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The **saint**

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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Edited by **LESLIE CHARTERIS**

In this issue

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LESLIE CHARTERIS



WATCH FOR The **saint** **ON TV**

adventure of the missing huntsman

A New Solar Pons story by AUGUST DERLETH

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY WRITING

Another change in the Saint that faithful readers have noted is in his driving habits.

The older (and, according to some, the better) adventures frequently featured him at the wheel of some sleek and souped-up sports car, for many years the legendary Hirondele, in which he was always taking off on fabulous chases to overhaul escaping villains or rescue some abducted damsel in distress. But even when he did not have such urgent motives, he was usually described as piloting his rod with sensational velocity (ranging from 60 miles an hour upwards, according to the capabilities of cars at the period when I was writing) just for the hell of it, with two fingers on the wheel and a faint reckless smile on his lips and a sublime disregard for all highway codes and safety maxims which left gray hairs on his passengers and on other motorists unlucky enough to be on the same road at the same time.

This, I confess, was only a slight exaggeration of the way I myself thought it was very clever to drive at the time; and the fact that I survived with a spotless record may have been due more to extraordinary good luck than to the reflexes on which I used to pride myself.

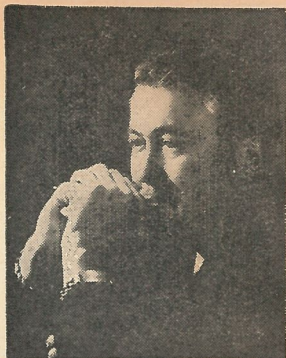
Now I drive in Europe a nice reliable Peugeot, in England a Triumph Vitesse which is quite nimble and eminently suitable for English lanes but which hardly makes the *gran turismo* class, and in Florida I am still driving a Ford station wagon which is entering its eleventh year but runs like a clock and is the right size for transporting the kind of bulky loads which we country dwellers always seem to be picking up, but which was a severe disillusionment to the last newspaper interviewer who saw it, who had probably expected me to come roaring up in the latest Jaguar.

These are practical cars for my needs of today, which tend to revolve around usefulness rather than flash. And I think I get all the performance out of them that they are capable of, which seems to be better than that of a lot of jazzier cars which I pass. But I do it quietly, discreetly, mostly within lawful limits, and always with a regard for other drivers which is both considerate and defensive.

For the consideration I make no excuse. It is simply that my manners, and the Saint's with them, have improved a little with advancing years, and that old aggressive brashness on the road no longer seems so clear or commendable.

The defensiveness is something else again. There are ten times more cars on the roads today, and twenty times more drivers. And where non-professional driving was once largely the prerogative of younger adults with an enthusiasm or at least an interest, it is now a semi-automatism performed by both sexes and all ages, irrespective of temperamental qualification or more than a purely nominal ability. Driving every day of my life, as I do, I am simply appalled by the daily examples I see of the sheer incompetence of presumably licensed drivers.

It's not the Saint and I who have lost faith in our own ability. It's the other idiots who have us scared.

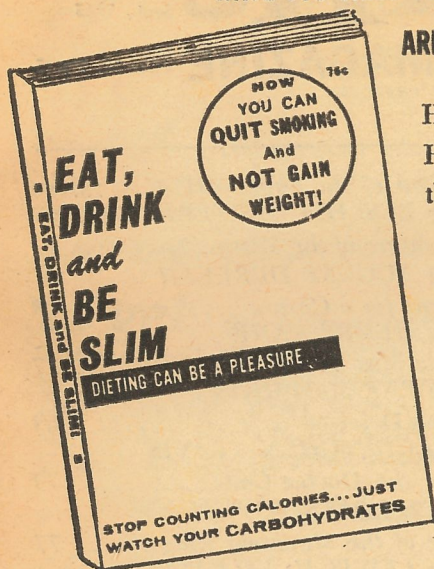


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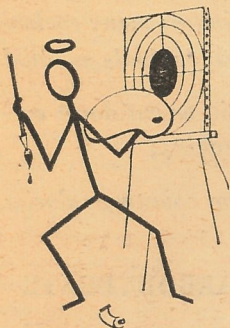
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The ^R saint

Sept., 1965

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instead of the saint—VII

by LESLIE CHARTERIS

The month of July, as I look back on it, is associated in my mind with two intriguing oddities

The month was invented under the aegis of, and named for, Julius Caesar. (One of his successors, Augustus, not to be upstaged, later stuck *his* name on the other extra month). Before that, as the roots of the names of what are the last four months imply, the year was a nice neat decimal job of ten months — the only trouble being that summer and winter would occur in different months every year, which could be confusing. The Julian calendar was the first attempt in Western civilization to coordinate dates with the observable fluctuations of the sun and the seasons, long before the scientific explanations were understood or even dreamed of.

Now, in modern Italian, which must be the most direct native descendant of Latin among languages the name "Julius" has become "Giulio". But the month of Julius is rendered "*luglio*".

No, that is not a mistake of our printers. *Luglio*. Pronounced "lulio". Even though the month of Junius, in modern Italian, is, as you would have a right to expect, "*giugno*" (pronounced "junio").

So how the L did that happen?

I have quizzed several Italian friends, but none of them could give me the answer.

Second, the national holiday of the United States falls on the Fourth of July, commemorating the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the manifesto which became the charter of the American Revolution, which made America the first British colony to leave the Empire — a trend which, alas, has in my time become almost drearily routine, but with completely dissimilar results.

(This document begins with the words "We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union," and goes

on to recite a list of grievances and principles. Only a few months ago, I hear, some youthful prankster typed up a copy of it, and went around public places to see how many signatures he could get. And it seems that everyone he accosted squinted at it with severe suspicion, nobody wanted to be associated with such an outlandish petition, and some more stalwart and vigilant citizens tried to have him arrested as a possible subversive or at least a dangerous crackpot.)

Independence Day, in the United States, is celebrated, among other traditional ways, by lighting bonfires and letting off fireworks.

In Great Britain, the national occasion for lighting bonfires and letting off fireworks is the Fifth of November, which commemorates the abortive attempt of one Guido Fawkes to blow up the Houses of Parliament; and Mr. Fawkes, who was horribly tortured and later executed for his crime, is hanged and burned in effigy with rather sadistic enthusiasm.

I feel sure that any cosmic conclusions that one tried to extrapolate from this contrast in national attitudes would be fallacious. So it remains, as I said to begin with, a teasing little anomaly.

I must admit that when I contemplate some of the performances of parliamentary institutions, and some of the utterances of their inmates, I often have a reprehensible inclination to think of Guy Fawkes as a martyr who unfortunately just failed to bring it off. I have a recurrence of that feeling whenever I think of Britain's shift towards alignment with the other "humanitarian" countries which have abolished the death penalty.

My personal views on this subject have been expressed before in this Magazine, in editorials as well as through the medium of stories. But it was interesting to me to come upon something I wrote on the subject in July 1946, in that venturesome *Letter from the Saint* which has been referred to before in this feature. I think well enough of it to reprint it here, verbatim for the benefit of anyone who missed it at the time.

Last November, it seemed like a sharp idea to John Romano, Vincent Giarrappa, and Russel Donohoe, three citizens with an especially well developed yen for easy money, to stick up a saloon in Brooklyn and depart with what they could find in the Scotch piano.

This week the idea didn't seem quite so hot, when they were convicted of the murder of Al (Bummy) Davis, an ex-pugilist who was unwise enough to get in their way during the heist.

At this point Judge Samuel S. Leibowitz asked Mr. Davis' widow what she thought should be done with the prisoners. Mrs. Davis said: "I don't believe in capital punishment. Whatever you decide to do will be all-right with me." Whereupon Judge Leibowitz sentenced the three little mischiefs to life imprisonment.

Several years ago I had the job of interviewing a famous Samuel Leibowitz, reputed to be one of the most successful defense lawyers of our time, who could substantiate the claim that none of his clients had ever gone to the chair, and very few of them had even been convicted. I cannot recall at this range what Mr. Leibowitz's views were about capital punishment, but I imagine that he had something against it, if he had devoted his life to reducing the potential number of its victims. Nor do I have any idea whether this Judge Leibowitz is the same attorney, now retired from the hurly-burly and elevated to the position of umpire. But there seems to be no doubt that, given an open choice, he has a similar reluctance to seeing people fry.

Now I cannot dictate anyone else's opinions on this subject, but I can state my own, and that is that this whole story is rather a fine cameo of sloppy thinking.

In the first place, Mrs. Davis' views on capital punishment have nothing to do with the case. Mrs. Davis was not murdered. Mr. Davis was. It may not be possible to consult Mr. Davis at this moment, but if any question could legitimately have been asked of Mrs. Davis I would have asked her whether Bummy had at any time declared himself on the subject. For all we know he may have disagreed violently with Mrs. Davis about this. And even if he didn't argue too violently while he was alive, the experience of being murdered may very well have changed his point of view.

There is even less excuse for Judge Leibowitz, who asked the question and seems to have respected the reply. If Judge Leibowitz is against capital punishment he should go out and campaign against it; but while he is on the bench his job is to administer the law, and the law in New York says that first degree murder is punishable by death.

There are no extenuating circumstances for murder committed during an armed robbery. The gunmen did not impulsively grab up some guns which happened to be lying around at the time. They took their artillery with them when they set out to make the stick-up, and it's a cinch that they didn't even take it just to scare off interference, or else it needn't have been loaded.

Al (Bummy) Davis lies a-mouldering in his grave, but the mob goes marching on. John and Vincent and Russel can now look forward to a few years of restful relaxation in Sing Sing, a calaboose which impressed me on one tour of inspection as quite an attractive resort. The rooms are a little small, but not much more cramped than a lot of quarters that some of my friends are glad to pay fancy rents for these days. They are simply but well furnished, and the guests are allowed to bring in their own pictures and radios. The work is no harder than the average artisan does for a living, and while he is not very well paid, the employee has no housekeeping or tax problems. The food is plain but good; and although there are no swimming pools or tennis courts there are baseball and football teams in season, and movies and lectures to brighten the dull evenings. All this of course is paid for by the state and charged in due course to the taxpaying citizens, with no exemptions to those who have suffered a loss from any of the robberies which have qualified the visitors for their term of residence.

After a few years in these idyllic surroundings, John and Vincent and Russel will undoubtedly be let out on parole, and being by that time even more conditioned to an easy and carefree life the chances are that before long they will be sticking up some other joint, and some other objector or policeman is liable to get a load of lead in his belly.

Perhaps next time it will even be some unfortunate individual who believes in capital punishment but whose opinions were not asked on the subject of whether he was in favor of having proven killers turned loose to shoot him up. Or the indirect victim may be knocked off by quite a different guy, who has figured that if John and Vincent and Russel could get away with it maybe he can too.

Not long after I interviewed Mr. Leibowitz, the attorney, I paid another visit to Sing Sing. This was quite late at night,

and in the company of a strictly limited audience. We had a preliminary interview with Warden Lawes, who I definitely remember said frankly that he didn't like capital punishment, but who unlike Judge Leibowitz went right ahead with what it said in the rule book. So then we went into a small auditorium and they stuck four guys in the chair in front of us, one after the other, and fed them the juice. They were just another small gang of punks who tried to stick up a subway employee with a bag full of the day's take, and bumped him off when he argued. One of the reporters with a weak stomach was quite sick, but I thought it was a swell show.

Well, that was almost two decades ago, and I've certainly changed a lot since then. In many ways. But not that one. If poor old Bummy's luck had only run out yesterday, I should have felt the same.

Maybe my closing sentence was a deliberate shocker. But, when the jokes are over, I think murder is rather shocking, too.

I have read a lot of published groans in recent years about the accelerating tendency of modern social systems to reduce everything, including people, to a number. Wherever we turn, these days, and according to where we live, we are saddled with an increasing multiplicity of numbers—social security numbers, identity card numbers, telephone numbers, health insurance numbers, driving license numbers, car plate numbers, and so forth.

Some of these complaints are strictly frivolous. In such a complex world as we live in, a certain amount of indexing is necessary, such as it may offend a human yearning for something with more emotional potential. A Ford is a fine car but with Detroit turning them out by the million you cannot effectively identify an automobile by describing it as "a Ford", or even "a new Ford", or even "a new blue Ford". John Smith has an honorable name, but in this global village there are too many of him to be handled with the old bucolic simplicity, like John-Smith-down-by-the-river as against John-Smith-on-the-hill.

OK. But I would like to enter my ineffectual protest against a proliferation of numbers which has no justification that I can see beyond the natural ambition of any Bureau to glory in its own expanding files.

Saddle each citizen with an identifying number if you must: once the stigma of a prison inmate, millions of us learned to accept that as a patriotic sacrifice of personality to a Greater Cause. But only a Parkinsonian self-inflation of bureaucracy could justify so many duplications.

Once each individual has been numbered on a national scale, that number could at least be made his official and statistical identity for all purposes. If printed on his driver's license, his passport or identity card, his health or unemployment insurance card, or any other document, it should be sufficient datum to locate him in any manual or computerized file.

It would probably be impossible to use the same figures for his telephone number or his car plates, since many people have more than one telephone line and more than one car; but I can't think of much else that would require a separate numbering.

I have also wondered why more use is not made of letters instead of figures to reduce the complexity of cataloguing. Letters, I maintain, are much more easily remembered than figures, and in some combinations like YMCA or RSVP they are recognized as instantly as if the words they stand for had been written out in full. Even in a meaningless combination, like UPHMG, it is not hard to invent a mnemonic sentence to fit the initials, like Uncle Potiphar Hates Milking Giraffes, which by its very absurdity imprints itself on the memory.

Yet the current tendency of Official Organizers, whose mission seems to be to make simplicity as difficult as they can, is away from letters and towards more figures. Many countries, like Switzerland, Austria, Spain, Sweden, Argentine, Brazil, Holland, and Mexico, do not have "name" telephone exchanges at all, their numbers being composed entirely of figures. London still keeps the old letter prefixes, as does Paris, although the rest of France uses only numbers. In America, the names are being methodically eliminated. In Florida, my telephone used to be linked to an exchange called Justice, which had a nice upright sound, but it has now been changed to the figures "965", which have no connotation.

Furthermore, the Arabic numbers offer only 9 different symbols and a zero; the alphabet offers 26. Or, if you reserved the letter "O" for the same purposes as the figure "0", there are still 25. Now, it takes seven figures to get up to as high a number as 9,999,999; but you can make 9,765,625—almost as many—different combinations

of only five letters. Seven letters would give you more than 6 *billion* different combinations.

Six letters would provide more than 244 million different codings—which, even if you had to scrap several million because they accidentally happened to form or contain words which would be considered objectionable, ludicrous, or derogatory, would still provide enough labels for every man, woman, and child in the United States.

Also, by making these letterings exchangeable or saleable, subject to formal registration, the Government could in effect conduct a dignified lottery in which there would be thousands of winners. A man named Thomas who drew the index MILLER might look hopefully for someone named Miller who had drawn the index THOMAS to make a swap with him, but would probably do better to offer it at auction to all the Millers in the country, and hope that he could realize enough to buy THOMAS in the same way, if he wanted the distinction of having his own name for his index. Since there are many thousands of Millers but only one combination of six letters that spells it out, the bidding would surely be brisk, with the prize going to one of the richest. On the other hand, there would be 50 combinations containing SMITH, either preceded or followed by an initial, attracting a perhaps larger market. The jackpot of all might be hit by the lucky man who drew the combination PGETTY.

A tax on these transactions would have the advantage of mulcting only those who had voluntarily chosen to incur it, and I suggest should be levied only on the buyer, who could presumably afford it or would be glad to pay it as part of the price of indulging his vanity, with no penalty on the vendor who could enjoy his windfall to the full.

Those of us afflicted with longer names, like mine, or Rockefeller, or Gulbenkian, might be forever denied the status of owning the one unique personalized “number” of *the* MILLER or *the* PGETTY, but we would still have the chance of drawing something saleable. But even if we were stuck for life with something as unglamorous and unmarketable as EENBFG, we could have lots of fun fitting it to mnemonics like ELEPHANTS EGGS NEED BIG FRYING PAN or Elegant Eels Never Beget Fishy Grandchildren. We would certainly never forget them, as I regularly forget my US Social Security number—which, as I look it up once again, happens to be 563-32-5613, in case any of you would like to credit

your payments to my account. This combination of no less than nine figures is something in which only a mathematical nut might discover something memorable. I would gladly exchange it for something like OBCBSS, which stands for Only Bureaucrats Could Be So Stupid.

The oblique references in part of the foregoing to someone whom our whiz-witted readers will have immediately recognized as Mr. J. Paul Getty, reputedly TRMITW (The Richest Man In The World), give me an unpremeditated excuse to mention that I have been personally acquaintd with Mr. Getty, and in fact have probably bought him more drinks than he has bought me, which should prove something about the equalizing influence of alcohol, if nothing else.

And this recalls to me a quotation which he showed me even 20 years ago when I was his guest in Santa Monica, California, where he had one of his homes at the time. It was in a book of memorabilia which he had been compiling for years, and may still be working on. I copied it down then, and I came upon it again only the other day. It says:

“The beneficent operations of commerce are invariably shackled by privileges and exclusions, instead of being left, like the rain of Heaven, to find their own level. Nothing is uncontrolled; oppressive regulations curb every exertion, and the people have been wittily said to be governed to death.”

This is not, as you were thinking, from a statement by some disgruntled Conservative who got clobbered in a recent election. It was taken from a forgotten book called *Travels from Paris in the Years 1801 and 1802*, anonymously authorized by “A Native of Pennsylvania”, published in 1808.



adventure of the missing hunter

by August Derleth

MY FRIEND Solar Pons laid a persuasive hand on my arm and slowed our progress along Praed Street not far from our quarters at number 7. "Gently, Parker," he said. "What do you make of that lady across the street?"

I followed the direction of his gaze and saw an attractive young lady, contemptuous of the wild March wind, striding up the street and turning to go back. She was well-figured, with golden blonde hair worn long in the face of the growing trend toward shorter hair. As she walked, she struck at the calf of her right leg absently with a stick, and from time to time glanced up toward the windows of our quarters.

"She appears to be contemplating a visit to you," I said, "but cannot quite make up her mind."

"Ah, said Pons. "I thought her a young lady of singular determination."

"From the country," I said. "See how she walks."

"An equestrian," added Pons.

Solar Pons — and Simon Templar and Perry Mason and Nero Wolfe — have, each in their way, become a part of the mythos of our times. Mr. Derleth, who lives in Sauk City, Wisc., is the author of more than a hundred books and novels. He is a widely recognized authority on regionalism in American literature and, as SMM readers know, on regionalism in murder. . . .

"Observe how she strikes at her leg; that is a horse-woman's gesture."

"I put her age at thirty-five or so," I went on.

"And moneyed," said Pons. "Her clothing appears to be conservative in cut but even from here it is evident that it is of excellent quality. And I should not be surprised to find that that little sports car up the street is hers. She has driven down on impulse and is now reconsidering that impulse."

"Or she has been to call and, not finding us in, was reluctant to wait."

"No, I think not," said Pons with annoying self-assurance. "She might have come down to sit in her car, but not to pace the street. She appears to be a young lady who cares nothing for the opinions of others or the attention she has already attracted. See there—and there," added Pons, pointing to pedestrians whose eyes had been caught by the lady and who had halted their own progress to fix their gaze upon her.

"But here we are," said Pons, as we reached number 7, "and our would-be client is still so engrossed in her problem that she is not aware of our arrival."

We mounted to our quarters, where Pons crossed directly to the windows facing the street and gazed down. I came up be-

hind him and saw that the lady had now come to a pause and stood looking directly across at us. And then, as if she had caught sight of us, she strode into the street with the intention of crossing to number 7.

"Ah," said Pons, falling back and rubbing his hands, his eyes alight. "We shall soon learn what troubles her."

The lady Mrs. Johnson ushered into our quarters within a few minutes proved to be uncommonly attractive, with a sensitivity of features which the stubborn set of her chin did not diminish. Her violet eyes met Pons' gaze boldly.

"Mr. Pons, I am Diana Pomfroy," she said at once. "My husband is Colonel Ashton Pomfroy."

"Master of the Wycherly," replied Pons, and then turned to introduce me.

Our client acknowledged me with a courteous inclination of her head and turned again to Pons. "Then you will have read of the tragedy?"

"A man trampled to death by one of your horses—and the loss of your Huntsman, Captain Dion Price. Pray sit down, Mrs. Pomfroy."

She took Pons' favorite chair at the fireplace, and Pons leaned up against the mantel facing her.

"I may have come on a fool's errand, Mr. Pons," she began,

sitting well forward in her chair, as if eager to impress upon us the importance of her words, "but I could not hold off any longer. There is something very much wrong at Pomfroy Chase. It is almost a month now that they found the man—and Mr. Pons, I should say at once that I saw the body—a horrible sight, and while I know that the inquest was conducted correctly, I cannot believe that everything was allowed to come out. Perhaps I feel some guilt myself because I did not say what I knew and what I suspected."

"And what was it that you knew, Mrs. Pomfroy?"

"Mr. Pons, the dead man—whom no one could identify—was wearing a weskit that belonged to Captain Price. I know because I happened to see it when Mrs. Parks was repairing a small tear for him, and I saw the repair on the weskit the dead man wore."

"And suspected?"

"I hardly know how to say it," said our client, lacing her fingers together, "but I couldn't escape the impression that the dead man had been *beaten* before he blundered into the stallion's stall. I could not understand how certain welts he bore could have been made by hooves. But then, I was unable to understand too how he could have blundered into that stall—the stallion's a

brute, Mr. Pons, a fine horse, but a brute. Was it chance? Or was he guided there? Or worse—pushed into it? The day we found the body, Captain Price disappeared—or rather, he was gone—he was last seen the previous afternoon—and ever since then there has been such tension at Pomfroy Chase—as if everyone were holding his breath for fear of something to come."

Our client reflected something of that tension herself, noticeably. She was now more agitated than she had been on her entrance, though only clenched fingers and pursed lips betrayed her.

"I recall that some effort was made to identify the dead man," said Pons.

"Oh, yes. Though his head was badly mutilated, a police artist drew a likeness and it was circulated in the newspapers, together with a full description of his clothing, though that was really very little, what he wore was so ordinary. Yet he was carrying a revolver, one chamber of which was empty and evidently recently discharged. He must have been an itinerant—a tramp or a laborer of some kind looking for work."

"Did he apply for it?"

"Not to our knowledge."

"Did anyone hear a gun discharged during the night?"

"No one reported it, Mr.

Pons."

"A gun shot could hardly have been so commonplace as to have gone unheard, if the weapon were discharged near the house. What of yourself—or Colonel Pomfroy?"

"Mr. Pons, we were away from home until shortly after midnight."

"Was any search made for a bullet, Mrs. Pomfroy?"

"I cannot say, but I doubt it. Since no one heard a shot fired, I believe it was assumed that the shot was fired away from the house."

"Did anyone report having seen this man prior to the discovery of his body?"

"No, Mr. Pons." She sighed. "But, of course, someone must have seen him. How else could he have got hold of Captain Price's weskit?"

"He might have stolen it," suggested Pons.

"I suppose that is true," she said doubtfully.

"Captain Price," said Pons. "How old is he?"

"Thirty-nine. He came to us well recommended by Lady Cleve seven years ago."

"And the age of the dead man?"

"They put it at about forty. Not over forty-five, Mr. Pons."

"The staff outside the house itself," pressed Pons. "What of them?"

"Well, of course, Captain Price. John Ryan is our First Whip, Reggie Bannan our Second, and O'Rourke our Third. Then, of course, there are the servants in the stables. The Hunt servants and our four horsemen were all hired by Captain Price. We established the Hunt seven years ago and we've had Captain Price ever since. We dislike to believe that he may not return—that something may have happened to him."

"And what is it you ask of me, Mrs. Pomfroy?"

"Oh, if I could say precisely! To learn who the dead man was—to lift the tension at Pomfroy Chase—and, yes, to find Captain Price." She hesitated, caught her lower lip between her white teeth, and added, "If he is alive."

"I see. I take it you have some reason to feel that he may be dead."

She shook her head. "It is only unreasoning fear, Mr. Pons. That man—the dead man—had the same kind of figure Captain Price had; he wore his weskit well, as if it had been made for him—but of course, he had a beard, and Captain Price was clean-shaven."

"When you last saw him."

"Yes."

"And that was?"

"Ten days ago. I spent a week in London recently, Mr. Pons. But now we are about to start

hunting . . .”

“But you don’t yourself know whether Captain Price was clean-shaven at the time of his disappearance?”

“No, Mr. Pons. I must rely on the Whips, who make no mention of any change in Captain Price. They saw him as late as six o’clock that afternoon—of the night during which the man was killed in the stall. I have spoken with them.”

“I shall speak with them,” said Pons.

“Oh, I don’t know that it would be wise,” demurred our client. “They seemed reluctant to speak. Would it not be best if you and Dr. Parker were to come for the Meet next Thursday and remain at Pomfrey Chase as our guests? I should like your inquiry to be discreet.”

Pons smiled wryly. “Murder—if murder is involved—can hardly be discreet, Mrs. Pomfroy. And it may be tantamount to murder to expect Dr. Parker to ride to hounds.”

I protested indignantly. “I believe I can acquit myself as well as you.”

“We shall see.”

“Then you will come, Mr. Pons?”

“We will present ourselves at Pomfroy Chase in time for the Meet, Mrs. Pomfroy.”

“Oh, thank you!” cried our client, as she came to her feet

in a swift, supple movement.

“Do be good enough to show Mrs. Pomfroy to her car, Parker,” said Pons.

When I returned, I found Pons deep in one of his carefully compiled files on interesting people and criminous events in Great Britain.

Without looking up, he explained, “Our client mentioned Lady Cleve, and I seem to recall making an entry on the lady some years ago. Ah, here we are. Lord Cleve, His Majesty’s personal representative in Ireland. Eight years back. ‘Daring Attempt to Kidnap Lady Cleve Frustrated.’ Let me see,” he went on, reading in a low voice as if to himself, “‘A daring daylight attempt to kidnap Ethel, Lady Cleve, by members of the Irish Republican Army was frustrated by a rebel, Sean O’Leary, widely known by his sobriquet, ‘The Black Prince’, and a handful of his followers, who interrupted the attempt even as Lady Cleve was being taken from her carriage in a Dublin street by terrorists. No effort was made to harm Lady Cleve. The attempt was evidently planned to force a compromise in the attitude of Lord Cleve in negotiations with representatives of the Irish Republican Army.’” He paused, then resumed. “Born Ethel Stewart, second daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Francis Stewart, Chelms-

ford, Essex. That would make her Scottish in ancestry."

"I'm afraid I cannot see the relevance of Lady Cleve's ancestry," I said.

He laughed. "Nor I."

"But what happened to the kidnappers and the other men who thwarted them?"

"Oh, they got into a battle among themselves and the Black Prince escorted Lady Cleve to safety. Once she was free, the rebels vanished from the street."

"They probably repaired to the nearest pub and spent the night in tall talk," I said. "But, seriously, Pons—do you intend to go to the Meet?"

"It ought to be a welcome diversion," said Pons.

"What is to be gained by such violent exercise? Will it help you solve the mystery at Pomfroy Chase?"

"Perhaps," said Pons enigmatically. "It will at least give me the acquaintance of the Huntsman and the Whips who show every sign, if our client is to be believed, of not having told all they know."

"Mrs. Pomfroy herself seems to be unsure about your role," I pointed out.

"Does she not!" cried Pons, delightedly. "Her little problem intrigues me. I do not recall anything similar in my experience. The victim is dead and buried almost a month—the Huntsman

has vanished." He paused suddenly, reflectively. "I did not recall our client's giving us the verdict of the inquest," he said. "Let us just look it up."

He returned to the back of his most recent file, and took from it a packet of clippings he had not yet had opportunity to enter. He riffled rapidly through them, reading titles aloud as he went. "The Framblehurst Arms murder. The Swansea mystery. Manchester double murder. Ah—'Death by Misadventure Verdict at Pomfroy Chase'.—I fancy it might not be amiss to reread the published accounts of the matter."

He settled himself to read again the trio of clippings which pertained to the Pomfroy mystery, but if he saw anything of interest in them, his expressionless face told me nothing. When at last he discarded the clippings and looked up, his face was reflective.

"Dr. Michael Paradine," he said, "is apparently the man we should talk to first."

"Who is he?"

"The examining physician. There is nothing in the published accounts our client has not already imparted."

"Pons, have you considered that this may indeed be a wild goose chase? That the matter may be exactly what the inquest determined?"

"Oh, I have considered it, but also discarded the thought," said Pons. "I submit our client's concern is well grounded. Even if we grant death by misadventure, we still have the problem of the missing Huntsman. But I am unwilling to grant even so much. The situation presents some interesting aspects. Consider that our client made no mention of anything untoward taking place at Pomfroy Chase prior to the night of the—let us just say, 'accident'. She held everything to be normal, I take it, or she would have said so. She would appear to be a young lady who is keenly sensitive to impressions. She related none. Then a man is found dead in the stallion's stall. The stallion was known to be a brute. The fellow might have been a vagrant, but Mrs. Pomfroy does not think so, because he was wearing Captain Price's weskit. And Captain Price is missing. Since then there seems to be a continuing tension at Pomfroy Chase. Now, does not this chain of events suggest anything to you?"

"For one thing," I said bluntly, "I would like to make a more careful examination of the dead man. I would like to know if his fingerprints and teeth were compared to Price's."

"Ah, that thought had occurred to me," admitted Pons. "It had also occurred to Mrs. Pom-

froy, but she cannot believe that the dead man is Captain Price."

"Perhaps because she does not want to believe it."

"Perhaps," conceded Pons. "But I rather think that it would be elementary to rule out Price by the simplest of tests. So let us assume that the dead man was not Price. On that premise hinges another—what had he to do with Price? He wore his weskit—and a repaired weskit, true—so we are left with the conclusion that he either visited Price and was given the weskit, or he stole the weskit in Price's absence."

"That seems beyond cavil," I agreed. "But who would steal a worn weskit?—one worn to the extent of being repaired?"

"Capital!" cried Pons. "And what do you make of the prevailing tension at Pomfroy Chase?"

"They are fearful that something will be discovered."

"The verdict is in and the case is closed," Pons pointed out. "What have they to fear?"

"Well, then, they are fearful of something to come."

"I submit that is far more likely," said Pons. "But perhaps at this point speculation is idle. We know too little of elementary matters. If Captain Price was abducted, why? If he chose to leave of his own accord, for what reason? The newspaper

accounts speak of a 'sum of money' found on the dead man. Surely that is ambiguous! Why not a stated sum? The Meet is two days hence. I think we will just run down to Cranborne tomorrow and have a word with Dr. Paradine before going on to Pomfroy Chase. Let us wire Mrs. Pomfroy to expect us for dinner tomorrow evening."

The following afternoon found us at Cranborne, waiting upon Dr. Michael Paradine at his office. Dr. Paradine was a gruff, burly man, with a thick moustache worn almost truculently on his upper lip, and cold, piercing dark eyes. He had kept us cooling our heels in the waiting room until Pons had sent in a note—"About the Pomfroy Chase Affair."—whereupon he had seen us at once.

"I am at a loss to understand this, Mr. Pons," he said curtly.

"I have read the published accounts of the matter with great interest," said Pons, choosing his words carefully. "I have had the privilege of speaking with Mrs. Pomfroy. We seem to be alike in the dark."

"Well, sir, you have no advantage over me and I none over you," said Dr. Paradine, smiling frostily.

"You examined the body, Doctor. You have that advantage."

"That is true."

"Did you, in fact, find on the dead man's head welts which suggested that he might have been beaten?" asked Pons.

Dr. Paradine looked at us for a few moments in silence. "I found certain welts," he answered at last. "I cannot say that they were the marks of a beating."

"You did not think it likely that they were made by the horse?"

"I cannot say, Mr. Pons."

"Come, come, Doctor," pressed Pons. "You must certainly have formed an opinion on the question."

A fine dew of perspiration had come to show on the doctor's temples. "In my opinion, it was unlikely that the horse made them. They were not fatal. They were made before death, as their color indicated. The fellow was fearfully mutilated."

"Thank you, Doctor. Did any suspicion cross your mind that the dead man might be the missing Captain Price?"

Dr. Paradine smiled. "While they were of somewhat similar proportions, sir, no such suspicion entered my mind."

"One more thing. Newspaper accounts mention that a sum of money was found on the dead man. None mentions how much. You were at the inquest and you may remember the sum, which was certainly brought out at that time."

"One hundred fifty-seven pounds, Mr. Pons, and some shillings. He was hardly, as some people have suggested, a vagrant."

"It would certainly not seem so. Are you, by any chance, a member of the Wycherly Hunt, Doctor?"

"I have that privilege," answered Dr. Paradine somewhat stiffly.

"See you again at the Meet," said Pons. "Good day, Doctor."

Dr. Paradine's eyebrows went up. "You are guests of the Master?" he hazarded. Without waiting for Pons' reply, he asked, "Perhaps I could drive you to Pomfroy Chase—unless you have a car of your own?"

"We came by train," said Pons.

"Well, then, if you have no objection, I would consider it a privilege, sir."

Dr. Paradine's frostiness had evaporated; he was now all civility. He left the office in the care of his associate, and within a quarter hour we were on the road to Pomfroy Chase, which lay out of Cranborne in the direction of Salisbury.

It was soon apparent, however, that the doctor had an ulterior motive, for he plied us with questions, primarily designed to discover Pons's motives at inquiring into the affair at Pomfroy Chase—however delicately, secondarily to learn how

much we knew of fox-hunting. Pons acquitted himself satisfactorily enough, without betraying the fact that he was acting for Mrs. Pomfroy, and Dr. Paradine left us at Pomfroy Chase a baffled and disgruntled man, though he was too much the gentleman to show it.

Pomfroy Chase was obviously the home of a wealthy man. It was evidently an old manor house which had been restored, a long, L-shaped building of stone, two storeys in height, of which the second was a gable storey, broken by dormer windows. The building faced lawns and flower beds and a handsome, circular driveway, while at the rear stood the kennels, and beyond these, well away from the immediate grounds, a septet of cottages, all of stone, which were clearly part of the estate, and very probably housed some of the Hunt servants.

The butler's reaction to Pons's name indicated that we were expected. We were shown without delay into Mrs. Pomfroy's presence.

"I'm glad you're here, Mr. Pons," she said at once. "I know something is wrong here, I feel it too strongly to ignore. The Hunt servants are so tense I fear for the day's hunting tomorrow."

"Surely it cannot be as bad as that," said Pons reassuringly.

"I know you must think it my

fancy, but I assure you it is not," she said fervently. Then, sighing, she said, "But I impose on you. Let me show you to your room—I hope you will not mind sharing it."

"We have been sharing quarters for some years, Mrs. Pomfroy," said Pons dryly.

"Thank you. Please follow me. John will bring your bags."

Our hostess led us up the stairs to a comfortable room, the gable windows of which opened toward the stables and the cottages beyond. Pons crossed to the near window at once and stood looking out.

"I take it those cottages across the meadow are occupied by some of the Hunt servants?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons. The largest is—was Captain Price's. Bannan, Ryan, and O'Rourke each has one."

Without turning, Pons asked, "The Meet starts here?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons. We try to start at eleven o'clock."

"Thank you, Mrs. Pomfroy."

"Dinner at seven, Gentlemen," said our hostess and withdrew.

"I submit there was design in Mrs. Pomfroy's choice of this room for us, Parker," said Pons, chuckling. "We have a fine view of the stage upon which the Hunt servants must perform."

He came back to one of the two beds in the room and flung himself full-length upon it.

"What did you think of Dr. Paradine?" he asked.

"A cautious and ethical man," I replied.

"Pray do not be so defensive. I admire caution and ethics in a medical man, as you well know."

"I daresay he was fearful that there might be some disclosure reflecting upon his judgment," I said.

"I thought as much. In sum, however, his attitude reflects and bolsters our client's. He is certain that the stallion killed the intruder in his stall—but he is not certain the fellow came there by accident. 'Death by misadventure' is ambiguous enough to satisfy no one."

"You postulate the man was murdered. But who would murder a stranger except for money?—which was not taken."

"Ah, Parker, you make progress. I submit that to someone the fellow was not a stranger."

"You are thinking of Captain Price. Do you suggest that Price then killed him?"

"My mind is open on the matter. But I cannot deny that certain suggestive indications offer fascinating solutions to the riddle," said Pons. "For one—it can scarcely be doubted that the two events are in some way connected, though it does not follow that Price murdered the visitor."

"But who then?"

"Ah, I fancy that time and pa-

tience will tell us that, Parker."

With that he had finished; he would say nothing further. He composed himself for rest—which, for Pons, meant the consideration of the particular problem which occupied his attention—and so he lay, almost inert, upon the bed until it was time to make ready for dinner.

Our host presided at the dinner table. Colonel Ashton Pomfroy was at least ten years his wife's senior. He was a ruddy-faced man with quiet blue eyes and a self-assured manner. If our client had told him why Pons and I had been invited to join the Hunt, he gave no indication that it was so; he was courteous almost to being deferential.

There were three other guests at dinner—General Hugh Pomfroy, our host's uncle—a great, shaggy-browed fellow, very hearty of manner—and the Chairman of the Hunt Committee, Richard Codrington—who, with singular punctiliousness invariably addressed our host as "Master", which Colonel Pomfroy's uncle did not always do—and the chairman's wife, who was seated next to me, and thus but one place removed from our hostess, so that conversation at dinner—which was, understandably, primarily of the morrow's Hunt, fell naturally into three divisions—among the two ladies

and myself, which was somewhat disconcerting since they seemed to enjoy discovering how much I did not know about fox-hunting—between the Master and the Hunt chairman—and between Pons and General Pomfroy, who held forth pontifically about "some fellow named Pons" he had known "somewhere in France during the war" and was finally convinced that it was Pons' brother Bancroft, though he found it difficult to imagine that "that fellow could be in the Foreign Office," for he had evidently a military man's dubiety about any devotee of ratiocination.

Pons listened, but spoke no more than the proprieties of the occasion demanded, and when dinner was done, excused himself. I followed suit.

But, though Pons had spoken of retiring to his room, he made his way outside the house and around to the stables where the hounds were quartered.

"Do you know anything about fox hounds, Parker?" asked Pons.

"About as much as I know of fox-hunting," I answered. "What is the size of your pack?"

"Twenty couple, I believe our host put it."

"I gathered that it is to be a large Meet."

"I believe some seventy people will take part."

We stood looking at the

hounds, I was certain, with some design on Pons' part, and presently we were discovered by a slender, greying man of perhaps forty, who came casually toward us, his narrowed eyes suggesting that we might not be entirely welcome.

"Is there anything I can do for you, Gentlemen?" he asked.

"You must be Ryan," ventured Pons.

"Right, sir."

"Dr. Parker and I were wondering whether one of your Hunt servants is not young Jock Britney?"

"I hardly thing so, sir," said Ryan. "We have O'Rourke, Callahan, Malone, O'Connor, and Keenan. Not a Britney among them. And none under thirty. You'd hardly call that 'young,' would you, sir?"

Pons laughed. "Ah, well, then, we were misinformed," he said. He turned from contemplation of the hounds, and gestured toward the cottages well off beyond the stables. "Can you tell me, Ryan, who occupies these houses?"

"Sir," answered Ryan with a querulousness rising in his voice, as if he meant to say that this was none of our business, "we live there."

"We?" persisted Pons.

"The near one is Captain Price's—and next to it my wife and I live there, and then Ban-

nan and his family, and then O'Rourke and his, and so on."

"Ah, no family, Ryan?"

"No, sir," said Ryan stiffly.

"I thought, a moment ago, I saw an old man there," persisted Pons.

"My father's come to visit us for a while." His words were now so short as to be crystal clear. He resented Pons' asking questions, but he did not want to risk offending a guest.

"Ah yes, Captain Price" murmured Pons. "That was the fellow who disappeared. Did you know him?"

"Sir, we all know Captain Price," said Ryan coldly.

"A good man?"

"None better."

It was now almost painfully clear that Ryan not only disapproved Pons' questions, but had tautened with suspicion of both of us.

"What weather will we have for the Hunt?" asked Pons then.

Ryan visibly relaxed. "A fine day. Some clouds, and a spot of misting rain. Ideal hunting weather, sir."

"This will be your first day's hunting without Captain Price, eh?"

Ryan froze once more. He nodded curtly, but did not trust himself to speak.

"Thank you, Ryan," said Pons.

"You're welcome, sir."

Ryan stood motionless while

we walked back toward the house, for the March air had grown increasingly crisp with the dying day. I thought the First Whip's attitude proof of his cold suspicion.

"Surely you gained little by making that fellow suspicious," I said.

"Were not my questions innocuous enough?" asked Pons.

"They were pointless," I cried.

"On the contrary," replied Pons, with a tight smile. "Ryan's replies yielded a wealth of information."

"You cannot mean it!"

"I was never more serious," said Pons. "For one thing—it is now evident that Ryan, at least—and perhaps the others—have good reason to believe Captain Price to be alive—you will have observed Ryan's insistence on speaking of him in the present tense. It is quite possible that they are in touch with him. That is but one of the valuable facets of our little conversation. I am sure that you will, on reflection, think of others. I commend our dialogue to your study, Parker. You know my methods. You have only to apply them."

Questions crowded to my tongue, but I knew it would be useless to ask them. Pons had said all he meant to say.

Looking back, I saw that Ryan was no longer alone. Two other men had joined him, though at

a little distance behind him; all three were gazing after us with motionless coldness, as if they meant to see that we did not turn back toward the stables.

Pons anticipated my saying so. "I saw them, Parker," he said. "I fancy we would have had a difficult time nosing about. Nevertheless, I intend to do so if you'll bear with me."

He made his way completely around the front of the house, and this time came to the stables where the horses were kept. We had not gone more than half way along the stalls when Ryan appeared once more.

"Oh," he said, "it's you again." His voice was like ice.

"Forgive me, Ryan," said Pons persuasively. "I had a fancy to see the stall in which that fellow was killed. Even in London, you see, we read about it."

"I don't wonder," said Ryan, and added, pointing, "That one."

Pons walked over to it under Ryan's watchful eye, looked in, and turned.

"The stallion's out at grass, if you'd like to see him," said Ryan sarcastically.

"It would be interesting to hear what he has to say," said Pons, "if I could only talk his language."

Ryan said nothing.

Pons walked past him, thanking him once more.

This time he had finished. We

walked into the house and up to our room, where Pons made himself comfortable with every sign of meaning to stay where he was until morning.

"Was there anything about the stall worth seeing?" I asked.

"You saw where it lays," said Pons. "I submit it would have been considerably easier to blunder into several other stalls before reaching the stallion's. It gives one food for thought, does it not?"

I agreed that it did. "It suggests that he was led or brought there. But again, if not robbery, what was the motive?"

"Ah, Parker, that grows with every hour the most intriguing question of this little puzzle. Indeed, unless I am very much mistaken, the solution to the events at Pomfroy Chase rests in it."

With this I had to be content, for he retreated into a copy of *Insurrections Against His Majesty's Government*, which he had brought along from our quarters in Praed Street.

The Hunt breakfast, for all its informality, was a gala affair, and a colorful one, with the field in pink and their ladies in dark garb. Our hostess had seen to it that we, too, had garb appropriate to the occasion. The members and guests stood about, inside and out, drinking coffee and

eating the food set out on the sideboard and the table, and the hum of conversation filled the air.

After a few words with our hostess, Pons made his way outside, where he stood watching the scene. The Master was busy with Ryan and Bannan, who were also in pink, but at sight of Pons and me, he detached himself briefly and came over.

"Gentlemen, Ryan will bring around your mounts in good time."

"Thank you, Master," said Pons—quite as if he had been riding to hounds all his life.

Some members of the Meet had already finished and were mounted. The hounds had been brought out—twenty couple, as Pons had said. They sat or milled about, keeping close together, in an open space among the horses. The Whips were not far away. An air of expectation hung over the scene, and everyone waited on the edge of awareness of the event about to take place.

"How many horsemen do you count, Parker?" asked Pons.

I looked among the crowd. "Two," I said.

"Were there not four?"

"So Ryan said."

At this moment General Pomfroy caught sight of us and came bustling over. "Ah, Mr. Pons," he boomed, "I forgot to ask you last night in what capacity you

served the Foreign Office." He had clearly, in the course of the night, convinced himself that Pons and his old military acquaintance were one and the same.

"Cryptography," said Pons without hesitation.

"Ah, fascinating, fascinating!" said the General, and launched into an account of an adventure of his own in military intelligence in France, an interminable tale which was interrupted by nothing and no one until the Master walked past to say, "Hounds, Gentlemen, please!"

One of the horsemen had come up with our mounts. Pons lifted himself to his horse with considerably more agility than I, but I fancied I sat my mount more securely than he, for he seemed to crane this way and that as if determined to take in everything at once—the hounds forward, the three Whips—the Master on his mount—our client in a little group leading the way after the hounds, leisurely—Ryan riding forward to join Bannan near the Master—Bannan carrying two poles, one of which he thrust forward at Ryan as Ryan came up—General Pomfroy mounting as if he were engaged in storming the battlements of a fortress—the Chairman of the Hunt off to one side, looking a little anxiously at the weather, which was now dark and louring

with a northeast wind and the smell of rain on it, though no rain had fallen.

The hounds moved in silence; here and there a stern whipped two and fro; the voices of the Whips cajoled and commanded. The field made a straggling party in the van of the hounds, with the distance widening between hounds and field; a babble of talk rose among the field in one place, subsiding in another. The field moved across the dark landscape in the grey morning like a great flower unfolding, going steadily away from Pomfroy Chase in the general direction of Salisbury, across a dale, between a knoll and a rambling copse, out upon the moor.

The wind felt raw, but Pons did not seem to mind it. He rode now more easily, having in to it, and having established for himself where the Hunt servants were and where the Master was; but he rode alert, I saw, as if he waited upon the first music of the hounds.

It came with startling suddenness when the hounds gave tongue. An instant later the cry "Gone away!" rang forth, and the field plunged forward. The hounds boiled out over the moor, their music ringing wild on the wind. From Huntsman to field and back among the other members the cry was passed that a dog-fox had been viewed,

the hounds were hot on his scent.

What had been leisurely was now charged with urgent action. The hounds streamed across the moor; the field strove to close the distance between; and the music of the hounds filled the morning, beating back the dark clouds, the threat of rain, and the chill that had seemed so omnipresent an hour before. Countryside, hounds, pink-clad huntsmen and, somewhere ahead, a dog-fox running for his life were all the morning—all else belonged to another world, and the excitement of the chase filled me as it filled Pons, too, for he urged his mount forward, passing several of the field in his insistence.

But the moor was difficult country. The flat of it had quickly given way to knolls, coppices, and an occasional rock, and the fox in his cunning led hounds and field through the most rugged parts of it. The field spread out and came together again. Ryan and Bannan were hard on the heels of the pack; the Master, as far as I could see, rode at the head of the field, with the Chairman of the Hunt Committee not far behind, and our hostess with six other women were close by. Pons was now well ahead of me; I caught sight of him from time to time, riding hard, just in advance of the ladies. General

Pomfroy had fallen back—a lone figure bringing up the rear. Ahead, I could see the Whips and the horsemen—four of them, though I could have sworn we had started with but two.

The hounds came to a sudden stop, boiling around in confusion, and two of the Whips rode forward to help start them again. Whining, yelping, baying, the hounds set off in one direction, returned, set off in another. The Whips turned them again, back to the old line, and the pack streamed forward once more, the confusion gone from their voices, their bugling once again riding the wind and falling to ear in this place like a melody of Schubert rose to intoxicate one's senses in the concert hall.

The moments of hesitation and confusion, brief as they were, had enabled the field in the lead to close much of the gap between them and the pack, though the hounds were widening it once more. The cry of the hounds, the shouts of the Whips, Ryan blowing the Huntsman's horn, the renewed "Holla-ing" ringing down the moor charged the morning again with excitement.

Pons had fallen back; now he was urging his mount forward again, using his crop. General Pomfroy had almost caught up. The Hunt Chairman wheeled from time to time to gaze, trou-

bled, at the heavens. And now and then a drizzle of mist or rain whipped into my face. The clouds threatened to end the hunt before the hounds could find.

Up ahead, the hounds swept up the slope of a bush-crowned knoll which fell away sharply on the far side in a tangle of undergrowth—up and over, the music giving way briefly to a tangle of confused yelping, and then they swept into view again. The Whips and the leaders of the field followed—and then suddenly the Huntsman's horn called hounds off, a babble of voices rose, and the Hunt came to a stop. The field slowed to a halt on top of the knoll, though Pons had gone over.

The Master had dismounted and stood pale-faced and silent, almost encircled by the Whips and the horsemen. Something had happened. Perhaps one of the field had taken a bad spill. The Master found his voice. "Dr. Paradine," he called, and Dr. Paradine pressed forward on his mount just as I came to the edge of the knoll and saw what lay below.

It was the body of a man, certainly not one of the field, for he was roughly clad. Only a cursory glance was necessary to suggest that he had been resting or sleeping there, and that one of the horses had delivered a

fatal blow to his head, for it was broken in, and blood was spilled from it. The road across the moor was not far away, and the fellow had very probably wandered in during the night, for the place of his concealment was well protected from the weather, though the plunging horses had torn away some of the vegetation there.

Dr. Paradine, who had bent over the body, now straightened up, shaking his head.

"Dead, Master," I heard him say.

I saw Pons press unobtrusively forward and in turn make a rapid examination of the body, while Ryan looked over his shoulder at him in hostile amazement.

The tableau held but for a moment. The restless hounds crowded about offside, whining uneasily; voices rose querulously from the rear of the field. But the Hunt had lost its excitement in the tragedy before us, and the Master, remounting, announced, "We will return to the house, Ladies and Gentlemen," and turned his mount to lead the way.

I fell back from the main body of the field and waited upon Pons to ride up. His face, when he came abreast of me, was impassive, but his eyes glinted oddly.

"A shocking thing!" I said.

"Was that fellow killed by one of the riders?"

"The wound in his head would indicate that he was certainly killed by something in the shape of a horse's hoof," said Pons cryptically.

"Who was first over the knoll?"

"I was unable to see."

"He must have wandered in off the road. Strange that the hounds did not wake him."

"Unless he were sodden with liquor," said Pons.

"True."

We rode for a few moments in silence. We were now well separated from the rest of the field, and Pons, I saw, rode with deliberate leisureliness because he was deep in thought. He turned to me presently, guiding his mount nearer.

"Would you not say, Parker, that anyone spending last night out-of-doors would have been rather wet with frost?"

"I would indeed."

"His clothes were not damp."

"Well, of course, he lay under bushes which would give him some protection."

"The scent presumably carried straight over him," continued Pons. "Would you say that is consistent with ferine behavior?"

"No. It would seem to me that the fox could be aware of a man's presence in time to avoid stepping upon him," I conceded. "Yet, coming up the knoll and

dropping over—it is just possible . . ."

"But unlikely," continued Pons. "The hounds divided and went around him. They were therefore aware of his presence. The fox could hardly have been less aware. I submit that no fox was ever near him."

"I'm afraid the evidence of the hounds must be set against that," I said. "They were clearly on the scent."

"You will recall that at one point the hounds were confused. There were two lines, one crossing the other. The hounds were bound for the fresher; they were whipped off and put on the other."

"I suppose it isn't unusual to put up a second-fox."

"There was no second fox. The only fox was the dog-fox we were hunting. I submit he was never near the sleeping man."

"The hounds would never have left the scent!"

"Unless they were misled by a false scent made by a fresh fox, a bagged fox or even a recently taken dead fox."

"Pons!" I cried. "You can't mean murder!"

"It is something like that fellow found in the stallion's stall. Here, too, no one seemed to know him. He was, once again, therefore a stranger, but whether to everyone remains to be seen.

His clothing, as I said, was rough, of decent quality, but of a kind worn only by someone not accustomed to expensive clothing. His hands were rough, also, and the callouses on them suggest that he was habitually engaged in some menial labor; there are certain indications that he was accustomed to using a trowel, and I should conclude that he was a mason by trade when there was work for him, though his hands are also accustomed to the use of a shovel. It was evident when one came only close to him that he reeked of whiskey. Unless I am mistaken, he carried inside his clothing a long, thin weapon in the shape of a poniard. I rather fancy no startling amount of money will be found on him, but the presence of the weapon will disconcert the authorities."

"It disconcerts me," I admitted.

"Ah, Parker, if you have correctly assessed the facts in the matter, it ought to fall into place with little difficulty."

I might have replied, but held my tongue, for General Pomfroy had caught sight of us lagging behind, and waited for us to come up to him.

"Rum go, what!" he boomed as we came up. "The Master's in a black rage—can't say I blame him. First it was that fellow who blundered into Prince's stall, and

now this drunken vagrant wandering into the field. Ought to have laws against that sort of thing."

In this vein General Pomfroy continued until we reached Pomfroy Chase and separated to go to our quarters.

Pons lost no time in getting out of his hunting clothes and into his own clothes once more. He seemed deep in thought and paced up and down our room for a few moments. He crossed to the windows and looked down. From where I stood, I could see the hounds being brought in, and our mounts being returned to the stable. An air of sobriety prevailed, with the Whips and the kennel staff going about their business in intent silence.

"I must go out and about," said Pons abruptly. "Are you coming?"

"I'm sorry, Pons. I must beg off," I said. "An hour afield has given me aches I haven't had for a long time."

Pons chuckled and left the room.

In a few minutes I saw him walking between the stables in the general direction of the cottages. I saw, too, that both Ryan and Bannan observed him, and their attitude, even from the distance where I stood at the window, was manifestly unfriendly.

They, like me, stood watching

until Pons had passed the row of cottages and begun to walk through the open country beyond. Only then did they visibly relax.

I was awakened from a light doze an hour later when Pons came in. His eyes were twinkling, and he stood, once again, at the windows looking down, rubbing his hands together zestfully.

"There is nothing like a walk in the rain to stimulate logical thinking," he said.

"I never knew you to need it," I said.

"Ah, that is well put, Parker," responded Pons. "It is true, it is facts I went after. For instance—would it surprise you to learn that there is a pet fox outside Ryan's cottage?"

"Nothing ever much surprises me when you are on the scent," I said.

"I must say, a little nap sharpens you," said Pons, agreeably. "Are you ready for London?"

"What!" I cried. "You are giving up?"

"Tut, tut! One ought never to jump to conclusions. There is nothing for us to do here for the nonce. The solution of the puzzle is perfectly apparent. I shall be interested to learn what the authorities make of it. I am not disposed to intervene. Let us just get our things together and make

our excuses to our host and hostess."

We found Colonel Pomfroy and our client in the drawing-room.

"Ah, Mr. Pons!" cried Colonel Pomfroy. "I had hoped for a word with you! I am half convinced I am the victim of some dastardly plot to ruin the Wycherly Hunt!"

"I should not be inclined to think so, Colonel," said Pons gently. "I fancy the solution to the matter lies farther afield."

"Mr. Pons!" cried our client. "You know it then?"

"I hope to resolve the problem directly after the inquest," said Pons with smooth confidence.

"You may need to come back for the inquest, sir," said Colonel Pomfroy.

"I am aware of that. But since no representations have been made to me, I shall feel free to go. You have our address, and we are on the telephone. We expect to return for the proceedings."

"I will have one of the cars brought around to take you to London," said the Colonel.

Our client came to her feet. "And Captain Price?"

"Do not be too sanguine, Mrs. Pomfroy," said Pons. "We may find him only to lose him."

With this enigmatic statement, Pons bade our host and hostess good-day.

For a week Pons watched the newspapers for accounts of the events at Pomfroy Chase. Reasonably good likenesses of the man who had died on the moor were published, but not one came forward to identify him, though descriptions of him were detailed and precise—"Age about 48. Height, 5 feet 9 inches. No identification. Contents of pockets: one pound, sixpence." There was a description of the poniard Pons had felt—"A thin, stiletto-like knife, evidently manufactured by hand. The blade is seven inches in length."

"Lethal enough," commented Pons. He read further, aloud: "The police regret that the presence of the field eliminated any ground clues, but it is presumed that the unknown man wandered in from the road nearby in an intoxicated condition and sought shelter in the lee of the knoll." The autopsy had disclosed that the dead man had imbibed freely of whisky some hours before his death.

The eighth day found us once again in Cranborne, present at the inquest on the unidentified victim of the Pomfroy Hunt. Pons sat with eyes closed during the preliminary evidence, but he grew alert as soon as Dr. Paradine took the stand and listened intently to the interrogation.

The coroner opened with, "Testimony has been advanced

to show that you were the first medical man on the scene, Dr. Paradine. Will you recount your findings?"

"The dead man was lying on his right side in a foetal position. He had evidently been sleeping. A horse's hoof crushed his left temple. The bone was broken in for a distance of two inches."

"Was it, in your opinion, an accident?"

"It could hardly have been anything else, sir."

"Was death instantaneous?"

"Practically. He was dead when I examined him."

There followed a rather technical discussion which served only to allow Dr. Paradine the stage long enough to establish his authority. In the course of it, Pons took out the little notebook he carried, jotted something down, and passed it up to the coroner, who read it with a frown on his face. He turned then again to Dr. Paradine.

"Doctor, you say the man was dead when you examined him. How long, in your opinion, had he been dead?"

"It could only have been a matter of moments."

"Then blood was still gushing from the wound?"

Dr. Paradine opened his mouth to speak, then closed it again, before he finally answered, "No, sir."

"Would it not have been?"

"Technically, no, if he were dead."

"Only just dead?"

Dr. Paradine looked uncomfortable. "Considerable blood had been spilled. There may still have been seepage from the wound."

"Do you testify that there was?"

"I cannot so testify," said the doctor stiffly.

Dr. Paradine was excused and John Ryan was called.

He came forward warily and was sworn. At the coroner's request he set forth the details of the tragedy on the moor. The coroner listened without interruption. Once more Pons' notebook came into action. The coroner looked inquiringly into the audience to detect, if possible, the source of the note Pons sent up before he crumpled it and threw it into a wastebasket nearby.

When Ryan had finished, the coroner asked, "Will you tell us what the hounds did, Mr. Ryan?"

"When?" fenced Ryan.

"At the moment they came over the knoll upon the body."

"Why, they divided and swung around on either side of the body."

"But the fox evidently did not?"

Ryan sat for a few moments without answering. Then he said, "Sir, I have no knowledge

of that."

"The hounds came together again beyond the body?"

"Yes, sir."

"So that we are to believe the line went straight over the body?"

"Sir, I cannot answer that."

"A pity the hounds could not be called," commented the coroner acidly.

Ryan's color deepened.

The coroner bent forward again. "Now, Mr. Ryan, in the case of the other unfortunate who was found in the stall at Pomfroy Chase, you testified that you had seen him on the grounds during the evening previous to his death. Had you also seen the man found dead on the moor before?"

"I do not believe so," said Ryan smoothly.

"Let me put it this way," pressed the coroner; "Had you ever known him before?"

Ryan was equal to the question which had certainly been prompted by Pons. "Sir, in my capacity as a hunt servant, I have occasion to meet many people. I could hardly be expected to remember them all."

Ryan was excused.

A few more perfunctory witnesses were called, and the inquest was closed.

The verdict, not surprisingly, was "Death by misadventure."

Pons shot a glance at Ryan and

Bannan, who sat with solemn faces. But the ghost of a smile shone through on each.

Then Pons pressed through the crowd to the street, where he sought and found Colonel and Mrs. Pomfroy.

"If you will be so good as to drive us to Pomfroy Chase, I may be able to throw a little light on the mystery," he said.

"Oh, Mr. Pons, if only you could!" cried our client.

"Let us just see," answered Pons.

"Come along then," urged Colonel Pomfroy. "The sooner we get to the bottom of this, the better. I've had my fill of death by misadventure."

Riding out of Cranborne, Pons said, "I submit that despite the verdict of the inquest both the visitors to Pomfroy Chase were done to death." He stopped Colonel Pomfroy's protest with an upraised hand and continued. "Quite possibly, it may be looked upon, in the circumstances, as committed in self defense, but I rather think the courts would take a different view of the matter. It seems quite unlikely that any stranger could have blundered into the stallion's stall, and it is wholly incredible that a fox's line should have naturally led across a sleeping man. Both these men were bearing lethal weapons, and one had actually been used; I think it a mistake

not to have searched for a bullet somewhere about the stables. But no matter. The verdict is in. If the first visitor was led to the stall and pushed in, it was done in all likelihood by more than one person; and no one person, it follows, could have arranged the death of that fellow on the moor. In the circumstances, it would be next to impossible to bring a conclusive action against anyone for either of those deaths. I am not sure that it would be desirable."

Colonel Pomfroy found his voice. "But the motive, Mr. Pons! What could the motive be?"

Our client intervened. "What Mr. Pons is saying is that the Hunt servants expected something more to happen. Something has happened. And they are still tense, still expectant..."

"Good God!" cried Colonel Pomfroy. "You don't mean to suggest that there may be still others?"

"Not, I trust, at Pomfroy Chase," said Pons enigmatically.

We rode the rest of the way in silence.

Once at Pomfroy Chase, Pons descended from the car with alacrity. "Now, then, if you please, let us settle the matter."

He led the way around the house, past the stables, across the greensward and directly to Ryan's cottage, where he knocked peremptorily on the door.

It was opened by a woman in her middle thirties, blue-eyed and dark of hair.

"Mrs. Ryan?" asked Pons.

"Yes." Seeing Colonel and Mrs. Pomfroy, she nodded a little shyly at them.

"Mrs. Ryan, I would like a word with Mr. Ryan's father."

She gaped at Pons, but recovered her composure in a moment. "If you'll excuse me, I will see if he's awake."

She would have backed in, closing the door to us, but a voice from inside said, "Come!"

"He heard," she said. "Please come in."

She stood aside, and we walked into the tidy living-room of the cottage.

There sat a white-thatched old man in an arm-chair. A shawl lay across his shoulders; he held it about him as if he were cold. His thick beard was streaked with grey, but, being relatively short, it gave him an appearance of grizzled roughness rather than of age. His narrowed eyes looked at us over spectacles.

"Mr. Ryan?" asked Pons again.

The old man nodded curtly.

Pons made as if to shake hands; instead, with a rapid movement, he tore the white hair from the old man's head, revealing touseled black, ringletted hair beneath.

"Mrs. Pomfroy—Colonel Pom-

froy," said Pons, "let me introduce you to Sean O'Leary, once known as the Black Prince of the Irish Republican Army, and, more recently, as Captain Dion Price, in your service, and at least co-author of the death by misadventure of the two agents of that army sent to execute him for his treachery in saving Lady Cleve, after he had been found at last."

"Oh, no!" cried Mrs. Pomfroy.

Behind us Ryan and Bannan, followed by the Whips, crowded into the cottage and pressed around the Black Prince, sullenly defiant, to resist whatever might be threatening him.

"And those gentlemen, if I am not mistaken, are all that remain of the valiant little band that rescued Lady Cleve and caused them to be proscribed by the Irish rebels," continued Pons. "The Black Prince was under sentence of death—when he could be found. Here he and his band were as one and acted as one."

Captain Price found his voice. "I am sorry, Mrs. Pomfroy—Colonel Pomfroy—what this gentleman says is true." Then he looked squarely at Pons. "I am not sure what he proposes to do about it."

Pons smiled. "Gentlemen, the verdict is in. 'Death by misadventure.' I am not disposed to question what amounts to poetic

justice. But you must know that your position here is untenable, that the men who came to kill you will eventually be followed by others, that you cannot go on dealing death even to would-be murderers. You have no alternative but to lose yourselves again."

Captain Price sighed. "Thank you, sir." And once again, to Colonel Pomfroy and our client, he said simply, "I am sorry."

"It was evident that our client did not believe in the verdict of the inquest," explained Pons, as we rode toward London in one of Colonel Pomfroy's cars. "Accepting that disbelief, I found it intriguing to speculate on the motive anyone might have for beating someone into near-insensibility, and thrusting him into the stall of a horse that might be counted upon to kill him. Robbery was clearly not the motive. But the size of the sum of money the dead man carried immediately suggested blackmail, and the presence of the weapon suggested that he had come to commit a crime. Captain Price's weskit linked the two men. I immediately concluded that the dead man had had some design upon Captain Price, that the Huntsman had attempted to buy him off, then had reason to think better of it, and, with the aid of his fellow

Hunt servants, arranged his death. That he did accept Price's money and then attempted to kill him, we now know. But the dead man's design had been large enough to make it seem advisable for Captain Price to disappear, which in turn suggested knowledge that the failure of the first man might bring a second, which accounted for the tension so patent to Mrs. Pomfroy.

"It was my brief and seemingly innocuous conversation with Ryan that brought to our notice two remarkable coincidences. The first was the fact that all the Hunt servants retained by Captain Price were Irish; this in itself was most singular, but most important, it suggested a motive out of the past. The second was the visit of Ryan's father, occurring almost simultaneously with Captain Price's disappearance. I was then virtually certain of Price's whereabouts, but before I could act, the second executioner sent from Ireland arrived and was dealt with by the Hunt servants, who managed to fill him with whisky—either by force or with his consent—and spirit him away to the moor—you will recall the absence of two of the Whips—where they placed him, well hidden, and either alive or dead—for he may well have been killed there by a weapon resem-

bling a horse's hoof only a few minutes before the hunters arrived—led Ryan's tame fox to the place and away from it again, and made certain that the hounds followed the planted line so that another 'death by misadventure' could be staged.

"At that point, the fact that Lady Cleve had recommended Captain Price for the position immediately suggested that

Price might be the Black Prince, and this in turn made it certain that Price would be sought out by the Irish Republican Army for his treachery to their cause and punished. Instead, the executioners were slain. I did what I could to put the coroner on the right track," he finished, "but I have no wish to interfere with the curious workings of justice."

NEXT MONTH—

THE SYMBOL IN THE BOOT

by E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

THE PEOPLE OF THE PEACOCK

by STEPHEN DENTINGER

THE RIDDLE OF THE STONE JARS

by PHILIP KETCHUM

ONE OF THESE DAYS

by HENRY SLESAR

THE HIGHER FINANCE

by LESLIE CHARTERIS

and

DEATH BID

A New Story by WENZELL BROWN

—in the October 1965 issue, *THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE*



*report
for
a
corpse*

by Henry Kane

IT WAS CRAZIER than seven Picassos upside down in the greenest light of early morning and you're drunk on rumba, rum, and remembrance and fresh from your only-beloved—except that five thousand dollars, banked along the edge of the desk in small-heaped hundreds, gave it the unreal aspect of normalcy.

I sighed. "So all right. So you have bought yourself a tail-piece."

"Tail-piece?"

"That's all I can do. The way you want it."

"I suppose . . ." She did drum-work on the desk-top. "Listen."

I listened again. I listened carefully. There is no gainsaying: for five thousand cabbage leaves fetchingly delineated on the customer's end of the desk you listen as carefully as you can listen.

" . . . and I'm not sure, not at all sure. If I were, of course, I couldn't live in the same house with the man. Ronald is methodical. How. How, is important. Not what. Or even when. With Ronald, how would be first and

Henry Kane, author of ARMCHAIR IN HELL, MY BUSINESS IS MURDER, CASE OF THE MURDERED MADAME, LAUGHTER CAME SCREAMING, etc., is one of the best known writers among those who, can be said to be the latter day inheritors of the Black Mask mantle.

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paramount. Not what. Nor when."

My old eagle of prospective client sounded like script for the patter-comics, but she wasn't script for the patter-comics, she was Virginia Dody Hanke, high society and big society; thick-corseted with yards of intricate frail blue dress over raw bones like a football player's, and a bosom like a platform in front of the politicians when they read a speech.

I said, "Lady, please . . ."

"Young man, don't call me lady. The name is Virginia Dody, of the Virginia Dodys; and the Hanke is for marriage."

She smiled with horseteeth.

This one was a cuckoo for the clock.

"Look," I said, "lady, let's sum it up. There's you, there's your husband, Ronald, there's an only child, your adopted daughter Veronica. There's your stately mansion on Fifth. And now, after twenty-five years of marriage—there's a wrinkle."

"Believe you me," Mrs. Hanke said. "She's no wrinkle."

I rustled up another sigh. "All right. You know that your husband has wriggled around with wrinkles before, but this time, it appears, it is more formidable. He wants a divorce."

"Correct."

"So what?"

"Young man, you simply will not understand."

"So you refused to give him a divorce."

"Yes."

"So now you insist he is going to murder you."

"Yes."

"A little bit, I'd say, it's ridiculous."

"Yes . . . No!"

She shifted seat in the chair. Shifting seat in the chair was no mean effort for the ponderous Mrs. Hanke.

"It is not ridiculous. Please. All I want you to do is discover for me how my husband intends to kill me. Simply that."

"Simply?" I said.

"Simply," she said.

"It's cockeyed."

"I'm paying for it."

She had something there.

"And, young man, if you're unsuccessful—I'm still paying you. All I want is your full effort." She wagged a long finger at me, crookedly. "Ronald has never been thwarted in his life. He has gone so far as to ask me for a divorce. There is no turning back. When I refuse, I am in danger. He wants this woman for his wife. He can have her only if I divorce him. Or if I am dead. Since I refuse to divorce him, I think he would like it if I were dead. I am hiring you to find out for me how he would

like to arrange it."

"You sure?"

What the *hell* could I say?

"Of course not, I'd get out, if I were."

"Lady. Then do it my way. Hire a bodyguard. Not a clairvoyant."

"Bodyguard," she said. "Please. This man is my husband. You cannot take a bodyguard to bed with you."

"No," I agreed. "Not for five thousand dollars."

"Mm," she said.

"You mentioned, I recollect, that you two had separate rooms."

"I did. But a husband has a legal right to wander around the house . . ."

She laughed, but grimly. She scrambled out of the chair. She shook hands with me. She said, "Young man, I like you."

When she was gone, I picked up where she had left off with the drumwork on the desktop. I also whistled a little. It was crazy: the prospective corpse paying you for inquiry about *how* she was going to get killed. Then I stopped with the drumwork and I stopped with the whistling and I herded together the crisp green lovable bills and put them in the safe. If an eccentric old society dame desires to play pitch with her money, I am willing to play catch.

Okay. It was strictly a tail

job. I could put one of the kids on it, but that wouldn't be honorable, and I am honorable when I'm well enough paid for it. So I would play tail-piece myself. For five weeks. At a thousand dollars a week, that is a good and proper stipend. Then I would make my report, and if she wanted more, I would be happy to oblige. For as long as she could rummage up the shekels.

I picked him up in the morning at eight-thirty outside his house. He fitted description: he was tall, straight, and long-faced, with the light springy step of a banker undevoted to conscience. He *was* a banker, and his devotion to conscience was out of my province—all I know is that he worked at being a banker. He got locked in steel and granite on Broad Street at nine o'clock every morning, and he marched out at one, springily, for three cocktails and a heavy lunch, and then he marched back to the steel and the granite and the heavy dough, and out again at five.

Monday evenings he went to a doctor, had a prescription filled, and went home. Tuesday evenings he visited a psychiatrist, and then he went home. Wednesdays he went home directly, and Thursdays, back to the psychiatrist. Fridays he saw his lady—tall and dark and won-

derfully hyphenated (the explosive widow of a moderately lamented movie star)—and he did not go home. Saturdays he saw the lady, and he went home, and Sundays he saw her again. And he did not go home.

There you have it. It was boring and routine, with interminable blank spaces for philosophy with the barkeeps, spiked with boilermakers (a boilermaker is rye with a beer behind). Kind of, constantly, I was on the good side of inebriety—by a shade. It was that kind of an assignment. Which is why, possibly, your good detective didn't give much heed until it suddenly exploded, interestingly, like a bursting balloon in front of a bubble dancer.

Every Monday night Ronald Hanke visited a doctor—but each time it was a different doctor, and each time the prescription was compounded in a different pharmacy.

That was the end of the tail job.

And the boilermakers.

I worked fast after that. I saw the doctors and I gave them fast pitch and rapid palaver about me, I'm a cop, and we're after this here madman who specializes in knocking off doctors after first a preliminary gander for what we call "casing the joint," if you know what I mean, Doc—mostly out of the side of my mouth. I describe the guy and I

confide we believe he was here this Monday night, such a date, and he was probably a stranger to you, and will you check your records, if you please and confidential.

The records were checked, with each Doc a slightly different color in the face (that is, a slightly different color out of a base color of apprehensive gray) plus the natural variations, depending upon temperament, in the vibrations of the shaky fingers—and each time it was: "Yes, this tall gentleman, never saw him before, officer. Complained of overwork and sleeplessness. Prescribed a small dose of barbiturates. My goodness, didn't look mad at all . . ."

So papa was preparing a cache of the old lullaby pellets. So the old dame had been right! Right as whatever they call it—rain!

Which was what was happening when I presented myself at twelve noon of a Friday at the stately mansion on Fifth, picking up the clanker and clanking. But rain. Half dollar drops boiled on the sidewalk like a stood-up date, with fierce gusty wind and the unhappy mutter of thunder. It was not a day for out of doors, it was not a day for standing around with a clanker in your hand, clanking.

I clanked louder.

The door was opened, **finally**,

by one of those frozen-faced guys that come with the house, the kind of a guy you ignore. I could see what took him so long. Beyond him arched a high, marble-pillared, marble-floored, domed, four-stairwayed hall that made Madison Square Garden look like an anteroom for pygmies. A scream would die of shame, ineptly, reaching for a wall to bounce back an echo.

"Chambers," I said. "For Mrs. Hanke."

He looked at me. Dimly. "Mrs. Hanke is not interested in chambers. Assuredly."

"Wise guy," I said.

"Peddler," he said.

He started to close the door. I plastered a spread hand, a wet hand, in the middle of his nice uniform, and I closed the door—behind me.

"Chambers," I said. "For Mrs. Hanke."

"She is not at home. Sir."

"Much better, prank-face. And when—"

Then a lady slid out of one of the numerous doorways and the harsh light of the marble barn turned boudoir-pink and soft for Chambers. I fidgeted, once, and I waited.

"What is it, Schwabel?" A voice like a kiss by candlelight in an old-fashioned red-velvet room.

"This gentleman. For Mrs. Hanke."

She looked at me. I looked at

her. She looked at me again, toes to head and back. I looked at her again, toes to head and back. Applaudingly.

"That will do," she said, "Schwabel."

She was tall with butterscotch hair and shock-blue eyes rimmed inside of thick black lashes, with a slow slide-eyed glance that ran hot ice along your spine. Her face was full and smoothly pale, and her mouth was riotred with a shining pouting petulant lower lip that was trouble on the double, even quicker. She wore a long simple billowy-skirted dress, high up on top and crowded, cut away at the sides and clasped about the neck.

Perfect. A gorgeous lass, a rainy day, and a "That will do, Schwabel." If I couldn't parlay that into an interesting afternoon, then I deserved to be out in the teeming rain playing solitaire on a manhole cover. And after all, I belonged there: I had important dope for Mrs. Hanke.

"You're Verónica," I said.

"How?—"

"Mrs. Hanke mentioned it."

"But why?"

"I work for her, sort of."

"Won't you come in here?"

I followed her along the hall, and I admired the architecture. Her dress, rear, was still billowy-skirted on bottom, but on top it was no dress at all, just a clasp around the neck. Her back

was soft and straight and supple, and, sidewise, imagination merged with reality, and her figure was like a marvelous numeral eight.

But eight, brother, like a number in the sky.

In a small room, heavily furnished, she said. "Take off your hat and coat. Goodness, you're dripping."

I took them off. I held them out to her, but she had turned and was walking toward an intricate carved bureau with a mirror in back and bottles on top. I looked around, at the expensive furniture; then I dropped the hat and coat on the carpet, and I worried, momentarily, about the puddle.

"Do you like brandy?" she said.

"Love it."

"What's your name again?"

"Peter Chambers."

She came back with brandy, in a beaker, one for her and one for me.

"Brandy in a beaker," I said. "Quaint."

"That's the way we do it in this house." She was very close to me, looking right at my eyes through the thick cluster of her lashes, and she smelled like she'd been drinking brandy out of a beaker all of this rainy day. "Take mother. In the morning, in the afternoon, and before retiring. A full tumbler of gin,

with bitters and grenadine. Rugged, we are."

I took the brandy. I sipped it.

"You're cute," she said.

"You too."

"Sit down."

I sat. She sat near me. I was unhappy about the long billowy skirt that covered her legs. I wasn't unhappy long. She leaned over very close to me. I forget about the long billowy skirt that covered her legs.

"Cute," she said.

"You too."

Sharp, that repartee, with beakers of brandy in our hands, and the rain blasing against the windows. But we did sharper repartee with our eyes, mine sort of moving down to her shoulders, and down . . .

Suddenly she said, "What is this with mother?"

"What?"

"You."

"Oh, a job. I have a report for her."

She finished her brandy. She put the beaker down on the carpet alongside the sofa. She put fingers on my face, lightly. "She's gone off to a luncheon. She isn't due back until eight." She put her hand out, palm up. "Right here. I'll take it. I'll take it and put it away for her. I'll take it and get it out of the way, you know?"

She leaned closer, and my breath going up got mixed up

with the brandy going down. I finished the brandy. I heaved for breath, deeply. I put the beaker on the carpet beside hers. I fumbled in my jacket. I came up with an envelope. I opened it. "Damn," I said. "The wrong one. I must have left it in the office."

What would you say?—what with eyes narrowed down at you behind a fan of black lashes, with a white dress shimmering burstingly in front of you, with the smell of perfume and the smell of brandy mingling close about you, and the sound of the driving rain in the street . . .

She touched me. "Cute," she said, "real cute, cute . . ."

I was out of there at six-fifteen, heading for the nearest saloon. I did bar-fly with brandy, dreamily, and then I had dinner. I had slow conversation in a barber shop and then, well-groomed and aromatic, at eight o'clock, I was back at the Hankses', clanking.

Mrs. Hanke was in. No Veronica.

We sat in a yell-across parlor, light dripping from a copious chandelier.

"Brandy?" Mrs. Hanke said.

"No."

I told her the story. "... So," I said, "it could be you're right. If there is a method, that's the method. The guy is collecting a lot of little pills for a long snooze. Do you still want me on this job?"

"No, thank you. Thank you very much. I like you, young man, I like you."

"I like you too," I said. "So be careful."

"Don't worry, son. I'm moving out of this house. Pronto, as they say. As pronto as I can manage it—without his knowing that I'm going."

"Good girl."

I got out of there. I didn't go back to work. I got out of there—straight into a restful healthful weekend in the country, and Monday morning, back in the office, my ankles were up across the desk and my swivel chair was tilted down for comfort and the morning paper was spread in front of me—and then my restful healthful weekend got rammed back into me, suffocatingly. In the lower left-hand corner of page one, Mrs. Virginia Dody Hanke was dead, Saturday night, a suicide from an overdose of sleeping tablets. I ached for a drink.

My ankles went down and the chair went up and bang went the drawers in quest of a bottle; and Miss Miranda Foxworth, the only secretary in the world who can make a hangover pleasant—by her absence!—was there, silently watching me, her hands on her ungodly hips.

"You don't," she said, "keep a bottle in the office. Remember?"

"Yeah. I'm hoping you've got one hid out."

"I don't drink. My boss drinks enough for the two of us."

"Not now, Miranda. Please."

"You're in trouble."

"What?"

"Trouble."

"Why?"

"Law."

"Miranda, what the devil are you talking about?"

"Law. Spread out in the waiting room. That nice man, the detective-lieutenant. Except he doesn't act like it's a social call. Anything I can do?"

"You can send him in. And stop worrying. Miranda, you don't know how much worse you look when you worry."

"Beauty," she said, "is a matter of the soul. Also a matter of opinion. Despite comment to the contrary, for me, you stink. Too."

Dear Miranda, I folded up the newspaper and I waited for the lieutenant and he came through without knocking. Detective-lieutenant Louis Parker, homicide—black-eyed, black-browed, serene and intelligent; thick and sturdy as a subway kiosk.

He sat down and he put white teeth into a black cigar.

"Business," he said. "Virginia Dody Hanke."

"I see," I saw.

"So tell me, pal."

"Uh-uh. First *you* tell *me*."

He stood up and he came over and he patted my head. "Let's not parry. Parry? How do

you like that parry?"

"Beautiful."

"So let's not. You got facts for me."

"Where'd you get *me* from?"

"A psychiatrist."

"What?"

"Psychiatrist."

"Adolph Vevrick?"

"See what I mean? About how you got facts for me."

He went back and he sat down and he brought his heels up and put them where my heels had been and he blew a lopsided smoke ring.

"Fair is fair. We have a lot of it. We don't have it all. With your filling in, I think we'll have it all. Listen . . ."

"Yes, sir."

"Saturday night, about eleven, this rich old hag retires. Before retiring, she drinks a glass full of gin. A glass full. Very rich; them rich ones have a right to their idiosyncrasies. Good word—huh—idiosyncrasies. I picked it up from the D.A. So this hag has her nightcap of idiosyncrasy, with bitters and grenadine, and she kicks off, because her comforter is loaded down with goofballs. So we check around, and even without her leaving a note, it's suicide, and that's the way it goes down in the books. Then we get a phone call from this psychiatrist, this Vevrick, and I goes up to see him. Well, he tells me about Ronald Hanke.

About how Hanke has this impulse or something to kill his wife and about how he goes along preparing and about how he doesn't like it, so he goes to see this psychiatrist to help him. The psychiatrist treats him, but even while he's treating him, the guy is still buying those pills, not telling the psychiatrist."

"Then how does he know?"

"He puts him in one of those trances, all the time. You know, hypnosis, and then the unconscious or the subconscious or something—it squeals on the conscious."

"Oh."

"It's complicated. I'm a cop, he's a psychiatrist—everybody's got methods. That's how he knew about you. Hanke stole your report from his Missus, read it and destroyed it, so there shouldn't be no evidence around, and then he goes into this fog, this state of hypnosis, and he squeals on himself, all the time, to his mind doctor."

"All right. So . . ."

"Two things. First the guy is his doctor, so he can't testify against him; it's privileged, not allowed in court. Second, Hanke himself doesn't know the names of the doctors because he just went to them without looking, so he can't stool on himself about that, when he's in this limbo on the couch."

"I get it."

"So you cure everything. You can testify, because you don't owe him no privilege, and you have the rest of the dope. So either you co-operate, or I am compelled, willy-nilly, to take you downtown and have your head knocked off, till you do co-operate. Which I do not like because you're my pal Pete, and we're chum-buds. So how'm I doing? Chum-bud."

"You're doing fine."

"You're my boy."

I recited for him. About Mrs. Hanke. About the tail job. About the doctors and the druggists and their names and their addresses.

"You know," Parker said. "Sometimes you surprise me."

"Have you picked him up yet?"

"No. Not yet. This guy's big. We've got him under what you call — uh — surveillance. Soon; when it's airtight, and it won't be long now. And you—you keep available."

"Of course."

Parker went, happily; and a few minutes later, I went, unhappily. I did a few ins and outs; the usual: Grand Central, and a few quiet alleys, just in case Parker had a couple of boys on me, playing tag. Then I called on Lily Rose.

Lily Rose, of mighty proportions and gorgeous, was an ex-stripteuse who had retired to a

life of luxurious alimony. Lily said, "Gee, Pete, swell," and I said, "Lily, I want a favor," and she said, "Why not, you're the guy that caught on that my ex-mister was dummy owner of all that real estate. I owe you a favor," and I said, "Honey, not that kind of a favor; get dressed and let's get out of here."

Next stop was Sammy Bone's, and I leaned against his doorbell like you lean against your subway-rush companion, tightly—because Sammy Bone was an orchestra leader at the Ostrich on Fifty-second Street and orchestra leaders are prone to past-afternoon shuteye. Sammy, in pale pajamas, opened the door. "Ugh," he said. "Company. Go away, please. Me, I'm P.O.'d." But Sammy, too, owed me a couple of favors on account of orchestra leaders don't always smoke simple cigarettes.

"Favor," I said. "And it's important."

"But is it lawful?"

"Mostly. Hurry up, get dressed. Do you know Lily Rose?"

"No."

He looked at her and sleep went out of his eyes.

"Lily Rose," I said, "Sammy Bone. I'm going to leave you two. Dress, and get over to my office. But get over pell mell, no scratching around. Wait for me there."

A taxi took me to Adolph Vevrick, M.D., proclaimed, hushedly, in discriminate bronze letters placqued on a downstairs private door. I pushed a little bell and I got a two-tone tinkle and a young lady with her hat and coat on.

"Oh. I was just going to lunch. Yes?"

"The doctor in?"

"Yes, but . . ."

"O'Hooley," I said. "Police."

We went back and she picked up the phone and she talked impatiently (like my Miranda). "All right, That door." She pointed. "Lunch. Sorry." She went by me breathlessly. She must have been hungry. I went through to Dr. Adolph Vevrick.

The doctor was real beautiful. He was taller than I am, which made him about six three, with wavy ashtinged hair, long and gracefully brushed over the ears. His face was ruddy and wide with the right kind of bones, and his nose was straight with small etched nostrils, and his chin was pushed out just enough.

"How do you do?" he said with a slightly English crispness.

"O'Hooley," I said. "Cop. Ha, ha. A few more questions. For the record." I brought out the little leather case with the snap button and snapped the button and flashed the buzzer, very rapidly, and put it away. "About

that Virginia Dody Hanke mess."

"Gladly."

"Now, let's see. Were you ever over at their residence?"

"I was."

"When?"

"I don't exactly recall. A month or so. One afternoon."

"Afternoon? Expect to find your patient home in the afternoon?"

He hoisted a thigh over a corner of his desk. "No. That wasn't my purpose. I wish to familiarize myself with his home atmosphere. I wanted to meet his people."

"Did you meet Mrs. Hanke? Miss Hanke?"

"Just a minute. I don't see . . ."

"Did you?"

"Now just one minute." He came off the desk. "I don't quite understand this line of inquiry."

"You're not supposed to, Doc. You're just supposed to answer the questions."

He stood up close to me, staring at me, a muscle jumping in a corner of his jaw. "If you please, I should like to see credentials again. I should like to examine your credentials."

Like that.

"No good, Doc."

"That's what I thought."

He swung. I swung. Mine missed. His hit.

I sat, precipitously, on the floor and I gulped for air, and then I saw the brogued foot

coming at my face and I moved away from it and grabbed the ankle and pulled, hard, and now we both sat on the floor, grotesquely. I shook my head like an outraged lady saying no, violently—and things blurred back into focus.

I got to my feet, and I waited for him. I was very much more careful when he came at me. I waved a gaudy left, high and obvious, and he shifted for it, and then I short-jumped a right that got wedged to the wrist in his middle. He bent in half, politely, protective hands at his stomach. I did some open hand slap-tennis on the face that hung out like neon in front of a roadhouse; then I rolled up a fist and I threw it, all the way from right field, and the good doctor hastily unbent, up to perpendicular and on to horizontal, and he cleared most of the desk backward and bounced off the side of the office chair.

When I got to him, he was folded up, quiet and comatose.

I straightened him out in an easy chair, very handsome, with his legs out stiff, and I hustled in his clothes for keys. I found them and I took them to a large green filling cabinet in a corner and after a little guesswork amongst small keys, I got nosy with the doctor's private affairs. I found what I was looking for: a duplicate of last year's income

tax return. The doctor hadn't done so well, not well at all. I tidied up the file and I closed the cabinet and I returned his keys. I patted his cheek and I left.

Back at the office, I picked up Lily Rose and Sammy Bone, quite chummy now, and we went, posthaste, by taxicab, to Ronald Hanke on Broad Street. I told the girl at the reception desk about how extremely urgent things were, but urgent, and she was impressed, frowningly, and she pushed doodads on the desk and talked into an inter-office enunciator, and soon enough, ushered by a svelte young man with a sway, we filed into a cool quite plush-appointed office.

Ronald Hanke, austere and executive, leaned across the desk, balanced on spaced fingertips. "I was told it is a matter of life and death."

"Well," I said, "you know how it is."

"What's that?"

"My name is Peter Chambers."

"I never heard of you."

"I believe that."

"What? Is this some impertinent?"

"It is about your wife. Who did *not* commit suicide."

He flushed, put his lips together like he was going to whistle, and then he pointed a finger. "If this is more newspaper stuff.

If—"

"The police believe your wife was murdered."

"What?"

"The police believe *you* murdered her."

"What?"

"Now, look, Mr. Hanke, they've got a lot of lines on you, and they're out right now, shaping them up. They know about the lady you want to marry, and the divorce you wanted from your wife, and the doctors you saw, and the pills you bought, and the psychiatrist who treated you, and about telling him you wanted to murder your wife. They know that your wife feared you were going to murder her, and that she employed a private detective to stay along with you."

He was no longer flushed and his lips weren't out like they were whistling; he was pale with a small twitch beneath one eye, and his lips were inside his teeth, being bitten. "Who *are* you?"

"I'm the private detective."

"Oh. Blackmail."

"No. Business. I don't think you done it, mister, and because I don't think you done it, I think I see my way clear to earning a fee. And that, I like."

"Blackmail," he said. "Blackmail."

"Fee. Fee."

"How?"

"Like this. First, I want five

thousand bucks to fix you an alibi. Then, if I can clear you, I want ten thousand more. Now, please, does it sound like blackmail or does it sound like fee?"

"Fee," said Lily Rose.

"Shut up," I said.

"How?" said Mr. Hanke.

"Deal?" I said.

Wearily he said, "Deal."

"All right. Were you home when this happneed to Mrs. Hanke?"

"I was home at the time the medical examiner said she expired."

"When was it discovered?"

"In the morning."

"Anybody see you coming home?"

"I don't think so. I came home at about ten o'clock. I let myself in, and I went directly to my room."

"Fine. So you weren't home. You didn't get home until four."

"Where was I?"

"You were with Lily Rose. At the Ostrich. With Sammy Bone looking down at you most of the evening."

"What?" said Ronald Hanke.

"What?" said Lily Rose.

"What?" said Sammy Bone.

"Like this . . ." I went into rehearsal. Then they went into rehearsal. And after a few hours, we had it straight.

Ronald Hanke loved Lily Rose, sort of. They had met once, by accident, in a lobby of

a hotel. Saturday night, at ten-thirty, they were at the bar of the Ostrich. Not at a table: a waiter at a table might remember; a bartender at a crowded bar like the Ostrich couldn't possibly be positive. But Sammy Bone had seen them, because Sammy Bone knew Lily Rose. He had waved to them, and, later, when the rumba band relieved, he had even joined them for a drink. They had stayed from ten-thirty until one, and then they'd gone back to Lily's place. He had left there at half past three.

"Lily," I said with my fingers crossed, "do you have an extra key to your apartment?"

"Sure. I keep it up at my sister's. You know how it is, people get tight and forget things. People . . ." she shrugged. "I mean me."

"Swell. Give him the one you've got on you. Papa, with that key in your keyring, reluctantly displayed, papa, you're a cinch."

"Shamus," Lil said, "you're an artist."

"All right, Mr. Hanke. The minute they pick you up, you howl for your lawyer. All that the cops have is a mishmash of circumstantial evidence. But you've got a stand-up alibi. And it'll stand up. These kids are people; they've been around."

Solemnly, he wrote out a

check for five thousand dollars. I waved it to dry and I thanked him, and we left. I put them into a taxi and they started reaching for each other's hands, which was good by me, Cupid Chambers, but I stuck around. I stuck around most of the day, and sure enough, at four o'clock the bulky boys came for him and took him away. I went back to the office and I called every half hour, and at seven o'clock, Ronald Hanke answered.

"All right?" I asked.

"Yes."

"You managed it quickly."

"I had my lawyer ready and apprised."

"Nice going. Stay there cooped at home. Don't worry."

Ah, the poor detective; he gets more exercise than a bullpen pitcher in a shaky ballgame. Now I scrambled out again and down to Headquarters, and Parker, dear Parker, looked like he'd lost his best bookmaker.

"You," he said. "Please. I hate your face. It smirks. Go drop dead. Somewhere. Not here."

"Ronald Hanke?" I inquired.

He jumped and he turned over a chair in his eagerness to be near me. He crushed my lapels in his big fists. I joggled.

"Look," he said. "God. If you had anything to do with *that* . . ."

"I may have something for you."

He released my lapels. He

brushed them flat. Purple went out of his face. "Something for me?"

"Maybe."

"On this case?"

"Yes."

"Spill."

"I'm previous, if you know what I mean. I'll need a little help. Then either I'll have it wrapped up for you, or I'll come here and declare details."

"Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why you interested?"

"I'm being paid."

"For what?"

"For delivering whoever murdered Mrs. Hanke."

His hand reached out again for my lapel. He drew me over. Close. Purple seeped back into his face; not purple; more lilac-lavender. Veins in his neck bulged like a dowager in a party dress. "You"—gratingly—"son of a bitch. So you *are* mixed up with it."

"Louis . . ." I reminded him gently.

He shoved me back. "Look, the police department gets along without you, admirably. It solves its crimes without you. Admirably. That is, when you don't jerk things around. But the minute you start mixing it up, to earn your dirty dollar, then we get trouble. Okay. It better be fast, and it better be good. What do you want."

"Nothing," I said, "really. I'd like you to pick up this Vevrick at his office, at eight. That's office hours. He'll be there. But you pick him up with display and fanfare. Then you call me at my office."

"Display and fanfare. But for what do we pick him up?"

"Questioning. Anything. But with display—"

"I know. And fanfare. Look, big-brain. I warn you . . ."

"Louis," I said. "We're a good team. We haven't missed yet."

"All I need is *once*. And I'm bounced. On my ear."

I used his phone. I got the Hanke place. I asked for Veronica. I talked to Veronica. "Urgent," I said. "I must see you. Terribly urgent. Oh terribly, terribly . . ."

"Of course," she said.

"So long, Lieutenant. Eight o'clock. But with fanfare."

He slammed the door after me.

I got there at twenty minutes to eight, and even in a severe black suit with her blonde hair tight over her ears and a bun in back, she put prickles on the nape of my neck. She gave me the eyes and a warm hand tight on my sleeve. But I didn't have the time.

"We've got to get out of here," I said. "Quick."

I wanted her away from a

phone.

"Why?"

"Please. It's important."

"But why?"

"Listen," I said. "Police, that sort of thing. I tell you it's of utmost importance."

She went with me. We flagged down a cab. I maneuvered with time, checking my watch.

"Drive down Fifth," I said to the driver.

"What is it?" he said.

"He wants to see you."

"Who wants to see me?"

"Vevrick. I was there this afternoon."

"I know . . . oh!" She put a hand to her mouth.

"Sure. This afternoon we didn't see eye to eye, but I've convinced him. Now I'm on his side. He's paying me to help. There's trouble."

"Trouble?" She put her hands under my arm and she moved very close, snugly. "Honey," she murmured, "you're so cute . . . trouble . . ."

I looked at my watch. "All right, driver. Adolph Vevrick." I gave him the address.

Display and fanfare! Parker did it right. There were four police cars outside the house.

"Hold it," I said to the driver, upstreet. "Stay right here."

We watched, while a phalanx of law came through, with Vevrick in the middle, and we lis-

tened to the sirens wailing departure. She shivered.

"It's not good, sister. We'll go to my office."

Bobo, the night man, took us up. Bobo was ex of the wrestling gentry, with a sweating bald head and small gleaming eyes.

"You still a notary, Bobo?"

"You bet," he rasped.

We sat in the frightening quietness of any business office after hours, and I let her fidget. I said, "We wait here. The lieutenant is a good friend of mine. He'll let me know."

She came near me. "Please, please. I'm scared. Put your arms around me. Please. Hold me."

"Look, sister, not now . . ."

The phone rang. She jumped like a nervous filly at the barrier.

"Answer it," I said.

She creased her forehead, and her nostrils opened.

"Answer it."

She lifted the phone.

I could hear him. "This is Detective-lieutenant Parker. Police Headquarters. Chambers there?"

"Yes, sir," She gave me the phone. I put it flat to my ear. "Chambers," I said. I listened and I said yes's, interspersingly.

I hung up. "You're jammed, sister."

"What?"

"He's singing. He's blaming you."

Her eyebrows came down,

knotted. "You're a filthy liar."

"Sister, I'll put it plain. There's one way you can keep clear of the wired chair and that's by telling it all to me. Now. We put it down and you sign it, and you're State's witness. Against him. It wasn't your idea, I'm sure of that. Mainly, your trouble is you can't resist a man. Especially a pretty one."

She slapped me across the face.

"That's just silly," I said.

"You're framing me," she screamed. "You're trying to bluff me into something."

"You want *me* to tell *you*?"

"I dare you."

I told her. I gave it to her in blobs, no detail work. I told her how Vevrick had come to the house one afternoon and how they'd gotten chummy and how they began to see each other, quietly. I told her about how Vevrick had cooked up a big idea. Here was Hanke out to murder his wife—yet fighting against it. Here was a perfect set-up. If someone pulled it, all suspicion would settle on Hanke. It could be *proved* he did it. Then Mrs. Hanke is dead and Mr. Hanke is executed—and look who inherits all the money: Veronica. And then she marries one Adolph Vevrick, because what has he got to lose, and they're both very rich and happy for ever after. So she pulls it and

Vevrick notifies the cops about Hanke—and our babes in the woods think they've outsmarted the world.

She was trembling like a breed-improver in the eighth with a ticket on glue which has finally gotten a nose into a three way photo—and she was white and worn.

I said: "Well?"

"How do you know?" she whispered, fingernails at her teeth.

"Parker just told me. Because Vevrick told him. And he shoves it along to you. All you. According to him, he was only the pawn." That's good. Pawn. It always works with the ladies.

"Oh, the brute," she said. "The dirty, dirty . . ."

The rest of it was easy. She told me, and I typed, two-fingered and laborious. She filled in, importantly. Like, that all along Mrs. Hanke had confided in her. Like, that Mrs. Hanke had told her about me, and why I was hired. Like, that she had told Vevrick about me, and he had recognized me when I had called on him. Like, that they had had to work fast because the old lady was preparing to get out, quietly, on Sunday. Like, that she herself had prepared the old lady's drink that night, and brought it to her, with stuff out of some of Hanke's bottles in his medicine chest

(wiped afterward).

I had it all typed, and I didn't listen to her while she said, "I'll fix him," over and over again.

I went out for Bobo.

"Here," I told him. "Take this sworn statement. You got your paraphernalia?"

Hoarsely he said, "Me what?"

"The seal and stuff."

"Oh, sure sure. I gotta sign also. I do dat wid me left hand on account de right one's got de fingers bit off."

Bobo performed the notarial ritual with solemnity and concentration, like he was changing up a baby's diaper. He finished and he straightened up and he sighed, half bellow half fire siren; and then Veronica Hanke and I went down for a visit with Parker.

I said, "Here you are," to Parker, and he grabbed it and he read it and he said, "Good, good, you son of a bee-hive" (in the presence of a lady), and then the lady, murmuring, insistently, "I'll fix him," was taken out of our presence, and I said, "Okay. Go to work on them."

"Me? Don't be stupid. With this set-up, what do you think I've got assistants for?"

He called for Cassidy, and he showed him the statement, and Cassidy said, "Maybe an hour. Then you can call in the D.A.'s smart boys for the legal touches."

Parker smiled at me, wide

across like an opera singer.

"Drink?"

"No."

"You sick?"

"Hungry."

"How's about a pastrami sandwich?"

"Yes, sir."

So we went across the street from Headquarters to the Lonesome Bar and Grill and we had pastrami sandwiches with mustard and pickles and munchingly and in wonder, Parker said, "Tell you the truth, I don't know how the hell you do it."

"This time," I said, "I really didn't do it. It was the young lady with the lubricity."

"Lubricity? It sounds like something when you grease a car."

"Well, concupiscence."

"That only sounds dirty."

"The lady was a hot number. Here I am sitting around with her on a rainy day. What do people do best on a rainy day? Anyway, here I am sitting around with her on a rainy day, a girl with abounding charms and a raffish eye, and she asks for Mrs. Hanke's report. So I give her a fast stall, and a flick of an envelope, and I tell her: 'Report, oh report, I left it in the office.' I don't want to waste time. I also don't want to go into a lengthy discourse about how an ethical detective doesn't give reports, only to the one

that hires him."

"Please. What's that got to do with it?"

"Detective," I said, "eat your pastrami, but think. *What report?* I'm a private dick, I'm not a fancy dan with trimmings. I had a report, strictly verbal, for the old lady. That's all. Then you tell me about a psychiatrist whose patient knows about me because he *read* my report—that's impossible. There's no report to read. So how does it add? Lubricity, that's how it adds. Because of the look in that tomato's eye, I pass off that report business, quick-like, by taking out an envelope and saying wrong report. So who would know about a possible written report? She! Then how would Vevrick know? Only because she told him. Certainly not Ronald Hanke, because there never was a report for him to see and tear up. So why are they trying to paste it on Ronald! That answers itself, and it gets underlined when I check some records and find that dear Vevrick is on his uppers."

Parker waved a pickle. "Yeah, but if the old lady took her into her confidence — how come she didn't know it was a verbal report, not written?"

"Because taking into confidence contemplates *volunteering information*."

"Sure enough."

"Not cross-examination."

"Sure enough."

"So, since it wasn't volunteered, Veronica couldn't press with cross-examination; it might make the old dame suspicious. And there wasn't enough time to work her over, subtly; the old dame was moving out Sunday."

"She must have looked for that phantom report, huh? But hard."

"You bet. And when she couldn't find it, they decided, she and Vevrick, that the old lady had destroyed it, so that Hanke wouldn't get a peek and spoil her plans for moving day."

"Yeah, but the old lady hadn't

destroyed it, because there wasn't any report. But according to *them*, there *was* a report, so weren't they worried in case that according-to-them report maybe *did* show up?"

"That's easy. They just shift on the story. They simply say that Mr. Hanke was lying when he said *he'd* destroyed it, or may be he just crossed himself up in his trance on the couch—but, here it is again, because it certainly fits."

"Lubricity." Thoughtfully, Parker chewed pastrami. "How do you like that lubricity? It even solves a murder case."

WATCH OUT FOR THE POTATO!



Do you need any browns or whites?

Or some tea?

Watch out for the potato, and you'll be able to get it right from the foot of the cow!

What's all this about?

Simple! Do you need any filter or non filter cigarettes? Or would you like some rather rare imported cognac? Keep an eye out for someone who appears to be wearing a police badge—but it'll actually be phony—and you will be dealing directly with the supplier.

The smuggler.

Smuggling is a multi million dollar a year business in Argentina—reportedly grossing a half-billion dollars a year. It has its own language, and its own fleet of cars, trucks, boats and aeroplanes. (And, one takes for granted, its own police force.)

It is estimated that almost a quarter of the nation's yearly imports comes into the country illegally. This includes the day-to-day "necessities" of life such as U.S. cigarettes (a dollar a pack at current prices), and Scotch (available legally at ten dollars a bottle). Smuggled stockings have forced several local manufacturers to shut down; they couldn't beat the competition. Contraband lace has close to wrecked the country's lace business. And if it's a question of minks—well, there are people like the ones who tried, some time ago, to bring almost two hundred and fifty mink coats into the country without observing certain formalities. . .

All imported items are supposed to have affixed to them a special customs stamp.

The other day, the police raided a printing shop specializing in these stamps.

uncle max

by Pat McMahon

OFTEN, in the summer, I went to visit Uncle Max in the big house on the hill. Though the visits were frequent, I never tired of them, and for days in advance I would imagine myself riding my bike down the great winding driveway that led from the house to the highway below. It was a place for fun, a place for growing up, and I enjoyed every minute of it.

I enjoyed Uncle Max too, despite the fact that he was often too busy to spend as much time with me as he would have liked. Uncle Max was stout and balding, and looked like a banker. He wore a Phi Beta Kappa key on his gold watch chain and smoked cigars that were longer than my arm—or seemed to be, at least. In the early days he had a habit of kissing me, but finally my twisting and squirming must have convinced him that I was too old a boy for such things.

I was eleven during that final summer of my visits, old enough to follow Uncle Max around the great house while he tended to his far-flung business matters. In one room on the third floor were the teletype machines which fed

Pat McMahon explores one possible aspect of that future with which George Orwell is commonly associated. We have no way of knowing whether it will be so. We can only hope it will NOT be so. . . . After this brief warning, we suggest that you turn to the story of Uncle Max. . . .

the latest world news and market reports on endless sheets of yellow paper, keeping Uncle Max in touch with his world. Then there were the visitors too, the quiet men in their long black chauffeur - driven cars. They came, spoke with Uncle Max behind the closed doors of the second-floor study, and then departed with pursed lips and thoughtful eyes.

All this I saw, and much more I felt, playing around the big house. There was the fun of the unknown every day, the waiting to see the long cars draw up—sometimes coming dangerously close to me as I coasted down the curving driveway on my bike. There was the bustle of activity with each occasional ringing of the alarm bell on the teletype, the thrill of anticipation when the frequent long distance calls came in from far-off places.

But most of all, there were the few precious moments with Uncle Max himself. "What are you doing today, boy?" he'd ask over breakfast, sometimes winking at his big-boned wife who sat opposite him across the marble-topped patio table. "Playing cops and robbers?"

The maid would appear with orange juice and bacon and eggs and toast, and the big glass of milk for me because I was too

young for coffee. "Not today," I'd stammer, because the truth was there was no fun playing cops and robbers by yourself. "Maybe I'll just ride my bike."

"Be careful of the cars," Aunt Rita cautioned, as she always did. "And don't go beyond the wall."

It was the last regulation that effectively cut me off from whatever other children might have been found in the sparsely settled suburban community. I often wondered about it, but not too hard, because as I've said the house and grounds and visitors were enough to fully fascinate any eleven-year-old boy. I had all the rest of the year to be with kids my own age, while these summer visits were my only entry into the exciting adult world about which I knew so little.

Sometimes when Uncle Max was busy, Aunt Rita would stay with me, giving a poor imitation of playing ball on the back lawn. "I guess I'll never make a pitcher," she said with a sigh one day, after a particularly lengthy session. "I'm too old for this sort of thing, Jimmy."

"Will Uncle Max be busy all day?"

She nodded, looking up at the big house. "Some important men have come all the way from Chicago to see him."

"How come Uncle Max never goes to the office like my dad?"

"He has his office here at home, Jimmy. Your uncle is important enough so that people come to see him." She shielded her eyes from the sun, staring intently at a taxi bringing the latest arrival. "Come on—feel like some lemonade?"

"Sure!"

Around the back of the house, beyond the patio, was an oval swimming pool that seemed like a small lake to me. I couldn't really swim very good, but I enjoyed splashing around in the shallow end, watching the sleek tanned women and the flabby men with their hairy chests. There was always a crowd at the pool on those hot summer days when people drove out from the city to see Uncle Max. I often wondered if they really came to see him or only to cool off in the big oval pool.

This day Uncle Max himself poured my lemonade for me. He took little interest in the swimming and I was surprised to see him at the pool at all. He watched a blonde girl make a perfect dive without a thought for her uncovered hair, and then turned to me. "Boy, I'm leaving you in charge. Watch over my pool and keep the lemonade pitcher filled."

"Where you going, Uncle

Max?"

"To work on my roses. These people are too young for me. I don't know them."

He often puttered around among the myriad rose bushes that surrounded the big house. It was the only real work I ever saw him do, the only task he did not trust to the half-dozen servants who seemed constantly underfoot.

It was hot in the sun, and after he'd gone I busied myself with the lemonade, drinking two tall glasses before Aunt Rita reappeared with the latest arrivals. The slim blonde girl who'd been swimming came up to me and asked, "Are those Daiquiris, I hope?"

"Just lemonade," I told her.

"Oh. And who are you?"

"Jimmy. My mother is Aunt Rita's sister."

"Oh. They leave you up here alone?"

"I like it here," I answered defensively. "I like Uncle Max."

"Everybody likes Max." She gave a short laugh and padded away across the damp concrete.

Two men who had just arrived went to speak with Uncle Max in the rose garden, and I could see them talking excitedly. Finally Uncle Max brought them over for drinks, trying to calm them with his beautifully placid voice. "Now, now, we don't

worry about those things until they happen," he said. "Have a drink and you'll feel better, both of you. Want a swim?"

But both men shook their heads. When they were settled down with their drinks, I deserted my lemonade post and went in search of Uncle Max among the roses. "Uncle Max?"

"Yes, boy?"

"Who are all these people, anyway? Why do they come here all the time?"

"They're business associates, free-loaders, friends, just people, boy."

"Who's that lady with the blonde hair? The one in swimming."

"She's something of an actress, I suppose."

"What kind of business are you in, Uncle Max?"

"The business of making people happy, boy. The most important business in the world. Come—let's walk a bit and I'll tell you about it. You see, boy, the world today is a terrible place. There are wars and rumors of war, riots in the street and corruption in high places. The average man needs to get away from these things, to escape into a sort of dream world. I help him escape, boy. I help make him happy, just for a little bit. And don't ever let anybody tell you that's bad, to make people happy."

"Could you make me happy, Uncle Max?"

"Don't I, boy? Don't I make you happy every day you're here?"

"Is that how you make other people happy—by inviting them up here to your house and your swimming pool?"

"Not all of them, boy. I couldn't invite all of them up here."

Someone called his name, and Uncle Max turned. It was Aunt Rita, running to catch up with us. "Max, that lawyer from Chicago is on the phone. He says it's about Duncan!"

Uncle Max let out a long sigh. "I just talked to two men about Duncan. Why is everybody so excited, anyway?"

"Talk to him, Max. I'm worried."

"For you, Rita, I'll talk to him."

We headed back toward the house, with Aunt Rita very much in the lead. I'd never seen her quite so upset, and it was reflected in the rapid pace she set across the close-cropped lawn. They hardly noticed me when I tagged along up to Uncle Max's private office and stood by his desk while he picked up the phone.

"Max here. . . . Yes, I know all that. . . . Yes, yes. . . . Well, can't you stop him? . . . All right, keep me informed."

He hung up and sat somberly

at the desk for a moment. Aunt Rita came up and put her long arms about his shoulders. "How bad is it, Max?"

"Duncan's going before the grand jury this afternoon."

"Do you think he'll . . .?"

"Who knows what he'll do?"

Uncle Max stood up and began pacing. For the first time he seemed really disturbed. "Clear those people out of the pool," he said finally. "Send them all home."

Aunt Rita went off on her mission, seemingly pleased to have a task assigned her. I stayed, hovering at my uncle's side, and presently he noticed me. "Well, boy, you still here?"

"Yes, Uncle Max."

"You should be home with your mother. This is no place for a growing boy." He said the words firmly, but not unkindly.

"I want to stay with you, Uncle Max."

He smiled down at me. "You're a good boy. Stay, but keep out of the way."

He pushed a buzzer on his desk, and after a moment the butler arrived. "Yes, sir?"

"Go up to the newsroom and keep an eye on the AP and UPI tickers. It'll be a story out of either Chicago or Washington."

"Yes sir."

When we were alone again, Uncle Max unlocked one of his filing cabinets and started going

through it. I stood very still watching him, and I knew that he'd forgotten my presence once again. I went to the front window and looked out at the winding black driveway, but suddenly it was no longer a place for fun and frolic. As the last of the visitors' cars curved down the ribbon of asphalt to the highway, a blanket of gloom seemed to slowly settle in place.

For the next three hours, hardly anyone spoke. Even the servants seemed caught up in the tension of waiting for something unknown to happen. Twice Uncle Max made long distance calls to New York, but the conversations seemed only to deepen the somber lines on his brow. He looked through the files on his desk again, and finally went upstairs to the room with the teletype machines.

The butler, still at his post, turned and said, "I think something's coming through now, sir. From Chicago."

Uncle Max grasped the sheet of yellow paper and read the words as fast as they were printed. After a moment he tore the sheet free and crumpled it into a ball. "Bad news, sir?" the butler asked.

"The worst." And then, to Aunt Rita as she appeared in the doorway behind me, "Duncan's talked. He's told them everything."

"What will you do, Max?"

Her question was interrupted by the jangle of the house phone. The butler answered it and listened intently. "There's a car at the gate, sir. Four men in it. They insist on seeing you."

"Already?" Uncle Max stared out at the changing sky. "They must have been parked down the road with their warrants, just waiting."

"If you'll pardon me, sir, some resistance could be offered."

But Uncle Max waved an arm. "We're still civilized people. I don't want them running all over the place, trampling my roses."

"Max . . ." Aunt Rita touched his arm. "Max, was it so bad?"

He looked around him. "All this? I don't think so." And then he seemed to remember me again. "I told you, boy. Just this afternoon I told you. No matter what you hear, no matter what they might tell you . . ."

From somewhere below, the door chimes started their familiar message. Uncle Max turned away from us for just a moment, and I heard Aunt Rita scream.

"Max! No!"

Then there was the cough of a muffled shot, and he started to crumple. I got just a glimpse of the small automatic he'd pressed against his heart, and then the butler hustled me out. Moments

later, when the tall man showed a legal-looking document and asked for Uncle Max, the butler simply shook his head and said, "You're a bit too late, sir."

And I knew Uncle Max was dead. Forever.

Later, after they'd taken away the body, I slipped out of my room and went back to the room on the third floor. There were still a few spots of blood on the rug, and I tried not to look at them. Instead, I found the crumpled ball of yellow paper where Uncle Max had tossed it, and spread it carefully between my hands. It was the news bulletin he'd watched being typed out.

CHICAGO, AUGUST 3, 1978
—FOLLOWING TESTIMONY BEFORE A GRAND JURY HERE TODAY, FEDERAL AGENTS MOVED SWIFTLY TO ARREST MAX QUIRE, IDENTIFIED AS THE SECRET PUBLISHER OF OUTLAWED DETECTIVE STORIES. SINCE THE BAN IMPOSED ON SUCH LITERATURE IN 1976, AUTHORITIES HAVE BEEN ATTEMPTING TO GATHER EVIDENCE AGAINST QUIRE, DESCRIBED AS THE LAST IMPORTANT DETECTIVE STORY PUBLISHER STILL AT LARGE.

death deferred

by Gretchen Travis

IT WAS starting to snow when Jean Carlson tossed her weekend bag onto the back seat of her old sedan. With the exception of a few early morning churchgoers, the streets were deserted, and she drove rapidly through town to the turn-off leading to the Taconic Parkway.

For a while hers was the only car on the road and she took advantage of the empty stretch to coax it to its maximum speed, her destination—a Vermont village—still nearly five hours driving time away. There was an eerie one dimensional quality about the hushed flat gray day, and the sound of the tires was muffled by snow already blanketing the ground. She switched on the radio, turning it off impatiently after a news broadcaster warned that the storm threatened to become one of the winter's worst and was expected to continue through the night.

By the time she'd eaten lunch, packed in a brown paper sack, the better part of the trip was behind her. She was travelling now on a secondary road, the sky much darker, the air churn-

There is a haunting quality to this story of what Jean Carlson runs into once she turns off on a secondary road, intent only on reaching her objective, unaware of what lies ahead. All sorts of things can be found in the shadows, after all, both in our cities — and elsewhere. . . .

ing with tiny snowflakes that carried their own warning of more to come, and the windshield wipers were performing sluggishly. But the directional signs bore names she recognized and the few visible landmarks were familiar ones.

So that it was with an exclamation of disgust, a little later, that Jean realized she'd taken a wrong turn. She was trying to back up when the wheel suddenly spun under her hands and, momentarily, she lost control of the car which lurched to one side and stopped, its motor still running. She made a futile attempt to reverse, stubbed out her cigarette in the ash tray, buttoned up her parka and got out of the car.

As Jean suspected, her left front wheel was imbedded in a drift. Pushing was of no use. She abandoned the effort and, bending against a driving wind, started up the road to look for help. There was nothing to be seen but the immediate shrouded countryside, its outlines veiled. A short distance away she glanced around to find the car almost obscured, and she hurried back to the only sure shelter in sight.

While she stood, debating what to do next, the wind suddenly lifted the heavy swirling flakes, as if a giant curtain had been raised, and for a second a shape loomed ahead, then vanished.

Half blinded and numb with cold, Jean plodded toward it.

Gradually the shape took on the contours of a square weatherbeaten farmhouse set back from the road. Blessing her luck, Jean waded knee deep across smooth untrammelled snow to an open porch where she looked for a doorbell or a knocker. There was neither. She rapped sharply and waited. The lowing of a cow caused her to turn her head in the direction of a barn not far from the house, an expanse of snow as virgin as that in front separating the two.

Before she lifted her hand the door opened and a man stood on the threshold, looking down at her. He was a tall man in his early forties, as far as she could judge, with stooped shoulders and close cut dark hair and an austere, rather scholarly face.

Jean smiled through stiff lips. "Hullo . . . I was afraid no one was home." She gestured vaguely at the trackless snow. "My car's stuck in a drift down the road there. I'm trying to get to Oneida—it's about half an hour from here, isn't it—and . . ." She waited expectantly, but the remote expression on his face did not change, and when he did not answer, she added, "May I use your telephone to call a garage? Or perhaps you . . ." Again, she paused, anticipating an offer of help and an invitation

to step inside out of the storm.

He said, slowly, "Telephone? We don't have a telephone."

For a moment she thought he was going to close the door in her face, but then he stepped back and Jean, construing the movement as belated hospitality, stamped snow from her boots and followed him into a narrow hall. Through an archway she saw a fire glowing in a fireplace in the room beyond, and the man, in response to her exclamation of pleasure at the sight, made a half-hearted motion toward it.

Jean stepped out of her boots and walked over to the fireplace. She unbuttoned her parka and held her hands over the flames, noticing that she was in an old-fashioned parlor lit only by the fire and furnished in Victorian pieces. A rocking chair was pulled up close to the hearth, a black horsehair settee opposite it.

"You don't know how glad I was to see your house. I was beginning to think I'd end up under ten feet of snow and no one would find me until the Spring thaw. This is a real blizzard, isn't it?"

The man walked from the hall into the parlor and spoke in a slow uninflected voice. "Yes. I didn't think anyone would be out today."

"No one in his right mind is." Jean smiled at her own foolhard-

iness. "I've been visiting my folks over the weekend and it wasn't this bad when I left home. I probably should have stopped someplace along the way, but I kept thinking I could make it to Oneida. And I would have if it hadn't been for a wrong turn. I teach school there, Third grade."

"Teach? I . . . used to teach." A flicker of emotion crossed the man's face and disappeared.

"Oh, did you?", Jean said politely and grew business-like. "You say you don't have a telephone? Do you have a neighbor who does?"

The man shook his head. "There are no neighbors."

Somewhat bewildered, Jean said, "Well then . . . I really do hate to bother you, but would you be kind enough to give me a hand? I have to be in my classroom in the morning and I'd like to get started before it gets any darker. If . . .". She broke off, her eyes following his to a small alcove at the far side of the room. She had not noticed it before and now she saw that it contained a couch and some potted plants and that a figure was stretched out on the couch beneath a blanket. A pair of women's low heeled shoes showed at one end.

"Oh . . . is someone taking a nap?" Jean lowered her voice.

"Yes, my wife is taking a nap."

"You should have told me. Here I've been talking away a mile a minute. It's a wonder I didn't wake her up."

He hesitated, then in his odd flat voice, said, "Clara won't wake up."

An element of unease stirred in Jean at the same instant that she told herself not to be silly, and briskly, she said, "I'm afraid I'm being an awful nuisance, but I can't budge the car by myself."

"Clara won't let . . . Clara has always done the driving. I don't know very much about cars."

"But all I need is help shoving it back on the road."

"Yes. Yes, I see." He seemed to focus now on her problem and inclined his head courteously. "I'll get a jacket."

Jean watched him disappear into the hall and heard a door open and close. While she waited for him to return, she glanced at the blanketed figure in the alcove, then concentrated on some books arranged on shelves at one side of the fireplace. A volume caught her eye. Impulsively, she reached out for it. In doing so, she stumbled against a small table, knocking it and a brass bowl filled with knitting to the floor.

Dismayed at her clumsiness, Jean stooped to right the table. She pivoted as the man re-entered the room. "Talk about your bull in a china shop," she

apologized. "You have a book of mythology I wanted to see. And look what happened . . . there, I don't think any harm's done." She replaced the bowl on the table and put the knitting inside it, then clapped her hand to her mouth. "Good heavens! I'll bet I woke your wife."

But the figure on the couch had not moved.

"She's a . . . sound sleeper, isn't she?", Jean said uncertainly.

The man's eyes strayed from the alcove back to Jean. "Yes, Clara is a very sound sleeper."

"Well, so am I, but I'd have thought that table made enough noise to raise the . . .". Abruptly, she stopped. The man was gazing blankly over her head. There was a brief silence. Then, with shocked understanding, Jean blurted out, partly in relief at guessing what was wrong, partly in horror, "Your wife's not asleep, she's . . . dead, isn't she?"

The fleeting expression on her face confirmed her guess and the single word he uttered was drawn from him with agonizing slowness. "Dead . . ."

There was another, longer silence. At last, Jean said gently, "I'm sorry. Here I've been asking you for help when all the time you were the one who needed it. I'm so very sorry." As he continued to stand, staring into the alcove, she added, sympathetically but firmly, as she

would speak to one of her pupils, "I know how you must feel, but you can't leave her like this. And you can't stay all alone with her. If you'll get my car on the road, I'll drive into town for help."

He did not answer.

In an effort to rouse him from his apathy, Jean asked, "Had your wife been sick long?"

He averted his gaze from the alcove and looked out a window. "Yes, a long time. Her heart is . . . was bad."

Through the window, Jean saw that the snow was still falling heavily from a blackened sky. "She wasn't caught out in this storm, was she?"

With a visible effort, he recalled himself. "Yes. She . . . she went out to the barn and when she didn't come back, I . . . I went out to look for her and . . ."

Jean gasped. "And found her lying there, dead?"

"Yes. Dead." He might have been reliving a dream.

"I'm so sorry," Jean said helplessly. "When . . . when did it happen?"

"When?" He faced her and answered, pausing painfully between each word. "It happened . . . just before you knocked at the door. Yes . . . I carried Clara in from the barn just before you came."

Jean's memory evoked a vague but recent picture. "That's fun-

ny, because I didn't see . . .". She hastily, without thinking. The picture grew clearer. The trackless snow, the moment's doubt that anyone was at home. She began to button her parka, edging apprehensively toward the hall, almost babbling in her hurry to be gone.

"Look, I'll get my car out of that snowbank somehow. I'll get to Oneida and send someone back . . . the police will be able . . ." She wished that she had bitten off her tongue, but it was too late.

He was standing in the archway, blocking her escape. She backed up to the fireplace and he followed.

Panic stricken, Jean voiced the accusation in her mind. "She didn't just die. You killed her!"

There was a slow chilling triumph in his reply, "Yes. I killed Clara."

Jean heard her own voice rise shrilly. She begged him to let go, promising not to go to the police, promising to forget she had ever seen him.

"Don't shout," he said. "Please don't shout. You have such a nice soft voice." He stared at her as if he was seeing her for the first time, but he made no threatening move, and they continued to stand silently facing one another for several minutes.

He did not look like a murderer, she thought. He still had

the same remote scholarly face, the same unworldly air. But then what was a murderer supposed to look like? Jean had no idea. In a daze, she fumbled in her parka packet, withdrawing a package of cigarettes and a folder of matches. He stared at the cigarettes. Still in a daze, Jean handed them to him, the act serving in some way as a stalling device. He glanced defiantly in the direction of the alcove before he put a cigarette in his mouth.

"I haven't smoked in a long time. Clara won't . . . Clara would never allow tobacco in the house. I used to smoke a lot." Never taking his eyes off her, he returned the package. After a moment he removed the cigarette from between his lips. "It doesn't taste right," he said, twisting it between his fingers as if it were something he had mislaid and recovered, only to find it damaged.

Jean stood, frozen, in front of the rocking chair, her eyes on his hands, on the long thin twisting fingers. "Did . . . did you choke her?", she asked faintly.

He dropped the cigarette in the fireplace and gave the question some thought. "No. No, I didn't choke Clara. I . . . I smothered her. With a pillow. I smothered her with her own pillow." The idea seemed to please

him. "She stuffed it with down from my geese. They were my geese. I raised them."

It was the longest speech he had made and, oddly, it gave Jean courage. While he brooded, she made an abortive attempt to inch toward the hall.

He walked around her and she whirled about to see him pick up a poker. She tensed. But he only prodded the coals and said, "You're cold, aren't you? Would you like some sherry? Here, sit down." He came closer and Jean sank into the rocking chair he indicated while he backed up to a sideboard on the other side of the fireplace where he poured from a decanter into the one wine glass beside it and handed the glass to her. "Drink it. It's a very good sherry. It's Clara's."

The wine warmed her so that she was able to say, with a flash of spirit, "If I don't show up at school tomorrow, people will start looking for me." She tensed again.

"What's the matter?" He looked, as she had done, into the alcove, then back at her.

"I thought . . . I thought I saw her move. It must be the light." The fire was lower, the room darker. She rubbed her eyes and set the empty sherry glass on the floor, wondering desperately what he intended to do with her. And when. She told herself to keep

him talking while she tried to think and she asked the first thing that came into her head. "You said you had taught? Where did you teach?"

He put the wine glass back on the sideboard and sat down on the settee opposite her. Jean fed him questions whose answers she listened to with one half of her mind, yet aware that his responses came less haltingly, that he talked now as though he was recovering the use of a tongue he had once spoken fluently. He had been an instructor in a small up-state college. He had married young and he had been in line for a professorship.

"Why did you quit?" She saw that there was only one exit, that into the hall through the archway.

He told her that Clara had not liked the academic life and that she had developed a heart condition. They had left to live on this farm she had inherited.

"But that's not a bad life. You can read and study and . . . and write." He looked at her indifferently and she sensed that she was losing his interest. Instinct impelled her to recapture it, to keep him talking, anything to keep him from whatever violence he had in store for her. "Why did you have to . . . to kill her?"

He did not answer directly,

but he made it clear that he had wanted to kill his wife for years, had dreamt of it and prayed for it and plotted it and lacked the nerve. He showed neither rage nor repentance, only a quiet triumph that he had won in the end.

Jean forced herself to keep her voice low and steady. "But you can't murder a person and get away with it. Even if I hadn't come here today, someone else would have. In time. Or were you planning to . . . to get rid of her body or . . . or make it look like an accident?"

He leaned forward slightly. "An accident?"

She saw that she had his complete attention. "Was that what you planned to do? Make it look like an accident? It won't work. You can't . . .". Suddenly, she jerked upright, suspecting danger from another source. "What's that smell?"

"Smell? Oh." He dismissed it. "It's the stove."

"Gas? There must be a lot of it escaping." She had ascribed a faint nausea to fear.

"It leaks. The gas company is always telling us that we need a new stove." The odor did not bother him although he started to get up to fix it, then thought better of it.

Jean's mind raced. "Couldn't you use that, the gas, I mean, to

"make your wife's death look like an accident?" She laced her fingers together to keep her hands from shaking and drew a deep breath, staring straight into his wary face. As matter-of-factly as she could, she began to bargain for her life. "Wouldn't you like to make it look like an accident? So that you'd never be suspected of murder."

"The gas? How?"

"If I tell you, will you let me go?"

"You tell me how first."

Jean gripped the arms of the rocker. She had no choice but to gamble, to pray that he was too unworldly to spot flaws in the plan she was about to offer. Either he accepted it and let her leave the house alive, or . . . "All right. Look, suppose your wife had been sitting here, knitting, in this rocker by the fire. She had been drinking her sherry and she grew drowsy."

He nodded. The picture was a familiar one.

"You . . . hit her with something. The poker there, maybe . . . on the temple and she fell forward and struck her head on that guard on the hearth. The stove was leaking and . . ."

"Go on."

"You had opened the jets on the stove and then you went out to the barn to tend to your livestock and while you were away, gas filled this room. When you

came back, you found your wife lying on the floor, overcome. You tried to revive her, but it was too late. She was dead. You would turn off the jets before you went for the doctor, but the house would be filled with gas. The gas company would back you up. They've been telling you to get a new stove. That the old one is dangerous. They'd say they've been expecting something like this to happen. A leak. No one would ever know. I'd never tell. I swear it. You can trust me."

She was tired, drained. Nothing seemed to matter. He would kill her as he had murdered Clara. Or he would let her go. She was too tired to fight any longer. She slumped back in the rocking chair.

"Yes." His voice seemed far away. "That's a good plan. A very good plan." There was a sudden noise as he sprang to his feet. And, in the background, there was another sound. Sounds made by someone stretching, someone yawning, a second pair of feet touching bare floorboards and a harsh demanding voice.

"George? George! That stove's leaking again." Then, agitated, "Who's that girl?"

The man's shoulders sagged. He answered in his usual monotone, only louder. Much louder. "Her car is in the ditch down the road."

"What? Stop mumbling. You know I can't hear you when you mumble."

He shouted. "Her car got stuck in the ditch."

Jean felt a figure bend over her.

"She's fainted. Here, help me rub her wrists. Oh, go on out-doors and get her car out of the ditch. You're just getting in my way."

Slowly Jean opened her eyelids and stared up into the unfriendly face of a stout, middle-aged gray-haired woman, who said, "You coming to?"

The alcove was empty, the man nowhere in sight.

The harsh voice went on. "You looking for George? He's out fixing your car. 'You all right?' There was apprehension in the question.

"Yes. Yes, I'm fine. I've been on the road since early this morning and I guess all that . . . driving tired me more than I realized." Jean got out of the rocker and stumbled into the hall. The woman followed and watched curiously while Jean put on her boots. With her hand on the door, Jean turned and stared directly at the woman, not knowing quite how to phrase what she knew she must say. "That stove of yours . . .," she faltered.

"What did you say? Stove?"

Oh, the gas. It's all right. Just goes out every now and then. Nothing wrong with it. They just want to sell us a new one."

The front door was ajar now and Jean spoke rapidly. In despair she saw that the woman did not believe her story, was not even listening. "Don't you see," Jean pleaded, "now I'll have to go to the police . . ."

"Police!" The woman seized on the word as her husband had done earlier. "Don't you dare bring a policeman to this house. Look here, young lady, you mind your own business and I'll tend to mine. Forcing your way in other people's houses, asking for help and then . . . I'll have the law on you."

"Please listen to me." Jean made one last attempt.

The woman opened the door wide and all but shoved Jean out onto the porch. They could see the man slowly making his way from the road through the snow. The woman shouted to him to hurry up. "He's slower than molasses in January," she said. Then she tapped her finger against her forehead in a contemptuous gesture. "He ain't all there. He don't have enough sense to lock the barn doors."

It was several hours after the girl had gone, but Clara could not get her out of mind. She sat

in the rocking chair, her knitting in her lap, a glass of sherry in one hand.

"What was wrong with that girl, George? You shouldn't have let her in the house. You should have gone right out and got her car out of the ditch the minute she knocked at the door. Gave me an awful start to wake up and see her all slumped over like that." She put her hand over her heart. "And what did she mean, talking about the police?"

"I told you. I didn't do anything to her." He sat on the settee, his shoulders bowed, his long thin fingers clasping his knees.

"Well you should have woken me up." Clara set her glass on the floor and began to knit. "Are you listening to me, George?"

"Yes. Yes, I'm listening, Clara." Softly, he added, "She was a nice girl. She helped me with my plan."

Clara cupped one ear. "What's

that? You know I can't hear when you mumble. What're you talking about?"

Very softly, George said, "I can't tell you, Clara. Not now." He nodded to himself. "But you'll find out."

Clara had lost interest. She rocked back and forth in front of the dying fire. "Well, you'd better to tend to the stock now. And you can bring in some wood on your way back."

Obediently, George rose and shuffled from the room.

Clara shouted after him. "And don't forget to close the barn doors." She gave a short laugh, got up and refilled her sherry glass and settled back in the chair, rocking more and more slowly, her knitting falling unnoticed to the floor, a ball of yarn rolling over beside the poker. Her eyes opened and shut and opened and then stayed closed. . . .

AND NEXT MONTH—



WE WONDER WHERE IS THE BORDERLINE BETWEEN FACT AND FICTION IN THE SAINT SAGA
in

THE HIGHER FINANCE

—in the October 1965 issue, *THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE*

after the doctor calls

by J. J. Marric

A PECULIAR kind of influenza epidemic raged over London. Not Asian flu, and not at all deadly. Not gastric flu, nothing like so uncomfortable. There were various names for it: Knock-out flu, 48-hour flu.

"A flicking awful flu," complained Superintendent Lemaitre when he entered the office of George Gideon, Commander of the Criminal Investigation Department at New Scotland Yard. Always thin, he looked positively gaunt, and against him Gideon looked almost too massive and fit.

"Knocked me right out. Left here on Friday night, fit as a fiddle. Got up Saturday morning, on top of the world. Had me breakfast — and went out like a light. *Non compos mentis* all day."

"Normal," Gideon remarked.

"No, I wasn't normal. I tell you. I —" Lemaitre, given to bright colours and smooth hair, suddenly realised what Gideon had meant, "Hope *you* get it," Lemaitre finished darkly. That'll show you whether it's funny or not."

George Gideon, by now chief executive officer of the Criminal Investigation Department, the Metropolitan Police — in other words, at New Scotland Yard — has within a matter of years become one of those names known to millions, all over the world, who've read and enjoyed J. J. Marric's GIDEON'S DAY, GIDEON'S NIGHT, GIDEON'S VOTE, etc. (all Harper & Row).

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Gideon grinned across. "Malcolm and Pru went down with it," he said, of two of his children. "They say the schools are half-empty."

Gideon stared at Lemaitre.

The Superintendent had worked with Gideon for many years and — to use his own words — "could read him like a book."

At this moment the page was saying that Gideon had suddenly become pre-occupied with a case, or some aspect of crime, and that he, Lemaitre, would be wise to keep quiet. So he sat at his desk and picked up some reports.

"Lem," Gideon said, out of the blue, "how many of our chaps are down with this flu?"

"I dunno."

Gideon glared, without speaking. After a few seconds, Lemaitre pushed his chair back.

"Okay, I'll go and find out," he said, and disappeared.

On Gideon's desk were reports of the week-end's crimes, of arrests which were triumphs and getaways which were abject failures.

The Yard was the pulse of London's crime, and Gideon was the doctor's finger on the pulse. He looked through some statements about crimes being investigated, then read the usual Monday morning summary, prepared with great precision.

"One hundred and forty-three

burglaries and forced entries," he read aloud. "Ninety-seven private houses, thirty-four apartments, all the rest shops and warehouses."

The ninety-seven and the thirty-four meant that at least a hundred and thirty-one people, men, women or children, had been scared out of their wits that week-end.

Gideon disliked crime; but even more he disliked it when ordinary people suffered in their homes. He put out a hand and lifted the telephone.

"Get me Mr. Robson, of N.I. Division."

"Yes, sir."

Robson had a Division which covered a great deal of St. John's Wood residential area.

"Hallo, George! You on your feet?" Robson was the bluff type.

"Just about, Robby. Like to do a nice door-to-door questioning job?"

"No, I wouldn't!" replied Robson, on the instant. "I'm at two-thirds of establishment now. My chaps are going down like nine-pins."

"You had seventeen burglaries on Saturday night," Gideon said.

"Are you telling me or asking me?"

"I'm asking you to find out how many of them were from houses where this flu struck," Gideon said.

"Eh?"

"Didn't you hear me?"

Robson said slowly: "It's just sinking in. I'll ring you back."

As Gideon hung up the receiver, the door burst open and Lemaitre came rushing in, obviously hot-foot with news.

"George, we're damn' near decimated! One in four are away this morning. I haven't known anything like it since 1948. Then—"

"Listen," interrupted Gideon, "I want to know how many flu-struck families had visitors over the week-end. I've asked Robson. Get three or four of our men on the job, and—"

"Visitors?"

The sad truth was Lemaitre would never learn to think before he spoke.

Gideon looked at him stonily.

"Oh, *burglars!*" Lemaitre breathed, and his eyes lit up. "George," he went on, "you're the knock-out. You really are."

Gideon smiled as the door closed again on his colleague. He studied all the reports on his desk, on crimes ranging from rape to robbery with violence, and from murder to blackmail, but all the time his mind was analysing the flu and the staff situation.

If one man in every four who should be on the beat was off duty, then the police were spread very thin on the ground.

One of his three telephones rang.

"Gideon."

"George," Lemaitre said, "there were a hell of a lot of burglaries and break-ins at places where the occupants were down with flu. Some of them didn't even see the beggars who sneaked in the bedroom in broad daylight. One chap says his wallet was lifted from under his pillow."

"I've been thinking," Gideon said.

"Go on," scoffed Lemaitre.

"If there's a big proportion of thefts from houses where the occupants are down with flu, the thieves must know in advance who's ill."

"That's all very well, but how could they tell?"

"See a doctor."

It took an appreciable time for that to sink in, but at last Lemaitre cried:

"You mean, *follow* the doctors."

"That's it," Gideon said.

"Then we ought to do the same! But George—we can't spare the men. We can't keep things ticking over properly as it is. What the heck are we to do?"

"Here's the drill," Gideon said. "Send a teletype message to all Divisional stations. Ask them to find out from the local doctors where patients have this

flu. And then have all the likely houses watched. Got all that?"

"I'll get that message off," Le-maitre promised.

As he rang off, another call came, this time Robson again, a Robson who sounded at once chastened and yet eager.

"Over half of our victims were down with flu, George. I'm going to check with the local medics, and—"

Gideon thanked the fates for men of such acumen, and then put the epidemic out of his mind and concentrated on the other cases, almost serenely sure that these were all he had to worry about.

And it was so.

All over London on that brisk, bright day, and that clear, cold night, the thieves who had thrived on the city's sickness made visits to the ailing. One after another they came out, pockets, sacks and cases laden,

into the arms of waiting policemen.

"How the hell did you *know*?" was like a refrain.

At first, no one could answer that despairing question.

Soon, however, the grapevine worked, as it always did. It had worked to tell the little crooks how to find the victims of the flu, so as to go for easy pickings. Now it served to say one thing to those in the police cells and the remand cells and to those who had planned their crimes for another night.

The refrain was: "Old Gideon caught on it to."

So the respect and the fear which so many criminals felt for Gideon grew. When he went home on the Wednesday night he was as fit as a fiddle, but on Thursday morning he was flat on his back, oblivious even of his wife moving about the room.

But none among London's criminals knew.

THE CHEWING GUM JOSTLER

The Spitter has long been in the pattern file at headquarters in New York. He'll spit on someone's clothing, apologize and offer to remove the spittle—and pick his victim's pocket while doing so.

Add to this the chewing-gum technique of a gentleman arrested the other day for jostling. He'd help you get the chewing gum off the seat of your trousers—which he'd put there himself, a second earlier—and then he'd offer to help his victim get it off.

Unfortunately for him, two detectives—who'd watched him try this some blocks away—were waiting patiently to see what'd now happen. They moved in when they saw him lift the wallet from the victim's rear pocket.

*cave
of
the
mountain
king*

by Lewis H. Kilpatrick

NOT MANY folks in these Kentucky hills would have lived in our weatherboarded log house across Clifty Creek from that cave up Garrard Mountain. But us Brattons had abided there since pioneer days. When Pa and Ma moved to the county seat to take their ease, and I wed, I rented the farm. I'd had plenty of the settlements while in the Army—and Myrtle, finishing college school, allowed the hollows looked mighty homelike to her, too.

That cave was just a playhouse to us when we were young ones. Gunpowder was made from the saltpeter there during the North-South War. And now and then a rockpecker came from the level country, hunting Swift's Silver Mine, worked and lost somewhere in these hills about the time of Daniel Boone. But that deep black hole in the limestone cliff never meant anything fearsome until old Caleb Garrard denned himself in there right after his pretty girl wife Neva died.

We've met Sheriff Clint Hawkins several times before (most recently in WOLF DOG (SMM, July 1965) and have perhaps half begun to understand this law enforcement officer who IS "the law" in those Kentucky hills where the ways of life—and of death—are those of earlier generations . . .

"Dale, I want you to come along," Sheriff Clint Hawkins said to me the summer after I wed. He'd hitched his horse at our slat gate and was tugging at his holster buckle when I met him on the porch. "I'm leaving my gun here. We're going peaceful—and I hope Caleb takes it that way.

Sheriff Hawkins was a big, mustachy man who wore his star over his heart to keep the badge warm. I hated to disoblige him.

"Clint," I spoke up, knowing Myrtle was listening from the kitchen, "us Brattons and Garrards have been neighbors since always ago. Our grandsires fought the Redcoats and Indians and Yankees together, and never a hard word has passed between us. We've just let Caleb alone since he took his queer turn four years ago. I don't aim to contrary him now."

Clint hung his holster on a doorpost nail and smiled.

"Dale, I need you with me because you are a friend," he said. "I wasn't high sheriff when Caleb Garrard's woman died. I just wondered then like everybody else. Now, after studying on it quite a spell, I hanker to face him and ask several questions."

There wasn't any real harm in trying to visit the cave, and all my brown-haired Myrtle said was a whispery:

"You be careful, honey. Recollect Caleb's a master shot and that mountain belongs to him." She kissed me right before Sheriff Hawkins, like I was going a far piece away.

He and I went down the trail to Clifty Creek, crossed it on a footlog and started up the timbered slope. It was then he stepped ahead of me, for we'd left my boundary and were on the Garrard land. That mountain, near a thousand feet high and topped by virgin pines, was all Caleb had now of the mile square tract he once owned. The rest of his land had been sold, passel by passel, to raise the cash money he spent trying to save Neva's life.

"Hallo!" The sheriff halted and I did, too, below the limestone cliff. "Hallo, Caleb Garrard! This is Clint—Clint Hawkins. Dale Bratton, your neighbor, is down here with me. I want friendly speech with you, Caleb."

A tall spruce, its limbs cut off close to the trunk, made a straddle-ladder from where we stood straight up to the mouth of the cave. I recollected the water vein that trickled just inside. Waiting there, I heard it *drip—drip—drip*—like the ticking of a big wooden clock when everything else is dead still.

"Sheriff, have ye got a warrant fer me?" Those words came

startling sudden from near the top of the trimmed spruce. I could see only Caleb's long white hair and beard in the shadows there, but the .38 special he held was clear enough. It was pointed down at us.

"No, Caleb," Sheriff Hawkins told him. "I haven't any warrant. I don't need one. You haven't done nothing wrong to my certain knowledge. Me 'n' Dale just want to make you a friendly visit. Can we come up?"

"*Naw!*" No bullet out of Caleb's pistol could have spoke more plain. "This is my mountain. I want no truck with you, Clint Hawkins, or anybody else. I prefer you all to leave me be."

"But, Caleb," the sheriff argued, "it aint in nature for a man to live as you do. You've got plenty of friends. I'm one of 'em. We crave your company and want to help you if we can."

"I don't need help," Caleb's stone-gray eyes appeared to blaze the words. "This is my home and castle, and here I'm king. You haven't any lawful business with me, Clint Hawkins. Now you git!"

We did, not too fast but not too slow, either. When we got back to my house, Myrtle was cooking an extra good dinner.

"I watched from the front window, honey," she said, putting the victuals on the table. "I had your Winchester ready, right in

my hands. If Caleb commenced shooting, that cave was on my sights."

"Reckon you and Myrtle are wise, Dale," Sheriff Hawkins nodded as we sat down to dinner. "Caleb don't harm nobody and the pension he gets from being in the Spanish War more'n keeps him. I'll study about it a heap before I pester him again."

"We don't want it norated, Clint," I said, "but he does visit us occasional. It's at night—and we haven't even tried to stay awake and catch him. We've got plenty of garden sass and corn, and we don't miss what he takes. But after such a time, when we see strange footprints in the garden, we always find a dollar bill stuck with a splinter to a barn door crack. Old Caleb more than pays that way for what he takes. He'd be welcome to it anyway."

"I do know this much," Clint said between mouthfuls, for he was a hearty eater: "He goes the first week of every month, without fail, to the post office in Jonas Stile's store on Bald Knob. There he gets his pension check, saying little. Jonas always has the cash money then to make change for the rations and other things he buys. Nobody sees him again for another month. Folks meeting him in passing no longer bid him *Howdy*, I hear, and some own they even take to the side and give him the whole

road."

Caleb Garrard, in his day, was the most powerful man in our parts. He stood nineteen hands tall, and his shoulders and arms and legs were lumps of muscle. Let a team stall with a load in a deep rut—and if he was around, that load moved up and free. I saw him when I was a boy, many a time, hist a full-grown hog into a wagon and tote hundred pound rocks in helping a neighbor clear a field.

But after he came back from somewhere in the settlements, fetching little Neva to wife, he was different in his ways. He never hardly left home then without her.

She was young enough to be his daughter. Her hands and feet were small, and she wore her long gold hair in a plait. She was smiling and happy all the time. Caleb, clean shaved and scarce gray those years, cherished her like a little girl does her first poppet. Even when folks were around, he'd reach out to touch her shiny hair gentle and worshipful. He obliged her at every turn around the house, too. He showed no shame in doing the gardening and milking, washing the dishes after meals and sweeping the floor. Seemed he just couldn't do enough for her.

Then she sickened slow but painful. Doc Hardin came out

from town often and did what he could. The grannies tried their herbs and charms. Caleb began taking her down to the settlements, hither and yon, seeking a cure. The year before I went off to the Army, he fetched her home—and they never went away again. He tended her by himself, forbidding Ma and the other neighbor women to even cross his stile. Finally, passing by one day, folks saw a black rag on the front door and Caleb going up Garrard Mountain with a pickax and shovel. That very night his house went aflame. By the time Pa and I roused and got there with buckets, it was burned to the rock foundation. Caleb was nowhere around. That was when he shed the world of mortals and denned himself in his cave.

"I wonder what varment he trapped for meat today," Myrtle often said when we sat out on our porch of a summer's dusk. "When I see that fire glowing in his cave across the valley, I always try to figure what he's having for supper."

"He could go into town, like Pa and Ma did, and live comfortable," I said. "What an old Spanish War soldier draws from the Government is considerable money in these hills. Caleb can't be spending more than several dollars a month, even with what he fixes on our barn door. He

must have a right smart fortune hid somewhere."

"Honey, would you pine and take such a turn if I died?" she mocked, moving her chair closer to mine.

I reached my hand in the dark to hers, for I loved her mightily. "No, ma'am," I teased back. "I'd go down to the settlements and get me a red-headed girl like Caleb did."

Myrtle got broody, for no matter what else we talked about there on the porch of nights, we always came around to him.

"Dale, some folks allowed Neva was an orphan he took pity on. Some, that she was a woodscolt of one of his dead Army friends. He always went to their yearly musters in the Blue Grass."

"And some spiteful women," I put in, "jealous-hearted of her being so pretty, held she was a fancy girl he picked up in Lexington or Louisville. Those two never said and nobody dared ask them much. Now all that know the real truth are Caleb and a scattering of bones buried somewhere on that lonely mountain."

"Dale, I feel a chill!" Myrtle gripped my hand tighter. "Let's go in and to bed, honey."

But Myrtle Bratton wasn't fearful at heart. And, being a female, she had a mort of questing in her. That she proved, came fall of the year, when I

went to town on my mare for a poke of salt against hog killing time.

I noticed, after I stabled the mare and came into the kitchen that late evening, she was mighty quiet. She didn't ask about the town folks or what was in the wrapped candy box I put on the table near her. Having been wed nearly a year, I was watching her humors for a certain sign.

"Dale," she commenced when I'd washed for supper, "I done somethin' today I shouldn't ought to." I listened close, for she never forgot the proper talk she learned in college school unless she was upset.

"Did Nat Gordon or Butch Simms come by?" I named two boys who used to court her, mad just at the thought of them. "Aint neither of 'em fit to set foot on my land."

"No." She sighed deep, and her cheeks were pale in spite of working at the cook stove. "Dale, I went over to visit Caleb Garrard."

I turned cold myself. "Did he hurt you?" I busted out. "Myrtle, did he even offer you harm?"

She smiled then, but tight lipped.

"No," she said. "I'd been worrying about him getting through the winter. So, with you gone, I filled a basket with some of my preserves and pickled cabbage,

and took them under the cliff. He let down a rope for the basket when I hollered what I had. Then he bid me climb up if I was minded to. I did."

"Myrtle Bratton," I almost swore, mad now for another reason, "I never knew you to act such a fool! Caleb's a plumb lunatic. He might have—he could have—"

"He didn't," she snapped at me. He gave me welcome and offered me a chair piled soft with varment skins. He—" She went pale and trembling again, shutting her eyes, her lips quivering.

"What did you see?" I asked, suspicious for the first time. "Myrtle, tell me what all you saw in that cave?"

She shook her head and opened her eyes, and there was a hardness in them and to her chin I hadn't seen since we used to fuss as young ones.

"I owned to what I did," she said. "That's enough. No mortal harm came to me. I didn't tarry long. And, Dale, I promise on my soul never, never to go there again."

I didn't press her more then, but I did later. Yet, for the first time since we were plighted, she had a secret she wouldn't share. When soon after Christmas she cuddled in my arms one night and told me what I'd been hoping, I had enough on my

mind thinking only of our three selves. We didn't even mention Caleb Garrard all the next month, shut in as we were by miry roads and an uncommon lot of snow.

On a frosty February morning, I was at the wood pile with my ax, chopping, when Myrtle came hurrying out the back door, wrapped in a knit shawl.

"Dale, look over there!" she said, pointing across the valley. "I've been watching it from the front window. Caleb never did that before that I've seen."

I looked, and saw smoke coming from the mouth of the cave. But it wasn't regular smoke, quiling up or pouring out. There was a white puff, then two puffs close together. A minute, and there came a bigger white puff.

"It's signals," I allowed, shading my eyes with my hand. "Smoke signals like I've read about and seen in Western moving pictures. Old Caleb was a Regular Army man on the plains before the Spanish War."

"Maybe he's sick, Dale. Maybe he needs help."

"Or maybe his turn has worsened," I said, "and he thinks he's back fighting Indians. Myrtle honey, you go inside the house and don't peer over there any more. We don't want our baby marked."

There hadn't been strange

footprints in our garden, of course, since I dug the last potatoes and turnips in the late fall. Few people could drop in during the winter and I was staying close to home on account of Myrtle. But after studying about those smoke signals, I went a mile to a neighbor's house and had him send his boy way to town to inform Sheriff Hawkins.

Next day I heard the sheriff calling from our gate. He wore a mackinaw this time and his mustache was dripping melted frost from his breath.

"I'm deputizing you, Dale Bratton," he said when he came in to the fireplace. He kept his pistol on his belt and a big flashlight stuck out of his pocket. "Wrap up warm and get your Winchester. I don't figger we'll have trouble—" looking closer at Myrtle—"but I'm going up and inside that cave this time.

"Myrtle, I just want Dale along in case something happens to me."

While I was getting ready in the next room, I heard them talking.

"Yes, something must be uncommon wrong over there," he said. "Jonas Stiles sent me word Caleb hasn't come after his pension checks for two months. He never missed before, fair weather or foul. Crazy he may be, but he's a human being. And it's in

my oath as high sheriff to care for all my people."

When we got across Clifty Creek, Sheriff Hawkins and I put an interval between us and dodged from tree to tree. Not a sound or a mite of smoke came from that yawning cave. The spruce ladder was still there and we stopped under it, still keeping a few yards apart. The sheriff called up as he did those months before, but there wasn't any answer this time. He called again and again. All I could hear was that *drip-drip-drip*—from the water vein just inside the cave.

"Take a tree, Dale, and cover me," said Clint, hitching his belt tighter. "I'm going up." And, grabbing hold of the cut-off limbs, he started climbing.

I hated to think of having to shoot an old man, once a good neighbor and a friend of my folks before I was born. Clint Hawkins, heavy built as he was, didn't take more than a minute to reach the top. But that minute was the longest I'd spent since leaving the Army.

I saw him stop at the cave ledge, grip his holstered pistol with his right hand and swing himself up, facing inside. Then, for another minute, there he stood against the blackness.

"Dale—Dale—" his voice was queer and he didn't turn around — "leave your rifle-gun and come

on up."

He was still standing there, the flashlight pulled from his mackinaw pocket, when I got beside him. He didn't say nothing and I didn't either for a right smart spell.

Caleb had boxed in most of the cave front with staves. His fireplace, walled with chinked rocks, was at the door. Inside, at the near corner under the limestone ceiling, was a pallet of blankets on leaves and balsam bows. There was a makeshift table and cupboard, I saw by the flashlight, and a battered old steel Army locker.

Across the cave room, in the hickory chair where Myrtle must have sat, was Caleb Garrard, upright on a pillow of varment skins. He'd roped himself to the chair back—and fallen at his side was the .38 special. His chin had sank on his chest and blood was dried dark on his long white beard.

Sheriff Hawkins went over to him, feeling of his body. I turned away, sickened at my stomach, and looked down at the Army trunk. There, weighted by pebbles, was a folded piece of paper. I picked it up, went to the cave door and opened the paper, my fingers shaking.

"The last Will of I, Caleb Garrard of Crag County, Kaintucky," I read in purple ink I knew was pokeberry juice. "I leave this mountain and all my cash money in this here locker to my good nabors Dale Bratton and his woman Myrtle. Signed by my Hand—"

"Dale—" Sheriff Hawkins spoke again. "Stand here and look where he died looking. That rock shelf yonder—"

A human skull, small it was, on a mat of green moss. A rusty tin can at each side held a drooping of wild flowers, picked the last of their kind and long faded. A snaky quile of plaited copper hair was laying on the shelf in front. And, as the flashlight showed the forehead of the skull clear, I saw a hole there, like that now above and between the shut eyes of old Caleb Garrard.

"He gave her what some folks call a mercy death," I whispered out.

"Yes," Sheriff Hawkins said beside me, taking off his hat—"and he finally gave himself the same."

All I heard then was that *drip—drip—drip*—like a big clock ticking when everything else around is dead still.

*'Curse his better angle from his
side*

And fall to reprobation . . . ?

Othello

*mei
wong
and
the
shakespeare
festival*

by Charlotte and Dan Ross

MEI WONG was spending a few weeks in the United States. It was the first time since World War II that the rotund proprietor of Bombay's Art and Curio Shop had been out of India. Whisked swiftly across oceans to the Western World by the magic of the jet age he was making his headquarters in New York City.

It was there he met James Glore, director of the Strathaven Shakespeare Festival. And that was how he came to be in the lobby of the summer theatre on this pleasant June evening. He had journeyed down to Connecticut on the invitation of James Glore to see the season's opening performance of *Othello*.

Mei Wong stood serene and alone in the smartly-dressed throng, a placid smile on his broad face as he observed with

Charlotte and Dan Ross return with another story about Mei Wong, the Bombay art dealer whose "hobby", or so it seems, is "crime and criminals". These Mei Wong stories have, over the years, been published all over the world, and in more than one language that even Mei Wong would not recognise . . .

interest the frantic pace of these Westerners in their pursuit of pleasure. He was wearing a light-grey linen suit that his tailor had made up especially for his American trip and he imagined that anyone who gave him a second glance would tag him as a prosperous graduate of the chop suey trade.

As he moved forward to hand his ticket to the doorman he felt a touch at his elbow and turned to see the florid, worried face of his new friend, James Glore.

"Would you mind coming backstage for a few minutes, Mei Wong?" James Glore's tone was subdued but full of urgency.

The elderly Chinese regarded him with mild surprise. "Of course. But I would prefer to wait until intermission I am anxious not to miss any of the play."

The director removed a white handkerchief from his tuxedo jacket and mopped his perspiring bald pate. "You won't miss a thing," he assured him. "The curtain will be delayed. I'm making an announcement in a few minutes. Something's happened to Derek Walters."

Mei Wong's broad face registered interest. "The new English star?"

James Glore nodded and led the investigator across to an exit on the other side of the lobby. As he opened the door that led

to the stage and the dressing-room area he told Mei Wong solemnly: "Derek Walters has been murdered."

Several minutes later they stood in the star's dressing-room and Mei Wong studied the slumped body of the English actor. His arms were sprawled across the make-up shelf and his head rested between them directly in front of the mirror with its glaring row of light bulbs. Walters was already dressed in the rich robes of the noble Moor and must have just completed his making-up. His right hand still gripped a stick of black liner.

James Glore pointed to the jewelled dagger that was plunged deep between the shoulder blades of his star. "One of the props in the play," he said huskily. "Whoever had the argument with him must have grabbed it from the shelf in a rage and—It's dreadful! Dreadful!"

Mei Wong gave the director a questioning look. "You have notified the police?"

Glore nodded. "The box-office has just put in a call."

"And what about the audience?" the art dealer asked politely.

The director raised his hands in anguish. "I know you've seen a lot of this sort of thing in Bombay, your hobby being crime and criminals. But I can't

imagine how you manage to remain so calm! I must look after the audience at once. I'll also check with his understudy."

"Will the police allow a performance?"

Glore became more upset than before. "But they must! Tradition of the theatre and all that!"

Alone in the room with the murdered Walters, Mei Wong carefully checked every detail of the scene. A jar of cold cream lay on its side and at the other end of the shelf lay a programme of the play. It was near the hand that still held the stick of black liner.

Mei Wong's eyes became alert as he studied it. Across the top of the programme was written the name Phillips. It had been written there with a black make-up stick. And before the cast of characters in the play there were a number of check marks made by the same soft black crayon. Mei Wong ran down the list of marked names: GRATIANO, LODOVICO, OTHELLO, RODERIGO, EMILIA.

At that moment the director bustled in again, closing the dressing-room door again the excited group of stage people clustered outside. "We'll be ready to begin the play in about ten minutes," he said. "The police are already on their way."

"Excellent," Mei Wong said easily. "Did Walters know any-

one by the name of Phillips?"

James Glore frowned. "Certainly. Ralph Phillips was his business manager. He arrived here from New York a few minutes ago. Shall I bring him in?"

Mei Wong pursed his lips as he considered. "Yes," he said, "I think so." His eyes moved to the murdered man again. "I doubt that he could have had anything to do with the murder though, since he must have been on the highway at the time."

Glore gave the art dealer a meaning look. "I hope he has some way of proving that."

Mei Wong nodded. "It might not be easy. Had Walters any known enemies?"

The director frowned again. "I suppose I oughtn't to say it. But there is one man in the company who hated Walters."

"Who?"

"Robert Carney. He plays the rôle of Gratiano. Walters stole his girl from him. They had a row during rehearsals. Carney threatened Walters."

Mei Wong had a knowing look. "This fits in, I assume the girl is also with the company. Does she, by any chance, play the rôle of Emilia?"

James Glore looked surprised. "That's quite right. How did you guess?"

"There is a clue," Mei Wong indicated the programme with a pudgy hand. "Walters checked

off the character's names in the final moment before he died. And wrote that of Phillips across the top."

James Glore's eyes bulged as he stared down at the theatre programme. "A message from the dead! Must have had a mighty good reason to do that or he would never have found the strength."

"At such times there is often a final burst of energy. A last desperate attempt to speak," Mei Wong studied the programme. "But why should he tick off his own rôle of Othello?"

James Glore shrugged. "Could have been so groggy he didn't know what he was doing. Must have been dead seconds later."

"Alternately he might have made the marks before the attack for some other different reason. Who plays Lodovico and Roderigo?"

"People he just met casually at rehearsals," Glore said.

A little later Glore brought in a tall, grey-haired man with a legal air. The newcomer gasped at the sight of the murdered Walters and strode across the room to Mei Wong. "What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"I am here at Mr. Glore's invitation," Mei Wong replied mildly. "I have some experience with this sort of thing." He indicated the programme. "Before Walters died he scrawled your

name on this programme. What would be the reason?"

Phillips gazed down at the programme a moment and then his eyes met those of Mei Wong. "I believe I can explain that," he said. "It's to catch my attention. He knew I was coming. The ticking off of the characters in the play tell us the name of his murderer. Actually it's a code we worked out. When he was on tour he often wired me to buy and sell orders for stocks and we always used this code. Names of characters in a play. The key being the first letter in each of the names."

Mei Wong quickly scanned the list. "So now we know who the murderer is," he observed quietly.

James Glore started out of the dressing-room. "The police should be arriving any moment," he said.

Mei Wong looked at him sadly. "Then perhaps you had better wait. They are certain to want to talk to you. As you see the key letters of the names GRATIANO, LODOVICO, OTHELLO, RODERIGO and EMILIA quite plainly spell out your name—GLORE!"

Phillips moved across and took Glore's arm. "And I can supply the motive," he said harshly. "Mr. Glore was a close friend of the girl who plays Emilia until Derek Walters came

along and cut him out."

Guilt showed plainly in the director's flushed face as he blustered: "But if I'm guilty why did I chose to bring you along, Mei Wong? Surely I'd have picked some other time for the murder!"

The old art dealer sighed. "I

fear that you hoped my presence might act as a convenient camouflage. To quote the play I would have seen Derek Walters in had you not killed him: 'Curse his better angel from his side, And fall to reprobation.' You have unhappily chosen to live that line tonight."

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a question of punishment

by Stephen Dentinger

"Is IT TRUE, Captain?" the police commissioner asked, fixing his hard blue eyes at the open newspaper on the desk between them.

Captain Leopold shifted in his chair, thinking that it was one hell of a way to start a Monday morning. "If you mean, did I make the speech, of course I made it. There's my picture."

"You made a speech to a women's club denouncing capital punishment?"

"I don't think *denouncing* is exactly the right word. I stated my views."

The commissioner leaned back, spreading his hands wide on the polished desk top. "Captain Leopold, you've been in charge of Homicide for how long? Four years now? How many killers have you brought to justice in those four years?"

"Maybe twenty or twenty-five."

"And you've sent some of them to the electric chair?"

"Three men, yes."

"And now you think that was wrong? You think they should be out walking around like anyone else?"

Leopold wasn't prepared for this sort of thing on a Monday

We've often talked about how it isn't the huge and sprawling areas such as New York and Los Angeles, but the smaller cities, such as the one in which Captain Leopold lives and works, which truly represents and is the strength of this country. Captain Leopold has been with us before. He returns now in this topical story of Death — and a controversy.

morning. "I don't think either of us has the time for a detailed discussion of my views, sir. I did not denounce capital punishment, whatever you may have heard. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a morning report waiting on my desk."

The commissioner made no move to stop him. "I'm afraid this matter is far from closed, Captain."

"I know. That newspaper article will stir things up."

"The press will want a statement from you."

Leopold paused at the door. "I'll think up a good one for them."

He went downstairs to his little office at the rear of the second floor. Sergeant Fletcher was already there, reading through the weekend's accumulation of reports. He was a big man who looked like a cop, but he had brains and Leopold liked him.

"Anything new, Fletcher?"

"The usual weekend stuff. Stabbing in a bar on First Street. The guy might die." Fletcher was silent a moment, then said, "I saw that in the paper this morning. Was that what the boss wanted?"

"Yeah," Leopold said, studying the reports.

"Trouble, huh?"

"Depends."

"Are you in if the reporters come?"

Leopold sighed. "I'm in."

But no reporters came that morning. The work of the detective bureau went on, with only a gentle ripple to the routine. Leopold had not been out all day, and so when the call came at five o'clock, he was ready to take it himself. "Come on, Fletcher," he said. "Shooting in a grocery store over on Fulton. Man dead."

"Let me handle it, Captain."

"Nuts. I've been in all day. We'll both go."

Darkness had already settled over the city, and a few gentle snowflakes were falling. Christmas was only three weeks away, but over on Fulton Street people didn't think too much about Christmas. It was a dingy area of near-slums, with high-ceilinged stores and pillared porches the only reminders of an elegance that might have existed fifty years earlier. For Leopold, the section had always been a slum, and he secretly doubted the occasional newspaper stories of past glory.

Simon Acker's grocery store was in the middle of a run-down block boasting at least one real flophouse. It was not the worst block in the area, but it was bad enough. Leopold saw the crowd on the street outside, and the police cars already gathered. A

few of the watching faces were Negro and Puerto Rican, but most of them were white—grizzled faces half hidden behind unshaven cheeks and bloodshot eyes. They watched in silence, as if awed by this sudden reminder of death.

Inside, a police photographer was taking pictures while another detective questioned a stout, balding man who stood behind the counter. There was blood on the counter itself, trailing down to the floor where a bearded derelict lay stiff with death. Leopold bent over and studied the pattern of bullet holes in his chest.

"You did this?" he asked the balding man.

"I did it. He was trying to rob me."

"You're Simon Acker?"

"Yes."

Leopold nodded and introduced himself. "Did you have to shoot him three times?"

"I . . . he leaned over the counter. I was scared."

"Did you know him?"

"I might have seen him around. With those beards they all look pretty much alike."

"But he wasn't a regular customer?"

"No."

Leopold glanced over at Fletcher, to make sure he was getting it all down. "All right. Tell me briefly what happened. Then

we'll go down to headquarters for a fuller statement."

"I can tell you in about ten seconds," Acker said. "I was alone in the store and he came in and asked for money. I told him to get out and he leaned across the counter to grab me. I took the revolver out of the cash register and shot him three times. Then I called the cops."

"He didn't have a weapon?"

"I didn't see one, but I couldn't be sure. Part of the time his other hand was in his pocket."

Leopold turned to Fletcher. "Any weapon?"

"Nothing. A few coins in his pocket, and a couple of cigarettes. That's all."

"How many coins?"

"I make it seventeen cents. That wouldn't have gotten him far."

Leopold grunted. "Finish up here, Fletcher. I'll take Mr. Acker downtown."

Outside, the faces still watched. Perhaps they were only waiting for the body to appear. Or perhaps, thought Leopold, they were waiting for another killing, for more blood. He turned up his collar against the snowflakes and led Acker to the car.

It was an ordinary case that evening, even though it kept Leopold from his dinner until eight o'clock. The case of Simon Acker would be presented to

the grand jury as a matter of routine, but nobody really expected him to be indicted for murder. A nameless bum had been killed, and whether or not his death was deserved, there was no one to speak in his defense.

No one, that is, until the following morning.

The day started with Fletcher and a piece of paper. "I guess that Acker case is pretty much open and shut, isn't it?"

"It will be once we identify the man. Any luck on that, Fletcher?"

"Not a thing. We're sending his prints to Washington. But I was wondering, Captain . . ."

"What?"

"This piece of paper . . ." He held out a narrow strip perhaps a half-inch wide and three inches long. "What do you make of it, Captain?"

Leopold looked at it. "Torn from a larger sheet." He studied the scraps of handwriting. "Where'd you get it, Fletcher?"

"Behind the counter in Acker's grocery store."

"Part of somebody's shopping list."

"Look at that stain near the top. It's blood."

"So?"

"I think this sheet of paper was on the counter between them when Acker shot that bum. The dying man's blood splat-

tered on it, and Acker carefully tore it into tiny pieces before he called the police. This piece dropped on the floor."

"Did you find any others?"

"No."

Leopold studied the carefully formed letters on the scrap again.

st

nd

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Then there was a half-inch of blank paper at the bottom and nothing else. "Notice, Fletcher, that the letters don't run off the paper on either side. These aren't parts of words at all. They're more like initials, only they're not capitalized or separated."

"Abbreviations? Street, Notre Dame, Road, Thousands?"

"Doubtful. It's something else, and this appears to be all of it. Notice the space at the bottom. A series of . . . let's see, nine things. Nine double-letter combinations, six of them the same."

"A code of some sort?"

Leopold smiled. "In a moment you'll be telling me that Acker is a Russian spy. It's probably some sort of pricing code for his stock. If that is the dead man's

blood on it, that proves nothing. Go ask him about it if you want."

Fletcher nodded. "Maybe I will."

After he'd left, Leopold settled down to the morning's routine. It was twenty minutes later when the girl appeared at his office door. She was tall and slender and gracefully dressed despite the weather. "Could I see you for a few moments, Captain Leopold?" she asked.

He let his eyes run down her body and then up again, "And who might you be?"

"Cynthia Cummings from the *Morning Express*. I covered your speech to the women's club Saturday afternoon."

"Oh."

"May I come in?"

"I guess you're halfway in already. Have a chair."

"I wanted to talk to you about your speech Saturday," she said, pulling a spiral notebook from her oversized black purse.

"I don't think there's anything more to be said."

She crossed her legs and opened her notebook. "You're opposed to capital punishments?"

"I thought I made that clear on Saturday, Miss Cummings. The state has a perfect right — even a duty — to take the life of a murderer. But I don't think the death penalty does much toward deterring murder. In

fact, it could be argued that by reducing the reverence for life in the community it actually lays the groundwork for more killing."

"Do you really believe that, Captain?"

"I believe in the reform and rehabilitation of the criminal, wherever possible. You can't expect to rehabilitate a dead man."

Cynthia Cummings shifted slightly in her chair. "What about Simon Acker?"

"Who?" Leopold had forgotten the name for an instant. "Oh, you mean the grocer. What about him?"

"Do you think he deserved the death penalty?"

"For shooting that bum who tried to rob him?"

She blinked and smiled, looking superior. "No, Captain. For murdering his wife twenty-two years ago."

Leopold let out his breath and tried not to seem surprised. "I see you've been consulting the newspaper files. Suppose you tell me about it, as long as you're here. I assume that's what you came for."

Cynthia Cummings flipped over a page of her notebook, and perhaps her skirt edged back a bit from her knee. "Acker was twenty-six at the time. It happened in New York City, which is why you didn't have a record of it up here. Anyway,

he discovered his wife had been fooling around with his brother. The brother took off for Canada, but Acker got out his hunting rifle and stalked his wife like a deer or something. He caught her outside a restaurant on 48th Street and chased her for two blocks before he shot her down. It was an open-and-shut case of premeditated murder."

"But the jury didn't think so."

She shook her head. "They seemed to think he was defending his honor, even though his brother was already out of the country by that time. The judge gave him twenty years, and he got out in fifteen. He came up here and opened the grocery store seven years ago."

"And how did you find all this information so quickly?"

"A New York reporter who'd covered the trial caught the name and called us to check on it. It was quite a famous case in its time."

"Did you just come here to tell me about it?"

"I came here to get your views on capital punishment in view of the Acker case. He deserved the electric chair for the killing of his wife, and if he'd gotten it, that poor bum would be alive today."

Leopold leaned back in his chair, feeling tired. "I'm afraid you have a quite feminine viewpoint, Miss Cummings."

"Have I? You said you believed in the reform and rehabilitation of the criminal. Do you think Simon Acker reformed during those fifteen years in prison, or did he just learn that he could get away with murder and decide to try it again?"

"I fail to see the connection, Miss Cummings. The man was trying to rob him."

"Was he? Or did he just ask for a handout and get a bullet for his trouble?" She took out another cigarette. "Killing comes easy after the first one."

"You think the man murdered this bum just because he escaped the electric chair in the killing of his wife twenty-two years ago?"

"I only say, Captain, that if he had been executed for the first murder, he wouldn't have been around to commit the second one. And that's what I'll tell our readers tomorrow morning."

"Miss Cummings, it's not murder when you're defending your property."

"We'll see what our readers think, Captain Leopold."

After she'd gone, he was depressed. A girl that good-looking should be home having babies instead of making trouble for the police department. He considered reporting the interview to the commissioner and then thought better of it. The

word would spread soon enough, when the next morning's paper hit the streets.

It was after twelve when Fletcher returned, out of breath. "I thought you'd be out to lunch, Captain."

"Not hungry. What's the trouble?"

"That guy Simon Acker. He's got a record!"

"I know."

"Do you know he killed his wife and served fifteen years in prison for it?"

Leopold nodded sadly. "I've had a visit from Miss Cynthia Cummings, a most charming and deadly member of our local press."

"What do we do?"

"What is there to do? You know that evidence of a prior conviction can't be introduced during a trial, except in a few rare circumstances. Besides, the fact that Acker killed his wife and served time for it has nothing to do with this case."

"It shouldn't have, but you know the press, Captain. If Acker had a spotless record, the grand jury would turn him loose in two minutes. We might not even bother to give them the case. As it is, we've got a one-time murderer who just made it two. Maybe he was justified in killing that bum and maybe he wasn't."

"Does the District Attorney

know about this prior conviction?"

"He knows. Everybody knows by now."

Leopold cursed softly and turned toward the window. "So what do I do, Fletcher? Do I go to bat for Simon Acker and get him off, or do I throw him to the wolves?"

Outside, a breeze-borne snow was beginning to fall. He heard Fletcher's voice behind him. "I don't know, Captain. I guess you sorta took a stand against capital punishment . . ."

"I'm not sorry for anything I said. You can't look at a man like Acker today and say he should have been executed twenty-two years ago."

"There's something funny about him, though."

"What?"

"Acker. I talked to him this morning about that little piece of paper and he denied it was even his writing."

Leopold had forgotten about the paper and its cryptic letter combinations. "Maybe it isn't."

"I compared it with some of his handwriting. Even I could tell it was the same."

"I'll go talk to him," Leopold decided. "See what the morgue has on the dead man."

He left Fletcher in the office and went downstairs to the car. Even the weather didn't bother him, and he greeted the snow

against his face almost with warmth. He wanted to be away from there, away from this constant weighing of men's lives on the sometimes faulty scales of justice.

There was a parking space across the street from Acker's store, and he left the unmarked car there in the midst of grimy playing children. Crossing the street, he took particular note of the outcasts, the shuffling bearded men, the vacant-eyed women. Perhaps these weren't the sort of people one reasoned with. Perhaps he too would have shot first and asked questions afterward.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Acker."

"Oh? Captain Leopold, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"A few more questions?"

"Yes."

"Your man was here this morning."

"There are still a few more questions," Leopold stepped aside while he waited on a Negro woman, then said, "It was about a little piece of paper that Sergeant Fletcher found on the floor."

"He showed it to me. I never saw it before."

"No idea where it came from?"

"Customer probably dropped it."

"Behind your counter?"

Simon Acker walked away and

began unpacking a carton of canned soup. "I don't watch them every minute. Am I supposed to?"

"I should think you'd notice somebody behind your counter, by the cash register."

"I noticed that bum yesterday. That'll be a lesson to the rest of them for a while."

Leopold took out a cigarette to make it casual. "Mr. Acker, you killed your wife, didn't you?"

"That was a long time ago. She was fooling around. I served fifteen years for it."

"Under the circumstances, you were lucky it wasn't the electric chair."

"What'd you want me to do? Sit back and take it?"

"Look, Acker," Leopold stepped in close. "I'll spell it out for you. My report to the District Attorney's office carries a lot of weight in your case. If I say so, they'll try for a manslaughter indictment, and maybe get it. Right now the papers are making a big thing out of capital punishment and I'm right in the middle of it. A lot of people are going to say you should have gone to the chair twenty-two years ago. I don't say it, but your killing that man yesterday doesn't help my theories of criminal rehabilitation very much. I'll go to bat for you on this thing, but only if I think you're

on the level. So far you've made two mistakes. You didn't tell us yesterday about your criminal record, and you denied knowledge of that piece of paper. Do you still stand by that?"

Simon Acker went on carefully building his pyramid of soup cans. "Look, Captain, if you want me to tell my story in court, say so. The guy was trying to rob me and I shot him."

"All right."

Leopold left him there with the cans and went back to his car. One of the children threw a wild snowball at him and the rest took off running. Overhead, the sky was white with uncertainty.

In the morning the story was on page one of the newspaper, under a byline and photograph of Cynthia Cummings. *Police Won't Arrest Two-Time Slayer!* the headlines screamed, in a reader-grabbing distortion of the facts. Leopold found his own name in the second paragraph and stopped reading.

"You saw the papers," Fletcher said, coming into the office with a stack of photographs.

"I saw them. What's this—a picture of Acker?"

"No, it's the dead man. They shaved his beard off for that one. Here are some others—the usual morgue views. The medical examiner didn't have much

else to offer me. He was a well-developed white male, probably in his early forties. Funny thing about his clothes—despite the neighborhood and his beard, the clothes were fairly good. Work clothes, you know, like lumberjacks might wear, but not shabby at all."

Leopold shuffled some papers on his desk. "Let me have that little piece of paper again—the one you found at Acker's store."

"Sure." Fletcher removed it from a small envelope and passed it over. "Too small for fingerprints. I already thought of that."

"Yeah." Leopold studied it for a few moments. "You know, Fletcher . . ."

The door opened without a knock, and the district attorney came in. It was the first time in six months he'd been inside Leopold's office. "What about this?" he asked without preamble, waving the newspaper.

Leopold closed his eyes. "What about it? Have you spoken to the commissioner?"

"I have. We have to make some statement."

"What do you want from me?"

"An arrest, man! We have to at least go through the motions. Listen to this: *Captain Leopold of Homicide, in charge of the investigation, is a known foe of capital punishment, and apparently sees nothing wrong in al-*

lowing convicted wife-murderers to kill again in our city. He speaks only of some nebulous form of criminal rehabilitation.

That's from the editorial, Captain. Do you want to hear more?"

"No. The thing's ridiculous, of course. If the man didn't commit a crime this time, we can't arrest him for the last one. He's already been punished for that."

"I know that, and you know it, but you've got us in a spot, Captain. We can't just let the thing drop."

"Present it to the grand jury. Let them decide."

"That's what I'll do, but I think we should charge him with manslaughter, all the same. The way it is now, he could leave town and thumb his nose at us. Then where'd we be with the papers?"

"Give me some time," Leopold argued. "At least wait until we hear from the F.B.I. on possible identification of the dead man."

"We heard this morning," the district attorney said. "They've got no record of the prints."

Leopold frowned down at his desk. "Now how does a man reach the age of forty these days without having his fingerprints taken? No army service or defense work during the war?"

"It happens."

"I know it happens, but that means no police record, either.

Does a nameless bearded bum without a police record walk into a grocery store and try to rob it?"

"That's just the point!" the district attorney said. "He wasn't trying to rob it. He probably just asked for a handout and your Mr. Acker up and shot him. There were no witnesses, you know."

"Let me think about it," Leopold said. "I'll phone you this afternoon."

"No later than that, or I'll have him arrested myself."

Fletcher waited a few minutes after he'd left, then went out for coffee. When he returned he said to Leopold. "What are you going to do?"

"I don't know, Fletcher. Shoot myself, maybe." He was staring down at the little slip of paper with its nine two-letter combinations. "Fletcher?"

"What?"

"I'm trying to remember—does Acker have a radio near his counter?"

"Yeah. It was on this morning." He sipped some of his coffee. "Why?"

Leopold was busy copying the column of letters. "Because I think I know what this piece of paper is."

"Radio? Radio stations or something? The *st* could be *1st*, I suppose. That's radio."

Leopold passed him the list

he'd made. "Here!"

1st

2nd

3rd

4th

5th

6th

7th

8th

9th

"I'll be damned!" Fletcher said softly. "The numbers got torn off! But I still don't get it. What's this got to do with a radio? And why was he so anxious to destroy it before we came?"

"Think about it on the way. We're going to see Simon Acker again."

This time the store was crowded with morning shoppers, and a little neighborhood boy was packing groceries for delivery on his bicycle. They had to wait for twenty minutes before the crowd cleared and Simon Acker could talk. "You men are bad for business," he said. "You come every day and scare the customers away."

"Which business, Mr. Acker?" Leopold asked.

"What?"

"The grocery business or your other business?"

The balding grocer rubbed the bristle on his cheek. "I got no other business."

"Come on, Mr. Acker. You're risking a prison sentence for

manslaughter to cover up a two-bit racket. This list—1st through 9th—gave the whole thing away. What nine items would you be making a list of in the late afternoon, that you couldn't let the police see?"

Fletcher got it then "Race results!"

"Of course," Leopold said. "Nine races are the standard number at just about every track, and the results are broadcast on the late afternoon sports programs. How long have you been making book, Mr. Acker?"

The grocer bowed his head. "It's a nickel and dime business. Nobody gets hurt."

"You almost did. I almost threw you to the wolves because of that piece of paper. Now do you want to tell us the rest of it?"

"What rest of it?"

"Did you kill that guy because of a gambling debt?"

"Nuts! I told you—if I get a dollar bet it's a big day. These people haven't got big money. That guy sure didn't have. If he'd won, even on a long shot, I'd have paid him off without any sweat."

"All right," Leopold decided. "I believe you. I'm on your side from here on in. You'd better not be lying."

"That's straight. I never saw the guy before. Nobody in the neighborhood did. He was a

drifter looking for cash and he picked my place."

Leopold nodded. "Keep your nose clean. You still may have to go before the grand jury."

They drove back through the dismal streets, and Leopold watched the wandering people with a sort of sadness in his heart. Perhaps the nameless man was well off to be out of this, by whatever means.

"Not much of a case," Fletcher said, turning the car toward downtown.

"It was to the man who died."
"Yeah."

"You checked all these places he might have been staying?"

"The boys did. Nothing. We figure he just arrived in town."

"And went straight to rob Simon Acker's grocery store."

"You were convinced a few minutes ago."

"I'm still convinced," Leopold said. "It's just that . . ." He left the rest of the sentence unfinished.

Back in his office, Leopold phoned the newspaper and told Cynthia Cummings he'd like to see her. "I have a statement on the Acker case," he said. "You might be interested."

Fletcher came in with a cup of coffee. "What are you going to tell her, Captain?"

"What I think. That Acker is innocent of any crime and

should not, on the basis of the evidence, be arrested for this killing. I might even throw in a few words about capital punishment if I'm in the mood."

"You're asking for trouble."

"It always finds me anyway. Bring in the dead man's effects and those pictures and stuff. I might as well give her the complete rundown on what little we have."

Cynthia Cummings came and sat down and crossed her legs and opened her notebook. "I'm ready, Captain," she said brightly.

"All right, Miss Cummings," he began, leaning heavily on his desk. "I said some things about capital punishment last Saturday, and I guess they could bear repeating. The fact that a man named Simon Acker escaped the electric chair twenty-two years ago and now has killed again has very little to do with my opinions. Simon Acker killed to defend his property. He. . ."

Leopold's voice trailed off. He was staring down at the desk, at the dead man's few effects, and at the seventeen cents which had been in his pocket. Three nickels and two pennies. And on the back of each nickel was a beaver.

"If you'll excuse me, Miss Cummings. Something important has just come up."

He strode quickly from the office and walked over to Fletcher's desk. "Damn it, man—you never told me the money was Canadian."

Fletcher looked up, puzzled. "What money, Captain?"

"The seventeen cents in the dead man's pocket."

"Oh. Yeah, three Canadian nickels. The pennies are American, though. You see Canadian money fairly often around here."

"Not that often. Not three out of five coins."

"So a Canadian gave him a handout."

"Or else he came from Canada. That would explain why he never served in the American army, why his prints weren't on file, why nobody in the neighborhood knew him. It would explain the beard and the lumberjack's clothes. And most of all it would explain why I looked at his picture without the beard and thought it was Simon Acker."

"Huh?"

"Listen carefully, Fletcher. I want you to get those prints off to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. We're looking for a man who was working as a lumberjack, who came to Canada from New York City twenty-two years ago, at about the age of twenty. Get on it, now. I have to go back in with Miss Cummings."

Fletcher scratched his head. "But who was the guy?"

"A man who came back after twenty-two years to see Simon Acker. He wasn't a bum, but when Acker took the wallet from his body, the beard and the clothes gave that impression." Leopold frowned at the wall and made a decision. "We'd better not take any chances on him leaving town. Arrest Simon Acker and book him on suspicion of murder."

"Murder?"

Leopold nodded. "Take another look at that morgue shot without the beard. I think the man Simon Acker killed was his brother."



*what's
new
in
crime*

by Stefan Santesson

A HUNDRED or two hundred years from now there will be, one hopes, some interest (amused or otherwise) in these times — and not only in the doings of the great and of the near-great, but in the lives and times of those men and women whom history will pass by — the raw material of these days' social statistics, the people who've fought or shouted or have prayed — or have died — and those others, those many others who have lived on throughout all this, uninterested in what went on around them, aware only of what they could see and touch and experience within their own immediate circle. And frankly afraid of anything alien, of anything strange. . . .

In our time we have come closer to the stars. At the same time — and it is so easy to blame the Wars for this — our social mores have changed. Acts of violence, individual and mass, have ceased to be an occasional phenomenon and have instead become an admitted part of our way of life as we know it.

There is a temptation to pretend that this is not so, and that this is none of our concern —

The writer, awarded the Mystery Writers of America 1963 Critics' Edgar, has been editor of this magazine since 1956. He was earlier, between 1945 and 1952, editor of the Unicorn Mystery Book Club.

particularly in this field. We all have something of the ostrich in us and there is ever present the hope that unpleasantness, if ignored long enough, will perhaps be good enough to go away and bother us no more. Unfortunately life is seldom so co-operative . . .

While the main-stream novel, preoccupied with Freudian abstractions, often does aid and abet this self-deception, our own field has in recent years done the contrary. This socio-documentary trend within the genre has meant that in novels such as Aaron Marc Stein's *BLOOD ON THE STARS* and in Robert L. Fish's novels about Captain José Maria Carvalho Santos Da Silva, in J. J. Marric's novels about Gideon of the Yard and in Dell Shannon's novels about Luis Mendoza, in Julian Symons' superb *THE END OF SOLOMON GROUNDY* and in Dick Francis' *FOR KICKS*, in Abraham Rothberg's *THE THOUSAND DOORS* and in Len Deighton's portrait of the other side of the medal in *FUNERAL IN BERLIN*, — we have in truth mirrors of these times!

These novels, and so many others, will give those researchers of the future a clearer idea of what made us tick — of what made us do the things we did — all the foolish things, all the brave things, all the angry things, all

the wise things . . . History is, after all, the story of men and women very much like us, men and women whose fears and whose hopes and whose dreams — and whose prejudices — were astonishingly like ours. In times to come many of these novels that have been a part of our own lives — in my case for the past twenty years — will, I feel, help those who come after us to understand us just a shade better . . .

George Gideon, chief executive officer of the Criminal Investigation Department of the Metropolitan Police — in other words, at New Scotland Yard — has within a matter of years become one of those names, one of those personalities in this field who come close to being a part of the folk-myths of our times. Duncan Maclain, Ellery Queen, Philo Vance, Simon Templar, Perry Mason, Nero Wolfe, and so many others, are each known to an incredible amount of people, far more than we ordinarily realize. And George Gideon, even though (or perhaps because . . .) the Gideon saga has come to be more and more aimed at this market, has come to be a member of this small group who are infinitely more real to many than were this fall's candidates for public office.

Law enforcement officers — senior law enforcement officers rather, such as George Gideon, are “people”, recognizably a part of our social fabric, warmly human in their reactions to the day to day events, the crimes and the misery and the despair and the broken dreams which you live. These are in other words not stereotypes and they are concededly not representative of their profession as a whole but, like many of Ed McBain’s characters, they are credible characters, and herein is the strength of the Gideon novels.

J. J. Marrie’s latest report on the career of George Gideon, *GIDEON’S LOT* (Harper & Row, \$3.95) sees him through characteristic days and nights and is, as always, an excellent police procedure novel. Gideon’s lot and life, already complicated, is complicated still further by the activities in London of two Americans, each of whom Gideon and his coworkers devoutly wish had stayed in the States!

Thoroughly recommended! And now turn to the Gideon story in this issue!

Julian Symons’ *THE BELTING INHERITANCE* (Harper & Row, \$3.95), the story of a murder and the attendant complications, told in retrospect, can be described as a comedy of manners in the grand tradition.

Just as *THE END OF SOLOMON GRUNDY* was very much a story of what we may, for want of a better word, describe as English suburbia, with all its pretensions and prejudices — and dreams — this is the story of an almost vanished way of life, destroyed by two Wars and by Death Taxes, whose virtues and whose strength are ignored in our time in our preoccupation with values which then had a somewhat declass   connotation. By all means do read this!

Carlton Keith’s *THE HIDING PLACE* (Doubleday, \$3.50), is the story of what happens to Alex Olszak who has inherited a lonely New Jersey “farm”, and at first doesn’t realize that he has also inherited trouble. But there are fringe benefits. Very pleasant. Do read this!

Kenneth Hopkins’ *BODY BLOW* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, \$3.50), brings back Dr. William Blow and Professor Gideon Manciple whom we’ve had the mixed pleasure of meeting on other occasions. I do not doubt that such elderly (and academic) *enfants terribles* both can and do exist, and that they would inevitably be catalysts for happenings such as they’ve been exposed to up to now, even in this tongue-in-cheek description of “retired” civil ser-

vants playing at counter espionage. As a spoof of the improbabilities cast up in the rush to imitate Ian Fleming, the novel has its moments, but I am afraid I still take a rather dubious view of the two old friends, likable though they may be. As series characters (this is not a typo!), they conform to the usual misconception that when you get to their age you behave this way, and I question this. It may be Manciple's Law, and it may make for some amusing moments, but it isn't necessarily so in real life. I would hate for the two friends to come up against Ruth St. Denis and Leigh Whipper, for instance, or others such as these. I am afraid they would be outdistanced by reality.

Bill Knox' *THE TASTE OF PROOF* (Doubleday, \$3.50), is the story of the robbery of the Glen Ault Whisky Company safe — and the aftermath. Interesting because of the information about the Scotch whisky industry. Chief Detective Inspector Colin Thane, head of Glasgow's Millside Division C.I.D., is his usual competent self.

The Editors of the *Great Books of the 20th Century* asked recently, in a special supplement published in the *New York Times* for Sunday, April 25th,

1965, — "Who is writing the *Great Books of the 20th Century*?"

"The time has come, perhaps," they say, "to begin thinking about which books and authors of our century will join the company of those now published in *'Great Books of the Western World'* (published jointly by the University of Chicago and *Encyclopaedia Britannica*). "Our century has seen the publication of more books than all the centuries that preceded it. It might, therefore, be quite reasonable to expect that it would produce more truly great books than any of its predecessors — perhaps as many as twenty-five authors worthy of taking their places beside Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Dante, Shakespeare, Newton, Galileo, Darwin, Tolstoy, and the rest. The Editors of *Great Books of the Western World* "solicit your nominations for inclusion in this August assemblage. Use the ballot to the right to send in your list of candidates for addition to the set when the 20th century has come to a close."

Apart from the reality that the intellectual arrogance — or ignorance — which can talk only of "*Great Books of the Western World*" is, in effect, a denial of the historical realities of our times, the list itself is fascinat-

ing — and revealing.

The "authors" suggested include Niels Bohr, Bertolt Brecht, Martin Buber, Albert Camus, Benedetto Croce, Marie Curie, John Dewey, Albert Einstein, William Faulkner, André Gide, Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, John Maynard Keynes, D. H. Lawrence, Nicolai Lenin (but not Mahatma Gandhi or Jawaharlal Nehru . . .), Andre Malraux (but not General de Gaulle . . .), Thomas Mann, Jacques Maritain, Eugene O'Neill, José Ortega y Gasset (but not Salvador de Madariaga), Marcel Proust, Rainer Maria Rilke (but not Lion Feuchtwanger), George Santayana, Jean Paul Sartre, G. B. Shaw, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Arnold Toynbee, W. B. Yeats and others.

The list, as I said, is both fascinating and revealing.

My own nominations for the ten great *authors* (not necessarily social scientists) of the 20th century were Salvador de Madariaga, Lion Feuchtwanger, Andre Malraux, Jacques Maritain, Bertrand Russell, George Santayana, G. B. Shaw, August Strindberg, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Arnold Toynbee. And if this list should be broadened, I would certainly add Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy, Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru.

What would be *your* nomina-

tions for this list?

Van Siller's *THE LONELY BREEZE* (Doubleday, \$3.50) is like a breath of old times. And this is pleasant, because the snobbishness-in-reverse which has come to be a feature of much of the writing in this genre can sometimes be rather boring. And unconvincing . . . This, in other words, is a story about the sort of people who, in theory, should be strangers to death by violence — but who are in actuality catalysts for the same. By all means do read this. You'll like it.

And you'll be fascinated by Donald Lam and Bertha Cool's latest adventures on the ragged edge of the law, in A.A. Fair's (ie., Erle Stanley Gardner's) *CUT THIN TO WIN* (Morrow, \$3.50). A Denver businessman involves the two detectives in a case which brings them considerable — but momentary — discomfort, and which, as has happened before, disturbs Bertha Cool, who never has quite understood why people do the things they do. . . .

Robert L. Fish's newest novel about Captain José Maria Carvalho Santos Da Silva, liaison officer between Interpol and the Brazilian police, *THE DIAMOND BUBBLE* (Simon &

Schuster, \$3.50), has the familiar qualities of the earlier novels. *THE FUGITIVE* was the winner, and very justly so, of the Mystery Writers of America Edgar for the best first mystery of 1962, after which followed *ISLE OF THE SNAKES* and *THE SHRUNKEN HEAD*. This time diamonds, and well meaning people, and decidedly less well meaning people, complicate Da Silva's case. This column — as I am certain you do — looks forward to many more of these novels!

Some of you are not going to like John Ball's *IN THE HEAT OF THE NIGHT* (Harper & Row, \$3.50), like some of you no doubt did not like Aaron Marc Stein's novel, *BLOOD ON THE STARS* (1964, Doubleday).

But I am afraid I did.

I liked this novel about Virgil Tibbs, Pasadena policeman and homicide "expert", who finds himself investigating a murder in the South, and doing so under rather difficult circumstances — to put it mildly. I hope this is the first of several novels about this interesting detective.

George Bagby's latest Inspector Schmidt novel, *MYSTERIOUSER AND MYSTERIOUSER* (Doubleday, \$3.50) starts

with a small boy, peering out from under the stone mushroom of the Alice in Wonderland monument in Central Park, and explaining politely that Alice had gone down the rabbit hole . . .

Zany? Yes — perhaps — but stranger things than this, in real life as well as in novels, have been known to be the prelude to some rather hectic hours for whomsoever stumbled upon such a situation. And this is true in this adventure in which all sorts of things do happen to both Inspector Schmidt and to George Bagby, and to the "innocent man" who'd done nothing more than "finance a young fellow in his struggle to come into his rightful share of his inheritance." And the gentleman in question no doubt felt that he *was* telling the truth. . . .

Josephine Bell's, *CURTAIN CALL FOR A CORPSE* (Macmillan, \$3.95) has to do with the misadventures of the members of Shakespeare Players, Ltd., who've come to the English preparatory school to do *Twelfth Night*, and have to remain there when a member of the company is murdered. A beautifully done story by the noted British author of *DEATH IN RETIREMENT*, *THE UPFOLD WITCH*, etc. etc., which I am glad to see has finally been published in this country.

stage fright

by Donald E. Westlake

Now, HERE was the room . . . Armchairs at the sides, flanked by drum tables, and a green sofa in the middle of the carpet. A telephone on the end table beside the sofa, ashtrays on the drum tables, and magazines on the coffee table in front of the sofa. On the first wall, to the sofa's right, a portrait of an angry-looking young blond woman in a breakaway frame. On the second wall, to the sofa's left, a mirror smeared lightly with soap. On the third wall, behind the sofa, a glass-doored secretary containing books, this flanked by two tall windows through which could be seen a bit of formal garden and a lot of blue sky. There wasn't any fourth wall; that was the curtain separating this room from the audience, who were now mumbling impatiently because it was twenty minutes to nine and the curtain hadn't yet opened. And the curtain hadn't yet opened because Heather Sanderson was lying on the sofa with her throat cut.

Sterling McCall and I wasted

Donald E. Westlake, whose latest novel, *THE FUGITIVE PIGEON*, just published by Random House, is being made into a movie, is the author of several novels including the award winning *THE MERCENARIES*, *KILLY*, *PITY HIM AFTERWARDS*, etc. (all Random House). SMM readers will remember his story, *A TIME TO DIE* (SMM, Jan. 1962).

a good three and a half minutes arguing about who should go out and soothe the patrons, because somebody had to and neither of us wanted to. I thought he should because he was, after all, the producer, and he thought I should because I was, after all, the publicity and public relations man and this was, after all, public relations with a capital PR.

"Ling," I said, "*I* can't go out there, for God's sake. I *saw* her, I'm still all shaken up."

"Andy," he said, "*I* can't go out there, for God's sake. You know how I stutter when I'm upset." But he didn't stutter when he was passing the buck.

And it didn't help to have Bobbi Barten, her feral eyes all aglitter, interrupting all the time, telling us, "*I* could go on, Ling, you know that. *You* know that, Andy. We don't have to cancel the show, I know it's a terrible thing but I *know* the part, and you know what they say about The Show Must Go On. I mean, I *am* her understudy, and we could still go on."

I give us both credit, Ling and I, we didn't succumb. Ling didn't want to have to give a lot of customers back a lot of money, and neither of us wanted to go out on stage and talk to the patrons, but we didn't succumb. I said, "Forget it, Bobbi, this

isn't your big chance. There isn't a Broadway producer in the house."

She glowered, and sulked, and said, "I'm only trying to help," and went back to her song and dance, while Ling and I continued to argue about who was going to go out there.

It was a foregone conclusion. I didn't pay his salary. He did pay mine. So I went out from the wings, from where we'd been arguing by the light board, and walked along the strip of flooring between the edge of the drop cloth and the bottom of the curtain, not looking at the sofa, where Heather Sanderson, the girl in the painting in the breakaway frame, had now departed her own breakaway frame, leaving it behind with its throat cut.

You've always got to poke at the curtains to find where they meet, so you can get through. It looks funny out front maybe, but it doesn't feel funny when you're the one doing it. Particularly when you've got to stand there, poking at the curtain, with the body on the sofa seven feet behind you.

I got out there at last, just as some dimwit backstage dimmed the house lights. I turned my head and croaked, "Lights!" and a few patrons laughed. The lights came on again, and I said, "Ladies and gentlemen, it is my

unfortunate duty to announce that the performance of *A Sound Of Distant Drums* scheduled for tonight—" And so on.

I spent only a couple of minutes out there, not telling them about the body they weren't seeing, only that the show was cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances beyond the control of the management and they would get their money back if they would make a line at the box office, and during the second minute there was a lot of rustling, as some of them yakked together and others of them got up and started out, to be first on line. As I was finishing, I heard the sirens coming out from town. They sounded to me exactly like fire engine sirens, even though I knew it was the police. I expected the audience any second to figure fire engines too, and get trampled in a rush or something, but they didn't. Nobody really believes in real life drama, and thank God for small favors.

When I got off, I went through the wings and into the green room and collapsed in a wooden folding chair. I wiped my face with my show handkerchief, and Edna Stanton brought me a paper cup full of Mountain Valley water, from the cooler in the corner. She asked me if I had any idea who did it, and I told her I couldn't begin to guess,

which is the same thing I told a man named Detective Einstein ten minutes later, in the office upstairs over the lobby where the people were getting their money back and trying to figure what was going on. So I had to stay, and two by two the patrons left the Red Barn Theater and drove their cars back to Clinton, three miles down the pike.

That isn't a very original name for a repertory summer stock theater, the Red Barn, but what are you going to do? We happened to be operating in a red barn, just like a lot of other summer stock outfits, and of course we had the same gag as them—the Red Ink Theater—because, same as them, we never made any money.

Face it, it's impossible to run a repertory theater with less than twenty-five people, including actors and stagehands and business manager and set designer and director and stage manager and a lot of other people. So we did it with nineteen, and we lost money. That is, Sterling McCall lost money. That is, the local business types who backed Sterling McCall lost money. Except they ran free ads in the program, and the theater being there did attract vacationers to stick around overnight or a couple of days, so the local business types maybe didn't lose money, either.

On paper, everybody lost money.

But even so, this year we had a star. Heather Sanderson. By summer stock standards, she was a star. There are two kinds of people who are stars by summer stock standards. The first is the kind of person who never made it really big, but almost did, who once was second lead in an Alan Ladd movie or once was ingenue in a Rodgers and Hammerstein musical on Broadway, the kind you may have heard of but you can't remember their name. The second is the kind who made it *very* big, but lately they've been on the wane, and haven't been doing very much on Broadway or television or in the movies in the last few years, the kind about whom you say, "What ever happened to Heather Sanderson?"

Nothing, that's the trouble. Until now. Now, she had her throat cut.

Anyway, Heather Sanderson was this second kind of summer stock star. Back in New York, Ling knew a guy who knew a guy, or something like that, and dickering was arranged, and over her agent's dying body Miss Heather Sanderson signed for the smaller chunk of a forty-sixty profit split. The agent was right; there weren't going to be any profits.

Actually, the set-up we've got is pretty good, and we figure sooner or later it's going to get

itself a reputation like Eaglesmere or the Music Tent or the Dark Horse Players, and then we should make some loot out of it. In the meantime, it's a good way to get a tan and three square during the summer, and a credit for the resumé besides.

So we've got this farm. The land itself is turning back into woods and weeds, and we've got just the two buildings, which these local businessmen formed a committee and bought and lease to us for a dollar a year. There's the farmhouse, where we all live, and the barn, which we converted into our theater. The seats are folding chairs and most of the stage lights are made out of tin cans and aluminum foil and the flies are jerrybuilt and never work right, but it's a theater just the same, and we put on shows in it. Nineteen of us.

There's Sterling McCall, who's the producer and the business manager both, which is even more dangerous than it sounds, though I don't suppose he steals as much as he could, which is something. And there's me, Andy Pelliteri, publicity man and prop hustler and stagehand and occasional bit-parter. And Edna Stanton, who already mentioned, who's secretary and ticket-taker and costume maker, the only local citizen in the crowd, saddled simultaneously with the acting

bug and a perpetually ailing widowed mother, and they're the only reasons I don't ask her to marry me, but either one of them would do. And hairy-chested Russ Barlow, light man and sound man and general technician. And non-chested Charlie Wilbe, set designer and set painter and carpenter. And Archer Marshall, phony director. And thirteen actors which, now that I think of it, is an unlucky number. Anyway, these thirteen actors spend their evenings performing this week's play and their afternoons rehearsing next week's play and their mornings swimming and sun-tanning at Berger's Kill. *Kill* is a word in Dutch that mean creek. It is also, as we were dramatically reminded, a word in English.

I was the one found her. No, that's wrong, I was the one noticed she was dead. She was a lush, you see. Maybe because she'd been on Mount Olympus and was now back in the valley with us mortals. Anyway, she was still conscientious, and she never missed a performance. She managed that by racking out on the set every afternoon, stewed to the nostrils, usually around three o'clock. At eight, half an hour before curtain, I would wake her. She'd totter away to the star's dressing room — an eight by eight plywood partition,

just like the other three — and put on her face and costume.

So she was there. The curtain was closed, and she was there on the sofa, and out front the rest of them had pushed the chairs out of the way and were rehearsing *Love Among The Falling Stars*, which was the play for next week. Edna Stanton, who was assistant director and carried the book, read Heather's lines. At six, the rehearsal broke, and they put the chairs back in place and went off for supper.

At eight, they were all in their dressing rooms, getting ready. The early arriving patrons were parking their cars on the pounded turf between the barn and the house. I left the green room and went through the wings and out on-stage — my steps muffled by the rug over the drop cloth — and went over to the sofa and shook Heather's shoulder and said, "Eight o'clock, honey chile. Time for the trouper to shise and rine."

Sometimes she was hard to wake up. This was one of the times. She was lying on her side, face pressed into the sofa back, knees bent, shoes off. I shook her again, yakking some more, and pulled her shoulder a bit, and saw the new red mouth in her neck.

When I hollered, Russ Barlow looked over from his light-board, where he was doing something

or other, and he told me later that I was on my knees in front of the sofa, with a face like Hamlet's father's ghost. White, in other words. I don't remember being on my knees, but I believe it. I believe I didn't have the strength in my legs to stand up for a minute or two.

How long do you suppose fifteen minutes is? Sit in front of a clock and watch the second hand go around fifteen times, and it takes forever. Sit in front of a man with a gun, who promises to blow your head off in exactly fifteen minutes, and you barely have time to take a deep breath. All I know is it was fifteen minutes before we called the cops. In the meantime, everybody ran around and jabbered.

If I hadn't hollered, we might have buttoned it up, just Russ and Ling and I maybe. But I hollered, and a couple of people came out from the green room, and went back and told the others. So everybody knew, and everybody talked, and nobody thought about calling the cops.

That's not right. Not everybody knew. Seventeen people knew. But nobody at all thought to tell Edna Stanton. She was still out front, taking tickets, letting the people in. It wasn't her fault; nobody told her.

At any rate, Ling finally thought of phoning the cops, which he did. He phoned the Clinton cops, and they said they'd be out in maybe half an hour, both cars were out right now. Clinton is a small town, seasonally swollen by vacationers.

And it was another fifteen minutes before any of us thought about the audience. By then, of course, it was after eight-thirty, and the patrons were all in their seats. Ling sent Nancy Stewart quick like a bunny to tell Edna to close shop, and then we fooled around a while, wondering what to do till the lawman came, and then we wasted three and a half minutes deciding who was going to break the news to the customers, and I lost.

I told all this to Detective Einstein, who wasn't city police after all. The theater was outside the city limits, which the city cops had remembered in the nick of time, and they'd passed the buck on to the state police. So Detective Einstein was a plainclothes State Trooper, or something like that.

Anyway, he was a rat. I don't have anything against police in general, but I have nothing good to say about Einstein. I told him the whole story, and I also told him that I personally had spent most of the afternoon in town

with the station wagon, picking up some of the props for next week's show, and then he said, "I hope, for your good as well as ours, that we find our murderer soon."

I said, "Me, too."

He said, "Because this theater is closed until our investigation is completed."

He didn't have to do that. Say nobody was supposed to leave the area, okay. Say nobody was supposed to touch anything on stage until the crime lab people—who showed up from Springfield a little before eleven—were finished with it, okay. Say everybody had to submit to a search, of his person and his room and his belongings, okay. Say everybody had to be available at all times for questioning, okay. But he didn't have to close us.

What did he gain?

He gained nineteen people who wouldn't have cooperated with him to drag him out of quicksand, that's what he gained.

The only way I could figure, it was gratuitous nastiness, because he thought we were laughing at him. You run into that all the time. He thought we were all from New York, because we were actors and like that, and it's a national phobia that people always think people from New York are laughing at them.

Except in Chicago or Miami or Los Angeles, places like that, where they don't care.

He was some detective. Right off the bat, he was wrong on two counts. We weren't laughing at him. We weren't laughing at him because one of us had been killed and we didn't feel like laughing at all. And not a one of us had been born and raised in New York, though we all — except Edna Stanton — had gravitated there in our late teens or early twenties, to get involved with Theater. Most of the rest of them as actors. Me as a playwright. I probably have a snowball's chance in you-know-where, but I own a portable typewriter and I type on it, so I'm a playwright. Which, naturally, is why I was off in the world's south forty, playing publicity man.

Anyway, the theater was closed. Nobody was happy about it, with the possible exception of Einstein. We all got surly, and he called us all together the next morning and sat us in the audience's chairs, and stood on the stage apron and talked to us about cooperation. Ling, who is not a coward, got to his feet and said cooperation was a two-way business, and how about opening the theater? And Einstein said, "As soon as our investigation is completed. If you

people cooperate, it will be completed that much sooner."

Ling's theory was that Einstein was using the Army's mass-punishment system. As though we knew who had killed Heather Sanderson, and he was punishing us all until somebody told him. Maybe so, maybe not. The point is, none of us had much faith in him as a detective.

So, when we had our own meeting in the living room of the farmhouse that afternoon, Ling suggested that it was more or less up to us to hand the good Captain (I speak sarcastically) the killer's head on a silver salver. "It was one of us," he said. "One of the eighteen in this room. I hate to say that—I hate to think it, even—but there it is."

Jack Andrews, boy character actor, said, "Why does it have to be one of us? Why not somebody we don't even know? Came up from New York, maybe."

Ling said, "How did he get into the theater?"

That right there was the stickler. There are four entrances into the theater—through the lobby and through the scene dock and through the green room and through the back way onto the stage—and they're kept locked. Five years ago, our first year up here, we had a lot of trouble with local vandals. Don't let any-

body ever tell you New York City breeds the worst kids. These little masters of high comedy out in the boondocks here would push a door open in the middle of the afternoon, throw a stink bomb—a smoldering strip of film, say—and run away giggling like mad, while we tried hopelessly to air the place before that evening's performance. Things like that. So the doors are kept locked, all four of them, all the time. The lobby door is unlocked before a performance and locked again afterward. All nineteen of us, of course, have keys to at least one door.

So it was one of the group, one of the people we knew to have been in the theater, rehearsing, all afternoon. The actors were acting, the director was directing, Russ Barlow was working on his light board, Charlie Wilbe was working on next week's set over in the scene dock, Ling was up in the office working on the books, and so on.

As it turned out, I was the only member of the group who wasn't in the theater all afternoon. I picked up the station wagon at two-thirty, and went to town. I spent two hours returning last week's props—since it was Monday—and two hours more picking up some of next week's props, and didn't get back to the theater till half past six.

"Captain" Einstein had checked my alibi, and it was complete. I had spent a busy afternoon.

So Ling made me Chairman of the Committee on Grisly Evidence. I said, "No."

Ling said, "Andy, you're the only one. You're the only one of us who couldn't possibly have killed Heather. If I appoint anybody else, I just might be appointing the killer. That wouldn't work out so well."

"Why don't you appoint yourself? You're the boss around here, for God's sake."

"I might be the killer," he said. "Phooey."

"All right, Andy, who's *your* candidate for killer?"

"I don't have any."

"Then don't say phooey, Chairman."

So I was Chairman. I became resigned to the fact, and then I sent everybody else away and talked with Edna Stanton and Russ Barlow.

Barlow first:

Q: Where were you all afternoon?

A: Working on that unprintable lightboard.

Q: There are ladies present.

A: If she ain't heard it before, she don't know what it means.

Q: All right, never mind. Did you see Heather on the sofa?

A: Sure. I saw her go over there. She made an unprintable

pass at me again, the dried-up old unprintable.

Q: What time was this?

A: Three o'clock. On the button.

Q: How do you know it was on the button?

A: Because I finally got the unprintable clock on the unprintable lightboard working at two minutes to three. I set the clock, see? Then she come staggering in, like always, and tried to rape me.

Q: And then she went over to the soft?

A: Like a tug in a heavy gale.

Q: And you spent the entire afternoon at the lightboard?

A: I had a couple head breaks. You know. And I went out and watched the rehearsal a while.

Q: Can you give me the times you were away from the lightboard?

A: I went away at three o'clock, right after she racked out on the sofa, and came back at three forty-two. The unprintable clock was still working.

Q: Did you leave there any other times?

A: A little after four, I went over to the scene dock and got a screwdriver from Charlie. The little one. Mine was too big.

Q: You said something about head breaks.

A: Yeah, two of them. The first one was at three o'clock, **when**

I hung around out front and watched the rehearsal a while. The second one was at five-thirty. On the button again. And I got back at twenty-four minutes to six. I was watching that unprintable clock. You know it's busted again?

Q: I didn't know that.

A: I looked at it this morning. It conked out at midnight.

Q: But it was working right yesterday?

A: On the button. With my watch.

Q: And when you went to get the screwdriver from Charlie, in the scene dock?

A: A couple minutes after four. Say five after. And I wasn't gone more'n two minutes.

Q: We'll give it lots of leeway. Sometime between four o'clock and ten after, you were gone for two minutes. Right?

A: Right.

Q: Did that cop ask you these questions?

A: Not in so much detail.

Q: How do you mean?

A: He asked me where I was between three and six, and I told him by the lightboard. So he asked me if I was there every minute of the time, and I said no, I took a couple head breaks.

Q: That's all? He didn't get the times?

A: Nope.

Q: Then how the devil does

he expect to get anywhere?

A: Don't ask me. You know these unprintable cops.

So I thanked him, and sent him away, and said to Edna, "Now, we've got ourselves a timetable. That GP they brought in, calls himself a medical examiner, said she was killed no later than six o'clock. She got there at three. Russ was in plain view most of that time, so she had to be killed either between three and three-forty-two or between four and four-ten or between five-thirty and five-thirty-six."

She said, "Unless Russ is lying, Andy."

"Okay. If he's lying, that means he did it himself. If we use his timetable and eliminate every other possibility, then it was him."

She said, "I think you're wonderful, Andy."

So the great detective necked with a suspect a while. Although she wasn't really a suspect. Not to me.

We were interrupted by Einstein, back to ask some more questions of his own. But still not the sensible ones. He was asking us about what we did for a living back in New York, and did we know Heather before this summer, and where we lived before New York, and things like that. Then he went away again,

presumably to send teletypes all over the place and find out whether or not we were, as he suspected, a gang of desperate criminals posing as actors.

I went back to my own questioning, of Edna this time:

Q: When did this rehearsal start?

A: Two o'clock. Well, it was *supposed* to start at two o'clock.

Q: Everybody was late, I take it. As usual.

A: Some of the kids had gone off to Berger's Kill in Archer's car. They didn't get back till almost two-thirty.

Q: You were holding the book, right?

A: That's right. And the watch.

Q: Oh, god glory! A line rehearsal?

A: Sure. Monday, *you* know. We went through the whole play, for lines and timing.

Q: Starting when?

A: At twenty to three. And it ended at quarter to six.

Q: Get the master script, will you, honey? And lots of paper and pencil.

A: I was going to tell you all this before, but you started kissing me.

Q: I may do it again.

I did. But I waited till she brought back the master script.

A master script is something like a three-dimensional maze, with the Start at page one and

the Finish three acts later. It's made up by the assistant director, held by her during rehearsals, and shared by the stage manager and light man and sound man during performances.

Here's the way it's made up: The assistant director takes two copies of the script (acting version, from Samuel French) and cuts them up into their separate pages, then glues one page each to a sheet of loose-leaf filler paper. This bundle is then put, hopefully in proper order, into a filler. The assistant director marks, in pencil around each glued-in page, all of the director's instructions for movement and stage business, with arrows to the appropriate actor and place. Light cues are added later, in blue pencil, and sound cues in red pencil. Line changes are made in pen. Pretty soon, the whole thing is impossible for anybody in the world to read, except a stage manager, who uses it as his Bible during each performance.

The master script of *Love Among The Falling Stars*, which Edna now brought me, was practically clean. There were a few line changes inked in, that was all, and tiny pencil notations at the beginning and ending of each scene. These pencil notes had been made yesterday afternoon by Edna, timing the rehearsal for pace. It had, as they

always do, run overlong.

They'd started act one at twenty minutes to three, and had gone through the three scenes of that act without a break, finishing at twenty to four. That was when Russ had grown bored with watching, and had gone on back to his recalcitrant lightboard and his unprintable clock. Archer Marshall, phony director, had yakked at them about interpretation of various lines for fifteen minutes, and at five to four they had started act two, going through both scenes without a break and finishing at twenty-five to five. After ten minutes of directorial advice, and five minutes of head break, they had gone on to act three, from ten to five till quarter to six.

Number one: Russ had been at the lightboard during the entirety of both act breaks.

Number two: If it was one of the twelve actors who had killed Heather Sanderson, he or she had to do it during a period when he or she had no lines, the character not then being on-stage.

Number three: In later questioning, the entire cast corroborated Edna's alibi. She had taken no breaks at all during the entire afternoon, but had sat at all times on the stage apron, in front of the curtain, holding the 'book', the master script, timing

the rehearsal and prompting people who forgot their lines.

Number four: Aside from the twelve actors, this left four other suspects; Archer Marshall, phony director; Sterling McCall, producer; Charlie Wilbe, set builder; and Russ Barlow, technician.

So. Edna and I decided to leave the actors for later and see if we could eliminate all four of the others at the outset. That evening, after supper and after Edna had driven her vintage Plymouth back into town and home and mother, I started questioning more suspects:

Charlie Wilbe:

Q: You were working on next week's set all afternoon, Charlie?

A: Since nine o'clock in the morning. Jack Andrews and Ray Hennessy helped out in the morning, before lunch.

Q: But you worked alone all afternoon.

A: Sure. They was all rehearsin'.

Q: What time did you start, in the afternoon?

A: Just about two, maybe a few minutes after.

Q: What work were you doing?

A: Fixin up a design for the set, mostly. Checkin to see what flats and doors and stairs I had around the dock, and puttin a design on paper.

Q: Was the scene dock door open or closed?

A: Open. You know how hot it gets in there, middle of the afternoon. No ventilation at all. One of these days, I'm goin to knock a window in the wall there, Ling or no Ling. I put it up high enough, nobody's goin to get in from outside.

Q: Could you see the stage at all, from where you were working?

A: Part of the time. Up till maybe three-thirty, I was around and about in the dock there, cataloging what I had to work with, lumber and paint and muslin and the rest of it.

Q: And after three-thirty?

A: I was workin on paper, on the design. I pulled my little table over by the door, for the breeze, and sat there the whole time after that, right up to six o'clock.

Q: All right, now. Your scene dock is off the wings to stage-left, the opposite side from the green room and the dressing rooms. And you were sitting in the doorway, looking out toward the stage. Could you see Russ Barlow?

A: Over there at the light-board? Sure. He had a light playin right on him, where he was workin there. I don't know if he could see me so good, inside the doorway like I was.

Q: Well, how much were you looking out at the stage? I mean, most of the time you were look-

ing at the paper you were working on, weren't you?

A: Maybe half and half. I'd keep lookin out there, visualizing the way the sets would go—we got a three-set show for next week, with set changes at the scene breaks, so I got to figure stuff with double-sided flats, swiveled on king pins, and stuff like that. I did a lot of lookin out at the stage, trying to see how it would all fit. I could look right through the double arch in the set on that side, and see the sofa and Russ both.

Q: And you didn't see anyone else on-stage at all?

A: Not a one. I couldn't see Heather on the sofa because of the angle.

Q: Well, would it have been possible for anyone to have walked out on stage, maybe out to the middle—

A: You mean kill Heather while I was sittin there? Not a chance. I was facin that way all the time, and lookin out every few seconds.

Number five: Russ's story was corroborated by Charlie. This still left Charlie a suspect during the first act, but it also limited the time of the murder to before three-thirty.

Number six: When I went back and asked Charlie how much "Captain" Einstein had asked him, I got the same answer as from Russ. Einstein had

wanted to know where he was, and if he'd been looking at the stage steadily for three hours, and a simple no was all the answer he stayed around for.

After Charlie, I questioned Archer Marshall, phony director, who smelled, as usual, of Kentucky's finest:

Q: You were running a line rehearsal all afternoon, is that right?

A: Absolutely.

Q: You started the rehearsal at twenty to three?

A: I suppose it was something like that. I *called* the rehearsal for two o'clock, but you know the kind of cooperation I get around here.

Q: But everybody was present when you did get started?

A: In body, if not in mind.

Q: During the afternoon, I suppose people left the group from time to time, to go to the bathroom or whatever. Did you ever have to wait for somebody, who'd stayed away too long?

A: Oddly enough, no. But of course it was just the first rehearsal, so I suppose they weren't bored with the show yet.

Q: Did you have to have someone read for somebody else who was absent at any time during the rehearsal?

A: That is one practice I refuse to have anything to do with, particularly in a line rehearsal.

Q: Well, Edna read for Heath-

er, didn't she?

A: Andy, you don't want me to speak unkindly of the dead, do you?

Q: All right, never mind—

A: We could consider ourselves fortunate if Heather attended *any* rehearsals, but certainly not a *line* rehearsal.

Q: All right. Now, what about you? Did you leave the group at any time?

A: Oh, am I a suspect? How delightful.

Q: Did you?

A: Yes, I suppose I did. I imagine someone else will tell you if I don't.

Q: Where did you go?

A: Over to the house a minute. I suppose I was gone five minutes in all.

Q: You left the theater completely? Did you leave the door unlocked when you went out?

A: No. It locks automatically when you close it. I unlocked it when I came back, and then it locked again.

Q: What did you go over to the house for?

A: These questions are getting just a trifle personal, Andy. I don't want you to think I murdered poor Heather, of course, but on the other hand you *aren't* an official investigator, are you?

Q: All right, never mind that. Just tell me *when* you went over to the house.

A: When? To the minute? I

really couldn't say.

Q: During which act, then?

A: Oh, first act. Definitely. I couldn't have lasted into the second—Well. Is that all?

That was all. Marshall had gone over to the house for his bottle, of course. If he was telling the truth. On the other hand, he'd very conveniently gone after that bottle during the first act, which had been going on during the time span I was interested in.

Number seven: Archer Marshall was still a suspect.

After Archer, I questioned Ling:

Q: All I want to know is where you were between three and three-thirty yesterday afternoon.

A: You've got it narrowed down that much?

Q: I sure do.

A: Well, I'll be derved. Good boy, Andy. I was in the office, upstairs over the lobby.

Q: Anybody with you?

A: Not a soul. Just me and the phone. That rang from time to time, but I wouldn't know exactly when.

Q: You've got a window in the wall overlooking the auditorium. Did you spend any time looking through that window, watching the rehearsal going on?

A: You mean, did I see anybody slink away and go around the side toward the stage? Sorry,

Andy. I was at my desk all afternoon. Doing my own typing a lot of the time, in fact, since Archer stole Edna from me.

Q: Okay, Ling. Thanks.

A: If you've got it narrowed way down like this, Andy, down to a specific half-hour, you ought to go talk to Einstein.

Q: I want to hand him the killer on a platter.

A: Silver salver.

Q: I never pronounce that right.

A: Anyway, you ought to go to Einstein with what you've got. Really, Andy. Maybe it'll get him on the stick. Besides, if you get *too* close, the killer may go after you.

Q: That's a happy thought.

A: You talk to Einstein, Andy.

So I talked to Einstein. I had the suspects narrowed down to nine, half the original number. Of the nine now exonerated, I was one and so was Edna, Russ was fully accounted for, and six of the actors had parts sufficiently large in act one to preclude their leaving the group for any length of time. That left, still on my list of suspects, the other six actors, plus Charlie Wilbe and Ling and Archer Marshall.

I gave it all to Einstein, carefully and in detail, and he sat there behind his desk and just looked at me. No expression at all. He was a short and heavy

man, well-jowled, and when he had no expression at all on his face he had no expression at *all*. Just a head, with smallish eyes and roundish nose and palish lips.

When I was finished, he nodded once and said, "Very cute. Very neat."

"I just asked questions," I told him. "I just asked around, that's all." I was feeling kind of smug, and proud of myself.

Then he said, "Now, you tell me just one thing more, my city-slicker friend."

"What's that?"

"Just why am I supposed to take your word for any of this?"

That one set me back. I stammered, "Well—well, you just—well, all you have to do is *ask*. Just ask everybody, the same as I did, and see if the stories check out or not."

"Is that right? And why am I supposed to take *their* word for it?"

"Well, you've got to take *somebody's* word!"

"Why?"

"For Pete's sake, do you think we all did it together? Do you think it's a great big scheme with eighteen people in it?"

"It's possible," he said. "It's been known to happen."

"You're nuts," I said, before I thought.

He flushed. "You watch your language," he said. "You're not

in New York now."

"I could tell that by the police procedure," I told him. I said that *after* I thought. I didn't care whether I got him mad or not, he'd got *me* mad.

"You just go on back to your the-ay-ter," he said, "and let me handle the police procedure."

"So you don't care what I found out."

"Not a particle."

I got to my feet and left. But hanging around theater five years had made it impossible for me to leave anyplace without an exit line. I delivered it from the doorway: "I just want you to know something, Mister. We aren't laughing at you because we're from New York. We're laughing at you because you're such a lousy cop.

Which didn't help matters at all, but I felt better.

Back at the farmhouse, I had a kitchen conference with Ling, over two cups of coffee. I told him what had happened between me and Einstein, and he shook his head and said, "We sure got a winner, Andy."

"I noticed."

"That's what they do with the cops who don't work out," he said. "They can't bump them off the force, because they're on State Civil Service, and they never goof up enough to satisfy the regulations. So they're ship-

ped off to some backwoods corner of the state like Clinton, where nothing much ever happens so they can't do too much harm."

"This one's doing a lot of harm," I said. "This one's lousing up our whole season. We've got six weeks to go this summer, and he may *never* let us open."

"I wrote a friend of mine in New York," Ling said. "A lawyer. Maybe he'll know some way we can force Einstein to let us open up again."

"That's all we need," I said. "A New York lawyer wandering around. Einstein would clap us in irons just to save face."

"Let's wait and see what my friend has to say. In the meantime, you tell everybody what happened, and tell them you've quit your amateur detecting."

"Why quit? The only way we'll open is to give Einstein the killer."

"You don't really have to quit if you don't want. But you're doing too good a job. If you keep poking around, the killer may figure you're too dangerous to live."

"So I tell everybody I'm quitting, and then I poke around on the sly."

"If you want to. I know I wouldn't. Why not hold off at least until my friend writes back?"

"If you say so."

"It's up to you, Andy. I just wouldn't want to see you get your throat cut."

"Neither would I."

Edna came in, then, from town, and we exchanged information. I told her about my interview with "Captain" Einstein, and she told me about local opinion in town. Local opinion in town pretty much agreed with Einstein that we were a crazy bunch of beatniks from New York who'd ganged up to kill one of our number, and local opinion in town wouldn't be a bit surprised if we came riding in with burning brands and set fire to the whole town one night. That's the way beatniks were.

"That doesn't sound like a bad idea at all," I said. "I'd like to see Clinton in flames."

Edna said, "My mother doesn't want me to come out here any more. She's afraid all you beatniks will murder me, too."

"My plans are a little bit different from that," I told her.

Ling got to his feet and said, "Okay, I can take a hint."

After he left, Edna and I took her Plymouth out to a secluded section of Berger's Kill and necked the afternoon away. It was a lot more fun than playing detective.

When we got back to the theater, it was suppertime. Edna stayed over, and afterwards I said, "Get the stopwatch from

Ling and come on over to the theater. I want to check something out."

She got it, and we went over, and turned on all the lights. Then Edna timed me with the stopwatch while I played murderer.

I sat in a chair in the first row of the audience. Edna sat on the stage apron, as beautiful as a new love, dressed in an old flannel shirt and faded blue jeans. Every once in a while, I'd look at her in a certain light or at a certain angle, and I'd think about the acting bug and the perpetually ailing mother, and they wouldn't seem so all-fired important any more.

Well. Anyway. When she nodded to me, I got to my feet and sauntered away to the left. Then I ducked through the door beside the stage and up the steps past the prop room door to the green room. I turned right and crossed the green room, flanked by two dressing rooms on each side of me, and through the well-oiled soundproof door to the wings. The lightboard was just to my right. No one could come through this door without being seen by Russ, if he was working at the lightboard.

I tip-toed across the flooring to the edge of the drop cloth, and then I could walk naturally, the double thickness of drop

cloth and carpet muffling my steps. I went over to where the sofa had been—the police had taken it away, apparently for further scrutiny—and stood there a few seconds, as long as I imagined it would take to stroke a sharp knife across a sleeping woman's throat. The curtain was open today, and Edna watched me, glancing from time to time at her watch and smiling encouragingly.

Turning, I retraced my steps, came around through the wings and the green room and down the steps and through the door and back over to the same seat in the front row, where I'd started from. Edna thumbed the watch, studied it, and said, "Two minutes and seventeen seconds."

"I doubt he did it any faster than that," I said, "and I bet he did it maybe a minute or two slower."

Then she said, "What did you do with the knife?"

"What knife?"

"The knife you killed Heather with."

"I wasn't using any props, honey, I—" And that's where it hit me.

She looked at me and grinned. "I can be a detective, too, Andy," she said.

"And I can be a defective. You're right, you're right, forget the two minutes and seventeen

seconds. The killer had to get rid of the knife. He had to *pick up* the knife, too, come to think of it."

She bounced down from the apron and said, "It might still be here. If it was a good enough hiding place for right after the murder, it might be good enough forever."

"I hope it isn't that good. I looked up at the stage and around at the auditorium and said, 'Well, where shall we begin?'"

"The dressing rooms, I suppose."

We searched the four dressing rooms, and we didn't find anything. So we tried the prop room. The prop room is down underneath the stage, a long narrow low-ceilinged room formed when the stage platform was put in. It's barely five feet high, and we keep all our permanent props down there. Permanent props are bric-a-brac and what-not and thingamajigs and assorted white elephants that might come in handy some day.

I owned one of the four keys to the bolt-and-bar prop room door lock. The other three belonged to Ling and Archer and Russ. So I said to Edna, "if there's something down here, like the knife for instance, it cuts our suspects down to two."

"Well," she said reasonably,

"unlock the door, then, and let's find out."

So I unlocked the door, and dragged the heavy thing open, and led the way down the stairs. The only light was a bare bulb on the wall beside the door, which I switched on on my way by.

It was dusty down there, and jam-packed full of junk. Edna took one side, and I took the other, and we searched for sharp implements not covered by dust.

We'd been looking maybe three minutes, when all of a sudden there was a shattering of glass and the light went out. I spun around, just in time to see and hear the door chunk closed. And then, in pitch blackness, the sound of the bar being dropped into place, and the lock-bolt slamming home.

And there we were.

You couldn't see a thing in there, not a thing. The lone door was heavy and solid, and it fit into the jamb without a crack showing. There was even a step up at the threshold, against which the bottom edge of the door nestled as snug as lovers in a clinch. The walls on all four sides were simply wooden slats in front of concrete block foundation or packed earth. The ceiling was the reinforced floor of the stage.

Not only was there no light, there was no sound. Beneath the thick stage floor, with the addition of the drop cloth and carpet atop that, we were effectively muffled off from the world. We could hammer on the door if we wanted, but no one would hear us. The bar kept the door absolutely snug against the jamb, so there was no vibration. It was thick heavy wood, and when hit it gave off only a dull thud, which you could barely hear ten feet away.

In the first few seconds after the door slammed shut and the light went out, there was only silence and blackness and astonishment and terror. Then I heard a faint bumping sound to my left, and a trembling hand touched my arm, slid down it, grasped my hand.

I could hear her breathing, rapid shivering breaths. I reached out toward her, involuntarily straightening up, and cracked my head against the ceiling. I swore, and she started to giggle, and I grabbed her and held her tight, because the giggling wasn't because anything was funny, it was just the prelude to screaming.

Gradually, the trembling left her body, and in the darkness I stroked her hair and murmured her name and silently cursed myself for a thousand different kinds of fool for letting her get

into a spot like this.

He meant us to die here. The theater was closed, no one would be coming over for days, not until Einstein relented, and that wasn't the most foreseeable of futures.

There was no food here. There was no light. And there was very little air.

We would suffocate in this dungeon before we'd starve. And we might go crazy and hurt ourselves in the darkness before that.

"Edna," I whispered. "Sweet Edna. Darling. Edna."

Gradually, she calmed, and finally she answered, whispering, "Andy! What are we going to do? Oh, Andy, what are we going to do?"

"Light," I said. "Light first, and then we'll be able to think better. I'm going to let you go now. Is it all right? Just for a second, I've got to find my matches."

"All right," she whispered. There was no need to whisper, but I understood why she did. I had to fight the same urge myself.

I released her, and took out my matches, and lit one. First, I smiled with what I hoped was reassurance at her pale face, and then I counted the matches still in the folder. Twelve.

"There ought to be candles down here," I said. "Something

that will burn, anyway. I'll hold the match, you look."

That was part of it, of course, part of the way to kill us. If we just stood there in the darkness, sooner or later we would die. So we had to act, we had to move. And every motion, every step, every movement of an end table or opening of a carton, swirled the dust into the air, choking us. Every match we lit—and every candle, if we found any—used up the air that much faster. Every act we made used up our energy and our strength that much sooner.

We found the packet of birthday cake candles on the tenth match, just as it was beginning to burn my fingers. I lit the eleventh, and we found a cracked china plate, and lit the candles, one by one, setting them in their own wax drippings on the plate. We lit four candles, and then we could see. With four candles left.

Birthday candles burn fast. In that stale dusty air, they also burned low. We were on the second floor before I found two larger candles, stuffed away in the bottom of a carton beneath a lot of maroon drapery. They were large red Christmas candles. We lit one of them, and blew the little candles out, and then we looked around to see if there was any way to save ourselves.

To begin with, I tried to get more air into the room. There were a couple of rusty cavalry sabers down there. I took one of them and jabbed it down against the line where the door met the step. I finally managed to jam it down in, but when I applied leverage, trying to separate door and step just a fraction of an inch, the saber broke and I went reeling back down the stairs. So that wouldn't work.

It was hot in there, and my mouth was already parched and dry. I couldn't seem to get enough air in my lungs. Edna's breathing was loud and ragged, and we were both stiff and cramped from having to stoop constantly under the low ceiling.

With the candle, I studied the door and the walls. The only place that seemed even remotely possible was the wall to either side of the stairwell. These two triangular sections were, with the door itself, the only part of the room above ground level. On the right side, the wall separated us from one of the dressing rooms. On the left side, it separated us from the auditorium.

The auditorium side was impossible. The proscenium wall, of which this was a part, was concrete block faced with plaster. That left the other side, leading to the dressing room.

The local businessmen who'd bought this place and paid for

the conversion of it to a theater had done too damn good a job. They'd been afraid of a fire, or of the building collapsing, or any sort of disaster like that that would have reflected on them in the community. So the conversion had built solidly.

This wall separating us from the dressing room—separating us from life—was a three-quarter inch thickness of plywood nailed to two-by-four uprights and supports, with another three-quarter inch thickness of plywood on the other side forming the wall of the dressing room. And it was the only possibility.

I made Edna sit down, to conserve her strength, and I took the other saber and started to poke with it at the wall. I knew I couldn't cut through the wood with a lousy tool like that, so what I tried to do was dig out the nails holding it to the two-by-fours. They were finishing nails, countersunk.

I kept at it and kept at it, and the saber was just too big and awkward. I threw it away in disgust finally, and Edna got to her feet, saying, "Should I look for something else? Something better?"

"Anything, for God's sake. With a sharp point on it, and short enough to handle."

We both searched, and I'd just run across a little wooden box

containing lots of spools of thread and two pairs of scissors when Edna said, in a funny rising sort of a voice, "Andy?"

I looked over at her. She was staring at something in front of her. "What is it?"

"Andy, please?"

I went stumbling over doodads and whatsits to her side, and looked where she was looking.

Do you remember the Raggedy Ann doll, with the triangle eyes? There was Raggedy Ann and Raggedy Andy, and down among all the other junk in the prop room was a Raggedy Ann. Looking at it, for a minute I became Raggedy Andy.

There was a knife stuck in it, right through the body. And a couple of brown stains on the material just under the knife blade, as though the doll had bled. Raggedy Ann looked up at us with her black triangle eyes, and she had a knife stuck all the way through her.

"That's it," I said. Then I realized I'd whispered it. I cleared my throat and spoke aloud. "That's what he used."

"He was watching us," she said. She looked at me, and her eyes were wide, and not triangle-shaped at all. "He watched and watched, and if we hadn't come down in here he wouldn't have bothered us."

"He knew we'd find it."

"Andy, my mother will start to worry, she'll call the police. They'll search for us, won't they?"

"Not on your life. I'll tell you just what he did when he left here, after he locked us in. He took the station wagon away and hid it, and if anybody says, 'Where's Edna?' he'll say, 'I don't know, and I haven't seen Andy either.' And everybody'll say, 'Those two crazy kids eloped, at a time like this, what do you think of that?'"

"They won't even look for us."

"Not here they won't. They'll look in New York, or in some state where there's no waiting period to get married, but they won't look in here."

"Andy, I'm scared."

"That's two of us." I remembered the scissors then, and went over and got them. "But we've still got a chance," I said, showing them to her.

I went back to work. She insisted on helping me, using the other pair of scissors.

The scissors helped. Finishing nails have practically no head at all, but the scissors could grip them and give me at least a little leverage, once I'd dug some of the wood away. But whoever had done this job had loved hammering nails. There were thousands of them, millions. Or

at least it seemed that way.

The first candle gave out, and we lit the second. The room smelled like a decayed tooth. I felt dizzy, and there were green and yellow flashes at the corner of my eyes.

Edna fainted. I half-carried, half-dragged her down the steps and stretched her out on the floor. Her breathing was quick and jagged. I went back up and fought nails out of plywood with sewing scissors.

The second candle burned out, and we were in darkness again. I had less than half of the nails out. But the bottom corner, farthest from the door, was free. I went cautiously down the steps and pawed around in the blackness till I found the saber, and brought it back up the steps again. I closed my eyes against the dust, and by touch alone managed to slip the saber in between the corner of the plywood and the two-by-four. I pushed it in almost to the hilt, where the metal was thick and should be less prone to break. Then, with some leverage to help me, I tugged on the saber, trying to pry the plywood free.

The sound of squealing nails was then the most beautiful song in the world. I heaved on the saber, again and again, and each time the nails would squawk, and each time I edged the saber

higher up the wall, I kept slamming my fingers between the saber handle and the wall corner, but I didn't care. Not then. All I cared about was the beautiful sound those nails made.

I got it off. One huge chunk of plywood, millions of nails still sticking out of its other side. I wrestled it slowly down the stairs, afraid any second it would slip away from me and go crashing down onto Edna, but I finally got it tucked away to one side, and then I went back up and attacked the other side of the wall.

That was easier. I only had to push, with nothing beyond the plywood to hold it back. I sat on the top step, my back braced against the other wall, and kicked out with both feet until I saw light around the edges of the plywood, and then I kicked it even harder.

Air came in, that was the thing. Air and a touch of gray dim light, and for the first time I really thought there was a chance I might live through this.

And for the first time, I got mad at the beast that had locked us in here to die. Up till now, I'd been too worried about Edna, and too worried about myself, to have room for any other emotion. Now I had plenty of room. *Plenty* of room. And I needed every bit of it.

I kicked the wall down, and

went crawling out to partial gloom. The theater lights were out, but there was a window in the green room, over the exit door, and daylight streamed through that, some of it finding its way into this dressing room, the door not completely closed.

I staggered to my feet and went stumbling out of the dressing room and out to the wings and the lightboard. I threw the master lever up, and every light in the place went on. Then I went back around to the prop room door and unlocked it, and carried Edna up out of there.

I left her on the sofa in the green room, still unconscious but breathing more regularly, and went back into the prop room and found the doll with the knife in it. He might even have been dumb enough to leave his fingerprints on the knife handle, so I carried it out by the doll's left arm. I went out of the theater and around the building to the farmhouse. The sun was high. It was almost noon. We'd been in there fifteen hours.

Jack Andrews was in the kitchen, making himself a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. He looked at me in surprise and said, "Where the hell have you been? Where's Edna?"

"Just listen to me," I said. It was one of two, Ling or Archer.

But he said, "You married?"

"Do I look married? *Listen* to

me, God damn it."

He saw the Raggedy Ann I was carrying, then, and said, "What the hell is that?"

"Shut up, Jack. Just shut up, that's all. You let *me* ask the questions, God damn it."

"I just don't—"

"Shut up! Now! Now, tell me, where did you go after supper last night?"

"Where did I—"

"Now stop that. Answer, don't ask. Where did you go after supper last night?"

"Well— A bunch of us went into Clinton, to the movies."

"Did Archer go?"

"No, it was just—"

"Did Ling go?"

"If you'll let me talk, I'll tell you who—"

"Did *Ling* go?"

"No, it was—"

"All right, never mind."

He started asking questions again, and I went around him to the front of the house and upstairs. Ling and Archer, unlike the rest of us, had private rooms, facing each other down at the end of the hall.

I tried Archer first. I went storming into his room and found him sitting at his writing table, the bottle tilted up over his mouth. He ducked it down fast, spilling some, and glared at me, starting to spout things about knocking first, and I overrode him, saying, "I got about ten sec-

onds, Archer. I want you to listen, and answer fast. Where did you go after supper last night?"

"Go? I didn't go anywhere, I stayed right here."

"In this room?"

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"Well, of course. What in the world—"

I held the doll up by its arms, and showed it to him. "I think you're it, Archer," I said. "I'm going to Einstein with this, and this time I'm going to *force* him to listen. Your fingerprints may still be on this knife, but either way you don't have any alibi for either time; and—"

"*Either* time? Now, wait, wait."

"You wait, Archer." I backed for the door. "Just wait for Einstein."

"Wait, please. I wasn't alone!"

I stopped, my hand on the knob. "What?"

"Bobbi Barten was with me. Ask her, she'll tell you. I wasn't going to bruit it around, Andy, you can understand that, but—"

He kept talking. I suppose he did, he would. But I wasn't listening, because I was listening to something else. Somebody was running down the hallway.

I yanked open the door, and went after him. He'd been in his room, he'd heard me shouting at Archer, he'd come out in

the hall to listen, and as soon as he'd heard Archer come up with an alibi he'd known it was all over.

"Ling!" I shouted, but he kept going. I could hear his footsteps going down the stairs.

I ran after him, and got to the head of the stairs just as the front door slammed. I went down, three at a time, and as I got to the front door I heard the sudden growl of Ling's own car starting, the red MG he kept parked around at the side of the house.

I went down off the stoop and around to the side, and he came roaring straight at me, hunched over the wheel. I threw the Raggedy Ann at him, and jumped out of the way of the car just in time, and rolled over and over and sat up just in time to see the collision.

Einstein was arriving, just turning his official car off the road when Ling came barrelling out from beside the house in the little MG, and they met head-on.

So Einstein got his man after all.

They both lived through it, and I'm sorry to say I can't feel happy about either of them. But at least the accident hospitalized Einstein, and the state had to send up another man, who turned out to have a brain in his

head.

It was Ling. In the hospital, he told how and why.

How: He looked down from his office window, and saw Russ watching the rehearsal, so the coast was clear. He'd started to kill her twice before, but somebody had been in sight both times. He got the knife out of his desk drawer, where he'd been keeping it for a couple of weeks, and went downstairs and out the front way and around to the green room entrance. He went in, and on-stage, and heard Charlie Wilbe wrestling flats around deep in the scene dock. He went over and cut her throat, and blood spurted unexpectedly, so he went down into the prop room and wiped his hands off with an old piece of drapery. He was mad at the blood being on his hands, and I guess that's why he jabbed the knife into the Raggedy Ann. He left it there, hidden deep in with all the junk, figuring there was too much sharp weaponry down there anyway for one more or less to be suspect, and he'd gone back to work. While he was gone, the phone was off the hook, just in case any calls came in.

And why: That was in the contract in his desk drawer. He'd told us all it was a sixty-forty profit split he had with Heather Sanderson, and that was partially

true. It was a sixty-forty split of the profits over and above Heather's salary. And her salary was a thousand dollars a week, eleven thousand for the full season.

He'd been convinced her name would pack them in. He'd been wrong. At the end of the season, there wouldn't be any profit. And there wouldn't be any eleven thousand for Heather. Also in the contract was what she would get in lieu of salary. The theater.

So he was getting revenge, because she hadn't fulfilled her promise to load the theater with customers. And he was saving the theater. He killed her the way he did because he had a refinement for his revenge: Her murder would publicize the theater. In death, she would draw the patrons as she hadn't drawn them in life.

If he hadn't tried to kill Edna and me, I would almost sympathize with him. Heather was a has-been and a lush, and she'd

taken Ling for a ride.

As to why he'd suggested I play detective in the first place, the reason wasn't exactly ego-building. He figured I couldn't possibly learn anything dangerous, and I might inadvertently help by goofing things up and confusing the cops. At the very least, he hoped my eager-beaver amateur detecting would convince Einstein we were on the up-and-up, so he'd let us open the theater again. But when I started doing so much better than Einstein, and when I started searching the theater, he got rattled.

But there was, from it all, one happy conclusion. Edna could never convince her mother she'd been out all night only because someone had tried to murder her. When she got home, she found her bags packed, and her mother gave her the bit about never darken my door again.

So what could she do? She had to marry me.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

We are indebted to a Canadian correspondent for the story about the conversation overheard in a border town where it sometimes seems that half of the town—a rather small town, we hasten to add—had something or other to do with the customs.

The one woman asked the other if her husband was still working as a customs officer, at which the other explained that he'd quit.

It seemed that he liked to smuggle, and he couldn't after all do this and *also* work in the customs. So . .

miss bennett

by Leighla Whipper

SHE FELT only a slight annoyance centered upon a ragged fingernail. It was rather irritating. She would get the beauty shop of the hotel to repair it the next day. In the meantime, there was this—this interview. Conveniently her Spanish was excellent.

If only she could dispense with these interviews. If only they could simply jot down a few notes for her. She was an expert in her job—one of the top five in the country—and they had been told that. Yet she sensed a tiresome “briefing”. She needed only ten minutes and they would probably stretch it into an hour. Being a professional had its problems. It was always an old story to pros—always a big thing for the new client. Each case of course was always different in detail, but basically the same for her.

The three men sat on the couch opposite her and were frankly staring. They spoke in undertones which they thought she could not understand.

“But this is ridiculous, Pepe,” the older one said. “This is a young woman—or a girl. She’d

Leighla Whipper returns with this story about a woman who has become prominent in a rather strange profession — prominent and extremely successful. But not envied. Almost until the end, her eyes seem dead. Her problem is that she is interested only in the job at hand. . . .

be dangerous, even flighty. Also she's a Latin American or seems to be. I wanted a North American for it."

Pepe, obviously the contact man, smiled a quick humorless smirk. "Listen, Chief," there was authority in his voice which carried conviction. "She's in the top bracket. Her looks are deceiving. She's all of thirty-five if she's a day. And she hasn't got any nerves they say. Straight from New York—top rate. Her looks are an asset."

The "Chief", Paco Fuentes, looked again armed with this new information. In these days, of course, with couturiers, expert beauticians, and the luxury she had obviously been able to surround herself with . . . yet there was something even his practised eye failed to understand. He glanced around the suite, noting the grand piano which must have been specially ordered even for this luxury suite. Then he read the label of the brandy she had poured for herself without offering. It happened to be his favorite brand difficult even for him in his favored position to acquire. Furthermore he was sure he recognized even at a small distance the fragile glass she used. It was Venetian. Somehow this was all vaguely unsettling. It did not inspire his confidence in the job

to be done.

The third man was the son of Fuentes. His prototype was common in any country. Patently raised in a luxury not of his making, carrying upon his handsome face a look of almost chronic dissatisfaction, he seemed preoccupied, eager to get the business over and done with.

"Do I understand that you speak Spanish?" Fuentes addressed her directly giving her a smile famous in the newspapers of Briseno. He spoke slowly as he usually did to foreigners and for his most important speeches before his fellow cabinet members.

"Yes, a lot of my work has been done in Latin America," she answered.

He now noted that her eyes were dead. As she looked at them all in one glance, there seemed to be no normal reaction from her, either as a woman or just as one human being to another. His hopes rose. Perhaps she was capable after all. This was more like something he might have expected. And yet . . .

"Do you think you can accomplish the job?" he continued, his eyes never leaving her face.

She sent him a look which he recognized as injured professional pride.

"Your man asked for the best.

I have yet to fail."

Fuentes smiled indulgently. "But everyone is human. Sometimes we all fail. What is the average in your profession?"

She also gave something which might be called a smile, warming her brandy at the same time. "If the figures were available to estimate an average," she replied slowly choosing her words with care, "I'd make a rough guess at—oh well, let us say one failure out of nine."

There was a short silence before she continued. "The unexpected often comes into the picture. That's why I usually need three or four . . . 'situations'. I never force the issue. I'm patient."

Fuentes indicated his approval as his son fidgeted. She took a small swallow of brandy. Pepe sat woodenly as is the habit of born benchmen.

Suddenly she seemed to lose any interest she might have had in the matter. She rose and walked over to the window giving onto the breathtaking view of Briseno City twenty stories below. Their eyes followed her. Fuentes also evaluated her understated but costly dress of white silk.

"Now what?" his son turned to him and spoke sotto voice. She's eccentric, Father. May be she's all right, but she's—"

"Let's get down to the job," Fuentes said, ignoring him.

"That's what I've been waiting for," she said returning to them. "The sooner I know, the quicker I can get to work."

Their conference was brief but illuminating. She required only the simplest of explanations.

How wonderful to be alone again, she thought. One more brandy then she'd slip into bed wearing the pink froth of lace just sent from France, and finish "Sense and Sensibility." Maybe she'd play some *Fada* of Amalia Rodriguez or maybe just the Bach. She was really in the mood for Bach or perhaps Handel would go better with the Jane Austen book? But first her fingernail to be filed.

The telephone rang. It wasn't possible. She knew nobody in the city, or more accurately, nobody she knew there knew she was in Briseno. She answered.

"It's Mr. Fuentes again, Miss Bennett. Could I see you just a moment? I'm downstairs in the lobby."

"I have only a short time to spare," she answered. "I'm quite busy."

"I won't take much of your time," he promised. She could imagine his smile as he spoke.

When he entered the suite he had so recently left, he apologized. "I don't like to intrude so soon, but . . ."

"Yes?"

"I had to return because I'm a little curious. Of course we've dealt occasionally with these things before, but this is the first time. . . ."

"The first time it's been a woman?" she finished in flat tones. She could still be in bed by nine if the fool would leave in half an hour.

He chose his former seat, and this time assumed the air of a friendly visitor.

"I see you have good taste," he murmured. "May I?" He poured two glasses of brandy. "The supply is limited," he said holding his glass to the light. "How did you manage this?"

She was silent, re-evaluating him without pretense. She had seen all kinds in many places. This was the questioning kind.

"What is it you want?" she asked cutting through the ambience he was trying to establish.

He adjusted his technique quickly, being quite used to adapting on the instant to varying circumstances.

"Not to detain you too long, Miss Bennett, I only wanted to ask you how you happened to get into this kind of work."

She cut in as if cued by a fellow actor.

"I wouldn't want everyone to know," she said smiling almost graciously as she accepted the glass he offered and joined him

on the sofa, "but it all began when my parents were divorced. And beside this, we were very poor. As you see, I enjoy a higher standard of living. So I led a—well what you'd probably call an irregular life for several years until I found I could do one thing well. Then I got to know the people who were in a position to give me work."

"An irregular life? You mean . . ." he raised his eyebrows.

"Exactly." She allowed a significant pause to elapse before she touched a switch which flooded the room with soft enveloping music.

"I had the best excuses," she continued. "I hope you're not shocked."

He stared at her. His direct contact and experience with what she was implying negated her words. He had half interest in every "irregular" house in his country and knew his ground well. He also knew when he had lost a round.

"The only thing you really want is success on the job," she added. "I'm only the instrument. You observe I don't ask you why—only what you want me to do."

"Yes, I realize I'm being a little intrusive," he recovered quickly. "Now are you ready for your first 'situation'?"

She finished her glass with an air of finality which did not escape him. "Yes. I thought it

was all settled. Meanwhile, if you really want to help me, you can invite me up to one of your ranches. I usually practice somewhere everyday."

"Of course," he answered rising to leave. As he went through the amenities of saying goodbye, he reflected upon his good fortune. At his ranch, she'd be safely away from the suite, and he'd have the opportunity to have her deposit box in the hotel searched. Also he'd have the opportunity to see how efficient she really was. The mystery of her was not really important to the job, it was only a whim of his to fathom it, but Mr. Fuentes had indulged most of his whims for the past forty years—ever since he was ten years old and his father had luckily risen in the world because of political favor.

The boys and girls of the Juventud of Brisene gathered on a clear and sunny morning to await the arrival of the head of state of a neighboring country. They enjoyed these days which were now regular, as there were many such visits during the year. Their immaculately white blouses and their blue skirts or in the case of the boys, their blue sharply creased pants signaled their unity and their duties. A cookie cutter could not have managed more uniformity

with their fresh young faces between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. The brilliant sun of their winter almost cast a halo over these as they milled about on the main street on which all traffic had been stopped, waiting to be arranged in line along the triumphal way of the cars in the parade. This, of course, meant a holiday from school, and a great deal of importance. Besides, there was the limeade which was served regularly, lovely flags to wave as the cars came by, and even a convenient fleet of ambulances if anyone fainted or felt the least bit sick. It was delightful, therefore in spite of being on their feet something like three or four hours straight, they never felt tired, and their welcome to the top brass of their own and the other country was as spontaneous as anyone could possibly wish. Above them, the tall ultra-modern buildings formed a stunning background which would show up to great advantage in the newsreels of theatres all over the world within a week.

Among the crowd, a quieter figure moved, who, at first glance seemed exactly like the others. In the excitement nobody noticed the tiny differences of her face. Her figure and hair-style and bearing were the same as theirs. She blended perfectly.

Miss Lopez, the Chief of Phys-

ical Education, came down the street and began spacing the lines. Alerted by special radio, she knew the officials were now just beginning their speeches at the airport. This would take twenty minutes to half an hour depending upon the pauses in between for the applause. She plodded along in her flat heels fervently hoping that her department had secured more flags. Recently she had had to stagger the flags giving every other girl or boy one. How different, she thought, it could look in the newsreels if there could be a solid phalanx. Much more symmetrical, she thought, and Miss Lopez was nothing if not symmetrical. The small jeeps would soon be arriving with the banners, distributing them at strategic points along the way. She was certainly going to lodge a complaint to the ministry if there weren't enough this time.

"All right. You know your places! An arm's length apart, and stand straight. Shoulders back, chest out, stomach in. On the balls of your feet, please, not on your heels!

Darn it! The jeeps were here, and the flags were in the same quantity as before, her experienced eye could tell. All along the route her assistants were arranging them in the hands of the Juventud. What terrible pouts, what disappointments

when they had to give them to every other child. She was definitely going to take her case to Senor Fuentes, Minister of the Interior afterwards. He was always so sympathetic.

What a marvelous cover with the flag, Miss Bennett thought. Although they had promised to cover her with a counter commotion, still she could work better with the flag in her hand. The children to her left and right were stretching their arms out, but as she had expected, she was the logical alternate to receive one. She ignored the whining complaint of the girl next to her when Miss Lopez herself placed the flag in her hands. The child was saying something about what a shame, the second time she hadn't gotten to wave a flag. But Miss Bennett had other things to do and to think about. Her neat blouse and skirt was specially made, and she occasionally put her hand to her side to see if the design was foolproof.

How quickly twenty minutes went. Down—way down the broad avenue, almost to the square—they could see the cars rounding the turn. Miss Bennett stood concentrating, showing no emotion, and waited. This was her job.

But to Mercedes Pizzarro y Gonzales standing next to her,

the whole thing was something else again. It was insupportable that for the second time she was not to have a flag. It was just not fair that this big girl whom she had never before seen should be standing there so serenely holding a flag. She began to hate her. In fact she was going to have her flag regardless of consequences. Miss Lopez had promised her one next time, and this *was* next time.

The newsreels later clipped the brief struggle of two of the girls from the Juventud group. It was such a childish incident.

"Yes, I saw the original newsreel. I know what happened." Fuentes was now warming brandy in the glass he had so admired. His fine aristocratic features showed no traces of strain under the indirect lighting of the room. Miss Bennett was drawing deeply at her cigarette and had curled herself in the manner of a kitten in the corner of the opposite couch. Her face, made softer by the same light, was almost pretty, the eyes, however without lustre.

"I must say, you afforded me the opportunity I usually make the most of," she said, "yet fate is unpredictable. Always the little girl with flowers who obscures the view, or the publicity seeker who wants to shake hands, or the autograph hunter

breaking through police lines.

"Your work must be extremely interesting," he said hoping to draw her out.

"Yes, sometimes. But mostly the result of hard work, practice and planning. You see, there's a big difference between us and the fanatic."

"I begin to understand," he answered. "I had a new appreciation for you when I saw you work out on the ranch."

"Thank you. I was sorry about the little joke I played on your son. I couldn't resist it."

Fuentes laughed. "That boy needs shaking up a bit. You didn't hurt him, shooting that cigarette out of his hands. Now back to business I'm afraid you're going to have to wait for your next 'situation' until the celebration of independence in a small village nearby.

"I'm patient. That's why I'm successful," she told him.

The bell sounded. It was Pepe. "Tough luck," he said. Our Chief knows what happened. It's O.K. These things take weeks and months sometimes. I'll have a drink too, if you don't mind.

Both Miss Bennett and Fuentes raised protecting hands to the brandy. "I have some nice Scotch," she said. "I'll get it for you."

The pink froth gave way to the pale green froth of a gown

that night. In between had come lavender, rose, black and taupe. For two hours she would have her program of dansants fados, the special material songs of Julie Wilson, then much later, the Etudes of Chopin. It had been a trying day. She needed something special. She chose a book of nineteenth Century English poems. The wide bed with its accurately adjusted electric blanket tuned for the slight almost imperceptible chill of the Brisena nights, was inviting. All lights were off except her muted reading light. She must remember to get a coiffure tomorrow.

Although Miss Bennett had been perfectly sincere in not wishing to know the details of the business of her employer, they had not had to draw diagrams to tell her what they wanted and why they wanted it. That was so often the trouble with these political things she reflected. One inevitably knew. After all, one did read the papers in a general sort of way, and everyone knew that in Brisena as in so many other countries of the world, a powerful inner circle decided upon the candidate sure to win the elections.

To a quickly calculating mind, it was clear that for several weeks the candidate had been selected and a tentative campaign launched to introduce him to the people. Yet, it was obvious

to any one with more than a passing interest in Brisena politics was that the man who was emerging stronger and stronger with each passing election no matter who was the titular head, was Antonio Ruz. He had selected his candidate for this year, and apparently he had changed his mind. Measures had to be taken.

She idly wondered why he had changed his mind, and could find only one answer from her brief but decisive excursions into the politics of several small countries. Ruz had selected a candidate whom he had somehow found he couldn't manipulate. A newspaper on the counterpane showed her the placid and amenable features of the retiring president. He filled every need of both the people and Antonio Ruz. He made a wonderful appearance with his hair tinged with gray. His voice was firm and he delivered speeches in measured tones which even the humble could understand.

Then she studied the picture she had been given to memorize. This face was different. Younger, firmer. The chin had a stubborn set.

She smiled as she took a Swiss chocolate and settled her back more comfortably against the stacked pillows. Then all thoughts of ugly politics faded

as she slowly began to be swept up into the thrilling lines of one of the minor poets of England. It had been an unsuccessful play in verse, but there was a part she had always loved and which she read only rarely for fear of dulling the impact.

It had long been the custom of the governmental elite of Brisena to celebrate the Day of Independence in a different little town each year. Some small but typical town was chosen in a different province each time for this great honor. From the moment the lucky mayor was notified of his signal good fortune, immediate and intensive preparations ensued. Garlands and festoons criss-crossed the two main streets to the town. Flowers completely covered the kiosk in the center of the little *zocolo* where the band played on Sundays.

During these two days of celebration various strolling trios appeared, guitarists flourished, and even mariachi bands dressed in their traditional costumes could be heard everywhere. Naturally all work was suspended, and when the President with his large entourage arrived, filling the one small hotel of the town, the joy of the populace was complete. Antonio Ruz also arrived in less spectacular splendor but with an equally large entourage.

The inevitable speeches which would ensure the following day would vary little from those the preceding year in another town. The emotionally freighted words, "Home", "Mother", "Country", "Future", and the new one, "Development" would ring sonorously and sweetly in the ears of the populace, their Spanish equivalents by far more attractive than in any other language. Then would come the fiestas, the dancing, the music lasting until dawn.

Miss Bennett had arrived by specially hired limousine over the almost inaccessible mountains which surrounded the picturesque village. A room had been reserved for her in the hotel, and as the morning of the fiesta came, she slipped almost unnoticed from her room in the provincial dress of the region. The excited help at the desk mistook her for one of the maids. Two long braids hung over her shoulders. She wore her simple blouse and gathered skirt with ease and handled her *rebosa* like an expert. The *rebosa*, a long wide scarf fringed at each end was a common part of dress for the women of the region who for centuries had found it convenient for carrying anything from small packages to year-old babies. Miss Bennett also found it convenient.

The place reserved for her

had been pointed out to her. It had an excellent view of the kiosk where the speakers would be. She estimated her distance and made her calculations. In the chilly early morning air, she hugged her rebosa to her and went off in search of some restaurant. She was hungry and was hoping for the best in the city, but experience told her she would eat tacos for two days before returning to the capital.

"You're new here," he said to her. His eyes encompassed her, and the expression on his twenty-year-old face was demanding. She had seen the same look before on certain matadors and prize fighters. She instinctively sensed trouble.

When she answered, she casually mentioned parents staying at the hotel, permission to eat out alone, and several brothers who might be looking for her shortly. But it was no good. He attached himself to her with dispatch in a most proprietary manner. Neither she nor Mr. Fuentes had calculated the effect of the woman alone in this small place. She quelled her frustration as this Carlos told her of his hopes and dreams, his plans for the future. He worked in the silver mines close by, and he planned to be married shortly. He had already bought his stove. It would take another six months with overtime to acquire

his record-player.

"And who is your fiancée?" she asked finishing the last of her breakfast. He had joined her and was now signalling for the check.

"I haven't decided on her yet," he answered with a brilliant smile. Look, you know that's the easiest thing to get. It's much harder to get the record player."

They both laughed. Yet, looking at him, Miss Bennett knew he was right. With the white open shirt, the white slacks, and the broad white regional hat with the narrow strings, he looked like some Hollywood star ready to go on location. There was also that unsettling intense look which she realized would have easily gotten under the skins of a good percentage of movie fans. But she was no movie fan, and Carlos had marked her as a potential prospect to preside over that stove he had bought.

"I don't mind the way you talk," he told her later. "I realize you're a 'pocha'. Yet I don't hold that against you."

This was an accolade. He thought she was of Latin American blood but born in the United States. These were not held in high esteem in these parts because of many who returned and professed not to be able to speak or understand anything but English.

"In fact," he continued, "you're going to be my guest today. You're going to celebrate this wonderful day with me."

"Oh, goody," she replied in English, her heart sinking. She knew well that nothing short of a useless scene could stop this determined young man.

Carlos, on the other hand, was giving her the acid test. If she could dance, he might think about asking her to be his novia. But that was important. Of course he knew well that a girl who dressed in that manner could cook well, but often they couldn't dance. After the speeches were over, he was going to take her to several places. He was not only a devotee of the more traditional dances of his region, but he was also an expert in the Twist. He planned to see if this pocha had lost all her sense of rhythm during her long stay in the United States. Meanwhile he wasn't going to let her out of his sight. Something of all this, Miss Bennett felt as they left the restaurant. She sighed. She resigned herself.

Several hours later, at 1:00 A.M. to be exact, Miss Bennett let herself in her hotel room and limped over to the one comfortable chair. Her wasted day was almost forgotten in the misery of her feet. She had worn simple shoes that morning, but high heels, damn it. And she had

been dragged around town to at least a dozen places where various types of music were featured. Contrary to the usual custom the town had only two churches, but many many places to dance, she bitterly reflected.

She knew her trail had been picked up by Fuentes' men whom she had pretended not to recognize. Yet there was nothing that even they could do without an inevitable scene, for she knew well that Carlos would not lightly give up his new friend. She had seen such men defend their pride to the death for far less.

She kicked her shoes to the other end of the room. Her telephone began ringing insistently. She limped over to answer.

"Yes?"

"I'll meet you back in Brisena City tomorrow." Fuentes' voice told her.

"I should have thought of that possibility," Fuentes in person said the next day. "Frankly, it never occurred to me." He smiled.

"Nor to me," she said. "But for a few hours, I might be the fiancée of Carlos Francisco Gutierrez y Gomez. I spotted your men. The least they could have done was to cut in."

"And get killed? You know the customs here don't you?"

She became abstracted as though concentrating on the

music, which as usual was in the background. She was now more herself being gowned in a Balenciaga original, but wearing bedroom slippers of soft gold leather.

"Of course I understand these things well," he continued, "Naturally I'm following each move. But others are getting a little, well; a little anxious." He gave her a whimsical smile.

She reverted to the present quickly. "I understand. That's the way it often is. The complete responsibility is on me. I am the only one to decide what to do at the time. I've never failed. And the reason is because I'm careful. There was no possible chance of success either time."

"Of course," he agreed. "The only thing is, to be perfectly candid, our—shall we say our big brother—knows absolutely nothing of the details. Those are left to me. All he knows is what he wants. Also we don't want to go too far into the publicity campaign we unfortunately started.

"Spare me the details, Mr. Fuentes," she said frowning. "It's really getting difficult to avoid listening and reading the periodicals. I just don't want to know anything. It's not even professional of you to speak about it. I have my work. I'm going to do my job."

For a moment he looked into

her expressionless eyes, recognizing the validity of her words. Of course he now understood her much better since he had searched, not only her deposit box in the hotel safe, but also her personal effects during her various absences from the suite. From there he had conducted his own additional investigations. It was fascinating, he thought, what things motivate people in various directions. The events which in some inspire dedication to God, even the nunnery, perhaps, in others inspire a completely opposite effect.

Had she known him better she would have recognized something different in his smile. Something rather superior.

The days passed much the same way for Miss Bennett in any city she happened to visit. In Brisena, her mornings were consumed by an hour's drive northwest of the city where Mr. Fuentes had one of his ranches. Here, dressed in Mainbocher slacks, knee-length leather boots and an Italian knit sweater, she went through various forms of target practice. In the afternoon she lunched alone in her suite. Occasionally she attended concerts and exhibitions of paintings. Her evenings were usually spent reading and listening to specially selected records. Two evenings a week were spent at

the piano. She was now discovering Albeniz and had almost memorized a *Sequidilla*.

The visits of Mr. Fuentes were few and she tried to discourage even these as they interrupted her schedule and made inroads upon her supply of brandy which was difficult to come by. Three weeks passed before he had anything significant to tell her. A most important dinner dance was being given. It was important that she attend.

"But if I work in such close quarters," she patiently pointed out, "I need a time-schedule for every moment of the evening.

He and his aide Pepe assured her this was forthcoming. "But who will escort you?" Both he and Pepe pondered a moment. It was not that escorts couldn't be equally furnished, but the three of them knew it would be better that her escort be a stranger, someone not identified with them. . . .

"Don't worry about that, she smiled finally. "I always manage a Patsy for these things."

"A Patsy? An English name?" he asked.

"An idiom in some circles . . . to you, a 'modismo.' In this case an unsuspecting but not so innocent casual acquaintance."

"I don't understand."

"There're plenty in every country. I usually concentrate upon the expatriate who needs

money."

The next evening, from the regular man assigned to follow Miss Bennett, Fuentes received one of his most interesting reports. She had appeared in the lobby of her hotel dressed impeccably in a long evening dress of pink brocade over which was a narrow white fox stole. It was difficult to avoid noticing a diamond necklace and bracelet. One of the hotel taxis had deposited her at the door of the small club devoted almost exclusively to a piano bar presided over by a North American who sang nostalgic songs from the States with a strong leaning to Vernon Duke, Cole Porter, and early Rodgers and Hart. Mr. Fuentes' man who never took his eyes off her from his position in the outer bar, could not say just how it happened, but an hour and a half later, Miss Bennett, with a North American in tow had emerged from the place and had departed for several other spots on the tourist path. They had said a long goodbye at the door of her suite.

"That must be her 'patsy'" Fuentes mused.

The Sala de Brillantes was one of the smaller rooms of the Nacional Palacio Hotel, but it was by far the most elegant. On this night, the scene could have easily been duplicated in similar

locations in Paris, Rome, London, or Madrid. The coiffures, haute couture, perfumes, all selected with an eye to France or Italy, mingled in a splendid melange of all the exquisite accoutrements of the overprivileged. The women somehow managed to be beautiful and distinguished at the same time.

There was also a strong flavor of a royal gathering due to the presence of every top government official of the country including that of Don Antonio Ruz himself. He wore his diagonal red order of the Castillo Rojo over his spotless evening shirt, and from his ample neck hung the medallion of the Caballero del Pais . . . both of which he had thoughtfully created and awarded himself through, of course one of his presidents. A more imposing man did not exist, Miss Bennett thought as she mechanically went through the receiving line. Taller broader and more imposing than any man present, he exuded restrained power.

Her escort, Jack Harvey had commented upon this along with his frank and witty remarks about moving in top brackets of the country for the first time. The champagne (specially flown in a month ahead thereby allowing it to become accustomed to the country) was naturally excellent. The dinner was superb,

the music properly muted and the speeches mercifully brief. The orchestras changed and they rose to dance. It was a good moment. But suddenly Miss Bennett put a hand to her head. "Look, Jack, I don't know what's wrong, but it feels like a migraine headache," she told him closing her eyes a little.

"Oh, goodness, Doll," he drawled in his customary synthetic British accent. "Do you have any medicine for this? Or do you want me to take you home?"

She covered his hand with hers almost blinding him with her six carat diamond ring. "That won't be necessary, Jack. I don't want to leave. If you could only get my medicine for me . . . in the medicine cabinet. I'll wait in the dressing room . . ."

She trailed off giving instructions and pressed her keys in his hand. Jack, considerably pleased, reflected that it just might be possible to pick up the small diamond clip he had seen her drop as they were leaving her suite. As he left, she went into the dressing room smiling as she thought of Jack's face when he would later discover that the clip was the only piece of rhinestone jewelry she owned.

As she repaired her make-up, two girls came in and took up the two pink satin poufs next to her facing the long mirror.

They continued a conversation which seemed to have had its beginnings far into the previous week.

"I still don't understand Papa," one of them said. She gazed in the mirror at the traces of tears then set about to repair the damage energetically.

Her sympathetic friend begged her to calm herself, and began speaking to the effect that every cloud must have a silver lining. But the other girl rejected this firmly.

"He encouraged me to see Mauro . . . to become engaged to him. He made all sorts of promises. Europe, our own house, everything. And now, look what happened." She busily applied a touch of cake powder under her eyes.

Her friend began talking in the voice women use while applying lipstick. "But Flor, let's be practical. Victor Fuentes is young, handsome and has a great career ahead. His father's a Cabinet Minister."

"You're just saying that to cheer me up. You know very well if it wasn't for his father he wouldn't be anything. Not a drop in a raincloud."

As the conversation continued, Miss Bennett wondered why it seemed to be her fate to be a spectator, as it were, to various bits of history in the making. All she now wanted was her mind

free to do her work. Any stories she needed could easily be obtained from the large selection of books she invariably carried with her. They usually ended more happily besides. For of course, she had immediately recognized one of the girls.

As she rose to leave, she was interested to feel a slight stir of interest within her. Most of her other jobs brought no sense of anticipation. She stepped out into the ambiance of amber lights, music and the splendour of the satin brocade silk and applique of the gowns whirling around to the music. Then came the sudden blinding unexpected memory. It was of another time . . . of another world.

She entered her suite unhurriedly. Jack had not returned for her, and she noted with a grim smile the clip was gone from its corner on the rug where she had managed to drop it as they left. She felt a little tired. How upset Fuentes would be, she thought. It was really too bad. Anyway she'd try a new song tonight on the piano to help settle that strange feeling she'd had earlier. Funny, she hadn't thought about it for two years now. What had happened? Then tonight. Before she could even consult her better judgement . . . What had motivated her? She dropped her fur on the couch and went over

to the piano. The brandy decanter was conveniently beside the music rack. Albeniz was demanding.

She continued to play as the bell rang and the three men entered her unlocked door, surrounding her at the piano. Young Fuentes was mottled. His father contained a calm which she had rarely seen, but she sensed something dangerous behind it. Pepe was merely bewildered.

"You'll pay for this!" young Fuentes spoke between clenched teeth.

Pepe seemed to be awaiting orders. Fuentes senior stared at her unbelievably. She looked up at them. For the first time, there was some life in her eyes. Young Fuentes came close to her.

"You fool. You crazy fool," he almost hissed. "You don't even realize what you've done!"

"General Antonio Ruz Ochoa is no more." His father said almost contemplatively.

"And to think I covered your exit." Pepe said bitterly. "Instead of our new candidate—you got our leader!"

Mauro Fuentes approached her threateningly. Suddenly in a quick judo move she thrust him from her. Her eyes were shining now. From her sequined low-cut gown she pulled an almost miniature twenty-two. Pepe drew quickly but held fire as he saw

her offer the jeweled butt to Fuentes who by now was in a purple rage.

"Why don't you shoot me then?" she demanded curtly. She took a step toward him. The words in Spanish were soft, inviting. "Máteme! Máteme!"

The father intervened quickly as he snatched the gun from her.

"Don't do her the favor!" he almost shouted. Don't you see that's what she wants?"

Young Fuentes cursed fluently, adjusted his jacket and left the suite slamming the door.

"Go with him, Pepe," his father said still watching Miss Bennett.

She had subsided and walked over to one of the couches, reaching for a cigarette at the low table. He followed her, standing over her as he spoke.

"Here is your special brandy, my dear," he said calmly pouring it for her. And of course, your book—let's see . . . Trollope this time?"

He turned on the music. "You must have your music too, No?"

She sank back among the cushions, accepted the brandy and stared back at him. Her eyes became wary. He continued softly now.

"You see, Miss Bennett, I happen to know you're already dead."

There was a long pause. **Then** she spoke. "Already dead?"

"To all purposes, more or less —dead."

"This is quite a cocoon you've woven for yourself," he continued indicating the room. Your luxurious tomb. The brandy, the music, the books."

"I wasn't aware that graceful living was unpopular."

"Not for some, Miss Bennett. But for you, it's a tomb. You're using it like cloroform. And I happen to know *you don't want to kill yourself*. You've still got that left over from your religion, no? And neither do you want the ignominy of the law punishing you. Because you despise the law. You're a victim of it, no?"

She gave herself a few moments by lighting another cigarette.

"I haven't an idea of what you're trying to say," she began conversationally. "I missed my target. I made a bad mistake . . . it's the first time for me. But in this game, that's the chance you have to take."

For the first time, Mr. Fuentes became really angry. His patrician face became severe and he changed his tone.

"You didn't miss your target because I happen to know your aim is perfect, Miss Bennett. Between the time you left your apartment and the time you actually fired, something happened to change your mind. And as dead as you are, as a woman and

as a human being, I strongly suspect it had something to do with what happened to you some years ago. You'll never tell me, I know."

She flinched. Suddenly she knew of his search among her things. "What do you mean? What are you talking about?" she parried.

Mr. Fuentes wielded the knife expertly in cutting tones. "Some years ago, in the States, a girl of fifteen was taken from her home by a group, raped and murdered. A senseless crime."

Miss Bennett froze. Her eyes became glazed.

"This crime was never punished by the law. For as in several similar cases, the verdict was by persons unknown."

There was complete silence.

"Then," Mr. Fuentes continued now seating himself beside her, "the mother of the girl, a young widow disappeared. She was never heard from since. Strange case. And it's really difficult to drop out of all existence."

She stared at the Picasso on the wall in front of her. The music almost absorbed the silence.

"Let's come back to this evening," he went on urbanely, not sure whether he had won or lost a point.

"There was the dinner. You danced. Then you sent your

escort away. You went into the dressing room. My man naturally had to wait outside. Yet, shortly after you came out . . . I have word that Flor Ruz and her friend came out too. Was there any relationship between this or simply coincidence?

A pause ensued. He continued almost angry still. "Because, you might know, Miss Bennett that Ruz was influencing Flor to marry my son because I was to have been the next president."

She held up her hand. "Mr. Fuentes, the world is simply full of coincidences. If we tried to analyze them all, it would be silly. Let's leave it at that."

"It won't be so simple. We now have to go through with our original plans. Even my son's plans—he can't have Flor now."

"Your country is full of beautiful girls."

"And that brash young president will probably put in a lot of crazy reforms. . . ."

"Your country could use a few."

He looked at her curiously. Now she seemed to have revived. She lifted her glance to him.

"But Mr. Fuentes, if you're your usual careful self—and I know how thorough and flexible you really are—somehow, I see the emergence of a new strong man—more intelligent—more retiring, but with more force. You have everything to work with."

A smile hovered on his lips. He finished his brandy, rose and bowed.

"I leave you to your lovely music, your ninety year old brandy, your specially made cigarettes, and your interesting book, Miss Bennett," he said. "Naturally, you won't be expecting your agreed compensation for this work tonight."

"Naturally not. It hardly matters. I've been a millionaire for some time now."

"Then, goodbye. I'll call you if I need you."

"Goodbye, Mr. Fuentes."

He paused at the door. "By the way, she would have been eighteen or nineteen by now wouldn't she—just the age of Flor Ruz?"

Miss Bennett did not answer. She continued reading. He shut the door quietly.



*slam
in
diamonds*

by S. L. M. Barlow

IT ALL came about because Miss Rose Brimbal went to the Symphony Concert in Boston. Having subscription seats, it was her custom twice a month to spend a night or two in town. As this jaunt was her one extravagance, it included a room at the Ritz overlooking the Public Gardens. (A legacy from her late aunt covered such expeditions most conveniently.)

As usual, she took the afternoon train from Gloucester, arrived for tea, and had an hour to read before preparing for the evening. By chance, she had taken the "Romance of Gems" from the shelves of the Annisquam Library (where she presided as librarian, curator, and town registrar) to read on the train. Before her adventures were over, several coincidences closed in on her, as it were, and among them the choice of a book was not the least ominous.

She had unpacked, hung up her evening gown, and ordered tea, when her bell rang. At the door was a young man ("everything about him was pointed," she said later: "his eyebrows, a

Rose Brimbal, librarian and curator of the Anisquam Memorial Library and Museum, and town registrar, has an uncanny faculty for getting involved, as SMM readers know, in things which have nothing to do with her profession. We found this out in MURDER BY CODE (SMM, May 1965), and in MONOLOGUE OF MURDER (SMM, Dec. 1961). And now. . . .

dark widow's peak, his ears and his shoes" . . .) He held a very small package in his hand.

"Brimbal?" he asked, with a faint French accent.

"Yes," said Rose. "Come in, please. You are . . .?"

"Pierre Veyron, from Carton-Buisson," he said and handed her the package.

Rose knew the name of the finest jewellers (Paris, London, Boston, New York) in town. But she could not imagine who, among all her modest if varied acquaintance, would be sending her some token from so illustrious and expensive an establishment. She hesitated a moment, then opened the package, removing a seal, brown paper, a small box and finally two layers of pristine tissue paper.

In her hand lay a segment of morning sunlight: a huge pear-shaped diamond of unbelievable brilliance.

Miss Brimbal gasped. "Is it real?"

"O, Madame!" The young man was so shocked at the question that he sat down on the nearest chair—as though he had overheard sacrilege.

At that moment there was a knock at the door and the waiter brought in tea and muffins.

"Two cups, please," said Miss Rose. She also was trying to regain her composure. "Now, Mr. Veyron, will you explain this

sudden Golconda?"

"But you ordered it, Madame!"

"I? Heavens no! I couldn't afford to insure it. Please let me see the address on the wrapping again."

A discreet card attached to the outside wrapper did indeed say "the Ritz" and "Brimbal"—but not "Rose Brimbal". It said "Marques Raul Hurtado y Brimbal".

Miss Rose sat down sadly. "There is no Santa Claus! No, it's not for me. Let us restore ourselves while you explain. Tea?" She handed him a cup. "Please tell me."

"Oh," he said, "it's quite simple. The Marques and his daughter came yesterday into the shop and stayed over an hour. You know we have or have had several famous gems: the Crowninshield, found curiously enough in Arkansas, small but perfect. Only six carats. And once, the great diamond, La Fiorentina, passed through our hands, after leaving the Austrian Crown. It disappeared during the war. But Senor Brimbal was looking for a Canary diamond to give to his daughter, the Condessa, as a present. To wear on a chain round the neck. She is very beautiful and has an olive skin and she preferred a yellow to a blue-white stone. You understand?"

"Of course." Miss Brimbal

waved a plump hand to indicate that her knowledge of gemology was sufficient. "And so?"

"We had this diamond in the vault. It has often been on exhibition (the Marques saw it in London) since it once belonged to the Princesse de Lamballe."

"Marie Antoinette's lady-in-waiting?"

"Exactly, Madame. But it was not precisely for sale. It was our *panache*, our trophy, as it were, how you say? Like Tiffany's hundred and twenty carat yellow diamond."

"I understand perfectly. But Carton-Buisson consented to part with it? For a consideration. . . ."

"Of one hundred thousand dollars."

Miss Rose's eyes opened wide and then shut in an effort to blot out the fantastic, the impossible. "I did not realize. . . ."

"But yes, Madame. And they paid in cash. And I have brought the beauty to them."

"Then for heaven's sake, wrap it up again. I can't bear the sight of it. With that sum, we could build a wing on the Annisquam hospital. It seems almost iniquitous . . . Forgive me . . . And now, I will explain. I am Miss Brimbal, plain Brimbal."

"I took you for the wife of the Marques whom we have not seen."

"Hardly that. Now let me tele-

phone the desk."

She made the proper inquiries and learned that the other Brimbals were indeed in the hotel and had a handsome suite only four doors down the corridor.

"Well, young man, I thank you for a glimpse of such splendor and I'm glad to have met you. May I drop by Carton-Buisson in two weeks or so to see your other gems? And now I think you'd best deliver the diamond to its rightful owners."

No sooner had Monsieur Veyron gone than the floor-maid, an old acquaintance of Miss Brimbal, came in on her evening round, with a great clanking of keys.

"Good evening, Anna," said Rose.

"Glad to have you back, Miss Brimbal."

"I hear you've distinguished guests down the corridor, with a name like mine."

"O, them? I can't make 'em out, Miss Rose. On their visiting cards it says they're Marquises or something but they live so simple. Nothing but Kosher food . . ."

"How odd," exclaimed Miss Brimbal. "A Jewish marquis from Spain! Tell me about the daughter. Beautiful?"

"That she is, Miss Rose. But daughter I think not. I do make up the couch in the sitting-room at night, but she sleeps in bed

with him."

"Heavens! Adding incest to injury? Of course not. Obviously she's not his daughter but a light-of-love to hang diamonds on. And at such a price! There is something extremely peculiar about all this. Thank you, Anna."

Miss Brimbal attired herself suitably, enjoyed a dozen Cape Cod oysters in the small dining-room down stairs, and went to Symphony Hall. The *Fontane di Roma*, a Bach Toccata and Fugue and the Brahms Second transported her beyond Jew or Gentile, but even during the music and far into the night in her room, the flash of a great golden diamond hovered before her eyes.

Back in her snug living-room in Annisquam, before a sparkling fire, Rose thought often of her encounter at the Ritz. Having a deep pertinacity (which some called "being nosey") she could not let the matter evaporate through any inertia on her part. One evening, shortly after her return from Boston, she telephoned her favorite nephew, Tim, who was doing research at MIT.

"Tim, do I remember correctly that your late room-mate is now on the Chronicle and doing police reportage?"

"Correct, Aunt Rose. Do you need him?"

"I'm not sure. How do I reach him?"

"Ronald Bird, Columbus 8,000."

Both boys had stayed many a holiday with Aunt Rose, and she mixed an affectionate admiration of them with an insatiable curiosity about their activities and a shameless desire to pick their brains, as well as a keen palate for the saltiness of their slang. She was tactful because she was intelligent and solicitous, but she was forthright in her demands.

Next day, she got Ronald on the telephone. "I have a feeling that something is odd about suite 79 at the Ritz. I'll explain later. Who's the house-detective there now?"

"Your old buddy O'Sullivan."

"Hooray for our side!" chorled Miss Brimbal. "I may have a cloak-and-dagger for him in the next week or two."

Relative calm descended on Rose for about ten days. Then the Symphony beckoned; but instead of an overnight sojourn she arranged to take three days.

Her first call in Boston was upon Messrs. Carton-Buisson. There, she was startled by the fervid onrush of Monsieur Veyron who greeted her breathlessly. "They want another!" he gasped.

"Who wants what? Another martini? Another suite at the

Ritz? Another girl-friend?"

"Another—a matching canary!"

"How bird-watcher can you be! Tell me all."

Monsieur Veyron achieved a relative composure. "The Marques came in yesterday and said—I quote exactly, as he addressed himself to me—'My daughter prefers earrings to a single dangle. She has two ears. Can you match my yellow diamond? It must be the same weight, size, cut, shape.' Imagine, Madame! We are all—how do you say, in a dather."

"A dither, a dather," said Miss Brimbal, "whichever, obviously you're in it. Sit here and tell me how you match Golcondas. Can't be many lying around for the asking."

"A dilemma. The horns are painful," said Veyron disconsolately. "But the Marques was fair, even generous. It was a great matter and Monsieur Carton himself came to consult. We are now in communion with Tiffany, with Winston, with Cartier, with everybody. You see, Monsieur Carton told the Marques that a pendant to his stone would be vastly more costly than the one he bought. It may have to be cut or recut. A good canary has exactly fifty-six facets. (Blue-whites have more.) It also has a faceted girdle. Such gems do not grow on every shrub. But the Marques said he'd go to one

hundred and seventy-five thousand."

Miss Brimbal was well beyond a mere gasp. "We are in the realms of fantasy. How long will the search take?"

"A day, a week, *qui sait?*" said Monsieur Veyron. "Eighteen carats are not at the carry of a hand."

Miss Brimbal translated mentally. "Yes, not always within reach. So now we wait. And the Brimbals?"

"They wait too."

"I wonder," said Miss Brimbal, and betook herself to the Ritz.

What with an exhibition of Incunabula at the Houghton Library, a show of Spanish pictures at the Museum of Fine Arts, a symphony concert and two dinners with friends at the Somerset Club, Miss Brimbal was prepared to pronounce the world as a fair and enchanting place. Even Golconda receded from her thoughts.

But on the day before she expected to return to Gloucester, she received another visit from Veyron. As usual he seemed breathless from excitement.

"We have found it!" he announced. "The diamond-merchants, Gulenkian, in New York have telephoned. We will have the exact duplicate!" And without pause he continued, "I was just passing, and, as you have

been so kind, I thought I should tell you."

Miss Brimbal thanked him and then, almost reluctantly, dismissed him. Her adventure had been resolved and had vanished into the normal thin air of a business transaction.

An hour later, however, her door-buzzer sounded and she admitted another stranger.

"Brimbal?"

"Myself."

"Here are your tickets for the Volumnia day after tomorrow."

"Young man," said Miss Rose with considerable acerbity, "you are in the wrong pew. Go to suite 79. I cannot afford Europe on the Volumnia any more than I can afford a hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars to buy a matching canary."

The messenger, convinced that he was dealing with a maniacal elderly lady, turned hastily down the corridor.

Miss Brimbal retired to a comfortable chair. Here is more than meets the eye, she thought. My nephew would say there's a gimmick lurking somewhere. Coincidence of name has pushed me into a blind alley. I'm as sure as of Judgement Day that there is, as Veyron would say, an eel under this rock. But how to put salt on its tail? Or does one tickle it, like a trout? Perhaps I should forget it and ring for a gin and tonic." And she did.

At nine-thirty the next morning her telephone rang. She removed the breakfast-tray from her knees and lifted the receiver. Veyron was on the wire. "May I see you at once?"

"In twenty minutes. The time, please, to be dressed respectably." And in due course Veyron appeared.

"I come to you," he said—and his haggard appearance was a shock—"because you have, from the first, known the facts and been so sympathetic." He drew breath and then blurted, "They have decamped!"

"I am not surprised," answered Miss Brimbal. "It was indicated, somehow; I can't tell you why, but it seemed inevitable."

"I knew you'd know. For us, a catastrophe!"

"My dear young man, will you speak plainly? Not necessarily in the tongue of angels but (as St. Gregory did not say) in the tongue of Anglo-Saxons. Simply, what . . .?"

"Miss Brimbal, dear Miss Brimbal, we procured the matching diamond in New York. It cost us \$175,000. Our commission to be five per cent. Gulenkian's commission perhaps the same. We have the jewel. And an hour ago we tried to telephone the happy news to the Marques. He departed last night, leaving no address. No nothing. . . . And we are, how you say, stuck!"

"O'Sullivan," said Miss Brimbal.

"Quoi?" said Veyron.

"Forgive me. The house detective."

Miss Rose got him on the wire at once and begged the favor of a consultation. He remembered her. Within ten minutes the three were assembled in Miss Rose's bed-sitting-room.

"A round of coffee?" Miss Rose rang for the waiter. "Now, I begin to see in a glass . . . lightly, shall I say. Monsieur Veyron, tell Mr. O'Sullivan the story."

It was not a long tale, but accurate. O'Sullivan said, "So what?" and Veyron moaned, "We are done for \$50,000."

Miss Brimbal adjusted a copious flowered dressing-gown. "I think," she said, "that the pieces fall into place. The Marques—God save the title—knowing you had advertised throughout all the trade that you wanted a specific stone and would pay—let me see—a hundred and seventy-five thousand, less two commissions—roughly a hundred and fifty thousand—got in touch with a dealer in New York (Gulenian, did you say?)—all honest and above board—and sold his canary diamond to him for one

hundred and fifty. The marquis and his fancy have evaporated. He's probably registered in police files somewhere."

"Cold comfort," growled O'Sullivan. "But I suppose we can fetch up with him somewhere."

"O yes," said Miss Brimbal. "He and his very neat profit of \$50,000 are sailing tomorrow from New York on the *Volumina*."

"Good work." O'Sullivan grinned. "I can stop that with one telephone call."

"Bless you!" Veyron was almost in tears. "We are eternally your—how do you say . . .?"

"Don't say it," said Miss Brimbal. "So you will pinch them (as my nephew would say) as they board the boat?"

"You bet," said O'Sullivan.

"And may I ask, what crime . . ."

The buzzer rang, the coffee arrived. A curious silence descended on the two men. In each of their minds, the majesty of the law appeared to be perched on a question mark.

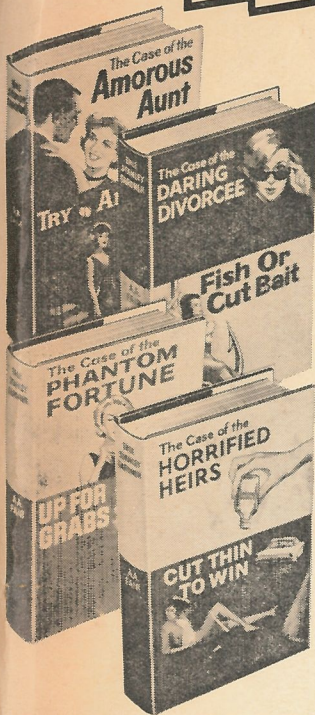
"What, if I may make so bold," continued Miss Brimbal, "just what *will* you charge them with?"

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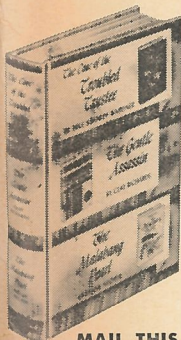
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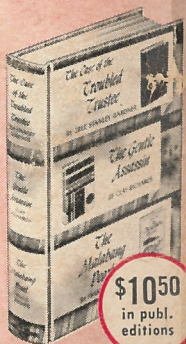
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