxurious furnishings thick with dust. Under a partly boarded window stood a large grand, its keyboard open—the piano stool empty! I was the only living presence in the room.

Then suddenly I was afraid. My scalp tingled with fear as the music surged all around, mysterious, intangible, like some hungry soul reaching out, searching for something, someone. I was swamped in the piercing sweetness of it, my strength ebbing slowly away. And then I knew that if ever I was to leave that room it must be now, this very moment. I turned and fled. Out of the room, out of the house, along the path, out of the gate. Into the little muddy lane where the trees dripped slowly; I realized for the first time that the storm was over and the rain had settled into a thin misty drizzle.

I had been walking in the cold sobering air for some time when I began to feel rather ashamed. What a hero! At the first sign of anything unusual my only steps had been long quick ones in the opposite direction.

My sergeant came into view and his earthy voice was a welcome diversion. "Well, 42, fine weather we've had. Anything exciting happened?"

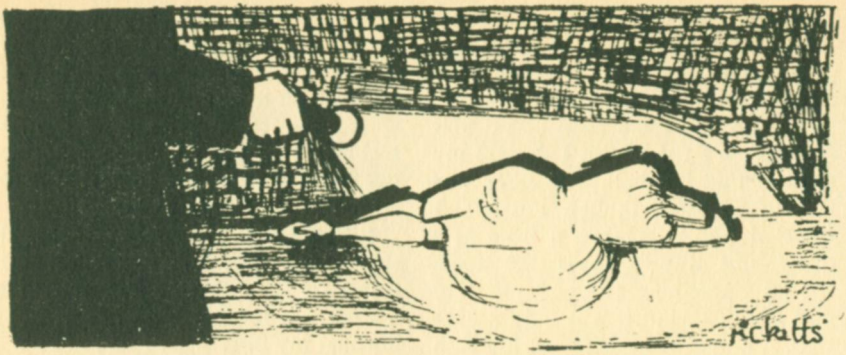
"No, serg, quiet night so far." I sounded calm, but I was still curious. "That house in Spinney Lane, sir. Bomb damage property. Been empty a long time, hasn't it?"

He laughed, "Old Mrs. Webster's place you mean? Yes, that's empty and likely to remain so. The old lady's daughter was killed by blast from a bomb that dropped in the wood behind the house. She was a famous concert pianist you know."

My throat was dry as I answered. "No, I didn't know."

The sergeant's voice droaned on, "Nutty as they come she is, swears her daughter comes back and plays at her old grand piano. Won't have it moved, and won't sell the house at any price." He laughed again. "You don't half get 'em, don't you?"

It isn't easy to speak when your tongue clings stubbornly to the roof of your mouth, but, "Yes," I managed. "You do indeed."



A STAR TOO MANY

JON H. THOMSON

Illustrated by Michael Ricketts

P.C. ROBERTSON WAS IN A hurry to get home. It had been a busy night at the station, and by the time he had written up his report, he'd missed the last bus.

The Station Sergeant gave him a lift to Ruel Street, and from there he took the short cut, across a derelict waste of tumbledown houses, to Castle Street.

This wasteland had been earmarked for a new housing estate, but meantime, during the day, it was the playground for dogs and children, while at night cats and other nocturnal creatures prowled amid its ruins. In the dark, it was a place to hurry through quickly.

Robertson had only gone about fifty yards when he saw her. She was lying against the base of a broken-down wash house wall. The moonlight bathed her body in pure silver, and lying there, her long silver hair cascading over her slender shoulders, the sequins of her dance dress sparkling like a galaxy of stars, and the layers of her petticoats frothing above her long, slender legs, she looked like a sleeping beauty on a stage set.

But—P.C. Robertson felt sick—sleeping beauties lie on feather beds in palaces, not in muddy puddles at the back of a derelict tenement, with their necks broken. He bent down, hopefully, to feel the girl's pulse. Her wrist was still warm, but as he had guessed, there was no pulse beat.

Anger so violent that it scalded through his veins and blinded his eyes with a red film, seized the policeman. Somewhere, not far away, perhaps even yet lurking in the nearby shadows, was a man—a less than man—who had killed wantonly for the third time in as many weeks. Rob-

ertson controlled his rage, and blew an urgent summons on his whistle. He shone his torch searchingly round the area, but all he could see were piles of old rubble and old cans, and the green pinpoints of light from a cat's eyes as they reflected the light from his torch.

In answer to his blast, another constable came panting to him, stumbling over the piled-up waste in his hurry. He stopped when he came to Robertson, and stood looking down at the girl. His hand went up to his mouth, as if he too wanted to be sick, and as his arm went to his mouth, the moon, unfeeling, gaily reflected back the shining buttons on his cuff.

A passer-by joined them. More police were summoned. The district was cordoned off. Hundreds of people were interviewed. Hundreds of statements were taken. And at the end of it all, they were no further forward.

For days, terror lurked in every quiet street and every dark, deserted corner of the town. Women were afraid to leave their homes after dark. Men formed themselves into vigilante groups. Everybody harassed the police with suggestions and theories, and through it all the police went on working stolidly, painstakingly sifting the little evidence they had.

Constable Robertson felt he had a special stake in the matter. Every evening, when he was off duty, he sat brooding at the fireside, gazing unseeing into the flames, trying to recall every incident, every detail of the night when he'd found a young girl lying dead in the moonlight. He would sit hour after hour, certain in his mind there was something he had overlooked, some vital pointer that would lead to the murderer, but always the detail eluded him.

One night his wife lost patience with him.

"Forget it, Jack. You did all you could. There's nothing more you can do, and this brooding won't help——"

"How can I forget?" he stared at his wife, and shook his head.

"Jean," he held out his arms and pulled her to him. "I shall never rest till he's caught. You see," his voice wavered, "when I saw her lying there, she looked so like you—the way I've seen you lie in bed, when I've come home late off duty, and you're asleep, and the moonlight is soft glowing on your face and hair, and you look too lovely to be real . . ." He paused.

"She was very like you, Jean. Young, and pretty. It might have been you, and unless we get this monster," his body shuddered against hers, "it might still be you!" He tightened his arms about her. "Oh, Jean, Jean, can't you understand?"

His wife smoothed back his rumpled hair with her long, soothing fingers. "I do understand, Jack. I know exactly how you feel. But you can't go on like this. You're getting nowhere, and you're just going to make yourself ill."

She slipped off his knee. "Look. I'll make a cuppa and we'll talk the whole thing over just once more. Maybe I'll spot something all you brainy coppers have missed."

She made the tea and sat down on

the rug by the fire, thoughtfully sipping the steaming liquid.

"Now, Jack, put quite simply the case is this. Three girls are killed. They are all young, all pretty. Two of them are killed going to a dance on their own. The third is killed coming from a dance, so this gives them one thing in common: dancing."

"We've been over that again and again. It didn't lead anywhere."

"But it should have been a warning. That's what I don't understand." Jean put down her cup and saucer in the hearth. "After the first murder, you'd have thought that every girl would have been on the alert, and after the second . . . why, it's a wonder any girl dared go out on her own!"

"The third victim didn't go dancing on her own," said Jack. "She was with a party. Apparently her special partner and she had a quarrel, and she went off in a huff. He'd had a couple of drinks, and was a bit merry. He'd started to play the fool, and she was annoyed. He thought she'd gone off to the cloakroom to cool down, so he didn't worry unduly when she didn't reappear." He shook his head.

"Everyone says she was a very quiet and charming girl, rather shy of strangers. That's what makes it so odd. I don't see her going off with just anyone!"

"Still, she must have left the dance hall of her own free will. Any disturbance there would have been noticed," said Jean. "Didn't the commissionaire see her leave?"

"The commissionaire?" repeated Jack.

"You know, dear, the man who stands at the door of the dance hall. Bill Wallace, with his navy-blue Swiss admiral's uniform, with all the gold braid and stars on his sleeves."

"The commissionaire!" Jack stood up suddenly, slopping his tea over his saucer and splashing it down his trousers.

"Jean, my love, you're wonderful!" He strode to the door. "Look, not a word to anyone. Not one single word. And whatever you do, don't leave this house till I come back!"

"But——"

"I must see the Inspector right away."

He was gone before Jean could even frame the words of the question which nagged her.

Jack returned home an hour later. With him came the Inspector and a man in plain clothes. The man in plain clothes did the talking.

"Mrs. Robertson, your husband has told us a most disturbing story. We have checked on it——"

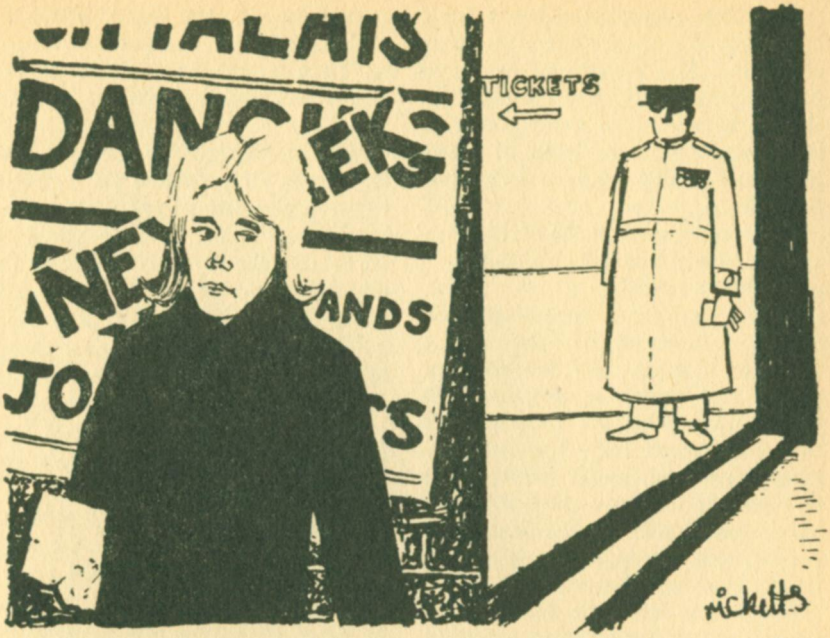
"Was he right?" broke in Jean, her voice high pitched with excitement.

"He could be," said the plain-clothes man cautiously. "We think he could be. It all fits in. The timing, everything. But there is absolutely no proof, so we'll name no names."

"But surely . . ."

"Mrs. Robertson, we can know a man is guilty beyond all doubt, but unless we have proof that will stand up in court of law, there is absolutely nothing we can do about it."

"You mean, you know a man is a murderer, and you just leave him alone, to go on killing people?"



"My dear, we do the best we can; but without proof, we're helpless."

"Is there absolutely nothing you can do?" She looked across at her husband. "Jack, can't you think of something?"

Jack flushed, and shifted uncomfortably. "There was one thing we thought of. If he were to try and kill another girl, and was caught in the act——"

"If there were witnesses to the attempt," broke in the Inspector, "then we would have something to work on."

"You mean, a decoy?" Jean looked at each of the three men in turn. She swallowed. "Wouldn't it be dangerous?"

"We would be close at hand."

"You want me to do it?"

"It would be frightening, but can you suggest anything else?"

"Why me? Why not one of your policewomen?"

"You're young and pretty. And, even more important, the fewer who know about the plan, the better."

"I don't know." She played nervously with her fingers. "I've known old Bill Wallace all my life." She looked at Jack, but he turned quickly, purposefully avoiding her gaze. Obviously he didn't want to influence her decision.

She thought of the nights he had brooded over the case, making himself ill. She thought again of the big,

fat, smiling commissionaire, a local character, a man she'd known since childhood. She thought of the three young girls, pretty, like herself, who should have had so many years of living and loving in front of them, and who hadn't been given the chance for either.

She looked once more at Jack.

"If you say it will be all right."

So it was settled.

A few days later, Jean Robertson went to a dance at the Palais with a party of friends. She looked very young and pretty in a full-skirted white dress, with gilt dust sprayed over her bronze hair. The only unglamorous thing about her was her wrist-watch. It had a scratched leather band, but it was an excellent timekeeper, and timing, it was impressed on her, was most important.

She was to leave the dance hall at seven minutes past eleven precisely.

At that time, Jack told her, there would be no taxis at the dance hall rank, so she would have to go home on foot, but she would be guarded every inch of the way by unseen watchers. Of course, nothing might happen, but she was to be on the alert all the time. She was given exact instructions which streets she was to walk along on her way home, and to take delaying tactics if anyone spoke to her, so that her guardians would have time to draw close.

Jean shivered nervously as she left the dance hall dead on time. The commissionaire looked at her admiringly as she came through the swing glass doors. She eyed him carefully. The white neon lighting was like moonlight on his broad shoulders and magnificent braided uniform.

"Taxi, miss?" he came up to her. "Shouldn't walk home alone if I were you."

"I'll be all right," Jean whispered the words. "I promised I'd be home early. I live just round the corner."

"All the same, I think you'd be wiser to take a taxi," insisted the doorman, and he waved to the taxi rank. A cab which had been there when Jean came out was now speeding along the road in the opposite direction, leaving the rank empty.

"I can't wait for a taxi," said Jean impatiently, avoiding the man's eye. "I'll be perfectly all right."

She walked off, and the tapping of her high heels echoed up the cold, lonely street. She reached the end of the block, and without turning round, as she'd been told, she crossed the road and started off down Ruel Street; out of sight, now, of the dance hall.

A policeman, who'd been examining the lock of a shop door, looked at her as she passed.

"You shouldn't be out alone at this time, miss." He stepped up to her. "Have you far to go?"

Jean was annoyed. If this silly man persisted in talking to her, it might upset all the carefully laid plans.

"I'm all right," she said shortly. "I live just round the corner."

"In that case, I'd better see you home." The constable took her by the arm.

Jean could have wept with vexa-

tion. Everything was going all wrong. If the commissionaire spotted the policeman, he would turn back, and she'd have to repeat the whole nerve-wracking performance.

"Let go of me," she said angrily, and tried to wrench her arm free.

To her surprise, the constable refused to let go. Instead, his grip tightened. She was too angry at first to feel any alarm; and, anyway, she wasn't expecting any danger from this quarter. She tried to shake herself free once more, and glared up into the man's face.

What she saw in his eyes terrified her. In sudden panic she opened her mouth to scream, but the man clamped a hand roughly over her lips. She was frantic with fear now, and started to struggle violently, but the man was big and strong, and Jean was small and slight. She didn't stand a chance, and in spite of her struggles, he half-carried, half-dragged her across the road, into the wasteland of the derelict houses.

Jean kept struggling, but the more she fought, the crueller became the restraining arms. She was helpless. Only her brain was free—free to realize why the other victims had trusted the killer: the big, helpful man in the blue uniform!

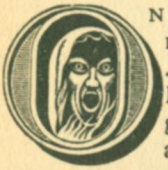
Jack, she thought. Jack, we made a mistake. We chose the wrong uniform. It isn't the commissionaire who kills by moonlight. It's one of your own colleagues! No wonder no one ever guessed. . . .

She went limp with fear. Her assailant gave a grunt of satisfaction, and pushed her from him, on to the ground. She made an effort to get to her feet, but now the man was kneeling beside her, and his hands felt for her throat.

She tried to pull them away, but they pressed tighter, tighter, on her Adam's apple, until all at once her head seemed to explode in a burst of light brighter than any star. Brighter even than the sequin her husband remembered seeing where it shouldn't have been, glittering in the moonlight on the cuff of a colleague who had come panting so quickly to his side on the murder night, on the cuff of the colleague whose fingers he was now pulling, in vicious hatred, and rage, and triumph, too, from his wife's gasping throat!

NOVA ET VETERA

RICHARD BRYANT



ON THE DAY THEY arrived no one expected them . . . save for one man. He sat alone on the ground with his back against a tree: the way he had sat every summer's day since most people in his village could recall. Long before the bad days had come he had sat that way. Still and watching, with his hands hanging at his sides and the fingers loosely nudging the dry sand.

His face rarely moved, its expression rarely changed. Sometimes the wisps of his white hair shaken by the light, warm wind seemed to be the only live part of him. But alive he was, and he alone had known they would come. Silent and motionless he watched them.

He had been a babe when the Great Queen had reigned in England. Like many others he had lived through two wars and the uneasy periods of truce that had preceded and followed them.

Then the cataclysm . . . the time of the blazing light and the searing heat like some monstrous sunburst . . . the turning of the green of his familiar fields and woods to sandy desert . . . the loss of contact between nation and nation, town and village . . . the five long years of silence.

Already, however, it was rumoured that to the south, where the ancient city of Winchester had stood, the Prince of Wales, sole surviving member of the Blood, was gathering men to his standard and starting the reorganization of the country. But it would take time to achieve. The old man knew it. Time free from interference. And here was the interference already. He knew it as surely as he had known they would come.

He knew it with the same deliberate certainty that he had always known things of matter long before they happened. Perhaps it was that Sight that had guided him unscathed through well over a century of hard years. Certainly it had been his guide many times. It was that which had led him, as a young music student at the Sorbonne, to work while others wasted their time. He had known that one day he would achieve great fame. How many of the world's great halls of music, now dusty heaps of rubble, had he thrilled with his skill!

It was that Sight, too, that had made him know the danger when he joined the Adepts of the Left, a small but bitter group of students and others who sought advancement through working charms and spells and the practice of Black Magic. At first it had seemed a good thing, and without much danger. He had progressed far, almost too far, before he saw the tragic result that must come.

Even now he shuddered at the nearness of his escape: at the threats he had received and at the years he had spent in dread of the perpetration of

some hideous fierce revenge. But he had known enough of the procedure. He himself had seen the first page of the Red Book and had read what was written there. He could defend himself if need be. However, he knew that the Watchful One would be ready if he ever again overstepped the border of his safety.

But all that was long past. Now his problem was even greater. He looked down at the visitors and then at his hands, thin and freckled but still long and sensitive—hands which years ago had held his violin and the baton. And he pondered how he in his weakness could destroy them in their might.

Without a sound the strange shaped craft had settled in a broad hollow a few hundred yards from the lonely watcher. A small cloud of whirling dust drifted away around the shining globe.

The old man watched four creatures emerge one by one and stand some distance off. They were ten feet tall and gleamed in the sunlight. He saw that they were machines and had no life of their own. A fifth creature joined them, different and living, and much smaller . . . their Master.

For a week they stayed in the hollow. They collected specimens of everything—sand, earth, water, plants —in small yellow containers. They measured and mapped the area. They drilled holes to sample the earth's crust. They reached temperatures, winds and pressures.

And every day the old man watched from his shady seat. He wondered in how many worlds this strange scene was being enacted . . . or was this the only one? Where would all the information go? To be assimilated by what great central intelligence? What enormous fleet of craft might one day sweep down from the blue heavens?

The Master of the newcomers did no work himself. He moved from place to place watching his machines and directing their efforts. Several times thoughout the day and always in the evenings, the watcher observed that the machines became more sluggish in their movements and their actions more clumsy. At these times he saw the Master go to them and direct at them the wand-like antenna of a small box he carried on his belt. In this way they received their supply of energy, for in a few seconds they would be working normally again.

On the fifth day, in the scorching heat of the noontime, one of the machines slowed down and stopped altogether. It was some minutes before the Master noticed and attended to it with the box. During that time the machine stood still and made no effort to help itself.

It was at that moment that the old man saw his solution.

He left his seat at sundown as usual and tottered back to his lonely hut, there to thumb the pages of some of his old poorly-preserved books until the last rays of twilight sank his room into darkness.

His old tired eyes, rimmed with red, were closed as he lay on his pile of bedding. His bony fingers were

clasped across his chest. But he did not sleep.

The whole night through he strove to pierce the shreds of cloud that nowadays so often obscured his memory.

It was long years ago. So many long memories away. He pushed his mind almost by physical effort back . . . back . . . back to that tiny room on his last dreadful night in Paris a hundred years before.

Slowly it was there. It was all there. The scarlet walls, the black symbols, the fearful pictures, the altar with its smoking black candles and the golden chalice of blood, the people. And everything there shaken by the wind that had blown—in the room without windows—as the awful words had been said. He could still see the grey cloud that had hovered on the altar steps, its shape changing in the wind and looking now like a cat, now a cockerel, now a goat, and finally like a single huge cloven hoof.

Piece by piece the pattern of long-forgotten words and deeds came together behind the furrows of his yellow forehead.

* * *

When, in the morning, he returned to his watching place, he carried with him an old handkerchief crammed with an assortment of small objects.

All day as he watched he worked. His hands still retained some of their former dexterity, but his task was intricate and his attention to detail infinite.

That night he did not return home. As the shadows lengthened he stayed in his place. He watched the Master treat his machines with the thin vibrating shaft of the antenna, then shut himself inside his craft.

While the air grew cold and a sharp wind drifted the topsand against his face, the old man still sat. Time passed ignored by him. He knew that his struggle had begun and that his courage was enough.

At sun-up his marrow warmed to the early rays for the last time. He was alert and watching long before the newcomers began their day.

As the hours wore on he saw the machines start to collect their various pieces of equipment and stow them inside the globe. Their task was being completed.

It was as well, he thought, that his task, too, neared its end.

In the late afternoon the Master prepared as usual to recharge the machines.

The moment had come. The old man glued his flickering eyes upon the busy form. His hands worked feverishly before him. His mumbling lips twitched and across the wrinkled face spread a frown of deep concentration. Drops of sweat stood out upon his brown and collected into trickles down his stubbly chin. He gulped his breath and muttered.

With intense effort he summoned all of what was left of his whole life force and funnelled it into a concentrated beam of will. His fingers moved into the sand around him and traced out a circle. Within it he drew seven starlike symbols. Then he took up the small product of his day's

work. It was a model of the Master made in wax and clay. It was perfect in every detail.

Still muttering and with his face drawn in a hideous death mask of anguish he took the head of the model between his thumb and forefinger, and as he slowly crushed it out of recognition, his other hand thrust a dozen rusty pins one by one into the life-like lump of wax.

The Master did not struggle or even retaliate. For a few brief seconds he looked about him, then sank slowly to the ground and lay still.

The machines came to a halt and everywhere was quiet.

The old man was slumped forward.

In the sand just outside his circle was the fresh imprint of a pair of cloven hooves.

By morning the newcomers and their craft had already begun to crumble.

On that hard Pagan world disgust
And secret loathing fell.
Deep weariness and sated lust
Made human life a hell.

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

Lo! thy dread empire, Chaos! is restor'd;
Light dies before thy uncreating word;
Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the curtain fall,
And universal darkness buries all.

ALEXANDER POPE.

This wild abyss,
The womb of nature and perhaps her grave.

JOHN MILTON.

THREE FEET WIDE...

PAUL MARSH

Illustrated by T. J. Gough

I KNEW THERE WAS something wrong with the room straight away. You get an instinct for that sort of thing when you've been in the business as long as I have.

I walked in first. Joe was following behind, making sketches. When he came in, I was still trying to figure out what it was that was worrying me, and I hadn't got any farther than the centre of the floor.

"There's something odd about this room," I said.

Joe looked up from his survey book, blinked at me through his glasses and grunted enigmatically. Joe was a man of few words; if grunts would do instead of words, why waste words? He began to sketch out the plan of the room.

This sort of building always depressed me: spacious rooms, tall ceilings with moulded plaster cornices, broad marble fireplaces and the unmistakable air of having seen better days. The house had obviously been neglected for years—that in itself was a sacrilege—but to see it in the nude, without furniture, carpets and curtains, was somehow beyond indecency: like a strip club in a crypt.

"I say; look at this." Joe was standing by the window and, as I moved across to him, I suddenly realized what was wrong with the room. After a year or two you begin to be able to piece together the plan of a building in your mind as you walk round. Of all the places in that room where you might have expected a window, this was the least likely.

"Just look there!" exclaimed Joe as I peered over his shoulder through the window. Then for a while we didn't speak any more. We were too busy looking.

The window opened into a little courtyard—a patio almost—totally surrounded by the walls of the house. It was a little island of space in the middle of the building. That in itself was not remarkable. We'd both heard of light wells before. What was remarkable though was the extraordinary profusion of the creeper that grew about the walls, the new-washed appearance of the paving stones and the colour of the pelargoniums in the little wooden tubs. This little yard seemed even now lived-in; as though the gardener had just put the finishing touches to the flower tubs and swept up the fallen leaves from the paving; as though the maid would, at any moment, serve tea on the wrought-iron table under the overhanging canopy of creeper. A little imagination, and the tea-cups were already there and figures were sitting on the chairs.

There was one door opening on to the court and one other ground-floor

window. Above, I could see other windows peeping coyly out of the creeper.

It was enchanting. There was no other word for it. Even Joe, not given to fluent appreciation of beauty or charm, seemed overawed by the undefined atmosphere of the place. I felt I had to walk out into the yard. There was something so calm and self-contained in its appearance. I left Joe and began to search for the door.

After ten minutes I returned to the room and found Joe still standing by the window looking out.

"I'll be damned if I can find it, Joe."

He started and turned round to me. "Find what?"

"The door—the door into the yard." I was exasperated and bewildered. "I've been all over the ground floor, and can I find it? Still, it'll turn up when we start measuring. Have you got the plan sketched out yet?"

"The plan? Oh, no; not the plan . . . not yet," muttered Joe, and began his work again. Sometimes Joe was positively dense.

The rest of the day we spent measuring up the house. First the ground floor, then the first floor, then the attics. But nowhere throughout the whole place could we find another window that looked out on to the yard—no other window and no door.

"Well, I'll be damned. They must all be bricked up on the inside," I said.

"Bricked up? What's bricked up?" Joe was being dense again.

"The other windows, of course—the windows and the door into the court. Funny, I could swear the windows at any rate didn't look bricked up. I was sure I could see the room beyond. Still, no doubt it will sort itself out when we draw up the survey."

And there we left it. We locked the front door behind us, and forgot about the courtyard.

Next day at the office, Joe called me over to his board during the afternoon.

"It's no good," he said. "I just don't understand it. I can't do this survey. Leastways I can; but that courtyard looks to be coming out about three feet wide by six feet long."

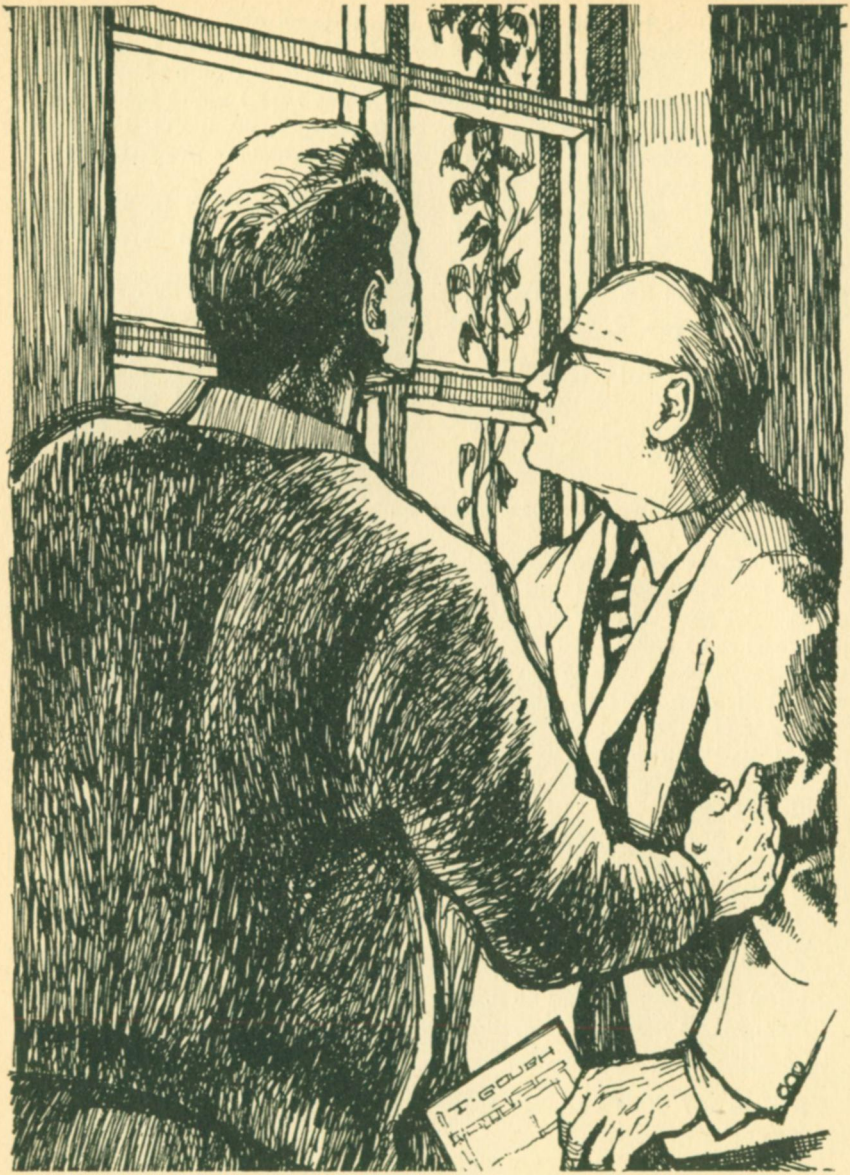
I looked at the sheet on his board. It seemed remarkably bare for practically a whole day's work. Joe never tore up trees, but this was crawling even for him.

"The internal dimensions check against the externals as near as damn it," he explained.

"Sure those external measurements are right?" I asked.

"Why not? The front one and the back one tie up. There's not a couple of inches difference in them," he replied. "So, it looks as though the yard *is* three feet by six feet." He smiled at me with satisfaction.

"Don't be ridiculous," I snorted, and began checking through his setting out. After twenty minutes I had to admit that he was right. Either we had made a series of unbelievable mistakes in taking the measurements, all of which conveniently cross-checked, or else that courtyard


T. GOUGH

was three feet wide by six feet long.

"Oh, but that's stupid," I protested. "It must have been at least fifteen feet square if it was an inch."

But the evidence stared up at me from Joe's drawing-board.

"We should have climbed out of the window and measured it. Then there would have been no argument."

It was easy to say that then, but when we had been in the house, such an idea seemed presumptuous. We had searched for the door, but when we had failed to find it, we had accepted it without question. Now our attitude seemed ridiculous.

"There's nothing for it," I said. "I'll have to pop in and measure it up on my way home tonight."

And that I did—or would have done if it hadn't been for the girl.

The late evening sun was slanting narrowly through the windows, casting long panels of light on the bare board floors. In the yard, of course, there was no sunlight, and yet it was surprisingly bright. I went to the window, slid back the sash fastener with little difficulty and pushed at the lower frame. It didn't move. I had hardly expected it would. I banged on the frame with my fists and pushed again. I felt it give ever so slightly. Once more I banged on the frame.

Just at that moment, out of the corner of my eye, I seemed to see a movement in the opposite window. I stopped banging and looked across the yard . . . straight into the face of the most beautiful girl I have ever seen. She stood looking thoughtfully out at the court and I believed she had not seen me. I stood motionless hardly daring to breathe, filled with an overwhelming sense of rightness. She seemed to belong to those spacious rooms with their tall windows and broad fireplaces, their moulded ceilings and their air of better days. She seemed to belong to the courtyard with its clambering cascades of creeper turning red, its vivid pelargoniums and its calmness. It seemed as though it had been her that I had imagined sitting at the table on that first occasion when I looked into this other world of the courtyard. I had known she was there all the time, although I had not seen her. I was the trespasser.

She wore a tight-bodiced white dress that sprung broadly from her slim waist in a curiously archaic line. There was in her face a gentleness, as she looked out of the window. I stood hypnotized by her appearance, asking myself none of the questions which should have been racketting around my brain.

And then our eyes met. For an instant we stared at one another and a feeling of calmness struck down into my soul and with it the feeling of looking into another age. Then she smiled, turned and was gone.

Gradually I came to my senses again and slowly began asking those questions. Who was she? How had she got into the house? Was she a casual passer-by who, seeing the door open, had wandered in? I began to hunt through the house, looking for the girl; but even as I did so, I became certain I should never find her—neither her, nor the other side of the courtyard. And the more I thought

about that, the less inclined I became to go back to the window. I had no desire to step through a window into another age.

* * *

We never did draw in that courtyard on the plan. Nor did I ever explain why I failed to measure it that night. I just made some foolish excuse, and Joe went down to do it next day. It was three days before he returned to the office—without the dimensions and after a spell of unexplained sick leave. He also had a rather peculiar explanation for not being able to produce the dimensions. At last we merely left a space three feet wide by six feet long in the middle of the building and left the builder to find out what it was.

I had never been back to the building after the night I had seen the girl.

In the course of time the scheme for converting the place into flats was drawn up and a small local builder got the job of knocking the place about.

The contractor moved in and began to tear the entrails out of the old house, and I sat in the office feeling miserable at the vandalism I was assisting and curious at what would be its outcome.

On the third day my telephone rang. It was the contractor.

"You remember that room on the ground floor without a window?" he asked. I hesitated.

"The one beside the stairs," he explained. I remembered the room all right. But why no window? Had Joe been right after all?

"Yes, I remember," I replied, and felt my tongue dry against the roof of my mouth. Joe had gone back the day after I had seen the girl and had found no courtyard—no window even. The shock had apparently sent him off on three days' sick leave.

"Well, that lump of nothing in the middle of the plan; we bust our way in this morning," the contractor continued. "You'd never believe it. First brick out and you'd have thought we'd broken into a sewer. The stench was fantastic. When we got a hole out big enough to look through, we found a sort of priest's chamber inside, little bigger than a coffin—except, instead of a body, there was a dress laid out just like a corpse. Proper eerie it was; although the dress was a smasher: pure white, even after all these years, with a long, wide skirt."

I remembered that dress well. Should I ever forget it?

"Funny thing though, it fell to pieces when we touched it—just powdered into a white ash. And the only other thing in there was a handful of leaves . . . red kind of leaves, sort of like virginia creeper."

REMEMBER ME

THOMAS OVERTON

Illustrated by Timothy Mathias

SOMEWHERE IN THAT isolated string of islands between the Florida mainland and Key West my vintage car decided the heat and pace were too much for it. Whoosh! The rattling monster died, its radiator spewing steam along the concrete guard rails of the Overseas Highway.

No help was in sight. August apparently was out-of-season for tourists; only a foreigner or a madman would travel in this noon-day heat.

I looked around in despair.

To my left was the Atlantic Ocean. To my right an island supported the massive concrete pylons of the bridge-highway for a mile and then dropped off to form a long beach on a narrow strait connecting the blue water of the Atlantic with the shimmering green of the Gulf of Mexico. Across the narrow blue-green strait another island, number twenty-one according to my count since leaving Miami, formed a link in the chain which the highway hedge-hopped for one hundred and seventy miles to Key West. These islands look as much alike as a rope of matched pearls.

I steered my car to an exit ramp, coasted down to island number twenty and stopped. Shielding my eyes with my hands I squinted towards the gentle slope of a sandhill which was topped by a large grove of lime trees surrounding one of those two-storey Spanish colonial houses typical of the area. A couple of hundred yards in front of the house, a man bathing in the straits was the only sign of life in any direction. From my jalopy I reckoned the house to be at least a mile away—too far to walk in this sun-baked wilderness.

I got out of the car, searched in the shade of the highway bridge until I found a can, walked over to the Atlantic side of the highway and dipped up some water for my overheated radiator.

My reflection as I leaned over the glass-like surface of the water made me realize that "vintage" and "rattling monster" aptly described me as well as my transportation. The merciless tropical sun exposed the tired lines in my face and erased the deceptively innocent expression of student days. For the first time in my life I looked every day of my thirty-six years: what's more, I felt it.

How incredible it seemed that only fourteen years ago I was hitch-hiking briskly down this same highway to Key West to write the "Great American Novel". Like so many undergraduate dreams, the novel never materialized. Lucinda did. Lovely, golden-haired Lucinda. Even now a

warm hand clutches my heart when I mention her name. Lucinda, Lucinda; try as I might I cannot forget her—the memory recurs almost daily now.

We met on Moscrip's Island several miles to the south of this one. I was en route to Key West in that glorious summer of 1946 when George Moscrip persuaded me to stop over for a week-end at his family's estate. George was my college roommate and a finer, more generous soul never existed. His father owned a large citrus plantation called Key Alba. Well, as I was saying, I met Lucinda on the Moscrip's Island, picking limes. An unromantic occupation? Not with Lucinda. She had a face I dreamed of sometimes but never encountered, its perfect oval shape framed in tumbled hair of bright chestnut. The eyes beneath the arched brows were green and wide set, the nose small and straight, the mouth generously curved.

I stared shamelessly at her as she stood there, her hands working swiftly along the lower limbs of the lime trees. Then she began walking towards me, her every movement holding grace, and as she came closer I could neither move nor speak.

The luminous green of her eyes returned my gaze, frankly admiring, and seemed to betray our secret.

Lucinda's aura enfolded me then like an ocean haze, kept me awake nights in the little guest-house, kept me busy days scheming to get her, knowing but refusing to face the hopelessness of the situation. You see, she was George's wife.

Days passed uncounted and I forgot Key West and the "Great American Novel".

George Moscrip's parents, with the rare intuition of New Englanders misplaced in the tropics, began to see through my pretended interest in limes. I'm sure they suspected Lucinda and I were lovers. After a fortnight of delayed farewells, I knew my visits to George's citrus grove had to end or his family's worst suspicions would be confirmed. Hollow fear gripped me then, fear that I would lose her, and, in the process, lose some basic part of myself.

Early one morning in my third week at the Moscrip plantation George announced that he was spending the next day and night in Miami.

"Will you look after Lucinda while I'm gone, Roger?"

"Of course."

Lucinda and I cavorted about the endless sand and coral beaches all day, hiding in tiny coves, swimming lazily in blue lagoons. Dusk came and I kissed her longingly—a paradise to be lost. I was leaving Key Alba the next day. For ever, I thought.

That night I suggested we return to a secluded coral promontory she had shown me. There is an almost obscene nakedness about sunlight on sand, making important activity by day very difficult for sensitive people like me.

After midnight, when George's parents were asleep, we slipped out the back door. Arm in arm we made our way through the lime trees towards the dull reflection of moon-

light on the Gulf. I remember Lucinda's beauty had a flush, a brightness, her green eyes strong against the sombre setting of the night. She laughed merrily as we climbed the gradual incline to the top of the promontory.

"I'm going to show you our secret pirate's lair," she said.

At the top, breathless, we could hear the rhythmic lash of the incoming tide, beating against the coral reef one hundred feet below. We skirted the edge of the promontory for a short distance until we came to an ancient, weather-beaten pier jutting out into a cove.

"This is it!" Lucinda shouted above the ocean's roar. "Pirates built this pier more than two centur . . ." The beating surf drowned her words.

It was then I pushed. Lucinda flailed the air wildly. Her eyes stared in horror as the rotting deck of the pier collapsed under her weight.

"R-R-Roger-r-r!" she screamed. Then she plunged downwards through clouds of spray to the jagged coral rocks. The tide was my partner in crime that night, washing her broken body out to sea, destroying the evidence.

You probably think I'm a madman or a cold-blooded killer. Well, I'm neither. It took me ten years to get the sound of that scream out of my ears, the sight of Lucinda's incredulous stare out of my eyes. I even considered changing my name from Roger to "John" or "William" . . or anything so that I would never have to hear the hateful sound again.

But this affair of the heart could have ended only one way. You can see I had to do it. If I couldn't have Lucinda, I couldn't go through life knowing that someone else had her. Now could I? One of us had to die. I'm too much of a coward to commit suicide and George was too good an innocent to be the victim. That left Lucinda, didn't it?

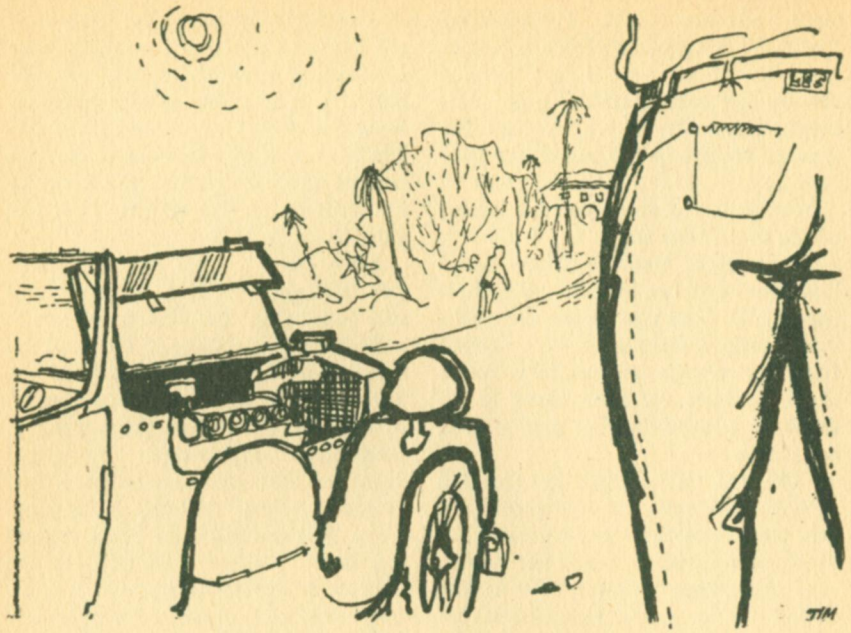
Since the . . . the unpleasantness I've managed to live a rather full life—one that the more mundane consider a great success. Head of the creative department (this side of the business gives me the privacy I crave) of a New York advertising agency, penthouse apartment, European vacations and expensive hobbies. One essential thing, though, is missing. Love. For the fourteen years following the . . . event I haven't felt the vaguest desire to marry; yet I know that even the toughest of men is only half a man without a woman.

That's why I was on my way to Key Alba again. The icy thing that crawled inside me that night, freezing my heart, had to be melted away in the slow fire of reminiscence. According to my psychiatrist you can relive an old experience, purge yourself of it, and clear the way for a new one. In my case, love and marriage.

I finished filling the radiator and tossed the can under the bridge. My car played the prima donna and wouldn't start.

"Damn these vintage vehicles," I muttered after ten minutes' struggling. "Ought to be in museums, not among my hobbies."

It was quiet here, the air motion-



less, the sun hot and alive. About to sit down in the shade and rest, I looked up to see the lone swimmer walking from the straits in my direction. Thank God, help was coming at last!

I sat down and began to review the events of my life again, surrendering myself to the grip of the obsession while I waited. You see, I must tell you this story quickly now; for, in this thoughtless age, nobody will remember me. . . .

The crunch-crunch of sand interrupted my reveries. Help was almost here! I greeted the swimmer warmly and rushed to meet him half-way.

"My car won't start!" I yelled.

"Not surprising," he smiled amiably. "Vintage cars rarely do." He hesitated a moment, then strode forward with renewed speed. "Roger? Roger Stanford?"

"Yes?" And then I recognized him. "George Moscrip, you old rascal."

We embraced. The sun had dried his skin to the texture of leather, and I recoiled from the touch.

For a moment I stared, wide-eyed in disbelief, the memory of our earlier friendship jolting me. Two fingers of grey touched Moscrip's heavy dark hair, and, though he was only thirty-six, there was a deep vertical furrow down each cheek. His brown eyes, usually twinkling, were flat and lifeless, sunken behind a puffy face. How the processes of decay are accelerated

in a warm climate! He had changed from the muscular string bean of college days to a potato sack.

"Lucky your car broke down here, Roger," he said. "Let's go straight to the nearest drink in Key Alba."

"Great. This calls for a big libation," I laughed. "Had fourteen years to get to this reunion, and then I'm late." I decided not to tell George that I hadn't even recognized his island.

We started walking towards the big stucco house rising sharp and clean from a haze of low citrus trees like a silent sentinel. As we walked, George told me that his parents had died five years ago, that hurricanes had taken a big toll of his crops, that the cook and housekeeper had left for better jobs in Miami and he was now living alone.

"You're a welcome sight, Roger," he said suddenly. "Makes me feel young again."

"Me, too." And, without thinking, I added. "We could use some rejuvenation after all we've been through."

George grunted indifferently. Not the same George Moscrip, I remembered, who was the campus hero, always exuberant even in the face of the football defeats.

We threaded our way through the lime trees and passed the little guesthouse. I shuddered inwardly, recognizing the first familiar landmark. I was conscious, then, with heightened sensitivity, of the sights and sounds that completed the setting for love and murder.

Perfect! Nothing seemed quite so horrible as it did that night. It was going to be easy reliving this episode. The psychiatrist was right. Already I was feeling better, gaining confidence.

The Moscrip mansion was one of those square, comfortable-looking houses with an ornate two-storey veranda running around its front and sides. Its big, high-ceilinged rooms were furnished with handsome Chippendale pieces brought from the ancestral home in Boston.

We stood at the mahogany bar in the den, sipping bourbon and chatting aimlessly about the past—our successes and failures through the years since 1946. George's reminiscences were of failure, mine of success.

"You should have come to New York with me after graduation, George," I said. "It's the place to get ahead."

"No . . . that's for you, not for me," he replied slowly. "You had a restless energy as if driven by some unseen force. I was a plodder. Just a plodder."

"But you're stagnating here, George. Where's your ambition?"

"Aren't you confusing ambition with discontent?" He put his head to one side, studying me. "I've learned to live with my memories. Not many people can." As he spoke his eyes seemed to go out of focus, staring through me, beyond me.

My stomach was a tight, cold knot of fear. Could he suspect me, I wondered? No, it wasn't possible. The wind and the waves were my only witnesses that night. The coroner's report had been "accidental death by

drowning." Not even my psychiatrist knew the whole story.

In the long uneasy silence that followed I could hear the throb of insects outside, broken by the distant, intermittent crash of the incoming tide. The tick of the grandfather clock in the dining-room seemed to beat inside my head.

"Let's go for a stroll around the island before dinner," I said suddenly, trying to break the tension.

"Strolling? In this heat?" A funny smile flickered on George's face and then was gone. "I'm afraid I won't make a very good guide."

Reluctantly, he set his glass on the bar, and led me out through the back door.

I almost screamed in the excitement of my freedom from the enclosure of the house. Behind us, inside open windows, there was only the sound of the ticking of the clock. It had gone into my bones and wouldn't leave me.

As we walked, the air grew hotter, the glare of the sun more violent. Once George stumbled on the root of a lime tree, faltered feebly for a moment, then lifted his face and strode with renewed determination against the glare of the hot sun.

"Only a madman would live in this climate, George."

"Yes, I suppose it is a far cry from the coolness of a college campus . . . or the excitement of New York." He laughed nervously. "But I like it, like it very much." His voice sounded flat and lifeless; his face, drained of colour, stood out white as chalk in contrast with his brown eyes. He stopped speaking, swayed from side to side, and pressed his fingertips hard against his temples.

"Shall we sit down and rest a minute?"

"No, no, Roger. I'm all right," he answered defiantly. "Let's go."

I knew enough about psychology to recognize the symptoms. George was going mad in this heat and isolation.

For a long time there was a silence between us as we approached the Gulf. Through the tangle of lime tree branches I could see its greenness merging with the blue of the horizon. The morning was lost. Even this afternoon seemed far away.

In my mind's eye I could see, almost feel, the surf rubbing itself ceaselessly on the coral rocks of the little cove. It seemed to be that the chattering and whispering of the sea slapping against the rocky wall was louder, quicker, more verbal. The heavy heat caused a mist to swim before my eyes like spray.

We were approaching the promontory, climbing. The steady slap-slap of the surf blended and then kept time with our footsteps on the hardened sand of the ledge. The mist rose in thicker and thicker columns from the cove. It began to focus into a vague, almost human shape, and, through it I could see Lucinda's lustrous green eyes beckoning to me . . . then staring in terror!

"R-R-Roger-r-r!" No, it can't be! I couldn't have heard that word. I ventured a sidelong glance at my companion, but George was absorbed in the climbing, oblivious of the turmoil in my mind.

At last we reached the top of the promontory, and the glare of the sun melted the mist away. This was exactly the way I wanted it, in bright sunlight, where I could see everything, relive every detail of that night fourteen years ago.

I forced myself to walk to the edge for a closer look. I grew calm again, surveying the cove. The sharp face of the cliff looked bare, stark.

"But where is the pirate's pier, George?"

He jerked around. His face darkened for an instant, his eyes sparking hatred.

Then he pushed me. Screaming madly and agonizedly, he pushed me harder. Harder.

Terror paralysed my muscles. Limp and unresisting I plunged over the edge and down to the bed of the reef.

"Nobody knew about that pier but Lucinda and me!" he screamed.

The cold hard sound of his voice echoes around me now. The soft slap-slap of the water repeats the words as the tide rises mockingly under my broken back, lifting me gradually out to sea.

You can see George is quite mad. And I must tell you this story quickly now so that you will remember me, remem . . .

Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,
And then thou must be damned perpetually;
Stand still you ever-moving spheres of heaven,
That time may cease, and midnight never come.

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE.

Vengeance, deep-brooding o'er the slain,
Had lock'd the source of softer woe;
And burning pride and high disdain
Forbade the rising tear to flow.

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

Truth sits upon the lips of dying men.

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

THE DROP

ELLESTON TREVOR

Illustrated by Woodward

MEAKE WAS A small man, easy to kill. He had a good brain, admittedly, but at the time I didn't worry about his brain. It was his body that stood beside me on the balcony, and all I had to kill was his body; and that was small.

There was a drink in his hand. I had left mine on the arm of my chair, in the room behind us. I didn't want my drink; I'd have plenty of time to pour myself another one, later. But Meake's was going to be his last. He'd brought it out on to the balcony, not knowing it was the most important drink in his life. It was going to have to last him all eternity.

He said, in his light, dry tone:

"So you have a room with a view . . . and such a view."

I said, "Yes, it's quite a view."

I thought: "You'd better look at it while you've another minute left. Take a good picture of the world, before you bail out. Because you're going soon, for what you did to Madeleine."

He said, "You can see almost half across London."

I said yes, we could see almost half across it.

He sipped his drink. I looked at the view, the chimneys, the rooftops, the spires, the lights that filled the network of streets as if the place were one gigantic fairground; but from the tail of my eye I looked at Meake, too.

He was a foot shorter than I. He was like a small, neat sparrow, standing there in his nicely-cut suit with his hair brushed back and his bow-tie exactly right. He was the rottenest little son of a louse I had ever known. He'd taken Madeleine away from me, and he'd shown her Paris, and Rome, and the Riviera; then he'd got bored and left her like a spent match-end, somewhere in France.

She must have known then that he didn't love her; she must have known then that she hadn't loved him, either. But she couldn't come back to me now. He'd taken her from me, and had swung her round his finger for a while, and then he'd let her fall.

So now it was his turn. He, too, must fall.

He was saying, "Exactly why have you asked me to see you, by the way?"

"What?" My thoughts came back. They had been looking down, measuring the drop. It was a long drop from here.

"I said may I know why you asked me to see you this evening?"

For a moment I said nothing. Then: "Yes. I'm trying to locate

Madeleine. I thought you might know where she is."

He smiled. He shrugged. He was a dapper little swine. "I'm sorry," he said casually. "We are no longer in touch. She is somewhere in France, so I believe."

That was his sentence. I heard it quite clearly. He had spoken too casually, too callously. Had he even tried to be helpful, I might have held back. As it was, I moved.

This had been carefully planned; but now the moment had come I wasn't so cool, so efficient. The hate banged in my mind like a gong and the effort of my muscles blocked the breath in my throat and the rooftops went spinning across my eyes as my hands worked, my arms flexed, my feet sustained my movement. All the pent fury of weeks had welled in my head, and something was drowned there. Consciousness.

* * *

He tilted the glass again, and again I drank, until my head stopped reeling like a chimney-cowl; then I sat up, and looked at him.

He smiled gently. He was as neat, as dapper, as calm as ever. He put the glass back on to the table and helped me up. Unsteady on my feet I said:

"What . . . the blazes . . . happened?"

He shrugged lightly.

"You tried to throw me into the street. But the idea of what you were doing made something snap in your nervous system. How d'you feel now?"

I felt queer, damned queer. Seeing the little swine standing there so calmly was another shock to my nervous system. I was having quite a night. I said:

"I'm—all right."

"Good . . . good. And now you won't have to dangle, will you? Congratulations. You, too, have just escaped death. We should go out and celebrate, m'm?"

As I gazed at him, my head clearing, I suddenly felt glad about this. He was right: I wouldn't have got away with it. Somewhere I'd have slipped.

His voice was dressed in neat, well-cut syllables: "You know, you wouldn't have succeeded."

Although he was telling me my own thought, I defended myself, by habit.

"Why not? No one knew you were coming here?"

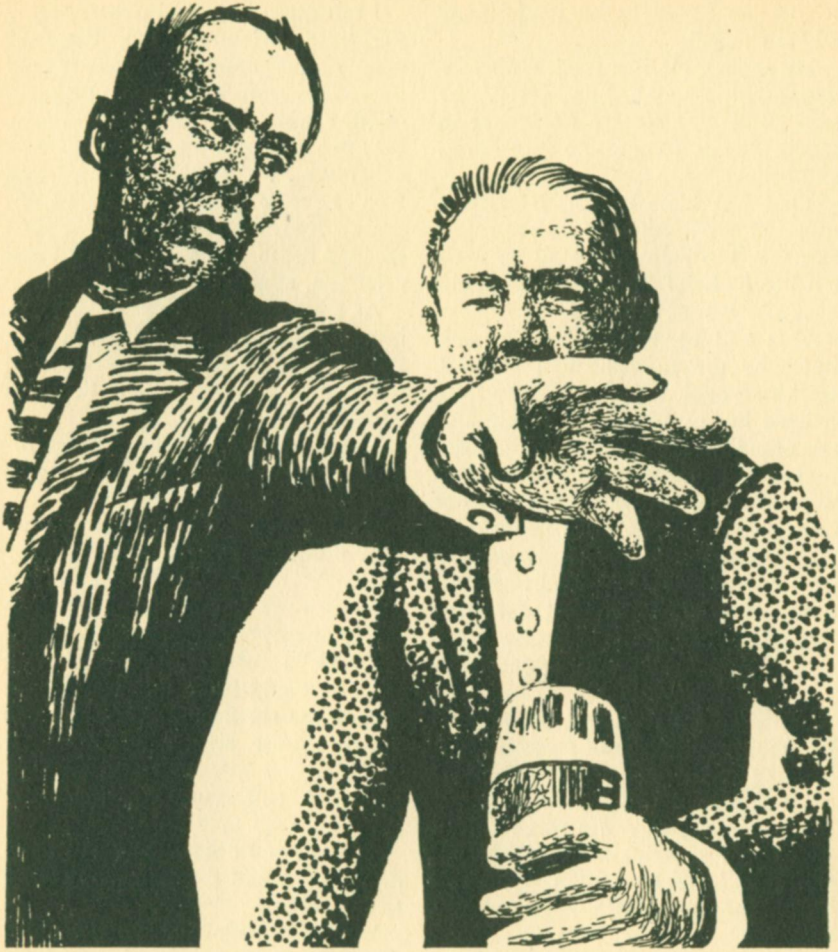
"True."

"You could have fallen from any one of the six floors above this one. From almost any window of the hotel."

"Again, true. But you would have given yourself up."

"Never. If I'd had the nerve to do it, I'd have had the nerve to keep it to myself."

"You may think so. I think not. I would have made you give yourself up. My death would have preyed on your nerves, until you had to shout out that you were guilty." His small hands fluttered in a shrug. "However, we need scarcely discuss that. I suggest that we retire somewhere secluded, and celebrate our narrow



escape: mine from a broken back, yours from a broken neck. . . ."

He was by the door, pulling on his yellow gloves. I brushed a hand over my brow. I felt almost normal again, but there seemed little resistance in me. I wanted to tell him simply to get out, but I couldn't frame the words. He seemed, in a strange way, in command of me.

"Come," he said gently. "I know a restaurant, a quiet place. We can entertain each other—now that we have become so intimately concerned in

each other's lives. We can discuss common interests . . . Madeleine, and others."

His voice had a lilting quality; it led me, and I stopped fighting its influence. I was too tired, too happy that I needn't hang for her sweet sake. Would it, after all, have been worth it? I hadn't asked her to go away with him.

"All right," I said.

We left my suite together, walking slowly and easily along the carpeted passage to the lift. He talked in his soft, beautifully-articulated cadences.

"Strange, don't you think, that you hated me so much and yet came so close to me out there on the balcony? To kill a man you must practically enter his mind, because you annihilate a soul as well as a mere body. It's quite a thing to do. Too much to do, perhaps, for the sake of what a romanticist would term a broken heart."

We reached the lift. The gates clattered open, clattered shut. I lifted my hand to the button, but his was there. He seemed in complete control. I drew a deep breath, and took a cigarette, and lit it. Then:

"I'm sorry . . . will you smoke?"

He smiled gently, shaking his well-groomed head.

"Thanks, no. I have given it up."

The lift sank like a smooth stone in a pond. When we walked out of it I felt the gladness come back: there were people, and lights, and life. I didn't have to hang. I hadn't killed him. It had been a near thing, but it hadn't come off. As we walked through the foyer, with my head still strangely light, I felt grateful to the little rat. In a way, he'd saved my life, up there on the high balcony, while he was saving his own—because he must have struggled until my nerve had snapped.

Again he seemed to be in tune with my thoughts.

"Glad to be alive?" he said softly. He was almost strolling now, through the bright-lit foyer, as though he were savouring the moment.

"Yes," I said. "I'm glad."

"Of course, of course. Only a fool would be sorry. There is so much to live for, even in these trying times . . . gay lights and a little wine, lovely women and always tomorrow, always the future . . . so stupid to give up what enjoyment there's left in the world."

I resented his picture of life. It was too luxurious.

"You live for those things," I heard my voice, "well, they're still yours. I live for different values, and they're still mine."

"It's still life," he agreed, "however we see it. I'm glad you've not lost your capacity to enjoy it, because death that finds a man ready means so little."

We went through the glass doors, down the wide stone steps. I said in puzzlement: "Because what?"

"I mean that you are not ready for death, and therefore it will come as rather a shock when the rope jerks, and I—being human and vengeful—will enjoy your little dance . . ."

I couldn't think what the devil he was saying. His voice had seemed to trail off, to fade in my ears like a dying echo. I shook my head, clearing

it, and when I looked around me I saw people, a lot of people. They were in a throng, on the pavement outside the hotel. I was among them.

"Meake!" I said suddenly. I couldn't see him anywhere in the throng. He didn't answer. A bell was sounding with a light, metallic trill; and the ambulance stopped at the edge of the crowd, bucking softly on its springs.

"Meake!" I called, panicking, because there was something that I couldn't grasp. And then I saw him.

I had looked downwards, at the thing the other people were watching. It was a slack, man-sized doll, sprawled on the pavement with one leg crooked grotesquely and one arm flung out. As they dragged it on to the stretcher I saw its face. The face was white, but the eyes were open, and they looked into mine.

I knew it couldn't be Meake. Meake had been with me, seconds ago, talking to me, walking with me along this pavement. . . .

Something was wrong.

It hadn't happened . . . I'd lost my nerve . . . he hadn't gone over the balcony . . . I hadn't killed him.

"But it's wrong!" I heard my own voice, calling to the crowd. "It didn't happen—this is all wrong! I didn't kill him! *I didn't kill him, d'you hear me!*"

Faces turned. The ambulance doors were closing. My voice pitched in a shriek, frightening me—

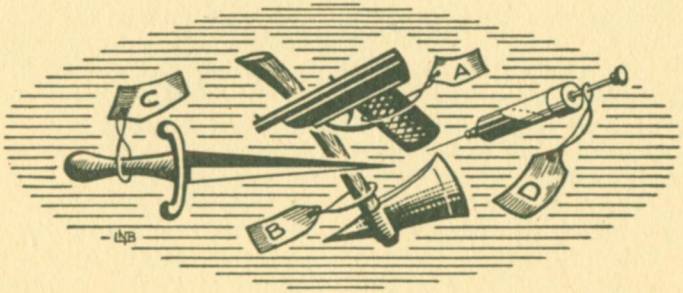
"I didn't kill him! My nerve went! This is all—"

My arm hurt as a hand gripped it. Another voice said:

"That's all right. Just keep quiet. Just calm down."

There was a cloud of white faces, watching me, and another hand held my other arm. A dark saloon span into my vision and its door opened. I stopped shouting. They didn't understand me. I just kept quiet, and sat still in the back of the saloon. Once, as we drove away from the staring crowd, I turned my head, and caught the reflection of my face in the window.

My face was dead-white, as if I had seen a ghost.



AFTER THE GREAT LIGHT

G. K. THOMAS

E LEFT THE village at the first light of day, travelling towards the mountains through the cold morning mist, with the sullen red ball of the rising sun to our left.

It was to be the first time that man had crossed the forbidden mountains to set foot in the dead lands that lay beyond the towering grey peaks.

We carried food sufficient for ten days: fruit and bread for as long as it would remain eatable; strips of dried meat to sustain us when the fresh food had gone; water carried in goat-skin bottles, slung with our blankets across our shoulders. Blankets that were heavy and cumbersome, but which with the coming of the cold nights would be even more important than the food.

Each night that passed seemed to be colder than the one before. Some of the older ones of our people said that it was because the world was dying; others said that it was because of the white death that was creeping steadily down from the north, getting closer to us each moon-period that passed.

And those who said it was because of the wall of ice also said that it might only be a temporary thing, that one day the cold would start to go and the sun would warm the ground as it had in the long ago.

But Arker told us—we three who had been picked for the journey—that the coming of the white death had been foretold; that it would never halt, being caused by something in the beginning of time. If our people were to survive, then we must go in search of warmth. Already there had been those who had gone hunting and never returned; those who had wrapped themselves in their blankets to sleep but had been found cold and stiff with the coming of dawn. Gradually the race was dwindling.

Arker sent for us, naming each in turn. Briar of the keen vision; Nevin with the great strength; me, Walpus, with the gift of perception and understanding.

We stood before him in his hut, the largest in the village as befitting his status as the oldest and wisest.

"We cannot wait any longer," he told us. "Each moon-period that passes the cold becomes greater. We must find a place that is warmer. The future of our people lies to the South. . . ."

The Elders chose the three of us to undertake the journey over the mountains. They said that we were in our prime, and that we were the strongest of the young men.

"You are to climb the mountains," Arker told us. "You are to go into the dead lands."

I listened to his creaking voice with a stirring of fear. From the days when I had been a child I had been taught,

as had all the others, that man could never live in the bad lands. It was the place, our mothers had told us, to which naughty children were sent if they disobeyed their parents.

No man had ever set foot on the evil black soil of the boundless empty plain. Only the more adventurous among us had ever dared to climb the steep passes and come out on a wind-swept plateau to find the forbiden lands stretching as far as eye could see. Nevin, I knew, had been there; Briar and I had once visited the plateau for a few moments, just to be able to boast that we had seen with our own eyes the barren expanse.

But the very thought of stepping southwards from that pleateau, going down the far side of the mountain to actually touch the forbidden ground, set the fear first gnawing, then racing through my veins.

It was an empty place; no trees, no bushes, no houses. Not even the faintest touch of green. Not even the blue glow that lit up our own country with the coming of each night. It was a place of death.

But being farther away from the ice it would be warmer. The mountains would serve as a shield against the piercing North winds that carried ice-crystals on their wings. If man could live on the barren plain, then there might be hope of survival.

Arker looked at each of us in turn, his eyes resting longest on Briar, the weakest of us. "You will recite to me now the story of our people," he ordered. He sat in his chair in the hut which was the largest in the village. The years sat with white feet on the thick hair that grew to his shoulders and mingled with his beard. He was old beyond reckoning; the oldest and wisest among us.

"The beginning was a great noise and a blinding light," Briar said, reciting from the litany we had all been taught when we were children.

Nevin took up the story. Tall and strong with fierce red hair and hands that could splinter the branch of a tree at one grip.

"And then man grew and prospered, and became as he is today," he said, "With the sun for warmth and the earth to feed him and clothe his body. But why make us speak of things we all know?"

Arker ignored the question, looking instead at me.

"And for the finish, Walpus?" he said.

"There is only man and nothing else. There is only the one land where he may live."

"Only the one land where he may live." The old man echoed my words. "And now that is being taken from us by the white wall that creeps nearer each day. Gradually we are being driven until our backs are almost to the mountains. It seems as if it is intended that we seek sanctuary beyond them."

"There is no life there," Briar murmured fearfully. He was the smallest of the three of us, but with eyes that could reach to the horizon.

"There is only man and no other creature," Arker said. "So we have been taught. But how can we know until we find out for ourselves? If other creatures do live in the bad

lands, then there is hope also, that we——"

"It is against the law," Nevin rumbled.

"The law is breaking itself. It has promised us a land in which we may live and now it is taking that land away." He raised his hooded eyes, his gnarled hands folded in his lap. "You have spoken of the true history of the past. What else do you know about the beginning of life?"

Briar looked at me. Nevin rumbled deep in his throat.

"There are forbidden things," I said. "Stories, fables without the stamp of truth."

"And these?"

"It is said that before the coming of the great light there were men who lived here; men like ourselves. They say that some of them became changed in some way by what came after the light; though they were not killed, they became altered in appearance, turning into monsters so that they were driven away. . . ."

"Monsters," Briar echoed fearfully. "It is said that they became monsters and were driven over the mountains."

"In my young days," Arker said wearily, "we were taught that to speak of such things was sacrilege—whatever that may mean—and so we spoke of them the more, but only in dark corners. But now we are more enlightened; we seek for the truth that underlies such legends. Perhaps the truth lies behind the mountains."

"So now there are two reasons for our journey," I said slowly. "To find a new land, and to seek the source of a legend."

Arker was already weary from talking, his eyes red-rimmed and sunken.

"We can ill afford to lose three of our young men. But it is a risk we have to take. You will carry food for ten days or longer. My son Obin will travel with you as far as the foothills, returning to tell me of the start of your journey. . . ."

We left the village at the first light of day. . . .

Because our people had been forced steadily southwards by the white death, the hills were but a day's journey from the village. We left Obin at the entrance to the first pass. The sun was starting to climb into the sky as we made our way between the towering faces of grey rock, Nevin in the lead, as befitting the tallest and strongest; Briar bringing up the rear and slowing our pace by the way his size forced him to clamber where we could walk, to hesitate where we were able to forge ahead.

With the sun low on the western horizon and with our own world spread out behind and shrouded now in the evening mist, we reached the high plateau where both the dead lands ahead and the country we had left could be seen at the same time. The wind blew sharply, in bitter, cutting gusts, striving to rip the clothes from our bodies. There we passed the second night since leaving the village, first eating fruit and drinking a little water, then wrapping ourselves in the blankets and seeking the sparse comfort of a crevice where the wind blew less cold.

With the coming of dawn we

folded the blankets, draping them over our shoulders. In the dim early light we could see the dead lands stretching away without a bush or a tree to break the bleak monotony.

Nevin, all of his strength in his limbs, seemed to feel none of the cold horror that came to sap my spirit. Briar was trembling visibly, seeming to have to force his legs forward. I told myself that our journey would be fruitless; that it was clear that no man could possibly live in such a place. When I voiced my thoughts, Nevin smiled grimly.

"We have had our orders," he pointed out. "We must travel as we have been told. Beyond," pointing, "it may be different. There may be living things." There was the faintest of sneers in his words, as if he understood how we felt and knew we would find any excuse to return.

"If there are living things," Briar said, "they will be monsters."

"This is no time for fear. And selfish fear at that." And now it was clear that he had set himself up as the leader. "We have the future of our race to think about. We must put aside our own feelings."

"You should be proud," he said, "that we are the chosen ones."

The cold struck into our very bones as we started to drop down into the plains. We rested with our backs to a rock when the sun was at its highest. There was nothing in sight save the grey peaks behind and the empty black wilderness ahead. The soil at our feet was black and lifeless, crumbling at each step we had taken.

All that day we travelled until the mountains became purple shadows against the cold blue of the sky. We slept huddled together in the blankets, alone in a world that was frightening by its very emptiness. But for all the fear that tugged at my breast and the cold that came seeping from the ground, I still felt that the night wasn't so cold as the nights in our own world. The miles we had left behind were already bringing a change.

But the next day brought something new. Seen through the morning haze a shape appeared, resolving itself at our approach into a small, stunted tree. We gathered round it, touching the distorted branches with wondering fingers, seeing how the few leaves clung to the withered wood. It was old and dying, but it was the only life we had seen in this place. And where there was life, then there was every hope that as we progressed farther we might see other signs.

And later on, as night was reaching out its dark hand, we came upon other trees and bushes: weak and sapless for the most part, but others showing signs of recent growth.

Two days later there was grass beneath our feet, short and dry and of a grey colour, unlike the rich green of the grass to which we were accustomed. More trees and bushes grew in clumps, and once we came upon a dried-up river bed where a small trickle of brackish water found a torturous way between mossy boulders.

It was Nevin, still maintaining his position as leader, who slid down the bank to place his face to the water

and then call back that it was fit to drink.

Later that day the mountains came into sight, far ahead, so far that at first we took them to be piled-up clouds, but which gradually took shape as we came nearer.

The next day produced a stream, this time running with clear water. There were trees on its banks bearing fruit that seemed similar to the apples of our own land. Again it was Nevin who pronounced them fit to eat.

We reached the foot of the mountains at sunset, sleeping under a tree with a stream nearby and fruit hanging overhead. And the night was noticeably warmer.

We spoke together before falling asleep, congratulating ourselves upon the discovery of a land to which our people could move. Briar was all for returning the next day with the news. Nevin took the relief from his face by saying that we had still found no signs of any other creatures.

There was some argument, Briar saying that there was no need to climb this new range of mountains, I agreeing with him, but Nevin saying that before returning we must have a full report. In the end I came round to his way of thinking, agreeing reluctantly that we ought to be in a position to state definitely that no danger lurked behind the mountains.

That night I slept fitfully, troubled by fears and vague thoughts and fancies that came entwining into my mind. My imagination peopled the night with strange, terrifying creatures. Several times I woke with my heart thudding against my ribs, imagining that I had heard movements. But each time I looked into the darkness the world was still and quiet.

At daybreak we started to climb, reaching the highest point as night came down, the dusk falling so swiftly that we had no time to see what lay beyond. For myself I received an impression of another spreading plain with a dark shadowy circle set in the middle.

And that night again, passed in a small ravine, was, at least for me, filled with foreboding and indefinite terror.

With the coming of dawn we found that the plain at our feet was richly green and fertile, with the dark circle becoming a large grouping of tumbled stone.

And as we dropped down from the heights and set off across the open country we could see that what we had at first taken for a natural outcrop of rock was, in fact, a mass of ruins.

Grey and red stones were piled one atop the other; jagged spikes reached up to the sky; ruined doorways gaped emptily. It was clear to all of us that we had come to the ruins of what had once been a village of enormous size, where the houses, unlike the wooden structures of our own people, had been made of stone. It was as if a fierce wind had come, sending them toppling and crashing to the ground.

At the point where we came close enough to recognize the stones for what they were, Briar was overcome by fear, squatting under a bush and

refusing to budge. Fighting back my own fear I helped Nevin to persuade him to move again. It was quite a while before he reluctantly climbed to his feet.

We moved more cautiously now, wondering if any form of life was inhabiting the ruined village. But as we walked along the ghostly path between the moss-covered stone, nothing stirred.

I found that some kind of small, evenly-shaped red stones had been used chiefly in the building of the houses. They were joined together by a white substance that was strange to us and powdered at the touch. We marvelled at the length of the walls, trying to estimate how they must have looked before falling into ruin.

It was Nevin who paced the length of one part.

It was Briar who used the word "Giants."

"For surely, to have lived in places of this size," he breathed with awe, "they must have been a great stature. Monsters. . . ."

The same thoughts were in my own mind. Giants, monsters. Creatures beyond imagination. And suddenly I knew that somewhere in this mass of ruins, creatures were living; watching us, perhaps. Watching and waiting. Seeing how Briar was bordering on panic I kept my own fears to myself.

Nevin was the only one who seemed unaffected. But then his strength lay in muscle and sinew. The Elders had chosen wisely when they picked the three of us. One for strength without fear; one for the keenness of eye; one for understanding and perception.

I tried to console myself with the thought that the fears lived only in my imagination, that because I had tensed myself during the journey, anticipating all kinds of horror, my mind was seeking to fill itself with unreality. But, fight as I did, I still knew that eyes had been watching us; that voices had spoken about our passing.

And that evening, just as the sun was setting, we saw the monsters who lived in the bad lands.

It was Briar's keen eyes that saw them. Walking between us he reached up an arm to each of our shoulders, bringing us to a halt while he pointed. We moved slowly forward, taking advantage of the cover of the ruined buildings.

The monsters had just emerged from a hole beneath a pile of stones, not thirty paces from where we had come to a halt. There were two of them, with their backs towards us, pointing ahead and talking. While we watched, another came groping from beneath the stones.

In the first moment of seeing them I felt a surge of overwhelming relief in the certain knowledge that we had nothing to fear from them. For they were pale, weak, puny creatures with spindly arms and legs that protruded whitely from the tunic-like garments they wore. And small, not much taller than the children of our race, barely reaching to my thigh.

They stood together: three miserable creatures with only two arms and two legs each.

Briar, his fear evaporated, uncoiled his spiral legs, coming to his full height, his three eyes taking in every detail. Nevin set two of his huge hands on a projecting piece of stone while he placed the other two on his hips, throwing back his head and laughing his derision.

I leaned against another pile of stones, letting the relief fill every corner of my body, two of my arms crossed, the third hanging loosely. My strength lay in my mind and not my limbs. There were times when I had regretted my miserable, undeveloped third arm and the fact that I had but three legs. But now, with my mind stretching itself and reaching out to touch the feeble stirrings of the three creatures, I felt no regret for my physical defects, only a surge of pride in that I could tell the others what the pallid dwarfs were thinking.

"They know we are here somewhere," I said. "They have been watching us from a distance. Now they think that we are farther ahead. And they are afraid . . ." I was gleeful. "Their minds are filled with a great fear and another word. But there is no sense in the other word."

"So the stories were true," said Briar. "Some did become changed by the Great Light. See—see how they are withered to little more than sticks."

He revolved his barrel-round body towards me. "A word in their minds?" he wondered. "And what is this word?"

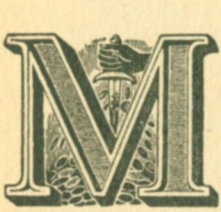
"Of no meaning," I replied absently, intent now upon how we should go about capturing them.

"It is what they call us for want of a better word. Mutants. No doubt it means normal men."

THE VICTORIAN UNDERWORLD

HENRY MAYHEW

A further excerpt from LONDON LABOUR *and the* LONDON POOR



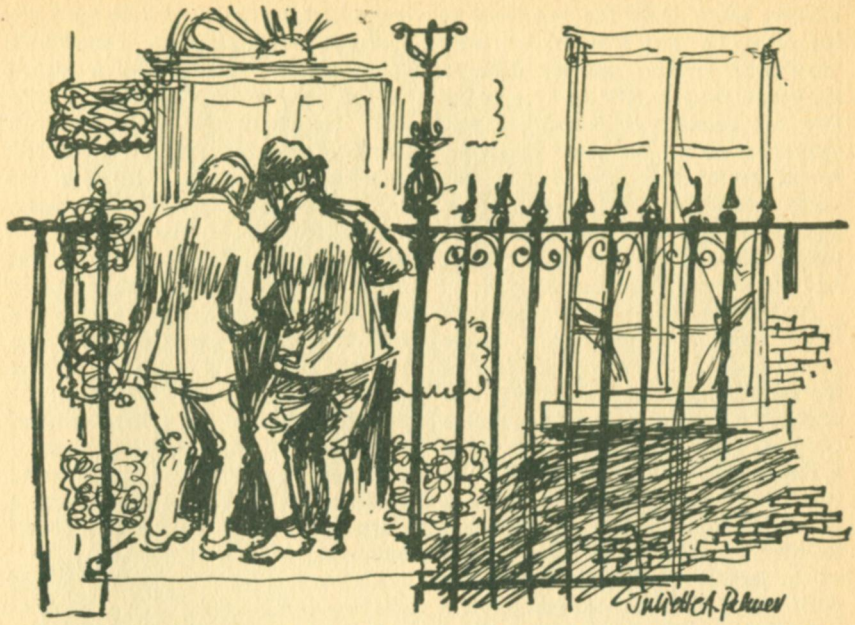
ANY ROBBERIES are committed in the metropolis by means of false keys, generally between the hours of seven and nine o'clock in the evening. After nine o'clock they would be considered burglaries. This class of robberies is generally committed by thieves of experience, and frequently, before depredations are committed, persons call at the house in daytime, who take particular notice of the lock of the street-door, to know the key which opens it, whether a Bramah, Chubb or other lock. These persons are termed "putters up of robberies", and supply the thieves with the requisite information, when they come in the evening and enter the house. In many cases they get clear off with the booty.

The houses entered are frequently respectable lodging-houses, or houses occupied by one family where there are likely to be no children about in the upper rooms. In the case of entering these dwellings they make their way to the bedrooms above, their chief object being to steal the jewellery and dressing-case left on the dressing-table, often of great value. They also take clothes out of the drawers, and other articles. On coming out they often put on some of the apparel, such as an overcoat, and fill the pockets with stolen property.

In houses in the West End, single gentlemen, such as government clerks, officers in the army and others, are often out dining in the evening, or at the clubs; and as the servant is generally engaged downstairs at this time, the thief is frequently not obstructed.

To elude suspicion from the police constables in the street they often have a carpet-bag to carry off the booty. If they meet one of them near the house, they generally ask him some question, such as the way to some street, to take him off his guard.

A case of this kind occurred early this year at the West End, where four men were engaged in a robbery. On their arriving at the corner of the street where the felony was committed they found two policemen there. They stepped up to them and conversed for some time, when the constables left, having no suspicion, from their respectable appearance. Two of the thieves crossed the street to a house opposite. Meanwhile their movements were narrowly watched by a keen-eyed detective, who knew the parties, three of the four being returned convicts. Having arrived at the door of the house, they endeavoured to gain an entrance,



which, after trying several keys, they effected. The other two confederates had taken up a position opposite the house, being what is termed "look-out", or outside men.

In a short time the two who had entered the house came out and closed the door behind them. They were perceived to have bulky articles in their possession. The other two men remained for a few minutes in their place on the opposite side of the street, when the followed their companions. When at a short distance from the house, they rejoined them, and the property was divided among them. This was done in the dusk in the quiet street.

The detective officer saw two of the parties with Inverness capes and carrying umbrellas in their hand they did not have before they entered the house. He went up to them and told them who he was and arrested one of them; the other was captured a few yards off by another officer when in the act of throwing off the Inverness cape. The other two escaped. On conducting the two men to the police-station the two capes were taken from them, and in their pockets were found a number of skeleton keys, a wax-taper and silent lights, along with various small articles, evidently part of the robbery which had just been committed.

Two hours after this a gentleman drove up in a cab to the police-station, and gave information of the robbery, when he identified the

articles taken from the prisoners as his property. The two thieves were tried at the sessions, and sentenced to six years' penal servitude. One of the two confederates who escaped was apprehended by the same detective, found guilty and sentenced to the same punishment, which broke up a gang of thieves who had infested the neighbourhood for several months, and occasioned great alarm.

An instance of a skeleton-key robbery from a gentleman's house occurred lately at the West End of the metropolis. The two thieves had engaged a cab to carry off the stolen property (the driver of the cab being a confederate) and drove up to the house next door to where the robbery was to be committed. They were seen to leave the cab, to go up to the door of the house, to apply the key to the door and walk in. About ten minutes later they left the house and walked to the cab with large parcels in their hands, when it drove swiftly away.

On that evening the butler of the house discovered that the whole of his master's clothes had been stolen from his wardrobe, and his dressing-case, with costly articles, his gold watch and chain and the whole of his linen. Information was given to a detective officer, who in two days after traced the robbery to two well-known thieves, one of them being singularly expert in the use of skeleton keys.

The manner in which it was detected was very ingenious, and reflected the highest credit on the officer.

On visiting a public-house near Tottenham Court Road, one Saturday night, he saw a middle-aged, intelligent man, like a respectable mechanic, conversing with a person at the bar over a pint of half-and-half. The sharp eye of the detective observed the former with a neckerchief which corresponded with one of the articles of this stolen property. The suspicion of the officer was aroused and he followed him late at night, and saw where he resided. On the next morning he went with two officers to his house, and found him in bed with his paramour, and arrested him for the robbery. On searching his house a handkerchief was found marked with the crest of the nobleman to whom the property belonged. On a further search a quantity of other articles was found belonging to this robbery.

On his paramour getting out of bed she was perceived by the detective to conceal something under her petticoats. Asked to produce it, she denied having anything, but when searched another handkerchief was found on her person, bearing the nobleman's crest. This man was afterwards identified as one of the two persons who were seen to enter the house where the robbery was committed, and to leave with the cab. He was tried at the Sessions and sentenced to seven years' penal servitude. This man had for some time been well-known to the police, and was suspected of committing a series of large robberies, but he was so dexterous in executing his felonies that his movements had not previously been traced.

Robberies are frequently committed by lodgers in various parts of the


Juliette A. Palmer

metropolis, in low as well as in middle-class localities.

A great many of these are committed in low neighbourhoods by abandoned women, frequently young. They commit depredations in their own room, or in other rooms in the house in which they lodge, by entering open doors, or by turning the key when the door is locked, while the parties are out. Many of these are done by prostitutes of the lowest order, who sometimes steal the linen, bedding, wearing-apparel and other property, and pawn or sell it.

Robberies of this kind are sometimes perpetrated by mechanics' wives, addicted to dissipated habits, who steal similar articles from dwelling-houses. Sometimes they are done by servants out of place, driven to steal by poverty and destitution; at other times by sewing girls, often toiling from 4 in the morning to 10 o'clock at night for about 8*d.* a day —many of whom commit suicide rather than resort to prostitution; and occasionally by clerks and shopmen —fast young men, when in poverty and distress; and by betting-men and skittle-sharps.

In March, 1861, two known prostitutes, lodging together in a house in Charlotte Street, were brought before the Lambeth police court for a felony committed in the room in which they lodged. They abstracted knives and forks, plates and spoons, along with two chairs, rifling the apartment of nearly all it contained. They were convicted and sentenced, the one to three months', the other to six months', imprisonment—the latter having been previously convicted.

Another felony occurred lately in Isabella Street, Lambeth, where a mechanic's wife stole the bed-clothes and the feathers out of a bed in the house in which she lodged. Her husband was glad to pay the amount to prevent criminal prosecution.

There are many felonies committed by persons lodging in coffee-houses and hotels, some of them of considerable value. The hotel thieves assume the manner and air of gentlemen, dress well and live in high style. They lodge for an evening or two in some fashionable hotel, frequently near the railway stations. They get up at night, when the house is quiet and business suspended, and commit robberies in the house. They have an ingenious mode of opening the doors, though locked on the inner side, by inserting a peculiar instrument and turning round the key. They go stealthily into the rooms, and abstract silver plate, articles of jewellery, watches, money and other articles.

These persons usually leave early in the morning, before the other gentlemen get up. Some of them are young, and others are middle-aged. They have generally some acquaintance with commercial transactions, and conduct themselves like active business men. They are birds of passage and do not reside long in any one locality, as they would become known to the police.

A very extensive robbery of this kind occurred some time ago at a fashionable hotel in the metropolis, near the Great Northern Railway, to

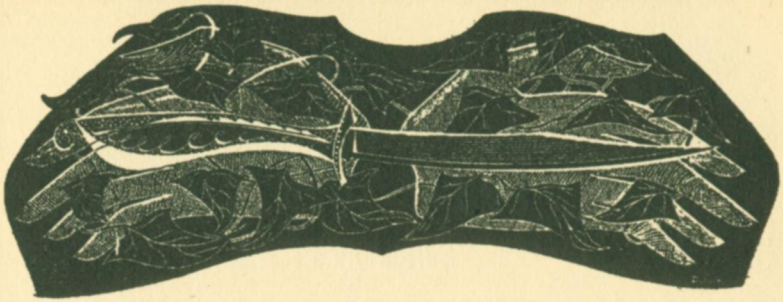
the amount of £700 or £800. The thief was apprehended at York, and committed for trial.

A great number of felonies are committed by servants in the metropolis, many of which might be prevented by prudent precautions on the part of their employers. On this subject we would wish to speak with discrimination. We are aware that many honest and noble-minded servants are treated with injustice by the caprice and bad temper of their employers and many a poor girl is without cause dismissed from her situation, and refused a proper certificate of character. Being unable to get another place, she is often driven with reluctance from poverty and destitution to open prostitution on the street. On the other hand, many of our employers foolishly and thoughtlessly receive male and female servants into their service without making a proper inquiry into their character.

Many felonies are committed by domestic female servants who have been only a month or six weeks in service. Some of them steal tea, sugar and other provisions, which are frequently given to acquaintances or relatives out of doors. Others occasionally abstract linen and articles of wearing-apparel, or plunder the wardrobe of gold bracelets, rings, pearl necklace, watch, chain or other jewellery, or of muslin and silk dresses and mantles, which they either keep in their trunk, or otherwise dispose of.

There are many felonies committed by the male servants in gentlemen's families; some of them of considerable value. Numbers of these are occasioned by betting on the part of the butlers, who have the charge of of the plate. They go and bet on different horses, and pawn a certain quantity of plate which has not the crest of their employer on it, and expect to be able to redeem it as soon as they have got money when the horse has won. He may happen to lose. He bets again on some other horse he thinks will win—perhaps bets to a considerable amount, and thinks he will be able to redeem his loss; he again possibly loses his bet. His master is perhaps out of town, not having occasion to use the plate.

On his coming home there may be a dinner-party, when the plate is called for. The butler absconds and part of the plate is found to be missing. Information is given to the police; some pawnbroker may be so honourable as to admit the plate is in his possession. The servant is apprehended, convicted and sentenced possibly to penal servitude. Cases of this kind occasionally occur, and are frequently caused by such betting transactions.



CROOKS IN BOOKS

A review of some recent crime, mystery and detective books

STEVE AUSTEN

"ZERO ALWAYS WINS", by Peter Gascoigne (*Collins*, 10*s.* 6*d.*).

This book has something in common with the James Bond saga; or perhaps all I really mean is that there's a devil of a lot of rather messy, bloody deaths in it, a quota of lesser violence, some of it rather nasty, a few voluptuous, bedworthy-and-willing women, Casino gambling and a general ambience of just credible espionage. But this is a first novel and it's by no means unimpressive. Mr. Gascoigne can sketch the smart bordello, the tart-with-heart-of-gold, the Riviera crowd and the international, wealthy megalomaniac, with verve and talent. His style is readable and often pleasant, although from time to time he breaks out in a rash of "poetic", descriptive adjectives. Undoubtedly he deserves a public and a commendation but, alas, to my way of thinking, he has soaked himself a little too thoroughly in the gore-for-kicks school. I hope next time he plays it with more finesse and more sensibility.

"THE ALARMING CLOCK", by Michael Avallone (*W. H. Allen*, 11*s.* 6*d.*).

Reappearance of Ed Noon, the clean-living, All-American Private Eye, in a case which hinges on an alarm clock. People get killed, beaten up, almost raped, and a war-victim without hands is deprived of his hooks by the baddies who seem to be ex-S.S. supermen now working for the USSR. A kind of bludgeoned fascination keeps you reading, and surprise, surprise, Ed Noon plus Uncle Sam win through to a rather over-sentimentalized conclusion—as the author puts it, "Ed Noon, a

private detective, was calling on the President." That was Ike, that was. But Noon can't be retiring yet and now there's Kennedy. Read on. . . .

"THE FAR SANDS", by Andrew Garve (*Crime Club*, 10*s.* 6*d.*).

Given identical twins, what happens when you marry one of them and then discover that the other is rapidly turning out to be a murderess? Add a pinch of East Anglian flats, and a dangerous tide, and you have *The Far Sands*, Mr. Garve's latest thriller. Andrew Garve always produces good plots and situations, but there are times when his characters bear only the most distant resemblance to people as one knows them. This time I began by half-believing, but ended by positively doubting his creatures. Somehow, somewhere, this means that his book is less than completely successful: none-the-less, it's worth reading for everything else, for what is, above all, a rattling good tale.

"DEATH ON THE BLUE LAKE", by Bernhard Borge (*Macdonald*, 12*s.* 6*d.*).

This, for my money, rates an alpha. Not a work of overwhelming genius, you understand, but a most entertaining and intelligent introduction to a delightfully Scandinavian twilight of death, ghosts, murder, literary critics, psychiatrists and nubile sleep-walkers. Borge has a rare old time with psychiatry (personified by Kai Bugge, a hypnotic trick-cyclist) and the world of small—and intentionally so—circulation literary magazines (Gabriel Mork, editor of *The Scourge*). *Death*

on the Blue Lake is good fun, good to read, clever and, even, exciting. Not surprisingly, a film has been made.

"EXIT DYING", by Harry Olesker (*Boardman*, 12*s.* 6*d.*).

A girl, on the Marilyn Monroe pattern, comes from small town Montana to Broadway. She encounters a useful director and a casual murder. This—as the telly has it—is her life. In fact, it's a highly readable, and rather intelligent, book which I found thoroughly amusing. A warning: it's a great deal better than its dust-jacket with "mirth and murder" and the blurb with "humour and homicide" side-heads would have you believe. Good, on its own terms, and these include originality and comedy, this is an encouraging successor to *Now, Will You Try for Murder?*

"THE GIRL IN OCEAN VIEW", by Maurice Symons (*Boardman*, 12*s.* 6*d.*).

An off-beat and almost endearingly gauche young hero is involved in a series of murders in a British holiday camp. There are flaws but somehow the book succeeds with its curious and rather attractive naïveté and its background details of the life of a professional camper—which seems to require a blend of Boy Scout, gymnast and demi-gigolo.

"A KILLING FROST", by Eric Burgess (*Collins*, 12*s.* 6*d.*).

The Thames not unnaturally exerts a special fascination for London authors, and in the mystery field *The Long Memory* stands out as a classic.

This newest book by Eric Burgess is not quite of the same class but it moves in the same waters. Out of the daily round of wharfingers, bargees and Doggett's badgemen, it creates a river world of reality and conviction. In addition, the characters and the plot are well above average. This is a thoroughly good read.

"MOMENT ON ICE", by Nat Easton (*Boardman*, 12*s*. 6*d*.).

An English, but not country-house, murder thriller in which aspiring, but hitherto unsuccessful, author finds his mistress/housekeeper dead in his cottage and himself cast as chief suspect. Not without occasional, and welcome, flashes of originality, this book nevertheless rarely rises above competent mediocrity. Fair enough for a cloudy flight to Paris.

"KILLER'S WEDGE", by Ed McBain (*Boardman*, 12*s*. 6*d*.).

A routine day for the detectives of the 87th Precinct, Mr. McBain's domain—or so they thought—but things happened; such as a female with a loaded ·38 and a bottle she said contained nitroglycerine. This is a *tour de force* with almost complete unity of time and place and I, like the detectives of the precinct, was thoroughly gripped. After I put it down—and it's the sort of book you need to finish at a sitting and, indeed, may find it difficult not to—I went on working out methods of breaking the closed circle of impotence but, to be frank, none of them would have worked. Very good of its kind.

"MURDER IS INCIDENTAL", by Douglas Rutherford (*Crime Club*, 10*s.* 6*d.*).

Murder *is* incidental to this competent, acute and rather sensitive picture of an isolated Italian sea-village which is the ideal holiday locale as long as no one else discovers it and the indigenous do not become too discontented with their lot. All of this, including my concern for the village of Rio Dana, makes it difficult to understand why this was made a Crime Club Choice. In other words, if it's slaughter you're after—or even good, clean, old-fashioned, one-murder - with - detection, whodunit fare—this is not for you. None-the-less, it's a highly readable novel in which a murder *does* take place, somewhat peripherally; the standard of writing is reasonably high and the story, albeit slightly melodramatic and slightly sentimental, is rather good.

"THE SPARTA MEDALLION", by H. L. Lawrence (*Macdonald*, 12*s.* 6*d.*).

This is Mr. Lawrence's second novel and a worthy follower to his *Children of Light*. Set first in the Peruvian natural jungle and then moving to Lima's artificial, urban undergrowth of crime and terror, this book is a clever and exciting story of an international, Fascist revival. Excellent character sketches abound, particularly that of José in his battered sombrero, the perennial fixer and master-mind of sub-surface Lima. A book of action and subtlety, it ends brilliantly, terrifyingly and, as

always, logically. Good, without reservation.

"THE BALANCE OF FEAR", by Hugh Matheson (*Anthony Gibbs & Phillips*, 13*s*. 6*d*.).

This is a 1960's version of the world of John Buchan, only not so good. There is even an Archie and the main protagonists (goodies) look back to the last war (1939–45)—"You served in Italy with the Eigth Army, didn't you?"—as Buchan's heroes looked back to the Western Front. They are also Establishment to a man and have the run of the War House, Air Ministry and, ultimately, even the P.M.'s office. But *The Balance of Fear* lacks the tautness, muscularity and vividness of Buchan's narrative style, and this is important because Mr. Matheson's events and characters are not particularly credible in themselves and the book needs a freshness of language and a firmer discipline in the writing to lift it out of the rut of half-misses and "good attempts". Unfortunately, the language is rather hackneyed, the phrasing stilted and the construction somewhat flaccid. On the other hand, Hugh Matheson possesses valuable gifts; he has a fertile plot-making brain and a pretty line in politico-scientific developments, inventions and horrors, and in master-villains.

"LET THE MAN DIE", by S. H. Courtier (*Hammond, Hammond*, 12*s*. 6*d*.).

Four hundred miles from Sydney, a small community living in the Australian "backblocks" waits for the annual ghostly reminder of a twenty-year-old murder and suicide. The action centres round the local hospital, doctor, matron, nurses and patients, with Superintendent Mahon of the Sydney C.I.B. calling the odds, at least 80 per cent of the time. This is a neat, taut, confined murder problem with an intelligent detective and, in more senses than one, an engaged observer. By no means dull, Mr. Courtier's book has its own kind of satisfaction and distinction, the country house murder transferred authentically, and thus transformed, to the Aussie outback.

"ALIBI", by Harry Carmichael (*Crime Club*, 10*s*. 6*d*.).

Another good, workmanlike Carmichael murder thriller, featuring Piper and Quinn. Exciting, ingenious, all that you expect from this thoroughly experienced and professional writer, *Alibi* has some very good scenes, including that essential, a gripping opening chapter.

"THE HALF HUNTER", by John Sherwood (*Gollancz*, 13*s*. 6*d*.).

This is a subtle, witty and thoroughly rewarding book. Shining like a newly-minted sixpence on a jaded bank-teller's counter, it ingeniously combines the freshness of a young love affair with a relentless search after truth, crime and the criminal. The first ingredient, the not quite cosy, unsentimental, boy-meets-girl motif, is tinged with youthful and ironical self-criticism; the second, the

pursuit, both intellectual and physical, is informed with an engaging and equally youthful, analytical imagination: the protagonist in both cases is a pleasant, sensitive and intelligent sixth-form tadpole turning into university frog. The characters, from the beat and bourgeoise *jeunesse dorée* of a south coast seaside resort to the great-aunt who is the *grande dame* of every sale of work, are cleverly and elegantly drawn. The plot, with its quicksilver changes of pattern, is well-contrived and beautifully edged. *The Half Hunter*, Mr. Sherwood's latest and, I think, best book, is a stylish and eminently readable thriller with double deception on two levels: by all of which I mean that this book gives you double value, in freshness and vivacity as well as in sombre, murderous overtones. It is good, intelligent, exciting and witty.

"DEATH IN COVERT", by Colin Willock (*Heinemann*, 15s.).

Colin Willock's third al fresco thriller, built round the sportsman-publisher (magazines) hero, Nathaniel Goss, is as refreshing, successful and entertaining as his previous two. Mr. Willock has discovered what seems to be a most rewarding recipe which always tastes good. He writes easily, wittily, well; his plots are clever; his characters amusingly credible, and recognizable as types, and, throughout, pervading the novels, are splendidly vivid open-air settings and a wealth of fascinating huntin'-fishin'-shootin' expertise. This time Goss acquires a gun in a rather odd shoot. The other members of the syndicate

range from a dispossessed and virtually indigent relic of the squirearchy through self-made money men to an almost flawless gem of the deductible expense account society. As well as this, you get ingenious murders, muzzle-loaders and a masterpiece of a P.R. party. What more could you ask?

"UNDER THE SKIN", by Dorothea Bennett (*Arthur Barker*, 15*s.*).

Nicely written thriller against a well-observed snowsports background, with a beautiful, ineffectual heroine, a rather vaguely delineated victim and a kindly, sentimental Government Agent conniving—for no very good reason—at a private assassination. On the whole, however, atmosphere and characterization compensate for a slightly unconvincing plot. A good idle read—but perhaps not for addicts with crossword puzzle leanings.

"DEATH OF A SNOUT", by Douglas Warner (*Cassell*, 13*s.* 6*d.*).

This is one of those rare books—for a start it's as good as its title—dealing apparently with accuracy and knowledge, and certainly with conviction and realism, with London's underworld. It's a story of tearaways, mobsters, three-rounders, toms and their ponces, of bank robberies, Soho Clubs, spivs and coshes, of Scotland Yard and snouts (police informers for the unknowing), gang fights, violence and murder. The book is exciting, well-written, compelling, neatly constructed and vividly convincing—if the crooks and layabouts don't talk

and act like this, then Mr. Warner is a superlative maestro of the confidence trick, but I have little doubt that they do. Full marks to *Death of a Snout*, a book well worthy of the Crime Connoisseur imprint.

"ARRANGEMENT FOR MURDER", by Roger Simons (*Bles*, 11*s*. 6*d*.).

Murder amongst the Chelsea-Kensington-St. John's Wood musical élite, the Friends of the String. The canary that gets her come-uppance isn't all that she seems. Chief Detective Inspector Wace, dyspeptic and perservering, preoccupied with his press cutting book and the memoirs he's going to write, gets there in the end. All rather fun, good police detective stuff and a decent puzzle for your money.

"THE ARENA", by William Haggard (*Cassell*, 13*s*. 6*d*.).

Mr. Haggard writes with smooth distinction and an always welcome awareness of the complexity of life at all levels from the painfully domestic to the relentlessly official. This latest problem for Colonel Russell of the "Security Executive" centres on the discreet world of merchant bankers and radiates out to the ramifications of the City's multitudinous operations. Thrilling, compelling, readable and satisfying within its limits, this book adds an extra dimension to its fictional plot with the credibility of its characters and the fascinating, factual detail of City and Whitehall machinations. Well worth reading.

"A SECOND COMPANION TO MURDER", by E. Spencer Shew (*Cassell*, 25*s*.).

This is the second volume of the crime addicts' vade-mecum. Need I say more, except that this instalment deals with murder by violence (knife, dagger, rusty razor, broken bottle, the lot) and contains the case where the butler didn't get away—*vide* Bishop where the butler is the victim?

"VANISHING LADIES", by Richard Marsten (*Boardman*, 12*s*. 6*d*.).

Enjoyable and good of its kind (i.e. tough but readable and a vindication of four-square virtue, with a streak of irony all the way through), this is the narrative of an American cop on leave with his fiancée who runs into murder at the motel. The lady vanishes and the local law is kinda corrupt, ruthless and unaccommodating.

"THE CASE OF THE EXTRA GRAVE", by Christopher Bush (*Macdonald*, 12*s*. 6*d*.).

Ludovic Travers, his old urbane self after umpteen novels, at it again in the case of the disappearing wife of an old-fashioned jeweller which leads—but you guess the rest.

"THE MAN WHO WAS THREE JUMPS AHEAD", by Hampton Stone (*Boardman*, 12*s*. 6*d*.).

Kidnapping with twists and kicks, seen from the D.A.'s office. Occasional—but hardly frequent enough—glimpses of originality.

LONDON MYSTERY SELECTION

Make sure that you receive regularly the LONDON MYSTERY SELECTION; fill in the form overleaf, and send it with your cheque or money order to the address below, or hand it to your newsagent for his attention.

Yearly Subscription 11s. ($2.00)

Your friends at home and overseas will appreciate a Gift Subscription, so if you fill in the spaces provided, they will receive the magazine regularly, and with the first copy a handsome Gift Card from you.

SPECIAL OFFER!

8 BACK NUMBERS FOR £1 OR $3.00

POST FREE!

A NORMAN KARK PUBLICATION

COURIER HOUSE
77 BROOK STREET

LONDON W.1
ENGLAND

Please send me LONDON MYSTERY SELECTION

☐ *4 issues for 1 year :* 11/- ($2.00)

☐ *8 issues for 2 years :* 22/- ($3.50)

I enclose cheque/postal order for .....

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

.....

.....

FOR YOUR FRIENDS

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

.....

.....

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

.....

.....

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

.....

.....

Cheques and money orders should be made payable and sent with this card to:

THE LONDON MYSTERY SELECTION,
Courier House, 77 Brook Street, London, W.1, England