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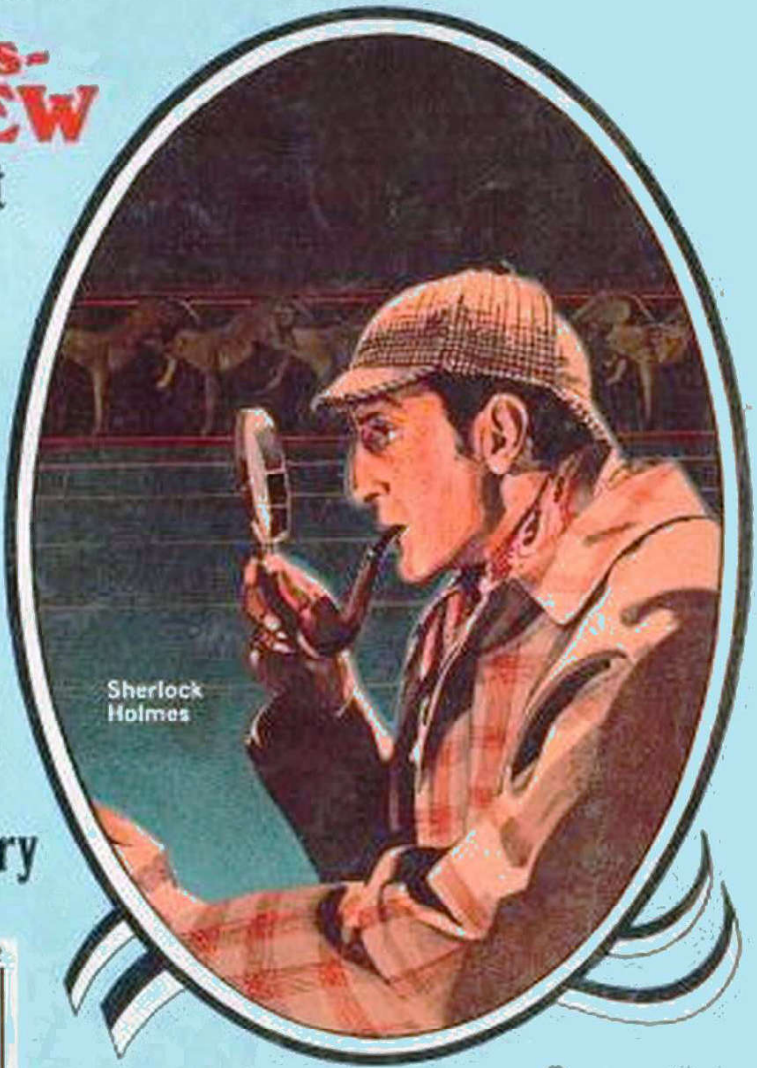

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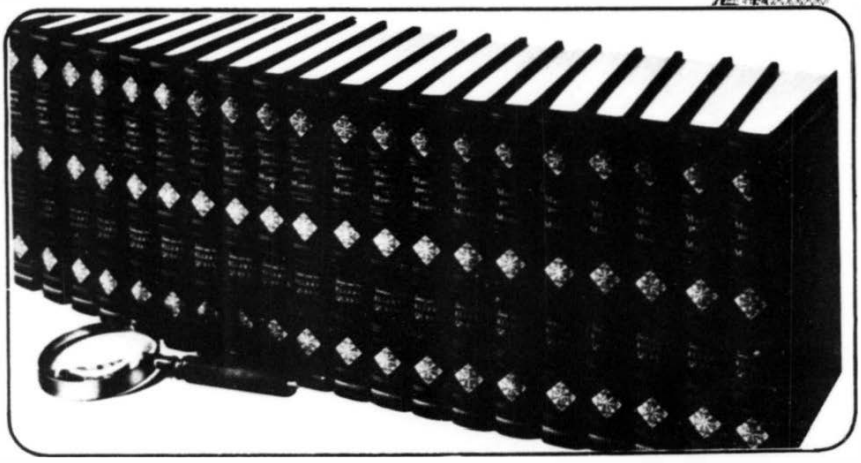

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a *NEW* Simon Ark story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Simon Ark, a tall man in black who "must be as old as sin," calls himself "an appraiser of irregular phenomena," with special attention to witches and demons, to Satanism and exorcism, to all the black arts and the occult. Including lycanthropy.

Now, there are stories whose titles are all you need to know to have your interest piqued. This is one of them—"The Man Who Shot the Werewolf"—one night when the moon was full . . .

THE MAN WHO SHOT THE WEREWOLF

by *EDWARD D. HOCH*

The strangeness at Cedar Hill began on an evening in late September. I'd returned home from my most recent adventure with Simon Ark convinced it would be years before I heard from him again. Even my wife Shelly, not always an admirer of Simon's, regretted that she'd missed his latest intrusion into our lives.

"Tell me all about it," she'd urged when I returned from England at the end of June. "What's Simon been up to, for heaven's sake?" And I told her what I knew.

By September we'd slipped back into the regular pattern of our lives. Vacations were over and the autumn publishing season was well under way. One of the less exciting books I'd edited for September publication was a collection of speeches by Hugo Maltz, candidate for governor of a New England state and a rising star on the national political scene.

Maltz was 38, handsome and articulate. He came from a wealthy family and he'd used the power of money wisely. If he

won the governorship, as many people expected he would, our little book of his speeches might become very important indeed.

But it was still a damned dull book to get excited about.

That was why I was more annoyed than curious when Shelly answered the phone as we were preparing for bed and came to me with the news that Hugo Maltz was calling from his home at Cedar Hill. "Bit late to be calling your editor," I grumbled, glancing at the clock. It was almost midnight.

She tried to soothe me. "He sounded very upset. You'd better speak with him."

I went to the phone and heard the familiar voice at once. Shelly was right—he was distraught. I wondered if he'd been drinking. "I've just killed a man! I need help badly—the police are here!"

I wondered what he wanted me to do. Was he planning to write a book about it? "Calm down, try to tell me what happened. Do you know the man?"

"No—no, it was a prowler. Out on the lawn. I—oh, God, it's terrible!"

I knew it was a two-hour drive to his home from where I lived, and that wasn't a trip I wanted to make in the middle of the night. "Is your wife there?"

"Yes."

"Could you put her on?" I'd met Donna Maltz only once, but she seemed like a sensible woman. Maybe she could tell me just what had happened.

I recognized her voice at once, and she was nearly as upset as her husband. "It's terrible," she told me. "He shot a wolf and it turned into a man!"

"A wolf! In New England?"

"He heard a howling outside, about an hour ago, and went to see what it was. We thought it must be a stray dog. The moon was bright and he saw it out on the back lawn. He came in and told me it was a wolf, and he went to get his rifle. I begged him to call the police but he said it would be gone by the time they got here. He went back outside and he said it came at him. I heard one shot and I ran out. He told me he'd killed it. But when we walked across the lawn to the body it wasn't a wolf at all—it was a young man. He was dead. Hugo had shot him through the heart."

"Are the police there now?"

"Yes. It's terrible—"

"What does he want me to do? Why did he call?"

"You'd better hear it from him."

Hugo Maltz came back on the phone. "Look, that day we had lunch you mentioned a friend of yours—a man named Simon Ark who investigates strange happenings."

"Simon?"

"I need him. I need him now or my chances in this election are finished."

"It'll get a bad press," I agreed. "Killing a prowler on your estate—"

"Prowler? But don't you understand? I think the thing that I killed was some sort of werewolf."

I spent the following morning trying to locate Simon. It didn't prove to be as difficult as I'd expected. Calls to a couple of university libraries where he sometimes pursued his researches into Satanism and allied topics yielded the information that he might be in Philadelphia sitting in on an informal conference on exorcism. I finally reached him there after trying a half-dozen hotels and then waiting while he was paged.

"My friend," his voice came over the phone. "What can I do for you?"

"One of my authors who's running for governor this fall is in big trouble. I'd mentioned you to him once and he says you're the only one who can help him."

"I'm in the middle of a most interesting debate on—"

"Just listen to this," I urged, and quickly outlined what little I knew.

He was silent for a moment when I finished. Then he said, "Interesting," and I knew he was hooked.

"Can you drive up there with me later today?"

"It'll take me two hours by train into New York—"

"I'll meet you at the station."

"Very well." There was a soft chuckle. "I never met a man who shot a werewolf before."

It was almost evening by the time we reached Cedar Hill, the sprawling estate in a suburb of the state capital. There were a half-dozen cars parked in the circular driveway in front of the house, and as we pulled up a private guard signaled us to a stop.

"No press!" he shouted. "Mr. Maltz is granting no interviews tonight."

I gave him my name and told him we were expected. He con-

sulted a list and checked off our names. "All right, park over there."

"It seems I'm not the only one he thought of calling upon," Simon remarked.

"These will be his political advisers and campaign managers. I imagine things are in quite a turmoil tonight. The story got a big play in the afternoon papers. His opponent is calling for Maltz's withdrawal from the race."

"Has he told the werewolf story to the police?"

"Not in so many words, apparently. He said he fired at what he thought was a wild dog or a wolf."

The front door opened and Donna Maltz admitted us. "Thank heaven you could come!" She was a tall brunette with a striking figure. Though she dressed expensively she still managed to be an asset to her husband's campaign in the poorer areas of the state. There was something about her personality that most people liked.

"Mrs. Maltz, this is Simon Ark. I hope he can help Hugo."

If she was the least bit startled by this tall man in black she gave no indication of it. "I hope so too. It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Ark. But please, both of you, call me Donna."

She led us into the spacious drawing room where Hugo Maltz was seated in his shirtsleeves with a half dozen of his closest advisers. He stood up as we entered and extended his hand. "You're a real friend. I won't forget this. And this must be Simon Ark."

Simon smiled and shook his hand. "You have a fine collection of books here."

Hugo Maltz waved away the compliment. "Law books, mostly. It goes with the business. Donna, have some more coffee made, will you? This could be a long session."

She glanced pointedly at her jeweled wristwatch. "How many are we likely to have for dinner, Hugo? We have to prepare things, you know."

"Who's thinking about eating now? I can't even remember if I've eaten all day."

"You haven't."

He ran a hand through his sandy hair. "Look, you fellows keep working on the speech. Sam, why don't you sit in on this meeting with my editor and Simon Ark? After all, you are my lawyer. Gentlemen, Sam Shugger. He's my lawyer, campaign manager, and best friend—all rolled into one."

Shugger was about Maltz's age, and I could picture the two of them playing tennis together at the country club. As we left the drawing room and went into a smaller adjoining study, he slipped his hand easily around the candidate's shoulders. "It's going to work out. Don't you worry."

"What's the speech going to be?" I asked, figuring I had a right to know after driving all the way up there.

"We may go on TV tomorrow night with a statement," Maltz said. "Tell the voters exactly what happened."

Sam Shugger nodded. "Take the wind out of Potter's sails."

"Potter?"

"My opponent," Hugh Maltz said.

"Sorry. I'm out of state."

He flashed his winning grin. "You're forgiven."

Simon cleared his throat. "Suppose someone tells *me* exactly what happened. Even though I can't vote for you either."

"Sure." Maltz sat down. "Sam, pour us a little white wine, will you?"

I followed Shugger to the sideboard to help him with the glasses. He glanced over his shoulder and said, "That Ark fellow must be as old as sin."

"You could put it that way," I agreed.

"Moves pretty well for an old duffer, though. Think he can help Hugo?"

"If anyone can."

We came back with the wine as Maltz was running through his story of the previous night. ". . . barking and howling. I thought it might be a dog in pain, so I went to have a look."

"You have no security guards?" Simon asked. "We saw one when we drove up."

"Hired him this morning. I have a bodyguard that accompanies me during the campaign, but we've never needed anyone on the grounds till now. There's a fence, you know, and it's always kept out intruders."

Simon nodded. "Go on."

"Well, as soon as I got outside I saw it—a great wild creature, too big to be a dog. I've done a bit of hunting out west and I recognized it as a wolf."

"Could you have been mistaken?"

"I don't see how. The moon was full and I had a good look at it. I went back inside to get my rifle."

Donna entered with coffee at that point, balancing the tray a bit uncertainly. I had the distinct feeling that she'd taken over the chore from some unseen servant in order to gain entrance to our conversation.

Her husband nodded to her and kept on with his account. "When I went out again, the beast was still there, down the hill at the end of the lawn. It started for me and I raised the rifle and shot it. One clean shot, right through the chest, at a distance of fifty feet. Donna heard the shot, of course, and came running. I went to her and told her what had happened. We could make out a shape on the lawn and we walked out to examine it. I kept the rifle ready, of course."

"And there was no wolf?"

"No wolf. Only the body of a young man in his early twenties, shot cleanly through the heart with my rifle. It was like something out of those old horror films."

Simon leaned back in his chair. "I see. Very interesting. And how long were you turned away from the time of the shot until the two of you started across the lawn? How long was this wolf out of your sight?"

"Not more than a minute, I'm sure."

That seemed to satisfy him. "Time enough."

Donna looked up from pouring the coffee. "Time enough for what?"

But Simon's reply was another question. "Has the dead man been identified?"

"He was a drifter," Maltz said. "Someone from the midwest. The police are checking on it. Donna and I never saw him before."

"So he could have been attempting to rob your house?"

Sam Shugger cleared his throat. "That is our present position with the local authorities. The man was trespassing at the very least. We don't think any charges will be brought against Hugo. It's the effect on the campaign that's really bothering us. Potter's people are already tossing around statements that sound suspiciously like slogans in the making: 'Do you want a governor who is trigger-happy?' and 'Do you want a governor who cries wolf?' The damn thing's hurting us, and I don't know if even a television talk can pull us out of the fire or not."

"It seems to me there are only three possibilities," Simon began. "First, your eyesight failed you, Mr. Maltz, and it was a man all along. Second, it was indeed a wolf that changed back to human

form as it died. And third, the whole thing is some sort of plot by your political enemies to discredit you. In the minute you were turned away, the man's body could have been substituted for that of the wolf. Even with a full moon you wouldn't have seen people moving among the shadows."

But Hugo Maltz himself had an objection to that. "I can't believe even Clifford Potter would resort to killing to win an election."

"He might not know what some of his people were doing. But come, show me the lawn where this took place. It's still light and we may find something the police overlooked."

We all trooped out on the back lawn and stared down at a line of bushes about a hundred feet away. The grass sloped gently to meet them at this point, with beds of rose bushes bordering it on both sides. "When I first saw the wolf it was down in those bushes," Maltz told us.

"I'm interested in one thing," Simon said. "Your immediate thought seems to have been of a wolf, whereas the average person in this area would have considered a large dog to be far more likely."

"As I told you earlier, I've hunted wolves out west. There was no doubt in my mind. There've been occasional reports of wolves crossing over from Canada, you know."

"Could you tell what type of wolf it was?"

"We hunted gray wolves up in northern Minnesota. It looked like the same breed—long fur and tail upraised as it ran. A sure sign of a wolf is that tail—it sticks out straight from the body, unlike a dog's."

I had to admit he seemed to know his wolves. Simon strode across the grass to a point about midway between the terrace of the house and the line of bushes. Here a wooden stake had been driven into the ground, and Simon asked, "Is this the spot where the body was found?"

Maltz nodded. "The police put that there for measurements."

"Who's in charge of the case?" I asked. I knew Simon would want to speak with him.

"Detective Sergeant Advic. He's a good man. I've known him for years."

Simon bent down, inspecting the grass in the fading light. "There's blood here. Did they take samples?"

"Yes. Advic knows his business."

"Perhaps I should speak with him." Simon headed next for the bushes, where he stooped to inspect some loose dirt. "There are paw prints here."

"He saw those too. But there's a neighbor's dog that comes in here sometimes, through the fence. They could be his."

"So there's no confirmation of your wolf story." Simon Ark straightened up. "Why should I believe it?"

"I'd hardly invent a story like that, would I?"

"No," Simon agreed. He was staring up at the house, bathed in color from the setting sun.

"Can you help me, Mr. Ark?"

"We'll see." He turned to me. "Come, my friend. We have work to do."

"What about the television speech?" Sam Shugger asked. "Shall we go ahead with it?"

"Wait until morning," Simon suggested. "We'll know better then where we stand."

We found Sergeant Advic at police headquarters. He was a big man who wore his hair short and probably had a temper to match. As we sat opposite his desk he was barking instructions into a telephone, oblivious of our presence. When he finally hung up he eyed us for an instant as if trying to place us in his memory. "Yeah, the Maltz shooting. You're investigating it for him?"

"That's right," I said.

"Can I see your private investigator's licenses?"

Simon Ark smiled. "I am not a private investigator but merely an appraiser of irregular phenomena, with special attention to the black arts and the occult."

"Yes? Well, we burned all the witches at Salem three hundred years ago, so you're a little late."

"Hanged."

"What?"

"Hanged," Simon repeated. "The witches of Salem were hanged, not burned. Except one who was pressed to death."

"Are you some sort of wise guy?"

"No, indeed."

"Hell, you're probably old enough to have been around then, so I guess I gotta take your word for it."

"Now look here—" I began.

"Okay, calm down. What do you want to know?"

"What have you discovered about the young man Hugo Maltz killed?"

"Not much. Name's Ken Twist. He comes from a farm near St. Louis. Apparently left home a couple of years back and has been drifting ever since. Age twenty-two, one arrest when he was sixteen for stealing a car, but they let him off. No other trouble with the law. He was working at a gas station here in town."

"Oh?" That seemed to interest Simon. "Then he wasn't just passing through?"

"He had a furnished room here, but just by the month. He wasn't putting down any roots."

"Find anything at his place?"

"Pictures of witches and demons, that sort of thing?" He said it with a sneer rather than a smile.

"That sort of thing."

"Nothing. He's clean."

"You think he was trying to break into the Maltz house when he was shot?"

"I suppose so. Or else he was hopin' to be first in line for a patronage job from the new governor."

"Are you supporting Maltz's election bid?"

The detective's eyes narrowed. "Can't support anyone publicly. That's the law."

"What about the bloodstains on the grass? Have you had the blood analyzed?"

"Sure did. It's all human, in case you were wondering. All Twist's blood type too. There's nothing to support this wolf story."

"Of course werewolves would have human blood, since they're really human," Simon pointed out.

"You *believe* in them?" Advic asked.

"A belief in lycanthropy dates back to ancient Greek legends, and some form of it is found in the folklore of almost every nation. Germanic legends, Chinese and Japanese tales, African tribal beliefs in leopard-men—all these are variations on the werewolf theme. There are documented psychiatric case histories of people who committed the most horrible murders while believing themselves changed into wolves."

Sergeant Advic smiled. "But Maltz says he *saw* the wolf! That's a bit different from some nut saying he turned into one."

But Simon was warming to his subject and would not be put off. "In Ireland around the year 1184 a synod of bishops was actually

convened to consider the question of whether it was a sin of murder to slay a werewolf. Closer to our own time, in 1870, a Portuguese farmer shot a wolf who had killed his baby son. When the wolf's body was found it had changed into that of a serving-wench employed by the farmer."

With all his facts, I noticed that Simon had still not answered the detective's original question of whether he believed in werewolves. Advic assumed it had been answered, though, and said, "All right. You go chasing your werewolves. I'm reporting that Maltz shot a prowler in the belief it was a large wild dog."

"There'll be no grand jury investigation?"

"Not unless Potter raises a stink before the election and forces the District Attorney to act."

"One other point," Simon said as we were leaving. "The bullet that killed this Twist youth. Was it fired from Maltz's rifle?"

"At that close range the slug passed right through the body. We couldn't find it. But the size of the wound was certainly compatible with a bullet from that weapon. There was a small penetration wound in the chest and the bullet followed a slight downward course from there, passing through the heart and exiting with a somewhat larger wound just above the waist."

Simon thanked him and promised to report anything we turned up in our investigation. Then he got the address of the gas station where the dead man had worked and we set off for our next stop.

The gas station, ironically, was located on a busy corner next to a large floodlit billboard proclaiming *Maltz for Governor*. "Think that's where he got the idea?" I asked Simon. "Looking at that billboard all day while he worked?"

"Perhaps. But exactly what idea did he get? Why did he go to the Maltz estate in the first place? Taking the suggested extremes, was it to rob them or to eat them?"

"My God, Simon, how can you think of such a thing?"

"That's what werewolves do, you know. They don't assume the form of animals just to be petted."

The manager of the gas station was a short burly fellow named Couchman. Seated at his desk behind a pile of striped litter bags that were an Exclusive Gift with All Fill-ups, he grumbled, "I've had it with police and reporters. No more questions!"

Simon slipped him a folded bill. "This is for your time, Mr. Couchman. We're investigating the case for Mr. Maltz."

Couchman snorted, but he accepted the bill. "First question the

reporters always ask me is if Ken acted strange."

"Well, did he?"

"Ken was a hard worker, in here at all hours of the day and night."

"But did he act strange?"

"Not so's I could notice. He was a nice young guy, minded his own business. The girls all liked him. He dated one from the hamburger joint across the street."

Simon glanced over at the building in the center of a landscaped parking area. "What's her name?"

"Joyce something. She can maybe tell you more about him."

"How did he seem last night? Tense, nervous?"

"Nothing like that. It was just another night. We worked together till the station closed at ten, and then he went across the street for a hamburger."

"You went home then?"

"Hell, yes. I got a wife and kids. Girls like Joyce are for single guys."

"Did Ken ever mention Hugo Maltz?"

"Not that I remember."

"Not even when that big billboard went up?"

"We didn't talk politics much, you know?"

Simon thanked him and we drove across to the hamburger place. It was one of a heavily advertised nationwide chain, but the girl behind the counter didn't look much like the ones in the television commercials. She looked more like an Eighth Avenue hooker. "Sure, I'm Joyce," she said. "I seen you over there talkin' with Couchman. Figured you'd be here next." She virtually ignored Simon to direct her remarks at me.

"He told us you saw a lot of Ken Twist," I said, taking up the interview. "You saw him last night just before he was killed."

"Sure. He always came here after work."

"How long did he stay?"

"Maybe an hour. It wasn't too busy, so we talked."

"He make a date for later?"

She shook her head. "Said he was busy. That was okay by me. I get tired of seein' the same guy all the time."

Simon interrupted at that point. "When you were with him, did you ever notice anything strange? What was his behavior toward pets? Dogs and cats?"

She looked blank. "I never noticed anything. They got a police

dog at the gas station and he used to play with it sometimes."

"A police dog?" Simon glanced back across the street. "We didn't notice one."

"Funny, I haven't seen it around today."

We went back across the street to speak with Couchman again. "The dog?" he repeated. "You mean Scotty? Sure, he's a big police dog we have around to discourage stickup men. Usually we leave him in the station at night, but once in a while Ken used to take him home to his apartment. He got along swell with Scotty."

"And where is the dog tonight?" Simon asked.

Couchman scratched his head. "Tell you the truth, this day's been so hectic between the cops and the reporters that I didn't even notice he was gone. Think he could be at Ken's apartment?"

"I'm sure the police would have found him if he was there."

"Well, there's a fellow opens up in the morning. He might have him."

"Could you call to find out? It might be important."

While Couchman was on the phone I asked Simon, "What's so important about a missing police dog?"

"Maltz said he saw a wolf and shot a man. Maybe he saw Ken Twist with a police dog on his lawn. Remember the paw prints in the garden?"

Couchman came back from the phone shaking his head. "He don't have the dog. Where in hell could he be?"

"We'll keep an eye out for him," Simon promised.

Back in my car, I said, "I suppose you want to drive around all night looking for that dog."

"The dog can wait till morning. He'll be easier to spot in daylight. I suggest we call it a night."

"Maltz said we could stay in their guest rooms."

"An excellent suggestion. Who knows? Perhaps the dog—or the wolf—will return tonight."

When we got back to Cedar Hill, Sam Shugger was just leaving. He'd stayed after the others and missed his ride back to town, so Donna let him borrow her car overnight. Hugo Maltz watched him drive off and then walked upstairs with us. He looked tired and just a bit haggard. "What did you find out?" he asked.

"Nothing yet," Simon said.

"We're going ahead with the television talk tomorrow evening. We're buying time on a statewide network for seven o'clock."

"Perhaps I will know something by that time."

We heard no wolves that night.
Not even a stray dog.

In the morning we had breakfast on the terrace. It was surprisingly warm for late September and the leaves had not yet started to change. From where we sat I could see the stake driven into the lawn, still marking the place where Ken Twist had died. I wondered how long it would remain there before someone got around to removing it.

"What will you say tonight?" I asked Maltz.

"I'll lay it on the line to the voters. I should downplay the werewolf angle, but I plan to tell them what happened. I thought I was shooting an animal and I hit a prowler instead."

"Will your opponent Potter let it rest at that?"

"Probably not. But it's six weeks till the election and maybe we can give the voters some real issues to think about in the meantime."

Simon Ark sipped his orange juice and said, "I'd like to call on Mr. Potter this morning, if he's in town."

"Call on him?" Maltz seemed startled. "What for?"

"There's still the possibility that he's somehow involved. Frankly I've found nothing to confirm the werewolf theory but there is some evidence to support my body-substitution theory."

"There is?" This was news to me, and I'd heard everything he had.

"Nothing conclusive, of course. Just a hint."

Hugo Maltz thought about it. "Sam will be bringing back Donna's car soon. Let's see what he thinks." Apparently Shugger was to be the decision maker in any Maltz administration.

Shugger arrived as we were finishing our second cups of coffee. He listened to Simon's suggestion and agreed with some reluctance. "If you insist, at least let me drive you down to Potter's headquarters and go in with you. These things can be touchy and I don't want you making some remark that could be misquoted."

"Is Potter at his headquarters?" Maltz asked.

"I saw his car out front when I passed. I'll phone to make sure." He returned in a few minutes and said, "He'll wait for us if we come down right now."

Simon got to his feet and I followed. Shugger held out the car keys to Maltz's wife but she waved them away. "I'm not going anywhere today. Drive them there in style."

The car was an expensive foreign model with luxurious leather upholstery. Sam Shugger drove it well, but about halfway into town he pulled off into a small shopping center. "I'm going to pick up a couple of doughnuts. I didn't have time for breakfast. Want anything?"

Neither of us did and he went in alone. "He seems to make the decisions for Maltz," Simon commented.

"I noticed that."

Shugger came out in a minute with two jelly doughnuts which he munched on as he drove. "It's not far," he told us. "Potter's headquarters are in the Plymouth Hotel. I was lucky to catch him there. He's leaving on another campaign swing this afternoon."

"Shouldn't your candidate be out on the road?" Simon asked.

Shugger munched the last of the doughnuts and dropped the wrapper into a striped litter bag hanging beneath the dashboard. "Sure. He was supposed to leave night before last and I wish to hell he had. Then he wouldn't have been home to shoot that guy."

"Why didn't he leave then?"

"Some trouble with his private plane. He decided to put off the trip till morning."

Simon was interested. "What sort of trouble with his plane? Could it have been sabotaged? Could a deliberate attempt have been made to keep him at home overnight?"

"It hadn't occurred to me, but I doubt it." He swung into a parking lot next to the Plymouth Hotel. "Here we are."

Clifford Potter was the Lieutenant Governor of the state, a man almost as wealthy as Maltz but 20 years older. It was a known fact that he'd accepted second place on the ticket four years earlier only with the understanding that he'd be heading it this time. Then along came Hugo Maltz, almost from out of nowhere, and what had seemed a shoo-in turned into a horse race. He greeted us at the door of his office and motioned us to seats. Then he quickly retreated behind a desk where his short stature was not quite so noticeable.

"I'm deeply disturbed about my opponent's troubles," he said, actually managing to sound as if he meant it. "But what can I do for you?"

Sam Shugger introduced us. "Simon Ark is an investigator of unexplained happenings. Hugo asked him to look into the events of the night before last."

Potter merely smiled. "I thought what happened was clear

enough. Your man was a bit too quick on the trigger."

Simon gazed at him with a slight smile and asked, "Mr. Potter, as Lieutenant Governor of this state, do you recall any reports of wolves coming over from Canada?"

"Wolves? Oh, no, I don't think we've had a wolf reported here in twenty years."

"Hugo Maltz thinks he might have seen a wolf."

Potter spread his hands. "What can I say? A man who shoots at anything that moves outside his house may imagine he sees a great many things."

"There's been a great deal written about so-called dirty tricks in political campaigns, Mr. Potter. I'd hate to think that young man died because of one of them."

"What are you talking about?"

"He might have been paid to sneak up on that house wearing an animal skin on his back. After he was shot the skin could have been pulled off him."

"And what purpose would such a stunt have served—except to get him shot? My campaign doesn't go in for tricks of any kind—certainly not the sort that costs lives!" Potter was obviously outraged at the suggestion. "I think you'd better leave now, Mr. Ark. I have nothing more to say."

Sam Shugger stood up. "Thanks for your time, Clifford. We'll be going."

At the door Potter asked, "What's your man going to say tonight?"

Shugger smiled. "Tune in and find out."

Back at the Maltz estate we transferred to my car and went off on our dog hunt. I honestly didn't expect we'd turn up the missing Scotty from the gas station, but Simon was intent on looking.

"What'll it prove if we do find him?" I asked, cruising the nearby streets at random.

"That he exists. That he may have been with Ken Twist at the Maltz home the other night. That he may have been mistaken for a wolf."

I grunted and kept driving. After another twenty minutes I was ready to give up when Simon suddenly tapped my arm. "Stop here."

"I don't see any dog. All I see is a woman out in her yard picking up scraps of rubbish."

"Exactly."

I parked the car and we walked across the yard to speak with the woman. "Has there been a dog in your rubbish barrels?" Simon asked.

She looked a bit startled and then replied. "There certainly has been—a big police dog. Does it belong to you?"

"We know the owner. How recently did you see him?"

"About ten minutes ago. He ran off toward the playground there."

Simon thanked the woman and set off through the back yards. A school playground loomed ahead, its swings and slides and jungle gyms empty in the early afternoon. I felt a little the way Holmes and Watson must have, stalking the Hound of the Baskervilles.

Except that this was a sunny afternoon in September, at a children's playground in New England.

"There he is," Simon said, tugging at my sleeve.

And then I saw him—a big police dog coming around the side of a teeter-totter. Simon crouched a bit as if expecting an attack, and I wondered what he was seeing. A werewolf, perhaps? Or the devil he's sought for so many years?

"Come here, Scotty!" he called out. "Good dog!"

Scotty hesitated a moment at the sound of his name, but when Simon repeated it he came running.

"He's only a big police dog after all," I said.

"Did you expect something else? Observe his tail."

"Looks like any other dog's tail to me. It certainly doesn't stick out straight like Maltz's wolf."

"Exactly."

"You mean after all our searching this isn't what Hugo Maltz saw at all?"

Simon bent to take the dog by the collar. "Come," he said. "It's time we were getting back."

We delivered Scotty to Couchman at the gas station and then drove back to Maltz's place. The candidate was closeted with Sam Shugger and his speech writer, going over last-minute changes in his television address. When they finally emerged, Shugger was jubilant. "It's a great talk, and we've got six key radio stations carrying it too, in addition to TV."

"Fine," Simon said. "Now I must speak to you both before we return to New York."

"You're going back?" Hugo Maltz asked, looking from Simon to me. "With the case unsolved?"

Simon merely nodded. "The case is closed. Come into the study, please, and I'll explain. Perhaps you'd better get Mrs. Maltz as well."

Shugger went to call Donna and she appeared almost at once from upstairs. "What is it?" she asked.

"Mr. Ark has something to tell us all."

Simon stood up, facing us, with his back against the desk. He looked for all the world like some aged but still vigorous professor about to lecture his class.

"First of all, I must tell you that my friend and I located the missing dog this afternoon and returned him to his owner."

"What missing dog?" Donna asked.

"The dog that accompanied Ken Twist here the night he was killed. The dog you heard barking, Mr. Maltz."

"Let's get to the bottom of this," Maltz said. "You told us last night there were three possible explanations—that my eyesight failed me, that I really did shoot a werewolf, or that it was a plot to discredit me. Well, which is it?"

Simon smiled. "I must learn never to limit myself in such a way. None of those is the true explanation. Your eyesight was perfect, Ken Twist was not a werewolf, and there was no plot against you."

"Then he was merely a prowler," Sam Shugger offered.

"A prowler would hardly come with a dog, especially a barking dog. No, Mr. Shugger, Ken Twist came for another reason entirely. And you shot him for another reason entirely, Mr. Maltz. You shot him because he was your wife's lover."

Donna Maltz screamed.

They gave her something to calm her down, and Simon Ark looked on sadly as they led her up to bed. "For two days she kept it all bottled up inside her," he said. "For two days she went along with her husband's story for the good of his career. But she had to break sometime."

Shugger came back into the room, his face flushed with anger. "What is this foolishness, Ark? Do you expect me to believe—?"

"I expect you to believe the truth. Ken Twist came to this lighted house, approached it with a barking, playful dog—certainly not to break into it. He was expected, and by whom?

You told us yourself that Maltz should have been away that night. He was delayed only by trouble with his private plane. Ken Twist was on his way to see the house's other occupant—Donna Maltz. Her husband must have suspected, of course. He heard the dog and saw the young man approaching. He got the rifle he kept nearby and shot to kill. Perhaps the dog gave him the idea for that far-fetched werewolf story—the dog and his memory of your telling him about my investigations."

This last was to me. "You mean, Simon, that he made up the werewolf story just to involve you in the investigation?"

"Exactly—but it was no great compliment to my abilities. He merely wanted the appearance of mystery, the investigation of something strange, to cover his real motive. If Ken Twist had been shot in his back yard without any of this wolf business, reporters might have dug up the truth. This way, if they dug below the public story of shooting at an animal, they would still find the werewolf story between them and the truth. Of course it was obvious to me that Maltz had not shot an animal. The bullet entered the chest and slanted slightly downward, as does the yard. A shot fired at an animal, or a man on all fours, would never follow such a path."

"But what was there to connect Donna with Ken Twist?"

"Maltz said neither of them had ever seen him before, yet her car has one of the striped litter bags Twist's gas station was giving away exclusively to its customers. I will admit she could have been a customer without ever encountering Twist, but it seems unlikely. Couchman told us he was in there at all hours, day and night."

"He might have gotten to know her and then decided to rob her," Shugger suggested. "That doesn't prove they were lovers."

"They why did she deny ever seeing him before? And why, again, would he attempt to rob a lighted house, accompanied by a noisy dog? No, everything points to his being expected—not by Hugo Maltz who should have been away that night, but by his wife, who had no chance to warn her lover to stay away."

Sam Shugger merely shook his head. "I suppose it's true, the way she screamed when you said it, but I still can't believe a man like Hugo would deliberately kill his wife's lover. There's something Victorian about taking a gun and—"

But it was Hugo Maltz himself who interrupted from the doorway. "You don't understand, do you? I knew about them, and I

made up the story about the plane trouble so I'd be here to catch them together. I didn't know I was going to shoot him until I saw him coming across the lawn, but then I knew. Don't you understand? He was fifteen years *younger* than Donna! And he worked at a gas station! If that ever got out the voters would do worse than defeat me—they'd laugh at me!"

There was little more to be said after that. Simon phoned Sergeant Advic as he'd promised, and we started back to New York. We picked up Maltz's speech on the car radio, crackling with static as we moved out of range. "Ladies and gentlemen," he began, "I come before you tonight to deliver the most difficult speech of my life. I have made the decision to withdraw from the race for governor and from all political activity."

"No werewolves," I told Simon. "And no devils. I brought you up here for nothing."

"Oh, there were devils," Simon corrected me. "Devils of the flesh and the more deadly devils of pride."

After that we drove for a long time in silence, listening to the fading sounds of Hugo Maltz's last speech.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

LEGAL LARCENY

by BARBARA JOYCE WEIL

To think that a small magazine
Could have started a near-murder scene;
'Tain't a dangerous thief,
Just my father in grief,
Screaming, "Who has my Ellery Queen?"

a *NEW* crime-detective story by

ANTHONY BLOOMFIELD

Roger was a public-spirited citizen who wrote his protests on the lack of social conscience in high places to the "Times," usually signed Indignant; and very good letters they were. This latest one caused a stir, with widening repercussions. It concerned the kidnaping of Sir Barnaby Frisk, and even more important, the un-British manner in which the Government had dealt with the ransom demand. . .

KIDNAPING—BRITISH STYLE

by *ANTHONY BLOOMFIELD*

A thud below slowly penetrated Roger's dreams.

"Ow-oo!" Caroline had been sleeping with her head on his chest. His abrupt movement sent her sprawling across the bed. "Damn and blast," Caroline said. "What's the matter?"

"Papers have come," Roger replied, throwing off the quilt.

"They won't walk away. Get back in bed." But by then he was almost at the door.

Roger walked quickly along the corridor, jogged down the wide curving stairway and into the hall. He picked up the roll of newspapers and carried them into the breakfast room. Tossing the others aside, he opened the *Times* on the table. His own name sprang out at him straightaway.

He read the letter through with care. Although the paper had published several, generally similar letters from him, the appearance of this one gave him a satisfying glow. He read it again. So far as he could tell they hadn't altered a single word. He smiled in unashamed vanity.

"Signed, Indignant, Tunbridge Wells." Caroline, bare as she slept, pink and refulgent in the morning light, stood just within the door.

"It's no joke, you know," Roger told her irritably. "This is very important."

"I know it is, sweet." To mollify him she said, "Read it to me. I want to hear it again."

"Sir," Roger began promptly, unconsciously assuming a graver voice, *"Kidnaping is an abominable crime; kidnapers are, no doubt, evil creatures, capable of any iniquity. However, an important issue of public conscience arises when their presumed treachery is taken to justify a parallel deceit on the part of the authorities. According to the reports in your news columns the abductors of Sir Barnaby Frisk agreed to release him unharmed on payment of one million pounds. This was raised in part privately, with, so we are told, because of Sir Barnaby's special position, a substantial contribution from the Government. The Government's action, however justifiable on humanitarian grounds, introduces important moral issues. . ."*

As Roger was reading, Caroline came farther into the room and tucked herself under his free arm. *"So far as is known,"* Roger, ignoring her, went on, *"the kidnapers were ready to keep their side of the bargain. Yet, when the exchange was due to take place, the police apparently attempted to set a trap. The sad result is that Sir Barnaby is still held captive, and we must assume his life is in even greater danger.*

"Unfortunate as this is, there remains another point of more fundamental public significance. It is my contention that only the gravest danger to the security of the state should permit the state, itself a party to the deal, to resort to such methods. Even if, as has been suggested, the kidnapers belong to some terrorist organisation, the peril is clearly not of that dimension. In a democratic society the ends cannot be held to justify such dubious means. The Government has compromised its integrity.

"Yours, et cetera," Roger concluded, a thoughtful look on his face as he folded the paper.

"Brilliant, sweet," Caroline said. "Shall we go back to bed now?"

"You can if you wish," Roger said briskly. "I am going to take a bath."

He was standing shaving when Caroline dashed in waving the paper. He almost nicked himself. "What the —" She cut him off by pushing the *Times* under his nose. "Look," she cried, pointing, "there you are again."

And there it was, under the heading, *A QUESTION OF CONCERN*. The article was precisely weighted. Without endorsing Roger's case against the Government, it conceded that grave moral and social issues had justifiably been raised.

"They're not exactly on your side, are they?" said Caroline, taking the paper back from him.

"Well, you wouldn't expect them to be." Roger was studying his soapy reflection in the glass.. "Still, it's not everyone who makes a *Times* leader, you know."

"Don't go getting swollen-headed now," Caroline said playfully.

The telephone rang while they were having breakfast. The B.B.C. producer wanted Roger to record an interview for *The World at One*. His letter, he said, had aroused much public interest. Roger hesitated for only a moment before accepting.

He was still dressing when Caroline called him to the telephone again. It was a girl at one of the commercial radio stations. A well-known disk jockey wanted him to take part in what the girl called a "talk-about." Roger again agreed.

"Do you think all this fuss is worthwhile?" Caroline asked him, with a worried expression. She had put her hair up by now and was wearing a sedate trouser-suit.

"Sometimes," Roger said, "you can be such a stupid little cow. Don't you understand, I want to get my views across—the more publicity the better."

"I was just thinking—"

"Well, don't," Roger snapped. "It's not what you're good at. I'll tell you what you're good at—" He put his arms round her and his mouth close to hers. She was still giggling softly as he left, with a wave, for Broadcasting House.

The B.B.C. interview went rather well, Roger thought. He was given ample opportunity to expand the points he had made in his letter. Then the presenter spoke with a back-Bench Member of Parliament, who stoutly defended the actions of the Government and the police. Afterward, however, in the hospitality room, the M.P. admitted the authorities were greatly concerned.

"Fact is," he said, "they've got themselves in the sweet violets now. Frisk may be all sorts of a two-faced crook, everyone knows that, but somehow they've just got to extricate him safe and sound."

"My point—" Roger was beginning, but the M.P. was unaccustomed to interruption. "And now they haven't a trick left to play." He waved his whiskey glass in emphasis. "They're completely in the kidnapers' hands. There's some pudding hit the fan in Whitehall, I can tell you. I suppose you know how Frisk got his knighthood," he continued in a lower voice. "It was that appalling Honours List when—" But Roger had heard the story before.

His spot on the commercial channel was a good deal less satisfactory. He was there, he felt, only in order to provide the disk jockey with the opportunity to express his own opinions, which were simplistic in the extreme. "You could send in a gunboat perhaps," Roger muttered at one point, but apparently he was what they called off-mike.

No hospitality was offered, either. As he was making his way from the building, a girl called him back to the telephone.

"Well, that was pretty bad," were Caroline's first words.

"Thank you," Roger said. "You called me just to tell me that?"

"No. To tell you there's a television crew waiting here for you."

"Television?" Roger repeated.

"With a film camera or something."

"Television. . ." He considered. "On the whole, I think not. Enough is enough. And they would probably be as cretinous as this mob here," he added, for the benefit of the girl listening.

From the radio station Roger went on to a cinema, then to a club, where he met friends who took him to dinner. This was followed by a mild session of poker, so it was well after midnight when he returned home. An ill-humored Caroline told him reporters had been trying to get in touch with him all day.

No other news had arisen to force Britain's first major kidnaping, Italian-style, from the front pages. In the morning papers Roger's letter and his *World at One* interview provided, in the absence of concrete developments, a talking point. Lawyers, churchmen, politicians—in the popular press, actresses and TV personalities as well—had been extensively quoted on the points Roger had raised. "So what are you going to do now, Mr. Social Conscience?" Caroline was still touchy with him.

"I don't think I have to do anything," Roger replied mildly. "The issues are being discussed. The ball's started rolling. I have made my commitment plain. I think my part's finished."

"Oh, yes!" The way she sneered gave her a look which Roger intensely disliked.

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"I think you are revelling in it," she said. "Every time you see your name mentioned, the look on your face—"

He seized hold of her, genuinely angry. "Look here," he said, "I'm not in this for thrills. And I'm not the one who's jumping on a bandwagon. I am—if the term's not too pretentious—a concerned person. Perhaps you wouldn't understand what that means. I am concerned about all kinds of rotten practices perpetrated in *my* name—and in your name too." He dug his fingers into her shoulders.

"You've read," he went on, in a quieter tone, "the other letters I wrote. They are my *bona fides* for any skeptics. I am a man who is concerned about unworthy standards in high places. I want to play my part in remedying them to the small degree that lies in my power. Is that clear?" he finished, pushing her hard.

"Roger," Caroline cried out, "you really are hurting me."

The next day Roger was edgy and withdrawn. The papers still carried the kidnaping story prominently, but his letter was no longer considered newsworthy. Apparently there had been no fresh word from the kidnapers. It was speculated that, after the security forces' failed coup, Sir Barnaby had been killed.

Her attentions obviously unwelcome, Caroline kept out of Roger's way. When the telephone rang, instead of shouting for him, she walked softly into the plant room. Roger was lying flat on his back staring up at the intricate network of creepers. "For you," she said in a whisper. "It's the Home Office."

He got up slowly, without looking at her. Caroline waited, giving him time and space, before following him.

"This is a free country," she heard Roger shouting. "I am entitled to express my opinions, even if the Government doesn't like them. I don't see where the Home Office comes into it. We are not living in a police state yet!" Caroline couldn't see his face. She had never heard him speak in this shrill tone before, though, even in rage.

"That's what you say—just a word with me." As he spoke, Roger's hand was drumming on the lacquered Chinese table. "I know what that means—the heavy stuff. I shall get in touch with the editor of the *Times*. I shall speak to my friend." He named the M.P. who had appeared on the radio program with him.

There followed a silence, which prolonged itself. "Very well,"

said Roger, his hand still. "I suppose I must accept your assurance." There was a briefer pause. "Room 508," Roger was obviously repeating. "Yes, I've got that."

He put the receiver down gently. "They want to see me," he told Caroline in a flat voice. "Tomorrow morning, ten o'clock." His face seemed drained. It reminded her of how he looked after intense physical exertion.

"Well," asked the Minister, "what do you say?" Up until then he had left nearly all the talking to the other two, the Civil Servant and the Commissioner of Police.

Roger's mouth opened, but no words came out. He was sitting in a deep armchair, coffee cup and saucer in his lap. He bent forward now, covering the silence, and placed the cup and saucer shakily on the carpet.

"Naturally, we don't like this business," the Minister said. "Not a bit. Any more than you do, of course. It's certainly not the way we would have chosen."

Roger caught the policeman's movement out of the corner of his eye. The policeman, he got the impression, was against the whole thing.

"But, you see, we have no choice," the Civil Servant put in.

Roger turned his head to face him. The Civil Servant was as smooth as satin, but an anxious self-concern stared out of his eyes. "No," Roger said, "you don't really, do you? Not after the mess you made of it last time."

"Yes, well. . ." The Minister leaned forward. "We know your views. After all, that's why you are here, isn't it?"

"In fairness, Minister—" The policeman was really addressing Roger. "There was no mess. They just weren't ready to hand him over then, that's all. It .was a rehearsal from the start—they wanted to see what we would do."

"Whether you'd play it straight, you mean?" Roger asked. "Whether you were going to keep your side of the bargain."

"For God's sake," said the policeman. "It's not a game of cricket. We're dealing with murdering bloody villains."

"Not murdering," the Minister said hastily. "There's no evidence at all of that. If we do as they say, no doubt Sir Barnaby will be released unharmed. We have every reason to believe," he added weakly.

"The position," the Civil Servant said, "is that we accept the

principle of an intermediary. Our Continental colleagues tell us this is standard practice. Frisk—Sir Barnaby—has no suitable relatives. From the abductors' point of view—you have to see it from their point of view—their nomination of yourself has a simple logic. You are known as a man of high moral standards. In this case, particularly, you have declared yourself strongly against any double-dealing. After your pronouncements—this is the way they are apparently thinking—it would be inconceivable that you would lend yourself to any trickery. I think that sums it up, Minister."

"And there won't be?" Roger asked.

"Er, what's that?" the Civil Servant stammered.

"Any trickery."

"We give you our absolute assurance," the Minister stepped in again. "Absolute."

"You're going to pay up?" Roger persisted.

The policeman could not restrain a grunt.

"We are going to pay up," the Minister agreed. "With your help as a public-spirited citizen."

"All expenses paid, of course," the Civil Servant said, filling Roger's silence. "Loss of earnings and such like."

Roger ignored him. He spoke directly to the Minister. "I really don't know. Of course, I should like to help. It's just that—" His fingers were tapping up and down on the side of the chair. He could hear the anxiety in his voice. "I'm not a man of action. Anything like this is way outside my experience. And it's going to be just me and them. If they are terrorists they're unpredictable, aren't they? I mean, they could be . . . ruthless."

"We don't think they are," the policeman said. "Either. We think it's a home-grown criminal gang cashing in on a new racket."

"And that there is no personal danger involved," the Minister quickly affirmed. "Isn't that right, Commissioner?"

"Yes, sir."

"Absolutely none at all." The Minister smiled disarmingly. "Otherwise, we couldn't possibly invite you to put yourself in this position. You appreciate that, don't you?"

"I suppose so," Roger said uneasily. All three men were watching him. His own breathing sounded quite unnaturally loud. He could sense the policeman's contempt. Then, without speaking, Roger nodded his head—and experienced an odd sense of relief.

"Good man! I never doubted you." The Minister rose and held his hand out. "And let me thank you on behalf of Her Majesty's Government."

It took Roger longer to get up from his low chair. He knew he must be looking as limp and worn as he felt. One of them must have pressed a bell. A flunky came in with a portable bar.

"I shall leave you now with these gentlemen," the Minister said. "They will give you all the details."

A thin drizzle was falling, just enough to compel the use of the windshield wipers. He drove slowly, automatically, his mind anxiously occupied. His own car: Roger had insisted on that. The bags on the seat behind contained—he'd seen with his own eyes, insisting on that too—£1,000,000 in various denominations, the notes all used.

He kept looking in his rearview mirror, though the two-lane B road, now running straight and level through a Forestry Commission plantation, was practically deserted. At his speed any following cars soon overtook him.

The lane was to the left, where the conifers ended and the land was flat and barren. There was a map open on the seat beside him, but he didn't need to consult it; he'd studied it sufficiently in advance.

The lane was winding so that driving required a little more concentration. He went on throwing quick glances at his rearview mirror, but more as a reflex action. He looked at the clock in the dashboard, and then, immediately, at his own wristwatch.

The descent was not steep enough to require a change of gear. At the foot the crossroads was marked by a signpost, which had tilted and whose faded lettering was scarcely legible. Roger had no need to read it.

He backed into the rutted entrance to a field which appeared abandoned; it was rank and marshy. The gate was gone from its hinges, and overgrown hedges blocked his view. He cut off the engine. He looked at the clock and his watch again. He turned down the side window a few inches.

Reason told Roger he had nothing to fear, but his throat was as dry as sandpaper. He kept swallowing unavailingly. His fingers began drumming against the ledge.

The figures appeared—Roger hearing nothing; they might have come out of the ground—at the end of the straggling hedge. The

one in front was tall and stooped, giving him the look in his stocking-mask of some extinct reptile emerging from the misty swamp. Behind him another masked man supported a heavier, plumper third figure whom, even though his head was down, Roger recognized as Sir Barnaby Frisk.

The tall man leaned down to open the door on the driver's side. Through the stretched nylon he seemed to give Roger a questioning look. Then his eyes went to the bags on the back seat. He opened the rear door, took out the bags, put them on the muddy ground, and looked inside them. Roger wanted to say something to him, but thought better of it.

Without attempting to count the money, the man closed the bags. The two of them took hold of Sir Barnaby and guided him round the car. They helped him into the rear seat, propping him in the corner. He seemed to mutter an indistinct word of thanks. Roger knew he must be under heavy sedation.

The car door was closed, gently. The two men came round to the front again. For a moment they peered in at Roger, their faces all bone. Then, as they stepped back, the tall man raised his hand casually, and Roger started the engine and drove out of the field.

In the lane he looked in his mirror. Sir Barnaby's eyes were open though his head was lolling. "Are you all right?" Roger asked. He wasn't really expecting an answer. He had spoken simply to relieve his unbearable tension. His arms felt stiff and numb; he had to fight to contain his bladder.

The drizzle had hardened into a steady rain. Gradually, as he drove, Roger's tension subsided. By the time he was on the B road, traveling fast, he felt light-headed, almost giddy from relief and the exhilaration of success.

At what the Civil Servant called a de-briefing, the Minister thanked Roger warmly on behalf of the Government. Then he left him with the Commissioner, accompanied by two other policemen.

"We're going to get these clever lads," the Commissioner told Roger. "Don't think we're not. They can't be allowed to get away with capers like this. Not in this country. A million bleeding pounds! To start with"—giving him a hard look—"what we need from you is every single detail. What happened at the handover. Minute, down to the last button. Unless," he added heavily, "you reckon that's not cricket, old boy."

Roger ignored the sarcasm. He described everything that took

place at the crossroads as thoroughly and accurately as he could, omitting only his own apprehensions. The policemen weren't interested in him, anyway. The masks they seemed to have expected. What disappointed them particularly was that not one word had been spoken.

"Clever lads," the Commissioner said again, when they had finished questioning and re-questioning Roger, until his head was swimming. "We'll get them all the same," he declared, although with less conviction, Roger thought, than when he had said it the first time.

The police had simply issued a brief statement saying the ransom had been paid and Sir Barnaby released. Heavily drugged, as Roger had supposed, but otherwise unharmed, Sir Barnaby was now secluded in a private clinic. The hunt for the kidnapers was being continued.

It was three days before the newspapers got wind of Roger's involvement.

Half a dozen reporters and two television news crews were jostling in the street outside, Caroline having refused to admit them to the house.

"Quite right, too," Roger told her, as he slowly dressed. "I'll do them all in one go. I'll hold a proper press conference—I don't see why not." He struck an attitude before the mirror like a politician rehearsing a speech. "After all, it's not everyone who would have gone through that ordeal. There's no need for any false modesty. You think this suit will be appropriate?"

His humorless self-importance made Caroline angry. She also feared for him when he was like this—as though he had lost his sense of proportion. She tried without success to laugh him out of it. Then she called him a hypocrite, an exhibitionist—

"What was that?" Roger asked, still smiling at his reflection.

"Getting your kicks like those poor men in dirty macs who—" His open hand against the side of her face cut her off.

"Point one,"—Roger was knotting his tie carefully—"you don't talk to me like that. Point two, you ought to be bright enough to recognize the inevitable. The media are not going to give up, and the public have a right to be fully informed. They're not going to get Frisk's side of it, as he's being smuggled out of the country. So once I've spoken to them that's it. Finis. End of story. Unless, of course, the police catch the kidnapers." He turned from the glass.

"You can let them in now. And for God's sake wipe your eyes—I didn't hit you that hard."

Roger's prediction proved correct. After his "press conference" the media left them alone. Reports concentrated on the "so far apparently fruitless" police investigation. One paper carried a blurred photograph of Sir Barnaby Frisk, hat against his face, dashing up the steps to a private airplane.

Caroline, however, was still nervous and distressed. The smack on the face had rankled. She hadn't looked at his interviews on television. She read the papers only secretly, after he had gone out. Roger seemed to be still preening himself; and when she refused to play up to him, he became patronizing in the way she particularly detested. Two nights running Roger walked out in a huff, and resentment and worry drove her to the gin bottle.

The second night, when he returned, Caroline was lying on the sofa, the papers with his picture torn to bits, strewn over the floor. He had two bottles of champagne in his hands—she could just about notice that—which he dropped on a chair. When he came to the sofa she let out a long howl and lashed out with her legs.

They didn't stray far from the house for the rest of the week.

"So now, little mongoose," he told her, "the hero is dead and done. I have had enough of being a public-spirited citizen."

"That's nice," Caroline murmured ambiguously.

"No more interviews. No more broadcasts. I don't think I shall write to the *Times* again, either."

"Mmmm," Caroline sighed. She lifted her head. "Perhaps you ought to, sweet."

"What?" He looked at her in surprise.

"No good reason to stop."

"You're right," Roger said after a brief pause. "Now and again, anyway."

"They were such good letters, sweet."

"They were rather, weren't they?"

London lay far behind them. It was a gloomy day, very like the one on which Roger had his rendezvous at the crossroads. Their route, however, lay in a quite different direction—although, as if from some unconscious memory. Roger kept looking superfluously in his rearview mirror.

The village consisted of little more than a church and a pub and half a dozen small uninspiring shops. Beyond it the house at the end of the road was drab and anonymous.

The man who admitted them led the way up the stairs and along a passage to the rear. Entering the room he had noticeably to stoop because of his unusual height.

There were three other men in the room, and a woman a little older than Caroline. Their greetings were exuberant, with just a shade of deference. The woman put drinks into the newcomers' hands. The tall man proposed a toast to Sir Barnaby Frisk.

The ransom money was already stacked in neat portions on a table. Roger recognized his pile, for it was somewhat larger than the others. Accepting another drink, he left Caroline to count the money—as, over the varied years, had become their custom. He knew how much she enjoyed doing it. She had told him once—not entirely playfully, he thought—it made up for what an evil, cunning creature he was.

Alexander Clark Hemming, who would like to be called the Great, is a very busy man—too busy to remember birthdays. . .

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, DARLING

by JOYCE HARRINGTON

It isn't so much that one really *wants* to be reminded that another year has gone down the drain or up the spout or however you want to put it. At any rate, kaput. I can live quite nicely, thank you, without singeing my eyebrows on all those candles. And there's no sane reason for making a public spectacle of the event, only to suffer the well-meant congratulations of friends, compliments that somehow turn into stinging nettles that itch and burn the tender sensibilities of the aging celebrant. I can hear them now.

"Darling, you don't look a day over twenty-nine."

"Here's to the birthday girl! I'd offer you a drink, my child, but first you have to prove you're of age."

". . . but, of course, you don't remember that." This one is obligatory whenever the speaker has been reminiscing and the nostalgia game has churned up the Great Depression, the Lone Ranger on radio, Orphan Annie mugs, the Battle of the Bulge, or the conquest of Mount Everest. You are caught in a cleft stick. If you admit remembering, you instantly date yourself; and if you agree that you are much too young for any personal recollection, everyone knows you are lying.

And, of course, and inevitably, "You're not getting older, you're getting better." Mixed blessings on the advertising whiz kid who invented that line.

Birthdays! Who needs them?

How clever of the Russians, or whoever it was, who celebrated name days. You were named after a saint and thenceforth, throughout your life, you had a day of your own on which to be congratulated with no smarmy nonsense about the years that had slipped away. No embarrassing overlooking of the stray gray hair or the additional "laugh lines," as we ruefully call them nowa-

days, for all those Elizavetas and Ekaterinas of the past. I wonder what the Soviets celebrate in place of name days now that the saints have all been banished to some Siberian kind of limbo.

But can you imagine the pantheon of saints we would need, given our current practices in the naming of the young, to provide a name day for everyone, should we decide to eliminate the detestable birthday celebration? For myself, it would be no problem. I am plain Joan. A flashy kind of saint to be sure, given to hearing disembodied voices and dressing up in men's clothing, but one whose day I would be happy to adopt as my own providing all flaming objects such as candles, stakes, and bananas flambées were kept well under control.

But what about all those up-and-coming Samanthas and Fleurs and Cleos, not to mention the Jasons and Todds and the inevitable crop of Elvises? Every day of the year would have to be dedicated to a name, possibly to two or three names in the case of those that have achieved less than national popularity. Envision, if you will, celebrations in remote outposts on the day devoted to all the Mortimers, Mabels, and Aramintas under the sun. Of course, the whole thing would have to be subject to Federal regulation, lest the ever-popular Susans and Johns form power blocs and contrive to have their name days designated in the balmy spring or dramatic fall months, leaving the dog-days of summer and the gloom-days of winter to the unfortunate Gertrudes and Homers.

Personally, it doesn't matter a whit to me when St. Joan's day falls. Perhaps I'll look it up sometime and treat myself to a new outfit or a day at Elizabeth Arden's or a soppy, maudlin solitary binge on that day each year. But name day or birthday, it would be all the same to Alexander. Unremarkable and unremarked.

Aha, you say. Now we come to the crux of it. I've just had a birthday, you say, and no one noticed. Not precisely. Actually my birthday was weeks and weeks ago, and there was a gratifying flurry of cards and a few well-chosen gifts from friends and relatives. Much appreciated, although evoking an astonishing array of feeling. Another year gone by and I haven't paid that visit to my sister and her brood in Denver. Guilt. How kind of Rachel to remember me, and her husband dead not six months. Sadness. A funny card from an old boy friend whose birthday is the same as mine. He never forgets and I always do. Regret? A heavy book from a feminist friend and a light one from my scatty cousin who

has laughed her way through four divorces and is about, she announces in the enclosed card, to marry number five. I will read both some day and perhaps be spurred to change my life. But in which direction?

And from Alexander? Well, Alex, you see, is very busy. (And when is Alexander's day? There must be one, if not for a saint, at least for the Czar of that name, or for the one called the Great. I'll have to look it up.) Alexander Clark Hemming, who would like to be called the Great, is a very busy man. He has an office at which he spends long hours every day and often much of the night. He has a secretary who types his terse commanding memos and diverts all unnecessary phone calls. In order to be considered necessary, I now have to declare a state of emergency, and lately I have been required to state the nature of the emergency.

"Mr. Hemming is in conference. He cannot be disturbed."

"Miss Wanderley, this is an emergency."

"May I tell him the nature of the emergency?"

"No, you may not."

"Then, I'm sorry, Mrs. Hemming. He left strict orders."

Bite your tongue, Wanderley. I know you in all your dreams and ambitions. You haven't been the first and you're a long shot from being the last. And even if you should, by some strange quirk of fate (accident, suicide, swift or lingering disease), take my place, do you think you would fare any better? Don't you know that you would be succeeded by a long string of Wanderleys, all pantingly eager to work long hours and provide consoling coffee breaks to the prince of industry? Haven't you ever noticed, Wanderley, that when the coffee is cold and you rise from the cushiony depths of that oversized sofa I chose for his office, it's back to the IBM Executive for you? Think about it, Wanderley. I do.

Wanderley, of course, is English. Cool, blonde, and efficient. Armored in the rote pronouncement of protective formulas. Intimidating to the unprepared.

"Do you have an appointment?"

"Mr. Hemming does not accept unsolicited proposals."

"May I tell him the nature of your emergency?"

But I am not intimidated, Wanderley. I have been prepared by 15 years of watching Alex Hemming rise to the top. Fifteen years of Christmas presents selected at the last moment by you and your predecessors. Don't you remember?

"Miss Wanderley, run around to Tiffany's and pick out something for my wife. And charge a little something for yourself."

I have quite a nice collection of empty Tiffany boxes on a shelf in one of my closets. How about you? But what happened to my birthdays, Wanderley? In your cool, efficient way how could you let him overlook the birthdays? Or did he simply never include them on your agenda of secretarial services, other things being more important? Shame on you, Wanderley.

On the other hand I will not forget *his* birthday. You're going to love it, Wanderley. Well, maybe not love it exactly, but I'm sure you'll be thrilled to pieces at your little part in commemorating Alex. He's already told me that he'll be staying in town all week (how nice for you, Wanderley)—the trade show, the difficult Japanese matter, the labor trouble in the Milan factory, the countless major and minor crises requiring the hand of the master. And I have already told him that I will be busy all week organizing the Art Show for the benefit of St. Hilda's Home for Unwed Mothers. He does so like for my name (actually his name—Mrs. Alexander Clark Hemming) to appear on programs and in publicity. It's good for business and it keeps me out of trouble. I've never been a mother, unwed or otherwise.

So he won't be expecting any kind of celebration on his birthday. Which is tomorrow. This afternoon I will telephone Wanderley, and the conversation will go something like this.

"Miss Wanderley, this is not an emergency."

"How may I help you, Mrs. Hemming?"

"Yes. That's it, exactly. I need your help. I'm going to enlist your aid as a conspirator, shall we say."

"How exciting." With all the enthusiasm of a jellied eel.

"Yes, it is, rather." I always find myself adopting Englishisms when bandying words with Wanderley. "Tomorrow is Mr. Hemming's birthday and since we can't celebrate it together, I would like to arrange for some small remembrance to be delivered to him at the office. Of course, I'll need your help, indeed, your active participation for it to be successful."

"Really." She has an uncanny knack of expanding the word by a couple of supercilious syllables. "What did you have in mind?"

"Nothing much, really. You know how fond he is of Sacher Torte." She could know nothing of the kind because he isn't, but sharing a supposed bit of inside information might enlist her more firmly in my plan.

"Of course." Oh, Wanderley, you are mine.

"Well, I've ordered one to be appropriately inscribed, you know, *Happy Birthday, Dear Alex,* and delivered at four o'clock tomorrow afternoon. It will come complete with candles and a card from me. All you have to do is light the candles and carry it in to him at an opportune moment. Perhaps when he takes his late afternoon coffee."

"Mrs. Hemming, how sweetly thoughtful of you. I'll be glad to serve as your emissary."

I'll just bet you will, you little twit.

"And I'm sure Mr. Hemming will enjoy his birthday cake."

Was there a hint of condescension in that so refined voice?

"Thank you, my dear. I hope you both get a big bang out of it."

Volunteer work has its rewards and they are not all in heaven. The unwed mothers are, by and large, a scruffy lot. Some of them are downright silly; others are earnest and highly principled. Yet others are radical young women with connections of an explosive sort.

It was through one of these that I acquired ten very innocent-looking birthday candles, one for each decade up to 40 and one for each year after that. It was a commission that gave much joy to the supplier, since the candles would be used to attack a highly visible symbol of Amerikan kapitalism. It cost me three of my Tiffany Christmas presents. Cheap at the price.

Tomorrow evening, after I officiate at the opening of the Art Show, extolling the courage and fortitude of the unwed mothers. I shall hurry to my lovely suburban home, alone as usual, pour myself a solitary glass of champagne, and celebrate all birthdays, past, present, and future. I shall watch the television news. With any luck at all, the FALN will leap in to take credit for my simple celebration.

Happy birthday, darling.

"Q"

a *NEW* short story by

JON L. BREEN

In which Millard Judson, drama critic of the Eastport "Sun," discovers that reviewing can be a dangerous occupation...

REVIVAL IN EASTPORT

by *JON L. BREEN*

From the Eastport *Sun*, July 17, 1927:

Millard Judson, drama critic of this newspaper, narrowly escaped death Saturday night when he was shot at outside the Sun Building. Police report no progress in discovering the assailant's identity.

Though Mr. Judson is inclined to laugh off the incident as "the work of some drunk and disgruntled playwright," the *Sun* has offered a $200 reward for information leading to the gunman's capture.

In the otherwise empty city room, Millard Judson pounded the keys of his typewriter. It was a few moments before midnight. The deadline for his piece was not until mid-morning, so, as various members of his family were constantly pointing out to him, there was no earthly reason for him to be working so late into the night. But, though deadlines had changed over the years, Millard Judson had not. In 55 years as the Eastport *Sun*'s drama critic, he had formed an opening-night routine he could not bring himself to break. So he was up late for a man of 78. Surely doing the piece now was better for his health than lying at home in bed unable to sleep because the review wasn't written. Why not get it over now with his memory still fresh?

What he was writing about the Broadway-bound new play, *Heated Encounters*, could only be described as a tepid notice, the due of a so-so play. When he got to the paragraph about Ernest

Spivey, though, he beamed as he typed. Writing nasty things was easier, but writing nice things always gave him more pleasure. It was good to be able to write a tribute to an old pro even older than Judson.

"Ernest Spivey, in the role of the non-foxy grandfather, is an utter delight. Though moving more slowly around the stage than in past years, the octogenarian thespian has lost none of his mastery of character development and comic timing, nor the ability to dominate every scene he is in through the sheer force of his still-potent vitality and energy. And his voice, familiar to generations of radio listeners and film and TV viewers, as well as those fortunate enough to have seen him on the stage, resonates with a power and command unattainable by the younger members of the cast who seem incapable of reaching the back row. Since his first appearance in this city some 35 years ago, Spivey has given us a range of portrayals that stay fresh in the memory."

"That's wrong!" cracked a voice from behind Millard. He jumped, startled, and turned around in his chair to find Ernest Spivey looking down at him. Passing quickly from anger at this severe test of his aging heart to delight at seeing the old actor, Millard rose from his chair.

"Mr. Spivey! It's good to see you. But what a surprise."

They shook hands. When they had first met many years before, they had been about the same height, but Millard Judson was now somewhat stooped.

"The watchman told me you'd be burning the midnight oil."

"Old habits die hard. You certainly approached very quietly."

"I don't know that I did," Spivey replied. "Also," he added, looking at Millard's copy, "I didn't think my young cohorts were quite so muted in their delivery."

"I know what you're hinting at. My daughter is always after me to get a hearing aid, but I can still hear just fine. Besides, if theater can reach only the keenest ears, it is failing in my view. Anyway, sit down. What can I do for you? And what's wrong?"

"Wrong?"

"Yes, when you came up and made me jump half a foot, you said quite distinctly, 'That's wrong.' So what's wrong?"

"Where you say I first played this city thirty-five years ago. It was longer. I played here in July 1927 as a matter of fact, in a play called *Molly's Treasure Chest*."

Millard wrinkled his brow. "I'm kind of famous around here for

my memory, but I can't remember that one."

Ernest Spivey removed a yellowed newspaper clipping from his wallet. "Maybe this will refresh your memory."

Millard sighed ruefully as he squinted at the clipping. "Whenever possible I try to avoid reading my early scribbling. But I'll make an exception."

Millard didn't know whether to laugh or blush. The clipping read in part: "The performance of E. W. Spivey is almost beyond words. This tall skinny youth has no presence, no idea of how to move on stage, no rudimentary notion of how to put a line across. Clumsy, graceless, and occasionally inaudible, he is obviously suited for any kind of endeavor but acting."

Millard looked up, shaking his head. "I don't know what to say. I'd never write anything this damning about anyone now. It's simply cruel, and I'm sure you could *never* have been this bad. If you had been, surely I would remember. I guess all I can do at this late date is apologize."

"I must confess, I was very angry and upset when I first read that. It did seem cruel, needlessly so. I'm afraid it affected me so much I almost did something drastic."

Something drastic? That phrase and the significance of the date, July 1927, hit Millard simultaneously, and he felt a sudden wave of fear. "You mean *you* were the one who—?"

"Shot at you? Yes." Spivey's voice sounded cold. Suddenly, on this warm summer night, the air in the city room felt chilly.

Millard didn't know what to say next. Could it be that after 50 years Spivey had returned to finish the job? Could a man hold a grudge about a bad notice for that long?

Spivey laughed. A mad laugh or just a theatrical one? "When I returned in 1942, I was a rather well-known actor and got a somewhat better notice from you, as I seem to have done tonight. Somehow I didn't keep a clipping of that one, though. Just this one. Do you know why?"

"No. Why?"

"Had it not been for your review in July 1927, I would not be where I am today. I would not have become a successful, even famous, actor, if you'll forgive my lack of modesty. I know this to be true. My whole career in the theater I owe to your review. Would you like to hear the story?"

Relieved and breathing more easily, Millard said, "Yes, of course. I'm fascinated."

"I was a small-town boy. Little town in Iowa, maybe ten thousand people then and not much bigger now. My father was not the richest man in town, but we were comfortably off, and he always expected me to join and eventually take over the family hardware business when I was through school. As sons will, I had different ideas. Acting still had a very bad reputation in those days, and my whole family was dead set against my entering the profession. But it was what I wanted to do, so I left home to go after it.

"I tried New York first and like so many before and since was disillusioned there. Finally I managed to start getting various stints with touring companies, and I saw a lot of the country over those next few years. It was a fine time for theater. There was no commercial radio to speak of, no television, and motion pictures were still dealing in dumb-show. As you well remember, of course.

"My parts gradually increased in size, from supernumerary to bit player to secondary leads, but I was attracting no particular notice, and after a while it began to seem like a treadmill to me.

"Playing my hometown on a one-night stand, I spent a little time with my family. They were semi-reconciled now to my chosen career. At least, my father didn't disown me and assured me that any time I changed my mind I could come back and enter the hardware business. That same evening I saw my old girl friend. Helen was her name. Lovely girl. I realized that night that I still loved her, and she loved me.

"We talked about my acting. I wasn't getting anywhere, I told her. I might even throw it all over and go into the hardware business, I said. And then, impulsively, I asked her to marry me and she said yes. But we agreed to keep it a secret until the current tour ended and I left the company and returned home.

"Just two weeks later our troupe hit this city. And your review appeared.

"Getting reviewed was nothing new, of course, but getting my shortcomings so strongly underlined was. I had become used to not being mentioned at all in reviews at worst and being damned with faint praise at best. But your notice—well, I probably deserved every bit of it. But at the time it infuriated me. I wanted revenge. I wanted to challenge you to a duel. But all I did finally was to take one shot at you."

"I always wondered who did that," Millard said. "I never knew. It was a damned terrifying experience and one I'll never forget. I

remember at the time telling one of my colleagues here it must be a playwright who was drunk, but I never thought it had anything to do with my reviewing. I thought it was some kind of mistake, a gun that went off by accident or somebody shooting at somebody else. When nothing further happened, I was sure it had all been just a mistake. The newspaper offered a reward, you know, and a lot of people tried to collect it with some of the nuttiest stories you ever heard. After a while we all just forgot about it. Even me, for the most part. I'd remember it late at night sometimes, but it never made me change my working hours. As you can see."

"Yes. You'll forgive me after all these years?"

"Yes, sure, it's a long time ago. But I have one question. Did you mean to hit me? Or was it just to scare me?"

"I don't think I really meant to kill you. But I was drunk and might easily have killed you by accident. I was a hot-blooded, irresponsible youth."

"But you got over it. I'm pleased you did."

"Yes, I directed my energies elsewhere. Back into acting. I determined I could not go out on a note like that, return home with my tail between my legs. I had to prove I was an actor. Would you say that I did?"

"In spades, yes."

"I wrote to Helen, asked her to join me, but it appeared she wouldn't leave home, more to the point wouldn't be the wife of an actor. It hurt like hell, but I rationalized that a wife who would stand in the way of her husband's true calling was not worth having anyway. For some years I gave all my energies to the actor's art, and gradually it seems I improved. Some might say you made a small contribution to American theatrical history there, Mr. Judson."

"*I* did?"

"Of course. Haven't I made it clear? If you hadn't written that review, my acting career would have ended and I would have returned to the mundane life of a small-town hardware merchant."

"Well, it's most handsome of you to give me the credit, but—"

"The credit is yours, all yours. Yes, it's been a long run for me in the theater. And on the radio and the screen and the little box. I've made and lost a couple of fortunes, married and divorced four wives, fathered seven legitimate children now scattered to the four winds, most of them drunk and miserable, some parents to my grandchildren who are on drugs and miserable. I am still

working because I need the money and don't know what else to do with my time anyway."

"Doesn't the appreciation of audiences give you satisfaction?"

"Oh, yes. Approximately the same quality and duration of satisfaction—if not quite the same intensity—that those drugs give my grandchildren.

"I recently returned to my hometown, Mr. Judson. My parents and even my younger brothers are dead now. The family business remains and apparently prospers, though no longer in the family. I would never have guessed what pain it would give me to see that. I feel great nostalgia for my brief experience as a boy in the hardware business, and I often think I would have been happier had I stayed."

"But think of all the pleasure you have given so many—"

"You imply that the hardware business is not important, Mr. Judson. It is in a basic sense far more important to ordinary people than the theatrical entertainment you and I have devoted our careers to. Also, I think I owed myself something. I deserved my pleasures, too, and my happiness ought to have been more important to me than the fleeting pleasures of this amorphous mass we call the audience.

"Helen is still alive, and I gathered my courage to visit her. She is seventy-six, married almost fifty years, and I think reasonably content. As happy as she would have been with me? I don't know. She is still beautiful and I still love her, but it is too late to find out what our life together would have been like.

"It is too late for so many things, Mr. Judson. Somehow it has become 1977, and I am a very old, very unhappy man who will never be a hardware dealer in a small Iowa town. Not ever. And I will never be young and I will never be married to Helen. In so many things I made a start and then turned the wrong way. So much of what I have attempted in life, I have left unfinished."

Though his alarm had left him, Millard Judson was no closer to knowing what to say. Though the actor's talent was undiminished, the old man was miserable, pitiful, and surely a shade unbalanced. What could be said or done to comfort him?

"Mr. Spivey, perhaps you would join me for a drink. I can finish this thing later, and there is a bar around the corner that—"

"I don't drink any more. Acting is the only vice I have left. There is one other thing I must tell you about my visit to Helen. It's funny really, in a way. It seems that *she* has a grandson. Fred

Barstow is his name, fine young man. And it seems that he, too, has aspirations as an actor."

"The name is familiar."

"It should be."

"How does she feel about her grandson's chosen profession?"

"Rather proud, I think. Now she thinks a good deal more of actors than I do, which is quite an irony. She showed me a clipping of a review he got recently when passing through Eastport."

"Oh, yes. I think I remember."

"Indeed! You should!"

Millard backed up in his swivel chair and glanced at the nearest exit. The old man seemed angry suddenly, not merely unhappy. And there was a hint of madness in his eye.

Fred Barstow, Fred Barstow. Millard flipped through his mental card file, then remembered.

"Of course. He played here three weeks ago in a revival of *The Country Girl*. Very promising young man."

The old actor rose menacingly from his chair. Watching him warily, Millard rose at the same time.

"Oh, yes," said Ernest Spivey, "a very promising young man. And you have tried to destroy him as you did me."

"Destroy him? But, Mr. Spivey, I remember what I wrote. I gave him a good notice, a very good notice."

"That's just it. He has no talent, that boy, I know him. But because of the encouragement of people like you, he will try to pursue a career in the theater and be crushed, the way everyone who pursues a career in the theater will be crushed, talented or not."

Spivey's voice boomed through the city room. Millard trembled convulsively. Would the watchman hear?

"So much I have left undone!" Spivey cried. And then he drew the pistol. "It's the same one."

Millard turned for the door.

"The same one I used in 1927."

Millard tried to run.

"Do you think it will still fire?"

From the Eastport *Sun*, October 24, 1977:

Millard Judson, drama critic of the *Sun* since 1922, collapsed and died Saturday night in the *Sun* offices. Veteran character actor Ernest Spivey was with Judson when he was stricken. Death was the result of an apparent heart attack.

a *NEW* Jericho story by

HUGH PENTECOST

John Jericho, the redhaired giant of a man, the crusading artist and Good Samaritan of detectives, the protector of the underdog and the weak—Jericho can never get far away from the presence of mystery and evil. Mystery hovers over him like a ministering angel—or an avenging angel? This time Jericho becomes involved in the disappearance of a twelve-year-old girl, driven into the streets of a big city in the middle of the night . . .

JERICHO AND THE MILLION-TO-ONE CLUE

by *HUGH PENTECOST*

The pounding on the door was like instant thunder. Jericho turned impatiently on his king-sized bed and glanced at the clock on the side table. Ten minutes to six—in the morning! Daylight was already pouring through the skylight of his studio apartment. The fog of sleep clearing, he realized it must be some sort of emergency in the building. A fire, perhaps. The pounding went on and he heard a muffled voice calling his name.

Jericho is an impressive figure of a man, four inches over six feet, 240 pounds of muscled body, bright red hair, and a beard and mustache that give him the look of an ancient Viking warrior. He slept in the raw. He scrambled out of bed, slipped into a robe that was draped over a chair, went to the door, and opened it.

"Oh, for God's sake," he said, a note of outrage in his voice.

The man facing him was inches shorter. He wore some lightweight summer slacks and a short-sleeved, plaid sports shirt. His face was chalk-white with rivulets of sweat running down from his hair line. He leaned against the door jamb as though he was about to collapse.

"Thank heaven, Johnny," he said, in a shaken voice. "I was beginning to think you were away somewhere."

"I am away as far as you're concerned, Peter," Jericho said. He turned and walked back into his apartment, but he didn't close the door. "What the hell kind of time of day is this to pay a call?"

"Johnny, I need help," Peter Braden said. His whole body shook like a man with malarial chill.

Jericho turned on him. There was anger in his bright blue eyes. "So what's new?" he asked. "We've known that for a long, long time. Peter, go away and leave me alone. If you're after a drink the bar is closed."

"It's Laura," Braden said. It was a hoarse whisper.

There comes a time, Jericho thought, when compassion runs out, when the well is empty. He had once been very fond of this man. They had first met long ago during the French war in Algiers. Jericho had been telling the world in violent colors on canvas about man's inhumanity. Peter Braden had been a brilliant war correspondent for *Newsview Magazine*. They drank together in odd places and at odd times. They laughed together when there was anything to laugh at. When the pressures had been at their greatest, Jericho noticed that Peter drank more than he could manage successfully. There had been some barroom brawls in which Jericho found himself siding with a friend who didn't merit support. Peter could be obnoxious when he was drunk. But the tensions and pressures seemed to explain it all.

A dislocated world sent them in different directions after Algiers. For about a year Jericho followed his friend through his byline stories in *Newsview*. Then Peter's name disappeared from the magazine. Probably writing a book, Jericho thought—that was where most war correspondents finally headed.

After some months Jericho came across a story and some pictures in a copy of *Life*. His old friend Peter Braden had got himself married in a very fancy fashion. His bride was Cynthia Warner, the steel heiress and a very beautiful girl. Peter, Jericho told himself, was set for life. His wife was a wealthy woman.

Then there was Vietnam in the late 1960s. Jericho spent time there, painting the horrors of a senseless war, trying to convey a message to a slowly awakening American public. There were interludes when he came back to New York and to his studio in Jefferson Mews. One night, five years ago, Peter had come pounding on his door. Peter was blind drunk. He turned out empty pockets.

He needed a drink. Jericho gave him one, stiff enough to knock out a horse, and bedded him down on the studio couch. The next day Peter woke and poured out a tale of shame and remorse. He had turned himself into a hopeless alcoholic. His marriage was on the rocks. There was, it turned out, a six-year-old daughter whom Peter adored. Her name was Laura.

It was the beginning of a long period in which Jericho, without success, tried to help his friend. The marriage ended in divorce. Jericho spent some time with Cynthia and came to be very fond of her. She loved Peter but there was no way to endure what he had become. Nor could Jericho take the endlessly repeated nightly visits to Jefferson Mews of a drunken Peter. Two years ago he had given up on his friend, told him in no uncertain terms to take his troubles somewhere else.

That was the end, until this morning.

"It's Laura," Peter said, leaning, shaking, against the door jamb.

Laura, Jericho calculated, must be about twelve years old now. Jericho fought against the revival of an old sympathy and lost.

"Come in," he said.

Peter sat on the edge of the studio couch, his hands locked together to keep them from shaking. He had to go backward in time. There had been the divorce from Cynthia, the custody of Laura, of course, going to the mother. There were no jobs to be had, and Peter quickly ran out of the money Cynthia had generously given him. He had washed dishes, slept in flop houses, gone down to the bottom of the sink. In the meantime Cynthia had remarried. Her new husband was a decent fellow named Carl Waters who, Peter said, had been a kind and affectionate stepfather to Laura. Peter had tried to visit his daughter, but always in an impossible condition. Then, two years ago, in utter despair, he had met a priest working in the Bowery with other derelicts.

"I haven't had a drink in eighteen months," Peter said.

"The hell you haven't," Jericho said. "You reek of it."

"Until last night," Peter said.

For a year and a half after he met the priest he had been clean. It was torture but he made it. He got a job in a Greenwich Village bookstore that paid the rent for a room and provided him with food. He went to Cynthia and Carl Waters and asked permission to see his daughter. They believed his rehabilitation was genuine. He was given permission to see Laura in Cynthia's beautifully

remodeled brownstone house on Washington Square. Every Saturday he visited Laura. If the weather was good they might go out into the park in the Square. But the situation was difficult. There was really no way for them to get close. The child tried, but somehow it wasn't working. She didn't really understand. Cynthia hadn't ever told her the truth about Peter; she had protected him, and Peter couldn't bring himself to tell Laura his problem.

A year of these weekly visits had gone by. Finally, desperate for some way to break the barrier between him and the child, Peter had asked permission to have her spend a weekend with him. Cynthia left it up to the twelve-year-old Laura and the child, reluctantly Peter thought, had agreed. That was yesterday.

It had been a dreadful day for Peter. He and Laura had had a fancy luncheon, then gone to a matinee of a hit musical, and then to a famous restaurant for dinner. All the while Laura was strangely distant, silent. When they finally got back to Peter's apartment Laura laid it on the line with painful, childlike clarity. It was all no use. She couldn't get to feel about him the way he wanted. He was a stranger, a nice stranger but a stranger. Her life was with Cynthia and her stepfather, Carl. No, she didn't want to go home. She would spend the weekend with him as she had promised. But after that, please, no more.

"She went to bed and I sat there, dying of it," Peter said. "And then I couldn't take it any more. She was asleep, and I—I went out to tie one on. God help me—and her."

"She saw you drunk?"

Peter nodded. "I came back, roaring high. I woke her up. I shouted at her. God knows what I said. She sat there, crouched under her covers, sheer terror in her eyes. Then I stormed back into the kitchen for another drink—I'd brought a bottle in with me. And I—I passed out cold. When I woke up—on the floor of the kitchen—about an hour ago, I went to talk to her, to try to— She was gone."

"So she went home," Jericho said.

"I have to make sure, Johnny."

"So be my guest. Use the telephone," Jericho said.

"I can't. I can't talk to Cynthia and—and tell her. And suppose Laura didn't go home?"

"Where else? A friend's house, maybe?"

"It must have been three o'clock in the morning. You know what the streets are like down here at that time of night. Junk-

ies, drunks—a well dressed rich-looking kid all alone—"

"I'll call Cynthia," Jericho said.

"No, Johnny. Not so early in the morning—in case she didn't go home. We have to be casual about it. I'd never have another chance, Johnny, if she didn't go home and even if she's all right somewhere."

"She'll tell Cynthia what happened."

"She might not." Peter gave Jericho a bitter little smile. "People have a way of protecting drunken creeps like me."

"So I notice," Jericho said.

Shortly after ten o'clock that morning Jericho rang the front doorbell of the Waters' brownstone on Washington Square. Sunday morning. Carl Waters answered the door. He was a pleasant-looking, sandy-haired man in his late forties.

"Jericho!" he said. "Good to see you!"

"Send me away if you like," Jericho said. "I was just passing by, saw your house, and on impulse rang the bell."

"Come on in," Waters said. "I just made some coffee."

Jericho followed him into a handsome living room on the ground floor. "How is Cynthia?" he asked.

"Spending the weekend with her parents," Waters said. "She'll be disappointed when she hears she's missed you."

"And Laura?" Jericho asked casually.

Waters gave Jericho a wry smile. "The big experiment," he said. "She's spending the weekend with her father. I'm a bachelor."

Jericho felt his muscles tighten. So the child hadn't come home.

"The first time?" Jericho asked.

Waters nodded. "Peter's really put up a hell of a fight, you know. Or did you know? I understand you and he haven't been close recently."

"I heard he'd quit cold turkey," Jericho said.

"Cynthia believes it's for real," Waters said. "I'm afraid it isn't going to work out too well for him, though. Laura just doesn't want the relationship. You can know for a fact that someone is your father. But he hasn't been her father. I have. Three parents are a little too much for her to manage at this point in her life. Maybe later, when she's a little older—"

"Rough all around," Jericho said. He wanted to get out of there. Where was the child? Where had she gone?

It was only a few blocks from the house on Jane Street where Peter had his one-room apartment to the Waters' brownstone on Washington Square. It was possible, Jericho thought, that a twelve year old, in shock from seeing her father turn into a drunken monster, from being shouted at, might find herself disoriented when she ran out of the Jane Street house. It was an escape, her father unconscious on the kitchen floor. But how far could she go without encountering someone who would set her on the right course for home?

"Unless it was the wrong kind of someone," Peter Braden said. He had taken the news Jericho brought him very hard. He was the villain of the piece. He had driven the child out onto the streets of a city peopled, in his mind, by dangerous and evil characters. Every day you read accounts in the newspapers of violence inflicted on elderly people and children. Little girls, returning from school in broad daylight, were dragged into alleys or up onto rooftops where they were assaulted by faceless fiends. In the dead of night the danger was even greater.

Jericho tried to play down his own mounting anxiety. It had seemed almost certain to him that, unmolested, Laura would have headed straight for Washington Square. But the fact that Cynthia was away for the weekend, visiting her parents, made it much less than a certainty. Laura must have known from Cynthia what the plans were, that her mother was not going to be home. For all Laura's good relationship with her stepfather, Carl Waters, she might not have chosen to run to him.

"There must be friends of Laura's, friends of the family, who live somewhere in this part of town," Jericho said. "People she might have run to in her panic."

"If she went to friends like that with her story," Peter said, "surely those friends would have called Cynthia and Carl would have gotten the call. He would have known when you talked to him."

Not debatable, Jericho thought. He and Peter had gone to Peter's little one-room apartment on Jane Street. There was just the one room with a little kitchenette in an alcove and a bath. There was a Murphy bed that pulled down from the wall and it was still pulled down, the covers rumpled as Laura had left them. It must have been a pathetic scene—the child explaining that she just couldn't make it with her real father, Peter retiring behind the curtain that drew across the kitchenette alcove to eat his heart

out, the child falling asleep. Then Peter had left her to find relief in the nearest bar. Hours later he had come back in a shouting rage, the child hiding under the bedclothes, frightened out of her wits. He had gone behind the kitchenette curtain to pour himself another drink, and fallen flat on his face. Jericho could imagine the child creeping out of bed to see what had happened, deciding on flight, dressing hurriedly with fumbling fingers, and running out of the house and into the night. She must have known then where she intended to go.

Jericho had made inquiries in the building. The superintendent managed several houses in the block but didn't live in Peter's building. He knew nothing, had heard nothing, seen nothing. Only one of five other tenants in the building had anything to report. She was a handsome blonde, probably a professional model. She lived across the hall from Peter.

"I heard some angry shouting in the middle of the night," she told Jericho. "It was a quarter past three—I know because I looked at my watch. I was outraged to be wakened by it. I was about to call the police when the noise stopped."

"You heard someone leave?" Jericho asked.

The blonde girl nodded. "I supposed it was a woman. Quick light steps. It sounded like that kind of quarrel."

"But you didn't look to see?"

"Lord, no. It was over. I didn't want to get involved."

It was well after noon now, on a warm sweet Sunday in the city. The time had passed when Peter could any longer hide the truth from Cynthia and Carl Waters. They must be told that Laura was missing. They might have a clue to where she could have gone other than back to her home on Washington Square.

Cynthia was still in Connecticut with her parents. Carl Waters, looking stunned, listened to what Jericho later called a "kind of cleaned-up story." There had been the luncheon, the matinee, the dinner. Then there had been the painful scene in which Laura had told her father she didn't want him to be a part of her life. She had agreed, however, to go through with the weekend. She and Peter had slept, Jericho told Waters, Laura in the Murphy bed, Peter on the couch. When he woke she was gone. No mention of drinking or shouting, or of the girl leaving an unconscious man on the floor of the kitchenette.

"She must have gone to some friends, Carl," Jericho said. "We have no leads in that direction, so it is up to you and Cynthia."

"She should have called me," Carl said.

"If you can't guess where she may have gone it's time for the police," Jericho said. He told himself he should have gone to the police when he first heard Peter's story at six in the morning. An old sympathy, an old compassion had got in the way.

Carl went to another room to call his wife. Money, Jericho thought, couldn't buy happiness or security. Poor Cynthia. She had married Peter, planned to finance his career as a writer, and he had turned into a hopeless drunk. He wondered what she had bought in Carl Waters. An amiable companion? A stand-in father for her child? Could money buy anything that really mattered?

Waters came back from the phone. "She's in shock, of course," he said. "She's starting back to town at once. She's given me the names of half a dozen people Laura might have gone to, though why she didn't come back here—"

"So make the calls," Jericho said. "I'm going to talk to Lieutenant Connors. He's a friend of mine in charge of the local police precinct."

"Shouldn't you wait till I try these people?" Waters suggested.

"I have a feeling I've waited too long already," Jericho said.

The Village, to Jericho, was like a small town and not a segment of a huge city. He knew the residents, the tradespeople. He knew their family histories, whose children were doing fine and whose were running wild. He knew the cops on the beat. He knew Dan Connors, responsible for law and order, who did a better job than most keeping his part of the inner city in line.

It was good luck, or bad luck, depending on your point of view, that they found Lieutenant Connors on duty that Sunday afternoon. The big rugged Irishman listened to Jericho's story, watching Peter Braden with a kind of reluctant pity as the tale unfolded.

"Can you give me a description of your daughter, Mr. Braden?" Connors asked.

"She's twelve years old," Peter said. "About five feet—maybe five feet one or two tall. They grow so fast! Dark hair worn down around her shoulders. Brown eyes. A little mole on her right cheek. We—we call it her beauty spot."

"Can you tell me what she was wearing?"

"A cotton print dress—checks, navy on white I think."

"A coat?"

"Not in this weather," Peter said. "She carried a small purse." He smiled. "In it was a five-dollar bill. Cynthia called it her 'mad money.' Of course she was too young to date. But she had the five-dollar bill pinned inside her purse in case of an emergency. And she had a house key. She could let herself into the Washington Square house if she'd been out in the park—or someplace."

"With five bucks she could have taken a taxi somewhere," Jericho said.

"I hope so," Connors said. He stood up, almost as tall as Jericho. "I hope so, because then I may not have bad news for you."

"Bad news?" Peter almost whispered.

"This way, please," Connors said.

There was a long narrow table in a back room. On it lay a body covered with a sheet.

A great strangling breath emerged from Peter Braden's lungs, and then he dropped down on his knees. "Oh, my God!" he cried out. "Oh, dear God!"

The body had been found on one of the West Side docks by a watchman about five o'clock that morning. No identification, but there was the purse with the five-dollar bill and the house key. The skull was smashed in by one savage blow.

"If it's any comfort to you," Connors said, "she wasn't sexually molested."

"Or robbed," Jericho said. "A punk kid would have taken that five-dollar bill. What the hell was she doing on the waterfront, Dan?"

"She was taken there," Connors said. "Taken there in a car, carried onto the dock, and left there."

"How do you know?"

"Freak clue," Connors said. "Not much use, but a clue. The streets are a mass of potholes from last winter's weather. The city is still trying to fill them in. Would you believe there was a large pothole just by that dock? Sometime around midnight that pothole had been filled in with fresh macadam and tar. Before it had dried someone drove over it and stopped. Footmarks with tar on them from where the car stopped to where the body was left and then back to the car again. Problem is, there are a million cars in this city spattered with tar on the underside."

"A million cars," Jericho mused. "A million-to-one shot. The old needle in the haystack."

There is grief that is intolerable to bear and equally intolerable to inflict. The senseless murder of a child is something a mother simply cannot take. Having to tell Cynthia was almost as bad as her hearing it. It was beyond Peter Braden. He was responsible for the child being out in the middle of the night, alone.

That responsibility was in the forefront of Dan Connors' mind. The true story, not the cleaned-up version, was told by Jericho to a shattered Cynthia Waters who sat beside her husband on the couch in the living room of the Washington Square house. Carl's arm was around her, holding her close, as if she might explode into a thousand pieces if he let her go.

"It will not be necessary for you to identify her, Mrs. Waters," Connors said. "Mr. Braden has made an official identification."

Peter Braden sat across the room, his face white, sick with horror.

"I think," Jericho said, "I could use a drink."

"On the sideboard in the dining room," Carl Waters said.

Jericho went to find what he needed.

"Do you own a car, Mr. Braden?" Connors asked Peter.

"No."

"Do you have the use of a car, a friend's car perhaps?"

"No," Peter said.

"You've been a war correspondent, I understand, in some pretty intense areas."

"Yes."

"I imagine you pick up some pretty unusual talents in such circumstances."

"I don't follow you, Lieutenant," Peter said.

"Transportation in a hurry must sometimes be vital—for example, when you find yourself unexpectedly the target for enemy shell fire."

"I suppose."

"It comes down to this, Mr. Braden," Connors said. "Do you know how to jump wires so you can start a car without a key?"

Peter stared at him.

"Do you know how, Mr. Braden?"

"I—I have done it," Peter said.

"So you could make a car parked outside your house on the street available if you needed it. I mean, it's not uncommon, Mr. Braden. Thousands of cheap car thieves know the trick."

"But why would I want to?" Peter asked.

"A desperate emergency," Connors said. "A drunken rage at a child who turned you down. Do you remember what you said to her?"

Peter's lips trembled. "God help me, no."

"I suggest you don't remember, quite conveniently, anything that happened in the early hours of Sunday morning. You don't remember what happened when you came storming back to your place where you'd left her. Your wife had rejected you. Now your child, that wife's flesh and blood, had rejected you. Your fury at this innocent kid knew no bounds. When she protested you struck her, with all the violence that was boiling in you."

"What—what did I strike her with?" Peter asked. He wasn't protesting. He wasn't denying. It was as if Connors had convinced him.

"We'll find out when we search your place," Connors said.

"Oh, Peter!" It was a cry from Cynthia.

"Murder can be a pretty sobering business," Connors said. "You killed her, and then you had to cover it somehow. First, get rid of the body. You couldn't just take it out and dump it in the yard. Any reasonable investigation would focus on you. You had to get her away from your house, away from Jane Street. But you couldn't carry a child's body through the streets, even at that hour of the morning. A car! There were dozens of them parked along the street below. You remembered what you'd learned in the war zones—how to jump wires. Did you leave her where she was and go down to pick a car?"

"I—I don't know. I don't remember," Peter said.

"Did you go back up to get her when you'd found a car you could start? Is that the way it was? You drove her down to the waterfront, stopped by a deserted dock, dumped her there. Then you took the car back and left it for its owner. But you still had to have a plausible story and someone to support it. So you went to Jericho, an old friend. He never dreamed you were involved in a violence. He believed your sad little story. He helped you waste hours before anyone went to the police."

"I still believe his sad little story," Jericho said from the door to the dining room. He leaned against the door frame, a drink in his left hand, his right hand out of sight behind him. "You missed your calling, Dan. You should be writing suspense novels."

For a moment the policeman and the artist stood staring at

each other. They were friends. They trusted each other.

"I would have to be a witness for his defense," Jericho said. "I've been to the Jane Street apartment with Peter. There isn't a drop of blood on the bed where it must have happened—if it happened your way, Dan. The girl across the hall heard Peter shouting at someone, and then it stopped abruptly, just as Peter told it. He passed out when he took another drink. That girl then heard someone leave, someone lightfooted enough to make her believe it was a woman. Of course she never dreamed of a child. If that was all, Dan, it still wouldn't hold water. Because, you see, I have found something while you were spinning your little fantasy."

Jericho's right hand came into view and between his fingers he was holding a pair of shoes, a pair of shined brown loafers.

"You did a good job on these, Carl," Jericho said, "But that road tar is pretty tenacious stuff. I don't think the police lab will have much trouble matching the one or two bits of it you missed on these shoes with that pothole alongside the dock where you stopped when you took Laura's body there."

"Tar?" Carl Waters said. His face had turned a strange gray color.

"Yours to check out, Dan," Jericho said, and crossed the room to hand the shoes to Connors. "I suggest that if you examine Carl's car where he garages it you will find remnants of tar on the foot brake and accelerator pedals."

"Carl!"

Cynthia had drawn away from her husband. She looked around her like a trapped animal. There was no place to go, no one to turn to. Jericho went to her, put an arm around her, and held her tightly.

"God knows I hated to do this to you, Cynthia," he said, "but it has to be Carl. No one else. I've tried to convince myself most of the day—before Dan showed us Laura—that she'd gone to friends. But my common sense told me that she must have gone home, must have come here. She knew you were away, Cynthia, but this house represented safety. There was no problem, even if Carl was out somewhere, because she had a key to let herself in. Why go anywhere else? She wouldn't want to talk to anyone but you and Carl about what had happened in the Jane Street place. For me, nothing else really made sense." He turned to look at Carl Waters. "It was a woman, wasn't it, Carl?"

A choking sound came from Waters, but no words.

"It was the second disaster of the night for Laura," Jericho said. "Her whole world was crumbling. The only person she could possibly turn to was Cynthia. Isn't that what happened, Carl? She found you making love to a strange woman and she ran for the telephone on the bedside table in your room—yours and Cynthia's room. I think you picked it up, crossed the room behind Laura, and struck her with it before she could dial her grandparents' number."

Cynthia raised a tear-stained face to Jericho. She was shaking from head to foot in the circle of his strong arm. "But why, Johnny? He didn't have to kill her! I—I must have failed him in some way if—if there was another woman. I could have listened to reason, to his explanation, whatever it was!"

"But would you have forgiven him?" Jericho asked. "He couldn't risk it."

"Risk losing me?"

"Not you, Cynthia. He couldn't risk losing your money. It turns out to be a kind of curse, doesn't it?"

Carl Waters made a panicky dash for the door, but Connors was there, waiting for him. Jericho held the sobbing woman, wondering how on earth she could be mended.

Connors, snapping handcuffs on Waters' wrists, knew his next job would be to find the woman who had been an eyewitness to murder.

a *NEW* short story by

ERNEST SAVAGE

She didn't even know who Dr. Mortimer was, but he had phoned and given her Mr. Fixit's name. "For that leaky sink, and any other problem you've got. Yes, Mr. Fixit's your man."

A touching and delicately woven story that will take you up to but not through "that light-filled door" . . .

MR. FIXIT

by *ERNEST SAVAGE*

He hadn't wanted to take the job, but she'd been so persuasive over the phone and had—somehow—sounded so much like Millie that he'd agreed to at least talk to her about it.

But the next morning at her front door he still didn't want the job and was prepared to tell her so when two things occurred at once—he got his first good look at her eyes, and the left-rear tire of his van parked in her driveway blew out with a loud bang.

"Good heavens!" she said, recoiling a ladylike distance, her eyes wide and luminous. "How clever you are."

He had not, of course, staged the event, and either her naivete or wit—whichever it might have been—annoyed him. But there were those eyes. How was it that frail and delicate women of a certain vintage had eyes of that special provenance?—from, say, Cartier's? As Millie's had been toward the end. Jewels glowing with a deep inner fire. You never saw them in the young or the fat or the healthy. Ah, the healthy.

"Come in," she said, pulling the door wide, but he still didn't want to. And if that damn tire hadn't blown out just then, he would've excused himself and driven away. But willy-nilly now, he was stuck in her driveway for at least a half hour and he might as well see what she wanted. He followed her into the dark

hall and through a door to the kitchen. She had mentioned the kitchen over the phone.

"There," she said, pointing. "The sink. And cabinets."

Well indeed, there was work there—too much of it. He could see the stains of dry rot where the old linoleum butted against the cabinet base; which meant, of course, that he'd have to tear out everything down to the joists below and replace it *all*. Four or five hard days of work for one man and he didn't want it; it was too soon, too soon after Millie's death. He'd not yet found the new path to follow with his life—but surely, he kept thinking, it wasn't more of this, more of the same. He turned, hard-faced.

"I can recommend a man to—" The eyes stopped him cold, staring from the door. Did they never blink?

"I wanted you," she said firmly. "*You* were recommended. You are Mr. Fixit, are you not? Your van says so."

The legend MR. FIXIT was painted on the side of the van clearly visible through the kitchen windows. Yes, he was Mr. Fixit and had been for the five years Millie had spent dying. Before her affliction, he'd run his little store downtown, but when she began needing his attention every several hours day and night, he tailored his work to suit that need. He could not have afforded outside help, and wouldn't have wanted it anyway. Luckily he had, in earlier years, developed the skills necessary to do almost any household-repair job and he'd become a handyman, Mr. Fixit.

But he did not intend to remain one, and with Millie gone a month now there was no need to. There were other things he could do, other places he could go, a whole world out there, and at 60 he still had time to explore it, to find his intended path. He knew it was not merely repairing kitchens.

"Please," she said; and he thought, well, this one last time, but by God she'll pay for it.

"It'll be expensive," he said gruffly, "and perhaps not worth it to you. I mean, the sink *works* at least, doesn't it? So what if it leaks a little? I mean, why not just let it go? None of us live forever, ma'am, and no offense intended, but you—" Well, no, he couldn't tell her her hold on life was palpably weak, even to a lay eye, that the new sink might not even arrive before— No, there were limits.

"I want you to do it," she said, almost imperiously, the large eyes blinking twice now, as though to hold back tears.

"I charge seven dollars an hour," he continued, thinking to blow her out of the water with the sheer cost. It was two dollars more than he'd ever charged before.

"That's all right," she said.

"Eight dollars if you watch me."

"That's all right."

"Nine dollars if you talk to me."

"Please—" She seemed frightened.

"Ten dollars if you tell me how to do it!" His voice had crescendoed in unexpected anger and she backed slightly out of the room. "And I get paid every night before I leave," he said. "In cash. Not a check, but cash."

"It's all right," she whispered.

"Too damn many people have cheated me," he said. "The laborer is worthy of his hire, but some people don't seem to think so. You'd be surprised how many people in this town owe me money for work done!" His voice was rising again. "I collect in cash at the end of every day—do you understand?"

"Yes—it's all right."

She had remained just outside the kitchen door in the gloom of the unlit hall and it was amazing how much she looked—just then—like Millie. Those glittering eyes set in the tightening silvery skin of the drawn face. The narrow shoulders hunched up against his anger—or some implacable inner pain. The formless dress, hanging straight as laundry on a line on a windless day. Lord God, how he had loved her! Can anyone understand how much love it had taken to do what he had done?

"And I'll want two hours for lunch," he said, more gently now. "I go home for lunch."

"It's all right," she said again.

They sometimes didn't understand that he had to have two hours in the middle of the day to tend Millie and do the chores. He had discovered early that if he let the dishes go, even for one day, or the endless laundry, or anything, that it seemed to become almost insurmountable and would bury him alive. And Millie's flowers— Always, every noon, he gathered flowers from the garden and arranged them in the vase by her bed. He was good with flowers—he had the hands both to grow and to arrange them. Artist's hands, Millie had said. Creative.

He smiled at the memory and the woman saw it and stepped tentatively back into the kitchen.

"When?" she said.

"I'll start tomorrow."

"And finish—?"

"When I'm done," he said. "It won't be soon. Do you like flowers?"

"My husband—when he was alive—we had a garden."

"And now?"

"I can't." Her hands, he saw, were lumpy, like gnarled pink clubs. She drew them behind the edges of her dress out of his sight, and her eyes closed for a moment. She had been a beautiful woman once; not, he thought, so long ago.

"When did he die?"

"Three years."

Her eyes closed again, slowly, as though of their own inexorable weight, and he stared at her until they opened again.

"I'll start this afternoon," he said.

He could not understand the flat tire on the truck. Outside, he looked at it as though it had betrayed him, which it had, he thought. If it had not blown when it did—and for no visible reason—he would be home by now sorting out his life, or trying to. More important to get your life sorted out than to replace some leaky sink.

He got out the jack and changed the tire. It took him twenty minutes. He would put it on her bill.

He brought her roses, a dozen or so mixed long stems from his yard. He'd always liked the way a random color-mix of roses looked in a tall slender vase—the vase was important—and even though the one she gave him was too fat, his arrangement looked fine on the kitchen table in a patch of sun there. It was the first thing he did when he returned that afternoon and it amazed her. His arrangement of the flowers was exquisite, a Renoir still life, and she could not believe the roughness with which those same hands attacked the sink a few moments later.

"Eight dollars an hour if you watch me," he said, his old gruff self.

"I'm looking at the flowers," she said spunkily.

"Nevertheless you're in the room."

"I'll pay it," she said.

He amazed and frightened her. He *must* be the man because he

was the man Dr. Mortimer had recommended, and Dr. Mortimer had called her, not vice-versa. She didn't even know who Dr. Mortimer was—someone from the Coroner's office, had he said?—had never even heard of him until he'd phoned and given her Mr. Fixit's name. "For that leaky sink," he'd said, "and any other problem you've got. Yes, Mr. Fixit's your man."

"Who are you—?" she'd started to say, but he'd cut her off.

"Oh, and remember," he'd said sharply, "Mr. Fixit works only for cash. No checks, just cash. Every night."

He was on his back now, under the sink, his legs sticking out onto the worn linoleum of the floor, his big battered work boots lolling there for a moment as though asleep. David had had a pair of boots like that—she supposed all men did—and he'd be doing this job now if he were still alive. Tears welled in her eyes, rendering prismatic the roses in the vase. Dying suddenly like that—in full stride—as it were—and leaving her to struggle on alone. What a blessed way to go!—all at once instead of one crumbling pain-wracked piece at a time.

The sink was older than God, he thought; cast-iron, heavy as a battleship. He would replace it with stainless steel and the corroded metal pipes below with plastic. He'd done a hundred jobs like this, his hands and tools moving almost without conscious direction. It was easy—and dull, deadly dull, and no way to spend your life. Before—with Millie alive—he'd had no choice and thus no nagging doubts. He'd never thought about his work, he'd just done it and then hurried home. But now— He had no sense of vocation. This was not really what he was meant to do with these hands and this life, and it depressed him now as it never had before.

He quit at five that afternoon. It was no longer necessary that he quit at five and rush home to Millie, but the habit of years wouldn't be broken overnight. Besides, the job was not going right, fighting him at every turn; an unfriendly job, almost an enemy job.

He wiped his hands clean on a rag and said, "I'll take my money now."

She was still seated at the kitchen table, reading. She got up awkwardly, painfully. "It's in the bedroom," she said. "Come."

"Bring it to me here."

"No!" She faced him, dander up, cheeks pink with the rush of blood. She'd thought that it might happen now, at the end of the

first day, and she didn't want it to happen in the kitchen. She felt firm and righteous about it. She had some say in the matter after all, didn't she?—and she'd been a fighter all her life. "In the bedroom," she said stoutly, and turned and walked through the open door to the hall. He shrugged and followed.

After talking with Dr. Mortimer, she'd closed her savings account at the bank and brought the money home, several thousand dollars in small bills. It was in a gray metal box on her bedside table, the lid open.

"That'll be four and a half hours," he said, "including changing the tire. Times eight. Thirty-six dollars—even."

The unfairness of it riled her suddenly. "But I didn't *talk* to you after that first minute or two."

"You were in the room—it's the same thing."

"It isn't! And the tire had nothing to do with me!" She stamped her foot and felt pain rush through her body and gather in her neck and head, as it always did. She could have screamed with it, her eyes wide with it, the pain burning in them like fire.

"Lie down!" he ordered quickly, and she almost fell onto the bed. He rolled her onto her face and his hands seemed to circle her neck, pressing gently, and the pain receded at once, a light airy sense filling her mind, as though she'd drifted free from her body and all that it was. She groaned. It was a wonderful relief.

But then his hands lifted and she returned to her body and its pain, and she groaned again and said, "More," a whisper, a prayer.

He was taking money from the box, counting off three tens, a five, and a one. He looked at her angrily. "You shouldn't have anything like this much money in the house," he said. "What about burglars?" He was angry at her because he didn't love her—and what right had *she* to need his hands on her as Millie had? You had to love a person to help them in that special way and he couldn't just turn it on, could he? "There must be thousands here," he growled.

"Take it," she said. "It's for you. Dr. Mortimer—"

"What do you mean 'Take it'? What do you think I am, some kind of crook?" He stuffed the $36 in his pocket and strode to the door of the room, whirling there to look back at her. He was going to tell her he quit, but she was so frail and thin as to seem almost printed on the surface of the bed, and his anger waned.

"I'll be here at nine tomorrow," he said, and then amended it to

"eight tomorrow," remembering he needn't spend so much time at home any more.

In the four hours before noon the next day he got a great deal done and was well pleased with himself. And not at all displeased with her. She had sat in perfect silence all morning at the kitchen table, reading, and now and again sniffing at the roses, which, even though just half open, nearly filled the window frame behind them.

From the little distance away she looked pretty sitting there, her misshapen hands hidden in her lap, and he felt a surge of sympathy for her, almost of affection. He asked her if she liked pizza and she said she did and he went out and got one for their lunch while she made coffee. She could make coffee, at least, and open cans with the electric opener, but not much else.

The afternoon went as well as the morning had and he didn't quit until nearly six o'clock. "Couple more days at this rate," he bragged, "and I'll have 'er done."

"Oh?" she said, surprised. "All of it?"

"Of course all of it. I don't leave loose ends, lady."

"Thursday then," she said, looking at the roses, and then out the window for a moment—at infinity. "Thursday will be fine. Thursday." She repeated it quietly to herself, getting the sense of it. Just two more days. After so many thousands of them.

She got up and led him to the bedroom again and asked him how much this time and he hemmed and hawed before answering, less assertive today. "Seven," he said finally. "Times seven. Forty-nine dollars."

"But you worked longer than that," she said. "Nearly nine hours. And then there's the matter of the pizza."

"My treat," he said. "Forty-nine is enough. Fifty. Make it fifty even."

She took five ten-dollar bills from the gray metal box and handed them to him. She would not argue tonight, one way or the other. But she would ask, "Would you—please—the neck again? It was such a relief. It was almost as though—a kind of preview." She closed her eyes and swayed a bit in delicious recall and he caught her arms in his hands and then dropped them as though they'd turned hot.

"I know," she said, her eyes open again, and hurt, almost ashamed. "It must be—repellent—to touch me. Anywhere."

"It's not that," he said angrily, and caught her fleshless arms again in his hands. "I'm used to it. It's just that—I have no right, only love gives you the right."

"Love! What has love to do with it? You have the gift—it's in your hands—I felt it there. Is not pity enough? Is not money? Empty the box, but for God's sake give me your hands! Dr. Mortimer did not say you'd fight me! You are Mr. Fixit, aren't you?"

"Who's Dr. Mortimer?"

"He recommended you."

He could remember no Dr. Mortimer, but he'd had dozens, even hundreds of customers down through the years. It didn't matter. "Of course I'm Mr. Fixit," he said, and drew her gently against his chest, his hands sliding up her spine to the neck, and that detached feeling starting almost at once for her, that sense of flight, of freedom—

"Oh, God—" She sighed against his chest, slumping there, her body almost empty of feeling, her knees melting. He caught her and put her on the bed and her big eyes flinched as the pain surged back again. "More," she pleaded, almost inaudibly, but he was standing now, his hands at his sides. He took the comforter from the foot of the bed and drew it up around her chin. Then he kissed her lightly on the forehead and told her to sleep, and she tried, searching for that distant point of balance where the pain would be like a fire at which she could merely warm herself.

He was there earlier the next day, and stayed later. He brought enough lunch for them both and ate his while he worked. He felt committed to being done with the job—paint and all—by Thursday night. He'd promised her and he saw in her eyes the need for that promise to be fulfilled. Besides, he felt a growing affection for her, for her courage, for her Millie-like qualities.

During the long painful years of Millie's decline he had not realized there must be other women out there in similar agony, but alone, with no loving husband to serve and protect them and finally, when the time came, to guide them through that light-filled door. Now he knew; and simply knowing was a source of love.

That night, before he left, he took just a few dollars from the gray metal box. He didn't really need money any more, with Millie gone. Then he eased her pain for a few moments with his hands, covered her with the comforter and kissed her. He didn't leave until he knew she'd found sleep again.

He was finished the next day by five o'clock and sat down at the kitchen table with her, tired. It was almost, he thought for a moment, like being home, like being with his wife again. He smiled at her and reached across the table and touched her hands, which she no longer felt the need to hide from him. The roses, alongside, had reached their peak of perfection and were awesome in their beauty. But already several petals had fallen to the table below.

"They too," she said to him, and felt a chill sweep her flesh. *He was through now.* Her eyes were enormous. She got up and walked from the room and he followed.

She insisted on paying him full count for the day's work, eight dollars for each of eight hours. $64. She made him put it in his wallet. She wanted no laxity now, nothing less than full measure, either way.

He took her shoulders in his hands and pulled her against his chest. He was happy with her there, she belonged there. He felt love for her, unforced, natural. His lips brushed her forehead and his hands moved up her spine for the last time to her neck. Her knees buckled then and he picked her up and placed her gently on the bed, his hands barely pressing her throat, the sinewy sides of her neck, softly probing, knowing more in themselves than he knew or wanted to know. He could almost feel her leaving, as Millie had left, almost feel her slip between his fingers and brush by as she rose.

He remained over her for three or four minutes and then straightened, exhausted. Her eyes were half open and he closed them and kissed her once more on the pale brow. Then he covered her with the comforter, tucking it carefully beneath her chin.

Then he went into the kitchen, gathered up his tools, and went home.

She had the same kind of voice and he told her over the phone that he'd come by at eight in the morning.

It was the same kind of house too, old, the shingles curling on the roof, the peeling paint. He stopped for a moment in front and then pulled into the driveway.

And the same kind of eyes—huge, aglow with the heat of a ceaseless fight. The same loose shapeless dress.

He didn't enter when she bade him. Instead he said, "Who recommended me?"

"What does it matter?" The same spunky voice.

"Was it Dr. Mortimer?"

"Yes."

"Is he your doctor?"

"No. I'd never heard of him before. He called me. He said he was with—" She paused, frowning.

"Yes?"

"The Coroner's office, I believe. I talked to him but once, yesterday. You *are* Mr. Fixit, aren't you?" The big eager eyes glanced at the truck with the name on the side.

He nodded; and once again refused her almost imperious demand that he enter. "Later," he said, his eyes flicking at the truck as though to say, "Quiet—patience," to the tires. "This afternoon at one. I get seven dollars an hour, in cash."

"I know what you get. Plus one if I talk to you."

It pleased him that she knew. He grinned. "Yes. I'll be back at one."

At the Coroner's office a lady clerk said to him, "Dr. Mortimer? Just a moment, please." She went away and returned in a minute with a man in a full-length white smock. She said, "This is Dr. Jackson."

Dr. Jackson put out his hand, had it shaken, and said, "Dr. Mortimer is not a member of our staff. Perhaps I can help you."

"Do you know Dr. Mortimer?"

"Of course. He's one of the finest pathologists I've ever seen work."

"Here? He's worked here?"

"Why, yes, of course. As a specialist. He assisted on a case just last week."

"A little old lady found dead in her bed?"

"Why, yes. How—?"

"And before that?"

"Well, last month—"

"Another little old lady?"

"Why, yes, I believe so. But—"

"Where can I get hold of Dr. Mortimer?"

"Ah— well, let me see. I believe he's with the University."

"Here in town?"

"Well—no, I believe another branch. Or perhaps—"

"What?"

"Well, come to think of it, I believe he mentioned an eastern school—Dartmouth? Harvard? I'm not sure."

"What does he look like?"

"Ah, well now— let's see, he's—"

"Tall? Short?"

"Hmmmm."

"White? Black? Brown?"

"Not brown, if I remember, but— well, maybe. By George, what color was the man?"

Mr. Fixit smiled. "I guess we'll never know," he said, and turned and walked away.

When he got to the little old lady's house that afternoon, he had a dozen long-stem roses in his hand, and, for the first time in his life, a sense of vocation—a calling.

And a partner.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

OPEN FILE

by CAROLYN T. CREW

Who killed the elderly millionaire?
The butler? or the spinster?
The stranger with the curly hair?
The Bishop of Westminster?

His widow may have been involved,
Or the man she'd been seen kissing.
The crime, alas, remains unsolved—
The final page is missing.

a *NEW* short story by

RUTH RENDELL

Six victims so far—and there hadn't been a killing for a week . . . something "special" from Ruth Rendell . . .

ON THE PATH

by *RUTH RENDELL*

There hadn't been a killing now for a week. The evening paper's front page was devoted instead to the economic situation and an earthquake in Turkey. But page three kept up the interest in this series of murders. On it were photographs of the six victims, all recognizably belonging to the same type. There, in every case, although details of feature naturally varied, were the same large liquid eyes, full soft mouth, and long dark hair.

Barry's mother looked up from the paper.

"I don't like you going out at night."

"What, me?" said Barry.

"Yes, you. All these murders happened round here. I don't like you going out after dark. It's not as if you had to, it's not as if it was for work." She got up and began to clear the table, but continued to speak in a low whining tone. "I wouldn't say a word if you were a big chap. If you were the size of your cousin Ronnie I wouldn't say a word. A fellow your size doesn't stand a chance against that maniac."

"I see," said Barry. "And whose fault is it I'm only five feet two? I might just point out that a woman of five feet that marries a bloke only two inches more can't expect to have giants for kids. Right?"

"I sometimes think you only go roving about at night, doing what you want, to *prove* you're as big a man as your cousin Ronnie."

Barry thrust his face close up to hers. "Look, leave off, will

you?" He waved the paper at her. "I may not have the height but I'm not in the right category. Has that occurred to you? Has it?"

"All right, all right. I wish you wouldn't be always shouting."

In his bedroom Barry put on his new velvet jacket and dabbed cologne on his wrists and neck. He looked spruce and dapper. His mother gave him an apprehensive glance as he passed her on his way to the back door, and returned to her contemplation of the pictures in the newspaper. Six of them in two months. The girlish faces, doe-eyed, diffident, looked back at her or looked aside or stared at distant unknown objects. After a while she folded the paper and switched on the television. Barry, after all, was not in the right category, and that must be her comfort.

He liked to go and look at the places where the bodies of the victims had been found. It brought him a thrill of danger and a sense of satisfaction. The first of them had been strangled very near his home on a path which first passed between draggled allotments, then became an alley plunging between the high brown wall of a convent and the lower red brick wall of a school.

Barry took this route to the livelier part of the town, walking rapidly but without fear and pausing at the point—a puddle of darkness between lamps—where the one they called Pat Leston had died. It seemed to him, as he stood there, that the very atmosphere, damp, dismal, and silent, breathed evil and the horror of the act. He appreciated it, inhaled it, and then passed on to seek, on the waste ground, the common, in a deserted back street of condemned houses, those other murder scenes. After the last killing they had closed the underpass, and Barry found to his disappointment that it was still closed.

He had walked a couple of miles and had hardly seen a soul. People stayed at home. There was even some kind of panic, he had noticed, when it got to six and the light was fading and the buses and tube trains were emptying themselves of the last commuters. In pairs they walked, and sometimes they scurried. They left the town as depopulated as if a plague had scoured it.

Entering the high street, walking its length, Barry saw no one, apart from those protected by the metal and glass of motor vehicles, but an old woman hunched on a step. Bundled in dirty clothes, a scarf over her head and a bottle in her hand, she was as safe as he—as far, or farther, from the right category.

But he was still on the watch. Next to viewing the spots where the six had died, he best enjoyed singling out the next victim. No

one, for all the boasts of the newspapers and the policemen, knew the type as well as he did. Slight and small-boned, long-legged, sway-backed, with huge eyes, pointed features, and long dark hair. He was almost sure he had selected the Italian one as a potential victim some two weeks before the event, though he could never be certain.

So far today he had seen no one likely, in spite of watching with fascination the exit from the tube on his own way home. But now, as he entered the Red Lion and approached the bar, his eye fell on a candidate who corresponded to the type more completely than anyone he had yet singled out. Excitement stirred in him. But it was unwise, with everyone so alert and nervous, to be caught staring. The barman's eyes were on him. He asked for a half of lager, paid for it, tasted it, and, as the barman returned to rinsing glasses, turned slowly to appreciate to the full that slenderness, that soulful timid look, those big expressive eyes, and that mane of black hair.

But things had changed during the few seconds his back had been turned. Previously he hadn't noticed that there were two people in the room, another as well as the candidate, and now they were sitting together. From intuition, at which Barry fancied himself as adept, he was sure the girl had picked the man up. There was something in the way she spoke as she lifted her full glass which convinced him, something in her look, shy yet provocative.

He heard her say, "Well, thank you, but I didn't mean to . . ." and her voice trailed away, drowned by the other's brashness.

"Catch my eye? Think nothing of it, love. My pleasure. Your fella one of the unpunctual sort, is he?"

She made no reply. Barry was fascinated, compelled to stare, by the resemblance to Pat Leston, by more than that, by seeing in this face what seemed a quintessence, a gathering together and a concentrating here of every quality variously apparent in each of the six. And what gave it a particular piquancy was to see it side by side with such brutal ugliness. He wondered at the girl's nerve, her daring to make overtures. And now she was making them afresh, actually laying a hand on his sleeve.

"I suppose you've got a date yourself?" she said.

The man laughed. "Afraid I have, love. I was just whiling away ten minutes." He started to get up.

"Let me buy you a drink."

His answer was only another harsh laugh. Without looking at the girl again, he walked away and through the swing doors out into the street. That people could expose themselves to such danger in the present climate of feeling intrigued Barry, his eyes now on the girl who was also leaving the pub. In a few seconds it was deserted, the only clients likely to visit it during that evening all gone.

A strange idea, with all its amazing possibilities, crossed his mind and he stood on the pavement, gazing the length of the High Street. But the girl had crossed the road and was waiting at the bus stop, while the man was only just visible in the distance, turning into the entrance of the underground car park.

Barry banished his idea, ridiculous perhaps and, to him, rather upsetting, and he crossed the road behind the oncoming bus, wondering how to pass the rest of the evening. Review once more those murder scenes, was all that suggested itself to him, and then go home.

It must have been the wrong bus for her. She was still waiting. And as Barry approached, she spoke to him.

"I saw you in the pub."

"Yes," he said. He never knew how to talk to girls. They intimidated and irritated him, especially when they were taller than he, and most of them were. The little thin ones he despised.

"I thought," she said hesitantly, "I thought I was going to have someone to see me home."

Barry made no reply. She came out of the bus shelter, quite close up to him, and he saw that she was much bigger and taller than he had thought at first.

"I must have just missed my bus. There won't be another for ten minutes." She looked, and then he looked, at the shiny desert of this shopping center, lighted and glittering and empty, pitted with the dark holes of doorways and passages. "If you're going my way," she said, "I thought maybe . . ."

"I'm going through the path," he said. Round there that was what everyone called it, the path.

"That'll do me." She sounded eager and pleading. "It's a short cut to my place. Is it all right if I walk along with you?"

"Suit yourself," he said. "One of them got killed down there. Doesn't that bother you?"

She only shrugged. They began to walk along together up the yellow and white glazed street, not talking, at least a yard apart.

It was a chilly damp night and a gust of wind caught them as, past the shops, they entered the path. The wind blew out the long red silk scarf she wore and she tucked it back inside her coat. Barry never wore a scarf, though most people did at this time of the year. It amused him to notice just how many did, as if they had never taken in the fact that all those six had been strangled with their own scarves.

There were lamps in this part of the path, attached by iron brackets to the red wall and the brown. Her sharp-featured face looked greenish in the light, and gaunt and scared. Suddenly he wasn't intimidated by her any more or afraid to talk to her.

"Most people," he said, "wouldn't walk down here at night for a million pounds."

"You do," she said. "You were coming down here alone."

"And no one gave me a million," he said cockily. "Look, that's where the first one died, just round this corner."

She glanced at the spot expressionlessly and walked on ahead of Barry. He caught up to her. If she hadn't been wearing high heels she wouldn't have been that much taller than he. He pulled himself up to his full height, stretching his spine, as if effort and desire could make him as big as his cousin Ronnie.

"I'm stronger than I look," he said. "A man's always stronger than a woman. It's the muscles."

He might not have spoken for all the notice she took. The walls ended and gave place to low railings behind which the allotments, scrubby plots of cabbage stumps and waterlogged weeds, stretched away. Beyond them, but a long way off, rose the backs of tall houses hung with wooden balconies and iron staircases. A pale moon had come out and cast over this dismal prospect a thin cold radiance.

"There'll be someone killed here next," he said. "It's just the place. No one to see. The killer could get away over the allotments."

She stopped and faced him. "Don't you ever think about anything but those murders?"

"Crime interests me. I'd like to know why he does it." He spoke insinuatingly, his resentment of her driven away by the attention she was at last giving him. "Why d'you think he does it? It's not for money or sex. What's he got against them?"

"Maybe he hates them." Her own words seemed to frighten her and, strangely, she pulled off the scarf which the wind had again

been flapping, and thrust it into her coat pocket. "I can understand that." She looked at him with a mixture of dislike and fear. "I hate men, so I can understand it," she said, her voice trembling and shrill.

"Come on, let's walk."

"No." Barry put out his hand and touched her arm. His fingers clutched her coat sleeve. "No, you can't just leave it there. If he hates them, why does he?"

"Perhaps he's been turned down too often," she said, backing away from him. "Perhaps a long time ago one of them hurt him. He doesn't want to kill them but he can't help himself." As she flung his hand off her arm, the words came spitting out. "Or he's just ugly. A little like you."

Barry stood on tiptoe to bring himself to her height. He took a step toward her, his fists up. She backed against the railings and a longer shudder went through her. Then she wheeled away and began to run, stumbling because her heels were high. It was those heels or the roughness of the ground or the new darkness as clouds dimmed the moon that brought her down.

Collapsed in a heap, one shoe kicked off, she slowly raised her head and looked up into Barry's eyes. He made no attempt to touch her. She struggled to her feet, wiping her grazed and bleeding hands on the scarf, and immediately, without a word, they were locked together in the dark.

Several remarkable features distinguished this murder from the others. There was blood on the victim who had fair hair instead of dark, though otherwise strongly resembling Patrick Leston and Dino Facci. Apparently, since Barry Halford hadn't been wearing a scarf, the murderer's own had been used. But it was the evidence of a slim dark-haired customer of the Red Lion which led the police to the conclusion that the killer of these seven young men was a woman.

"Q"

a *NEW* detective story by

THOMAS WALSH

Old Maggie Kennedy, seventy if she was a day, was the cleaning woman at McGarvey's Lakeview Motel, near the Adirondack town of High Falls. Now, Maggie was as poor as the proverbial church mouse. She worked, and worked hard, for her room and board as part of her pay. All she owned was some cheap costume jewelry, a rusty old black dress for Sundays, a ragged flannel bathrobe that had seen better days—no bankbook, no stock or bond, no safe-deposit key, no antiques, no objets d'art—nothing. So why should anyone want to harm poor old Maggie? . . .

THE STILLNESS AT 3:25

by *THOMAS WALSH*

McGarvey and his old friend and colleague Fred Logan drank more than a little Irish whiskey that night, which was St. Paddy's night, and in consequence McGarvey slept just fine afterward. So he had no idea what time it was when his dog Nutty woke him. In the middle of the night, McGarvey thought, with the hushed and undisturbed stillness in the air and not a car passing on the state road. Three or four o'clock, perhaps, but he did not know and did not care. He was drifting back into sleep when he was awakened again. Once more, standing stiff-legged on an old wooden chest under the bedroom window, Nutty repeated the low ominous growl in the throat.

This time McGarvey irritably forced his eyes open. It had been raining heavily at eleven o'clock when he had come up to bed, and now, in the fainter darkness outside his window, he could see thick, slowly wavering banks of ghostly white fog. He always kept a night light on downstairs over the office door, but the night bell

had not been rung, and no voices could be heard from down there. No belated wayfarer then, seeking shelter for the night at Dan McGarvey's Lakeview Motel. It must be something else. But what?

The dog knew. McGarvey did not. Nutty was a small, brown, and very aggressive little mutt, and now he had his front paws up on the window sill and his pointed small head pushed down and a bit forward. He was looking at something in the yard, and when he heard McGarvey stir behind him he growled a third time.

"What's the matter?" McGarvey demanded peevishly. His wife Catherine had been dead for some years, and in the great loneliness he still felt he quite often talked to the dog as he would have to another human. "What the hell are you growling at over there?"

But that was an altogether useless question, because Nutty could not explain to him, not in words. All he could do was trot quickly over to the door, then back to the window, meanwhile whining to himself at the slowness and stupidity of human sense impressions.

"Now listen here." McGarvey knew that Nutty was growling right back to him. "Just let me out, then I can see who it is. Get up out of there. Open the door, I tell you, and let me out!"

But McGarvey would not. There had been other occasions when the something downstairs had proved to be no more than a prowling woodchuck or raccoon, and Nutty had roused the whole motel, together with all the surrounding countryside, by an infuriated pursuit of it. McGarvey did get up, though, in order to prevent another ruckus at this hour of night, and padded across to the bedroom window in his bare feet.

Through the fog he could see the faint glimmer of the office light just below, but almost nothing else. The Lakeview Motel was in the shape of a U, with twelve units on the north wing, and twelve on the south wing, while at base center were the office, a small coffee room, and a small bar. On each side of the office were five more units, and McGarvey's private living quarters—three rooms and bath—made up the whole second floor.

But it was a thick early-morning mountain fog, and all McGarvey could see in the parking lot were the shadowy outlines of a few cars—the black Buick by Cabin 11, the green Volkswagen by Cabin 8, the Chevy station wagon by Cabin 15. Nothing at all seemed to be moving down there, not even a shadow. McGarvey

could not see the open end of the U, or beyond that, over on the other side of the state highway, even a glimpse of the lake. Everything in that direction was blotted out by a solid bank of cottony white mist, including the street lights farther on in the Adirondack town of High Falls.

Something down there that should not be down there? Very probably, McGarvey knew, to go by the unfailing animal instinct that he had seen Nutty display time after time with never a miss—but in all likelihood nothing to fret over. "Now I'll take the stick to you," McGarvey growled, though he never had yet. "I know what you're after—just a bit of a run for yourself. Well, you're not getting it. Do you hear what I'm telling you? Go back to your bed."

After that McGarvey padded into the bathroom, drank some water, and glanced down at his wristwatch. It showed 3:25. That was how they knew, afterward. But it was only Nutty who knew then, at the moment itself, when the thing must have happened.

There was a fine crystal-clear morning next day. When McGarvey got up it looked to him as if everything outside had been freshly washed and scrubbed down, with the sharp mountain air wonderfully bright and transparent, the lake an almost unbelievable deep blue, the pines black as night, the maples red as fire, and the birches—it had been a wonderful autumn for foliage—all pure golden white. The Volkswagen had already gone, the Buick too; early starts. The dozen or so other cars in the parking lot all had a touch of gray frost on their windshields, and a line of dripped-off black water all around them on the white concrete. McGarvey let an exuberant Nutty out for his first run of the day, and then, back in his tiny private kitchen, he made eggs and coffee.

Downstairs, in his small business office, he noticed by the littered wastepaper basket and a couple of unemptied ashtrays that old Maggie Kennedy, the cleaning woman, was not up yet, which was very unusual for her. But he thought nothing much of it until an hour or so later when she still hadn't appeared and when he suddenly remembered the way Nutty had carried on last night. Almost 70, McGarvey knew, and yet as brisk and spry most times as a young girl. But still . . .

He waited until ten o'clock. Then he walked down the left wing of the motel to the room at the very end, the road end. Three months ago, when he had hired old Maggie, room and board had

been agreed on as part of her pay; and so McGarvey knocked at the door now, and knocked again. After that he used his passkey and went inside.

He was not inside very long, perhaps half a minute or so. When he came out—a tall dour-looking man with bushy black eyebrows and a long deep crease in each cheek—he was walking quickly. Nutty bounced up at him from the woods and was plainly annoyed at the lack of attention he got. The dog muttered angrily, then perched himself in the office doorway to watch McGarvey use the phone. McGarvey did not use it very long—three or four sentences in all. Then he hung up, the twin creases in his cheeks deeper than ever, and waited beside the phone, without even a glance for Nutty, until the siren could be heard coming along the state highway.

In the old days, when they had both worked on the New York City police force, McGarvey had been homicide, and Fred Logan narcotics. It was Fred who had retired first, having to retire after a shootout in East Harlem, and then jumping at it when an offer was made to him of the Chief's job in High Falls. The physical requirements there were not so rigid, and once or twice McGarvey and Catherine had come up to visit Logan and his family. It was McGarvey's first experience with small-town life, and he discovered that he enjoyed it enormously.

So when Catherine died, and the big old house in Astoria—all McGarvey's now with Catherine gone and the children all grown and married—had been put on the market, he went up to visit Logan again. That time he decided to stay on, and got enough for the house in Astoria to make a down payment on the Lakeview Motel. He knew he would never marry again, not after Catherine, and if now and again he missed the old life there was always Fred Logan's house just down the road, and things for both of them to recall fondly or not, as the incident warranted.

But the morning McGarvey found poor old Maggie Kennedy with her head battered in, it was not old times that he and Logan talked about. There was a young state trooper with them, and a man from the sheriff's office, and after old Doc Patterson had given his opinion that the time of death had probably been about three o'clock—or maybe 3:25, McGarvey thought, wincing a little and finding that he had clenched both hands in his pockets—they all began discussing the thing in the tiny motel barroom.

"Smashed two or three times," Logan remarked, "on the back of

the head—and so smashed deliberately. The thing was meant then—only who in the world would want to harm poor old Maggie Kennedy? She didn't have a nickel to her name and never did have. But whoever did it wanted something of hers—and wanted it enough to kill her for it. You can see that by the condition he left the room in—the closet door open, the bureau drawers open, everything scattered around."

"Not everything," McGarvey put in. "Only the top bureau drawer was open, Fred. Not the second."

"And that means something to you?"

"A little," McGarvey said. "That the murderer found what he was looking for in that top drawer. It's why he stopped looking."

"Could be," the state trooper objected, "but not necessarily. He could have been scared off. I think we ought to tear this whole place apart. That old lady had something. Maybe money, maybe jewelry, maybe stocks or bonds—but something. She just had to, in order to be killed for it. There's no other answer."

But whatever poor old Maggie had in her cabin that was valuable enough for someone to have smashed in the back of her head for it was as much a mystery after they had searched the unit as before they had started. One dollar and 30 cents in her pocketbook; a few items of cheap, very cheap, ten-cent-store jewelry; a rusty old black Sunday dress in her closet; a ragged flannel bathrobe; and otherwise, no bankbook, no stock or bond, and no safe-deposit key.

"Then it looks like what we got to find," the man from the sheriff's office commented sourly, "is a million-dollar nothing. She was killed for whatever it was, only what was it? What could it have been? Who has an idea?"

"Can't help you there," McGarvey had to admit, "but I can tell you exactly what time she was murdered. I'd say it was twenty-five minutes past three."

"So you heard something then," he was told angrily, "or you saw something. Only you weren't interested enough to get up out of bed and check the thing out?"

"I didn't hear anything," McGarvey said. "And I didn't see anything. He did."

The sheriff's man glanced contemptuously at Nutty.

"That crummy little mutt?" he asked incredulously. "Okay. Swell. We'll have to see if he's ready to swear to it in court, maybe."

"Now come on, come on," the trooper said. "We're not getting anywhere at all, looks like. Tell us about last night, McGarvey, all about it. Just what happened?"

So McGarvey did, describing the way Nutty had awakened him, the way he had got up from bed and looked out the window, the way he had seen nothing at all down in the parking lot.

"But you only stood there by the window," the sheriff's man said. "Didn't go downstairs. Didn't even call out. Just stood there. Even that mutt you own has more brains than you, it looks like. Proved it out, didn't he?"

"Guess he did," McGarvey said, raising his eyes slowly. "But I wouldn't put it like that, sir. I mean I don't own him."

"No?" And the sheriff's man grinned sarcastically. He did not really know his job and he knew it. What he must have been afraid of, therefore, was that McGarvey and Fred Logan might show a little more professional competence. "Then how would you put it?"

"That he happens to be a friend of mine," McGarvey said slowly and clearly. "And that he seems to enjoy living with me. That's how I'd put it."

"But this million-dollar nothing," the trooper interrupted once more. "What would you say it could be? It's not money. It's not furs. It's not some kind of valuable bric-a-brac; and it's not a picture or old china or anything like that. Then what could it have been? The furniture in here all yours, McGarvey?"

"All mine," McGarvey nodded. "And you can buy more like it at any second-hand store down to Albany. The lot of it's not worth a plugged nickel."

"Then something else was," the trooper said fretfully, slapping his right hand down on the bar. "Something had to be, if the guy didn't mind killing her for it. She have any family?"

"Nephew," the sheriff's man said. "Smart-aleck young kid named Earl Jackson. Works here, works there, but no dammed good, actually. You know the kind. The kind that—"

He stopped. Then he turned slowly, ignoring McGarvey and Fred Logan, and looked at the trooper.

"Of course," he said. "Earl Jackson. Where were my brains? Call your office, call them right now. He's the one. He's gotta be."

So that night, over in Burlington, Vermont, they picked up Earl Jackson. It was all in the town paper the next day, big news, and

McGarvey read it at breakfast. There were even pictures, the sheriff's man being the center of each one, with young Earl Jackson—slim, blond, boyish, eyes bleary from desperately unshed tears—held masterfully by the right arm.

But in a way, McGarvey supposed, the thing had to be considered almost inevitable. No signs of forced entry had been found on the door or windows of Maggie Kennedy's room at the Lakeview Motel, so all the odds were that, whoever the killer had been, Maggie Kennedy had admitted him herself. He must have been known to her, therefore—a friend, an acquaintance, a relative. And if the only relative she had was young Earl, and if, in that capacity, he might have been told whatever it was of value that old Maggie had got hold of . . .

The sheriff's man had it all figured out, anyway. It was his idea that old Maggie had found something—a wallet, a diamond brooch, a bag of money; that in her excitement she must have told Earl Jackson about it; and that, later on, he had come back to the motel and murdered old Maggie in cold blood to get his hands on whatever it was. In that way the whole business could be made to fit together almost perfectly, and McGarvey might have been tempted to believe it himself, if he did not happen to know old Maggie and young Earl.

But McGarvey did, and so from the first he felt sure the answer lay in another direction. Several times that winter young Earl had done various jobs around the motel—plowing out the driveway or painting a cabin or tinkering with McGarvey's old Dodge—and on such occasions he had proved himself to be an honest, conscientious, and hard-working young man. He had seemed to be very fond of his Aunt Maggie, as she of him, and indeed, judging by the newspaper photograph, had been affected to the point of tears by her murder. Yet, if young Earl was not the murderer, who was—and again, what was the reason?

That was the answer to the whole thing, McGarvey decided. That held the secret to everything else. Once found, it would unlock all the doors. Every morning, rain or shine, old Maggie had walked a mile into town to attend seven o'clock Mass and to receive Holy Communion—which indicated that if she had indeed found anything of value she would never have kept it for her own benefit. No. She would have returned it, if there was any identification on the thing—or else she would have asked someone's advice on what she should do with it, maybe even McGarvey's.

Besides which, if anything of value had been lost, the word would have been all around town the next day. So something had not been found by old Maggie, something of great value—and she had not been killed for it. Then what had she been killed for?

Easy now, McGarvey cautioned himself; go step by step. First, the something must be very small, since even a tiny matchbox had been emptied out on her dresser in the search of her room that night; the something was extremely valuable, since cold-blooded murder had been done for it; and the something, being small, was also quickly and easily portable. So he knew those three facts about it. What fitted on all counts?

He could not think of anything. It seemed to him that he could not even begin to think. What had she done on the last night of her life? She had done everything quite as usual. She had eaten her supper in the motel coffee room. Then, in McGarvey's office, and with nothing at all nervous or secretive in her manner, she had read the town paper until nine or so, and then she had walked down to her cabin.

At eleven, when McGarvey himself had gone to bed, her light had still been on—but again quite as usual. She was an old woman; she did not sleep well; and so, night after night, she sat up to watch the eleven o'clock news on the little television set that young Earl had bought for her only last Christmas.

But at or about 3:25 that morning she had got up out of bed and admitted a caller. Or wait a minute there. Had Nutty been disturbed not by the arrival of the caller but by his departure? There was no way to tell even that much. Oh, damn it to hell! Why hadn't he paid a little more attention to Nutty the other night? The whole business might have been settled then and there. Yet the fact remained that he had not paid attention, or enough attention; and now a decent and likable young lad like Earl Jackson . . .

That afternoon he drove down to the Town Hall lockup and spent ten minutes with young Earl.

"But I never even saw Aunt Maggie after nine o'clock that night," the boy whispered to him. "I knew she was having a birthday this week and I brought her a little present. I had to drop it off that night, Mr. McGarvey, ahead of her birthday, because I was getting a permanent job as a car mechanic over in Burlington. So I did, and then I drove straight back to my rooming house and went to bed. I can swear that to God. I never

even woke up till eight o'clock the next morning."

McGarvey nodded, but said nothing. What he thought, however, was that it would be only Earl's unsupported word for what he had done that night—and how easy it would have been, later on, for him to have slipped out of the rooming house, walked half a mile or so to the Lakeview Motel, to have done there what had been done, and then to have slipped back to the rooming house again.

"Now don't worry about anything at all," he heard himself comforting futilely. "We'll see what turns up, Earl. I'll ask a few questions here and there, and be in to see you sometime tomorrow afternoon."

And he did ask the questions, although not finding much help in them. All the Lakeview guests on the night of the murder had long departed, and so he could question only two permanent residents—prim old Miss Potter who worked as assistant in a dentist's office and a salesman in Watson's Department Store named Arthur Whaley. Neither of them was able to give much help.

"No, I can't tell you anything at all," Miss Potter sniffed. She was a tall, exceptionally broad-shoulderd woman, with bony square hands that seemed to McGarvey as powerful as those of a man. "I've never been interested in other people's affairs, Mr. McGarvey. I've quite enough to do to attend to my own."

"And very commendable, ma'am," McGarvey soothed her. "But I'm sure it isn't young Earl. So if there was anything at all that you saw out of the way around here that night, I'd be very grateful to know what it was."

"Sure of it, are you?" And Miss Potter favored him with a dry, knowing smile. "Only the young people these days—well, I guess you know what they are as well as I do. But I can tell you one thing which I meant to tell you before. That night Mr. Whaley entertained a female visitor. After I put off my light at eleven or so, I happened to glance at his cabin, which as you know is directly across the parking lot from mine. He was just closing his door, but I had the glimpse of a woman's dress inside. Is that the sort of carrying on you permit in this establishment, Mr. McGarvey? Because if it is—"

So McGarvey assured her as to the Lakeview's utter propriety and that night he discussed the matter with Arthur Whaley, who reacted so angrily to it that he began stuttering.

"And you believed her?" he demanded angrily. "Why, that—

that silly sex-starved old maid. She never saw any such thing. She must be crazy! I didn't smuggle any woman into my room, Mac. I'm engaged to a girl over in Glens Falls! And that damned old biddy—to say something like that. I ought to—"

"Now take it easy!" McGarvey counseled. "I'd have to agree that she always has her nose poking around at something or other. But what I really wanted to ask you—did you notice anything unusual around here the night poor Maggie was killed? Anything at all?"

"Well, gosh," Arthur Whaley said, and hesitated uncomfortably. "I'm not sure that I know just how to answer that, Mac. I mean I don't like to get anyone in trouble. And I don't think I could swear to it, anyway. I'm just not sure."

"Nobody likes it," McGarvey said. "But things are beginning to look pretty damned serious for young Earl. You'd have to think of that, too."

"As if I haven't," Arthur Whaley said, with a crooked grin on his lips. "The way it looks now, once they can put him on the scene of the crime, he's a gone goose—and I've always liked that kid, between you and me. Which I guess is the biggest reason of all I didn't say anything about this to Chief Logan yet."

"Anything about what?" McGarvey said, lowering his voice cautiously. "I think maybe you'd better tell me, Arthur—and strictly on the q.t., of course. Just between you and me."

"Well," Arthur Whaley said, after again hesitating, "the first thing is that I'm not sure, Mac, not sure at all. I don't know what woke me up. I don't even know the time. But all of a sudden I found myself wide awake and felt like I'd just heard something. And you know how that is, I suppose. You know you heard it, all right, but you have no idea what it was. A door slamming? A woman's scream? A car driving up? You just can't say. So you lie there in kind of a fog, at least I did. Then—"

"Then?" McGarvey prompted. "I suppose you got up and looked out of your window?"

"What else?" Arthur nodded miserably. "But there was fog outside then, real thick fog." And McGarvey remembered that there had been. The noise that had alerted Nutty had probably awakened Arthur Whaley too, who lived just two cabins down from old Maggie, she in Cabin 12 at the end of the wing, he in Cabin 10. He would, therefore, have heard the sound, whatever it had been, much clearer than McGarvey had, and it must of course

have been about the same time—3:25 a.m. "Only it seemed to me that somebody was sneaking around the end of the wing from old Maggie's cabin, somebody in a yellow windbreaker. Before I could manage to make out who it was, he was gone. But I think, I just think, Mac, that maybe it was—"

"Young Earl?" McGarvey demanded, feeling something ugly and a bit sick in him. Two or three times last winter, working around the motel, Earl had worn a yellow windbreaker. And yellow was the most visible color of all on a foggy night, or at any time when viewing conditions were not too good. Arthur Whaley did not answer in words. He only tilted his head sideward, twisted down one corner of his mouth wretchedly, and shrugged.

So now, McGarvey realized, the last brick of all was in place. All they had needed was a witness who could place young Earl at the scene of the crime that night, and now they had one.

After he was left alone in the motel office, McGarvey stood with his hands spread apart on the counter and a bit of cigar in his mouth. He did not move for quite a while. When he did, it was to reach over for the phone and call Fred Logan.

In the end, consequently, Miss Potter was proved quite wrong. Dan McGarvey did not know what the young people were like these days as well as she did. Dan McGarvey, despite his long and varied professional experience, had never so much as suspected. He had failed to realize that a child's mind, or even the mind of a boy in his late teens, did not function at all like that of an adult. It had built up no solid background on which to stand firm. It could be enticed in one direction without difficulty, and then, quite as easily, diverted to another. Given the right circumstances and companions, it could be led to believe in anything at all, or else in nothing at all. It was young Earl, certainly. It just had to be. There was simply no other answer.

But he would not admit that the next day, when McGarvey saw him. His face still looked pale and tired, and when he saw McGarvey the boyish and innocent young eyes appeared almost to brim over.

"They're going to let me go to the funeral, anyway," he managed to say. "Eleven o'clock, Mr. McGarvey. The Chief said Wally Nordstorm would take me."

"Is that right?" McGarvey said, his dour face more dour than ever. "But I wanted to talk to you about something else, Earl.

You told me that last Friday you stopped in to see your aunt at the motel about nine o'clock, to drop off her birthday present, and after that you went straight home to bed. You never saw her again and you never went back to the motel later on that night for any reason at all. You still insist that's God's truth?"

"What?" young Earl said. The innocent young eyes—too innocent? Too clear and grief-stricken? Too cunningly heartbroken? They stared off into space somewhere back of McGarvey's right shoulder. "Well, sure. That's right. It's just what I did, Mr. McGarvey. Just what I told you."

"Then you're a damned liar," McGarvey said, in quite an unexcited conversational tone. Sometimes that direct, unemotional man-to-man approach won them over, when loud-voiced bullying and empty threats would have toughened their spines to cold steel. "You did the thing and you know you did. But what were you after? What in hell did the poor old woman have that was worth killing her for?"

The boy's candid eyes stared up at him as if with deep hurt and honest bewilderment.

"But what are you talking about, Mr. McGarvey? I didn't lie to you. I did everything the way I told you already. I drove out to your place and gave her the ticket at nine, because that was the only thing I could afford by way of a birthday present. 'And don't forget to listen to the eleven o'clock news,' I told her, 'and maybe, just this once in your life, you'll have a bit of luck.' "

Yes, a bit of luck, was McGarvey's grim thought. But at 3:25 that morning, when Earl Jackson would have been sure that everyone at the Lakeview Motel would be sound asleep, he had come back again—and he had been seen. But what had he killed her for? The dollar or two in her purse had been left there; she had nothing else worth even a five-dollar bill; and yet she had been murdered that night in Cabin 12, and murdered deliberately. But for what? That question had still not been answered. Something small; something easily carried off once it was found; something of great value. The million-dollar nothing that did not exist, yet had to exist. But what fitted? Nothing. Nothing at all. Unless . . .

McGarvey, jerking around his head quickly, stared down at young Earl. Young Earl stared up at him.

"Good God," McGarvey burst out. "Good God Almighty! Fred, Fred!"

And he rushed off to find Chief Logan.

Early that afternoon, in the Chief's office, Miss Potter and Arthur Whaley faced Logan from the other side of his desk, while the man from the sheriff's office stood between them, and McGarvey, hands at his back, rested himself against the closed office door.

"But I thought," Miss Potter was protesting angrily, the flesh over her cheekbones colored now to a delicate pink, "that what I told Mr. McGarvey was simply and solely for his own ears. But if I do have to say it again, and in this company, it's perfectly true. I did see a woman in Mr. Whaley's room that night. Not much—he was just closing the door. But I saw her. There's simply no question about it. I saw just the one flash of her skirt or dress as he closed the door after her."

"What color skirt?" the Chief asked.

"Dark. Black, perhaps. Yes, black."

"Dan," the Chief said, but without turning his head to McGarvey. "I don't remember old Maggie Kennedy wearing anything but black since her husband died three years ago. Do you?"

"Never once," McGarvey said. "Not at my place, Fred. Always, when she wasn't wearing the gray uniforms I bought her, the black dress."

"So," Logan said, resting his chin on his right hand and apparently thinking it all over. "And what time was that, Miss Potter?"

"After eleven," Miss Potter said. "After the news was over. I'd just snapped off the TV, and was opening my window for the night. When I saw—"

"Fine," Logan said. "Thank you. So you say one thing and Mr. Whaley here says another. A slight difference of opinion, I'd say. One of you has to be lying and one of you isn't. But which is which?"

"Very difficult to say," McGarvey thought, dark eyes fixed on the back of Arthur's Whaley's head. "Because there appears to be more than one lie. Earl says he never came out here again after nine that evening, and Mr. Whaley here says he must have. Mr. Whaley says he saw him in my parking lot at 3:25 a.m., which was right to the second. Very convenient, wasn't it? Then there could be only one answer to the thing for any sensible man. The killer was young Earl."

And Arthur Whaley must have felt the eyes on the back of his head. He turned slowly, lips tight, and faced them.

"What are you getting at?" he demanded. "Just what are you trying to say, McGarvey?"

"Nothing much yet," McGarvey announced stolidly. "Plenty of time."

"Or let me guess," Arthur Whaley said, his lips curling. "That I killed old Maggie—and when I'd heard Earl had been arrested for it I tried to damn him by false witness. But that's something I think will need a lot of proving. Old Maggie had nothing in the world—not a dollar. So why should I have—"

"That's right," McGarvey said. "All her life, the same story for the poor old thing—not a dollar. Until a little after eleven o'clock last Friday night when they read off the winning number in the special state lottery. Before that time she still didn't have a dollar in the world. And after that—could she dare to believe the thing?—she had the ticket that had won the million-dollar first prize."

"The million-dollar nothing," Fred Logan remarked coldly, also watching Arthur Whaley. "As we called it before, Dan. And it isn't too hard to figure out how poor old Maggie must have felt at that instant. She couldn't believe the thing. She was afraid to believe it. No, no. A mistake somewhere. So she rushed out to have somebody else verify it for her, and just two doors down was our friend Mr. Whaley here. Dan had gone to bed. The other people around were all strangers—but she knew you, Whaley. So I submit that she ran down and knocked at your door in great excitement, and that you let her in—and that she was the woman Miss Potter saw from the other side of the courtyard. The time fits exactly. Anything to say now?"

"That you better wait a minute," Arthur Whaley said, his voice shaking. "That—"

"And I submit," Logan said, even more coldly, "that you sat up with her until the eleven-thirty radio news on which they also gave out the winning number—and it was her number. So there it was. A million dollars right in your hands and no questions asked, if only poor old Maggie was out of the way. I also submit that you lay in bed after that turning and tossing, trying to nerve yourself up to the thing, and that at a little after three in the morning you did nerve yourself up. I submit that's what Nutty heard at that time, when you made some excuse and smashed her

over the head the instant she opened her door for you. Sound carries on a damp night—enough for the dog, anyway. Oh, yes, he heard you. That's when he—or are you about to explain it all to us in some other way now, Whaley?"

But Arthur Whaley had to make two attempts to speak and even then could only croak huskily.

"Some sort of proof," he got out. "So far you haven't given me an iota of it. And if you think—"

"That's true enough," McGarvey said, and moved forward a step with his right palm extended. "So there's your proof, since you want it so much. The ticket, sir, the winning ticket. Tucked away all nice and neat in your sports jacket in Cabin 10, quite as if you'd just bought it somewhere or other, and had forgotten the thing. But you'd have remembered it quick enough one day when you had a dependable witness in the room. What a surprise it would have been for you! Just fancy—the million-dollar ticket! And all yours."

"She'd have written her name and address on it," Arthur Whaley got out desperately. "There's a place for that! So if it was hers—"

"She did a little better than that," the Chief said. "She left her fingerprints on it, because we've just checked out that part, and young Earl left his too. And I think that ought to be enough identification as to who bought the ticket and who had legal ownership of it. Not you, Mr. Whaley. Any more objections now, or are you fresh out?"

"Now listen," Arthur Whaley cried, his whole face cream-white. "I tell you—"

But McGarvey never much enjoyed that part. He walked out to the other room where young Earl was waiting for him.

"All right?" young Earl said.

"Fine," McGarvey said. "Just perfect, Earl. And excuse me."

"Excuse you?" Earl said. "For what? I have to thank you, Mr. McGarvey. Because you're the one—"

"For a certain idea I had," McGarvey said. "I'm very sorry for it, Earl. Now let's get out of here. But I think, as soon as the formalities are over, Aunt Maggie has one last present for you."

"Poor old Aunt Maggie," Earl said, not too steadily. "When I think how—what's the present, Mr. McGarvey?"

"A million-dollar nothing," McGarvey said. "Now come on, I'll drive you home."

ELLERY QUEEN'S
MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME DOSSIER

by OTTO PENZLER

THE BUSTED FLUSH: John D. MacDonald and his adventurer hero, Travis McGee, are the subjects of the *JDM Bibliophile,* a small, semiannual periodical devoted to appreciation and bibliography of the author and his creation. The editor, Edgar W. Hirshberg, welcomes submissions of material concerning the best-selling author or about mystery and detective fiction in general. The journal appears in April and October, and an annual subscription is $3.00. Ante up—you can't lose. To subscribe or contribute, write to Professor Hirshberg at the Department of English, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL 33620. (Checks should be made out to JDM Bibliophile.) And if you haven't read the latest McGee novel, *The Empty Copper Sea* (Lippincott, $8.95) you are missing a treat. It leaped onto the best-seller lists immediately upon publication, of course, and deserves its flood of sales.

FLUSHED WITH PLEASURE: It's always a joy to receive an honorary award of some kind, especially when presented by your peers, and this has happened recently to a few scholars, devotees and admirers of Dashiell Hammett: William F. Nolan, author of *Dashiell Hammett: A Casebook,* and Jack Kaplan of Pinkerton's San Francisco office (as was the creator of Sam Spade and the Continental Op) have formed The Dashiell Hammett Society of San Francisco, with headquarters at the Maltese Falcon Room of John's Grill in San Francisco. It is a slightly different society, designed to honor the author but is non-profit, has no membership fees, is (happily) non-political, and accepts no applications for memberships, all of which are honorary. Charter members include Joe Gores, Frederic Dannay, Ron Goulart, Ned Guymon, Ross Macdonald, James Sandoe, Howard Haycraft, Chris Steinbrunner, and 36 others, including Lillian Hellman, Hammett's two daughters, and his widow. Make a film or write a book and you may be admitted.

TO BE FLUSHED: Pacific Quar-

terly, which describes itself as "An International Review of Arts and Ideas," has devoted its Volume 3, Number 1 to Criminal Literature, and apologizes for it. Readers are told, in the preface, that "the fact that a novel's subject is crime or specifically murder does not *necessarily* [italics mine] mean that it is second rate . . ." How comforting for us to know! The guest editor, David Skene Melvin, has assembled a good issue, with original material from Dame Ngaio Marsh, Derrick Murdock, and others, but he is fighting a difficult battle. I get uncomfortable when a publisher spells its editor's name "Melven" on the front cover, correctly on the title page, and "Melville" on the Table of Contents page—twice. To order copies at $3.00 each, write to Mr. Melvin at Outrigger North America, 36 Chapel Street, Brampton, Ontario, Canada L6W 2H4.

FLUSHED WITH SUCCESS: With all the attention being paid to Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys these days, let's not forget about the first great boy crime-fighters in American literature, the heroes of Horatio Alger. Each of these honest and hard-working young fellows got a break and were then given an assignment which required serious detective work or espionage talents. The complete story of the author and his stalwart heroes may be found in *Horatio Alger* by Ralph D. Gardner (Arco, $10.00), which includes a comprehensive bibliography that is worth the price of the book all by itself. This fine book is a genuine happy ending for America's all-time best-selling author.

BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

Alfred Hitchcock is certainly the best-known film director in the world; both his rotund profile and work are universally recognizable. He is also *the* master of the mystery cinema, a genre he has made his own. There has been no lack of critical studies of his landmark motion pictures; now, however, English critic John Russell Taylor has provided us with the first authorized biography of the man himself, in *Hitch: The Life and Times of Alfred Hitchcock* (Pantheon, $10.00). The book is a fascinating, hugely entertaining peek over the shoulder of a genius at an incredible body of great suspense films—and their meticulous construction. Shy, private, the secret Hitchcock (a devoted family man, deeply religious, but with a marvelous sense of macabre whimsey and the bizarre) is at last joyously exposed.

Drama is life with all the dull

parts left out, Hitch is fond of saying. (Another favorite maxim is the classical Sardou's recipe for drama: menace the heroine.) He sometimes has constructed whole film stories from a single visual kernel: a man clinging from the granite faces of Mount Rushmore, a bishop kidnaped during a cathedral service. Some of his greatest successes he doubted would ever get off the ground: the elegantly smooth-flowing *North by Northwest* took two years to write! (Hitch is the unbilled collaborator on all of his screenplays, and the major shaper.) He has brought to the screen the works of some of the greats of our field—John Buchan, Josephine Tey, Patrick Hamilton, William Irish, Robert Bloch, Patricia Highsmith (he was the first to see her brooding cinematic possibilities), and Daphne du Maurier (whom he especially liked because he had known her father Gerald). He has worked with such writers as Evan Hunter and a surprisingly churlish Raymond Chandler.

The book deals in depth with the director's formative period in cramped British silents, with unjustly underrated films such as *Foreign Correspondent* and *Vertigo,* and with the long succession of cool blonde heroines Hitchcock has managed to get into troublesome situations on screen. Once in Rome the devout Hitchcock declined an audience with the Pope a thoughtful friend was about to arrange. "What would I do," he said, "if the Holy Father declared that in this world, with so much sex and violence, I ought to lay off?"

On the cinematic front, the new J. Arthur Rank remake of *The Thirty-Nine Steps* is about to be released in England. Directed by action specialist Don Sharp, it has a good cast, including Robert Powell, David Warner, and John Mills. Meanwhile, Angela Lansbury has been added to *The Lady Vanishes*—in the title role. Another classic remake will be Mary Roberts Rinehart's *The Bat,* with Lillian Gish starring as the elderly mystery writer who exposes the villain.

There are a few new movies too. Richard Dreyfus is fairly mellow as new-style private eye Moses Wine in *The Big Fix.* It's based on a book by Roger L. Simon, who did the screenplay; another has been optioned. Stanley Ellin's novel, *The Bind,* about an insurance investigator digging into a murder at a Miami Beach couples colony, is being filmed (the locale changed to Acapulco) as *Sunburn,* with Charles Grodin as the detective. Ellin tells EQMN the production will be a gaudy one. He did the original draft of the screenplay, but it was considerably reshaped to fit the talents of heroine Farrah Fawcett-Majors. That sunburn may jiggle.

NTERVIEW: ELLERY QUEEN (2)

This is the second half of an nterview with Frederic Dannay the first half appeared in the Jan- uary issue of *EQMM*) to commem- rate the Golden Anniversary of he original publication of the irst Ellery Queen novel, *The Roman Hat Mystery.*

EQMM: What was the nature of your collaboration with Manfred B. Lee—who did what, in what order? What contributions did you each make?

QUEEN: I really can't answer that fully because it was Manny who wanted to keep our profes- sional working methods secret. We both kept the secret while he was alive and it isn't fair for me to give any concrete details while he isn't here. I can tell you that, dur- ng the course of 43 years of col- aboration, you are bound to try every method of collaboration known to man—and some un- known to man. We sometimes worked together over the same typewriter; we sometimes did not work together over the same type- writer, but worked in the same room. We sometimes worked three thousand miles apart. And all the methods finally distilled themselves into a realization that Manny did certain things better than I did, and I did certain things better than Manny did. Our most productive method of collabora- tion was for each to do the things that he was better at and combine them for the best possible result.

EQMM: Did you use the same collaborative methods for the Barnaby Ross/Drury Lane books as you did for the Queen books? There seem to be major differ- ences.

QUEEN: We used the same col- laborative method that we were using at that time. The major dif- ferences you see were probably (and don't forget this goes back to the early 1930s, more than 40 years ago) owing to the fact that Manny and I felt we should be putting something very different into a different series by a sup- posedly different author. We couldn't, or rather we didn't want to, duplicate for Ross what we were doing with Queen.

EQMM: As you look back at the past 50 years—incredibly produc- tive years—what gives you the greatest satisfaction? About what are you most pleased to have done?

QUEEN: In a general way, it would be if people looked back at the work, or read the work for the first time, and said that this was honest merchandise, mean- ing that it was work done with in- tegrity. I think that would please me more than anything else. Be- cause whatever our failures—and some of our books were undoubt- edly failures—our intent in our work, our *working,* was always done with the highest degree of integrity of which we were cap- able.

EQMM: Is there something you

would like to have done that you did not do?

QUEEN: When Manny and I were creating what we believed were individualistic plots, themes, concepts, and characters, we realized that we were at one time part of the Golden Age and at another time part of the departure from the Golden Age, but never did we consider ourselves originators. There is a great difference between originating and innovating. I think we can be given credit for many innovations, but we didn't originate a style within the framework of the detective story. Speaking for myself, the biggest thing that I could have done, but don't think I did it (and I don't know whether I ever could have accomplished it), was to originate a new form—to give the detective story a wholly new approach. Not just a refinement, or a crystallization, but a wholly new *kind* of detective story. I don't know. I do believe that with each generation or even each decade the world changes so much that something new can be added to the basic form, that an original form may come out of that. Whether we worked in the periods when that couldn't happen, I don't know. And that's a good way to end this interview—by admitting I don't know.

THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

Though the pure classical detective novel of the twenties and thirties may never make a comeback as the dominant form of the mystery novel, it still has its practitioners, including a heartening number of newcomers. Two first novels, one American and one Canadian, both initial entries in promised series, call to mind the Golden Age in different ways.

**** Fredric Neuman: *The Seclusion Room,* Viking, $8.95. A seclusion room is a locked and empty chamber in which psychotic patients are sometimes placed for their own protection. Such a room is the scene for a possible, though impossible, murder in this Edgar-caliber first novel, most notable for a hospital setting that is funny, believable, and disturbing. Dr. Abe Redden, a moody and likeable psychiatrist, is a new detective to watch.

*** John Reeves: *Murder by Microphone,* Doubleday, $7.95. Coggin and Sump of the Toronto Police investigate a murder at the headquarters of a fictionalized (and presumably exaggerated) version of the Canadian Broadcasting Company. Here we have a crossword puzzle opposite the title page and more footnotes than even S. S. Van Dine would have dared. The action of the story, one interview after another, is static in the best sense. More successful as satire than detec-

tion, the novel is emphatically not for all tastes. Many will deem it arch, not without provocation. Readers appalled by the decline of good English will especially enjoy Inspector Coggin. (Though the author says it's okay to skip the footnotes, since no essential clues are included therein, no reader inclined to skip the footnotes is likely to enjoy the novel. It is a book for footnote-readers like your reviewer.)

*** Cornell Woolrich: *Angels of Darkness,* Mysterious Press, P.O. Box 334, East Station, Yonkers, N.Y. 10704, $10.00. Introduction by Harlan Ellison, Afterword by Francis M. Nevins, Jr. This collection of eight lesser known Woolrich tales, all with women as protagonists, does not, as Ellison indicates in his Introduction, show the author at the top of his form in most cases, but even lesser Woolrich has a special magic about it.

*** William H. Hallahan: *Keeper of the Children,* Morrow, $7.95. The author's first since his Edgar-winning *Catch Me, Kill Me* is a suspenseful and skillfully told occult mystery on the timely subject of mind-controlling religious cults. It won't, however, win over many readers who are weary of the glut of supernatural novels.

*** James K. MacDougall: *Death and the Maiden,* Bobbs-Merrill, $8.95. Midwestern private eye David Stuart serves as go-between in a kidnaping in his second recorded case, a good novel in the serious, tightly plotted Ross Macdonald vein.

*** each to the latest novels in some reliable series. Simon Brett's actor-detective Charles Paris is in good form in *An Amateur Corpse* (Scribners, $7.95), including Brett's trickiest puzzle plot (and one of the *genre*'s grayest bearded clichés) with the usual wit and satire. Rabbi David Small completes his week in Harry Kemelman's *Thursday the Rabbi Walked Out* (Morrow, $8.95), which does not, I'm pleased to say, seem intended as the last of the series. Travis McGee's mental health seems more and more a worry in his seventeenth adventure, John D. MacDonald's typically fine *The Empty Copper Sea* (Lippincott, $8.95). Janice Law's *Under Orion* (Houghton Mifflin, $7.95) is a skillfully wrought espionage thriller about one of the new breed of self-sufficient heroines, New World Oil's Anna Peters.

Two of the Judson Philips-Hugh Pentecost stable of winners are in good form in their latest adventures: Julian Quist in Pentecost's *Deadly Trap* (Dodd Mead, $6.95). a high-tension kidnaping yarn offering more suspense than detection, and Peter Styles in Philips' *A Murder Arranged* (Dodd Mead, $6.95), where puzzle-making is more the order of the day.

"Q"

EQMM BOOK DISCOUNT DEPARTMENT

The titles which we are offering this month are listed on the opposite page. These books are regular publishers' editions, the very same as those available in bookstores. Only those books which appear can be ordered; we are not in a position to order other books so please do not include any others on the Order Form.

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REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

DEADLY TRAP, by Hugh Pentecost. Dodd, Mead, $8.95.

Here is Hugh Pentecost's exciting new thriller featuring public relations expert Julian Quist. On a vacation in the Berkshires, Quist stumbles into the hideout of professional terrorists who are holding hostage the daughter of an Arab oil tycoon. Worried that his absence will produce an intensive search, the terrorists move him and the girl to another part of the country. Realizing he and the girl will almost certainly be killed, Quist fights a race against time to get out of this deadly trap.

"Superior mix of Quist's glamorous New York life with the violent mess into which he is forced."—*ALA Booklist*

THE CAT AND THE CANARY, by Gerry Kingsley. Dale Books, $1.95.

This "ultimate old-dark-house thriller," as Chris Steinbrunner described *The Cat and the Canary* in last month's newsletter, has as its main ingredients a deserted old mansion, a will that predicts insanity and murder, and a host of trapped guests who must face a vicious murderer who kills for blood. Full of sliding panels and people-watching portraits, this novel is based on the new screenplay version by Radley Metzger which remains delightfully true to all the classic elements of the original 1922 stage play by John Willard.

***PLEASE NOTE: ADD 10% TO DISCOUNT PRICE ON ALL CANADIAN ORDERS.**

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	RETAIL PRICE	DISCOUNTED PRICE
Ball, John, ed.	COP CADE	Doubleday	$7.95	$6.35
Brett, Simon	AN AMATEUR CORPSE	Scribners	7.95	6.35
Burke, John	LADYGROVE: THE THIRD ADVENTURE OF DR. CASPIAN AND BRONWEN	Coward, McCann & Geoghegan	8.95	6.95
Egan, Lesley	LOOK BACK ON DEATH	Doubleday	7.95	6.35
Gage, Edwin	PHOENIX NO MORE	Harper & Row	8.95	6.95
Hallahan, William H.	KEEPER OF THE CHILDREN	Morrow	7.95	6.35
Herzog, Arthur	MAKE US HAPPY	T.Y. Crowell	8.95	6.95
Kemelman, Harry	THURSDAY THE RABBI WALKED OUT	Morrow	8.95	6.95
Langley, Bob	DEATH STALK	Doubleday	7.95	6.35
Law, Janice	UNDER ORION	Houghton Mifflin	7.95	6.35
MacDonald, John D.	THE EMPTY COPPER SEA	Lippincott	8.95	6.95
MacDougall, James D.	DEATH AND THE MAIDEN	Bobbs-Merrill	8.95	6.95
Marice, Anne	MURDER BY PROXY	St. Martin's	7.95	6.35
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Phillips, Judson	A MURDER ARRANGED	Dodd, Mead	6.95	5.50
Pryor, Larry	THE VIPER	Harper & Row	8.95	6.95
Reeves, John	MURDER BY MICROPHONE	Doubleday	7.95	6.35
Rooth, Anne Reed and James P. White	THE NINTH CAR	Putnam	8.95	6.95

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 512th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . an exceptional first story—sensitive, perceptive, the stuff of life . . .

The author, Carol Weiss Rosenberg, was born in 1944, grew up in Washington, D.C., and was graduated from Swarthmore College with Honors in English Literature. In 1967 she received a Master's degree in Teaching from Harvard. In the same year she married Charles Rosenberg—"under false pretenses." At that time her husband was a medievalist, and she assumed they would live in France; but he became an Italian Renaissance art historian, and they lived in Florence. The Rosenbergs have two children, Jessica and Jasper.

Mrs. Rosenberg has had a patchwork of work experiences: Congressional intern, clerk in a medical library, high-school teacher, executive secretary, researcher, editor, pollster, book reviewer, and (how does she do it?) full-time mother and free-lance writer of articles. And that doesn't include her hobbies: crafts, chiefly weaving and making children's toys; modern dance and music; and, of course, reading . . .

OLD MAN'S BARGAIN

by CAROL WEISS ROSENBERG

Her old man has been gone for over two weeks now, but I can't seem to get him off my back. After dinner I go to the bedroom, close the door, and fold myself into the lotus position. But instead of closing down, my senses perversely extend themselves into the next room. I can feel the old man's heaviness as he lies on the vinyl couch in the living room. I can *hear* the mindless babble of the TV (which has been silent since his departure).

His uninvited presence refutes reason, disturbs meditation, and sends me prowling from the bedroom in search of Maria. Ever

since she got back from Puerto Rico (she took the old man home), she's been tiring herself out with mindless housework. Today she's sorting the girls' school clothes, taking down the boxes from closet shelves, airing and pressing. The cloying smell of mothballs is finally yielding to her ministrations. Not so the subliminal scent of the old man.

In some introductory psych course, years ago, I studied sleep-deprivation experiments. An appropriate analogy for my present state—or paranoia—of mind, for meditation is my own form of deep sleep, and I've been hanging on without it for a long time now. Which explains a lot about my role in this whole affair.

I've been meditating for 17 years. That was before the hippies discovered gurus or the movie stars started doing it at fancy resorts. This love affair with the East even predated Maria by a number of years, so right from the beginning we had to establish a sort of *ménage à trois*. Maria reads my haiku translations with grave attention; she leafs through my books, attends some of my art lectures. And she accepts my silent evening withdrawals as do the girls.

With Tonia and Lilia we constitute the archetypal nuclear family. If you count Maria's father, though—and you must count the old man, for he is the central character in this domestic drama—then there were really five of us.

I don't use the word "domestic" lightly. Our life with father revolved, quite literally, about the free-standing central wall of the "Eden Estates" apartment. Around this wall we march from entrance hall to bathroom to kitchen, to dining nook, and around the far edge of the wall to the living room, which ends once more in the entrance hall (off which are the two bedrooms). Everywhere there is sea-green wall-to-wall carpeting, lest we forget that despite the pretense of the dividing wall we are really enclosed within one monotonous, cubic cell.

But it was last July that things really began to get to me in this apartment.

Abuelito—or "Lito," as the girls called him—has been with us 100 days today. Is he aware, as he lounges on the blue-green plastic couch, that our private centennial is passing us by?

He calls for his after-dinner coffee. Imperiously: "Maria! The coffee?" She is singing to the children. I'm the one who pours the cup of coffee and brings it to him. This is customary, but he refuses to acknowledge the fact. For him it's a question of respect.

I come around the wall from the kitchen, bearing his brew—dark, black, bitter—an apt reflection of my mood. I have been swept into my role of cupbearer as unwillingly as Ganymede (though there the resemblance stops; Zeus abducted the young boy for his beauty; I am pushing 40, dark, skinny, short, and slightly stooped; even my thin mustache looks like a caricature next to Lito's luxuriant silver growth). Cupbearer to the head honcho.

I've been in the kitchen washing dishes. "Women's work." I know what he sees. Assistant Professor Nobody, teaching in the boondocks while Maria supplements our income by tutoring her native Spanish. (The gold at her ears, throat, and wrists remind us all of when she was her father's girl.) We are civilized. We don't discuss these things.

Later, after I've paraded past him in flapping pajamas (before, I slept nude), politely bade him good night, and received a nod—eyes still fixed on the flickering images of the tube—I enter the bedroom and slip silently into my sleeping bag on the floor beside Maria. The children are asleep in the double bed beside us (Lito has their room) and Maria is nearly asleep too. But I won't let her escape that easily tonight. All day we cat-and-mouse around, exchanging a glance, a furtive embrace. Careful, polite. Strangers to each other and ourselves. I need to reach her, my own Maria, after going through the motions of communication all day without saying a thing.

"Maria!" A stage whisper.

She turns in her bag as I prod her from sleep.

"Maria. How much longer are we going to take this? It's over three months since we could talk without feeling as though we're on stage or involved in a conspiracy. Enough, already! Are we supposed to ruin our lives just to avoid hurting the old man's tender feelings?" I'm being melodramatic, but she refuses to rise to the bait.

"Babe, he's driving me up the wall. We have no privacy, the girls have been displaced, you're his domestic servant, I haven't been able to meditate since God knows when, and we haven't made love in so long I don't even remember when!"

"Hush! He'll hear you. You'll wake the girls."

"All right, so maybe I could put up with that if he just once said something like thank you—if he'd give some sign of recognition of what we've been doing for him I could say okay, he's old, he's used to women waiting on him, but he's family, there's love going

both ways here, even if all the sacrifices are on one side."

"Be fair, Alex. Some day you'll be a demanding old man, and—"

"I could put up with that, Maria, given just a little respect and recognition as a man."

"Oh, for God's sake, Alex! It's got nothing to do with manhood. He just comes from another tradition. You're getting as bad as he is! Freud would have a picnic with you two."

I'm not amused. "He's insensitive and patronizing and constantly reminds me of what a poor gift you gave him when you made me his son-in-law."

"I've never heard him say a *THING*, Alex."

"He doesn't need to say it. That's just the point. He can sit there all day on the couch and it just hangs in the air. Here I am, the unsung schlemiel, and there he is, the Latin peacock, the grand macher of macho."

"Please, Alex. I don't want to go into it now. I'm so tired."

"My God, Maria, don't you think I'm tired? I'm going crazy! *You're* going crazy. The girls are hardly happy with this arrangement."

"Lilia is," she interrupts.

"Sure, Lilia. She's learning to cater to an old man's whims. That'll stand her in good stead if she ever becomes a kept woman." Maria swings, and though I see her hand coming in the darkness I'm tangled in my sleeping bag and can't dodge the blow in time. It lands with a thwack and the tension breaks. We smother laughter in our down bags while Maria hisses, "Shh! Father, the girls . . ."

It's good to know that however inadequately she handles the situation from day to day, Maria is still on my side. But I'm thinking of other things now, of eight-year-old Tonia confounded by her struggle between grief at her grandfather's neglect and jealousy over the old man's blatant preference for the ebullient Lilia. Maria is silent, and I know that she too is thinking of Tonia. We have let her feel our sympathy and understanding, but they are insufficient to the occasion. She needs privacy, and he has taken her room. She needs love, and he has devalued her gift of it.

I ask myself how much restraint the human soul can tolerate before it cracks apart, or twists itself in self-defense into a shape no longer recognizable to its former master. We are an ecumenical family: Maria, the lapsed Catholic; I, the meditating Jew; Tonia,

who ploddingly recites the "brucha" at every meal; and Lilia, the joyous heathen. Maria practices forgiveness. When I could still meditate, I practiced patience. It must be the dybbuk of my fathers who whispers to me now, "An eye for an eye."

Maria brushes my hair back from my face. "Alex, you know he may be dying."

I swallow the obscenities that spring to my lips. Dying? The old goat will live forever. He has no conscience to burden his heart or his nerves. Even to get colitis, you have to suffer a conscience! Dying? Hah!

But it's an old story. Eight and a half years old, to be precise. That's when his doctor, concerned over a growth on the old man's neck, suggested it be removed. It was malignant.

The women on both sides of his family went to church. The old man brought his will up to date. Maria, seven months' pregnant with our first child—his first grandchild—was anxious, frightened, and for a period of time severely depressed. It became a waiting game. "If only I live to see my first grandson I'll die happy!" It's a declaration I shall not easily forget. We were very emotional. Each letter from Puerto Rico reiterated the same deathbed desire—to survive until Maria's child was born.

Tonia arrived, and so did Lito. It was the first of his prolonged visits. It didn't seem so bad, then. He stayed in my study. The baby was sleeping in our room anyway, so that she was near Maria for nursing. Lito's disappointment in Tonia's sex is a matter of record, and he formulated then his oft-repeated joke about fate: he had prayed for God to let him live to see his first grandson. As long as Maria continued to bear females, he would be safe. He was proud of Maria, proud that his flesh had reproduced itself, but he did not bother to hide his desire for a male heir, despite his bargain with fate. And Tonia has always known that although she was first, she wasn't what was ordered.

Lilia was that laughing sort of baby that made even Lito forgive her her sex. At four, Tonia knew. That visit he stayed longer, and it wasn't as easy. My study had become Tonia's room. We tried putting Lito in with her, but it was a disaster. Tonia, upset with new sisterhood, deeply felt her grandfather's uncaring. Finally we brought the distraught little girl into our bed. How could we know it was an augury of things to come?

He stayed six weeks that time. Maria served him the sort of meals her mother had always made him. She nursed and changed

the baby, read to Tonia, hushed both children while Lito watched his favorite television programs, and tried to make us feel that all was well. I did what I could (and noticed for the first time that look I get for "women's work" as I walked the baby to sleep, combed out Tonia's hair, or blended applesauce for Lilia).

Somehow, despite the bone-weariness of it all, I managed that hour alone during the evening or at night, after a feeding. I could still shut him out then. Our common adversity (Lito, the demanding baby, the emotional drain of Tonia) brought Maria and me together in a very sweet relationship. And meditation put me at peace with myself.

All very well, you are saying by now. But how come the old man isn't dead? What about that malignant growth? I must tell you that it simply never recurred. To this day he has never been troubled by another growth. His sisters will tell you that God counted the candles they lit and heeded their prayers. A fatalist would tell you the old man's time simply hasn't come. His doctor says it's a miracle. But the old man himself will tell you he's made his own miracle. Its name is laetrile. All scientific evidence to the contrary, Lito believes in the little pills, and no one has ever denied the mysterious efficacy of irrational faith.

In the morning we all sneak around hushing each other once more. Maria's father rises at noon. If Tonia has forgotten her socks, she must steal into her room, ease open a drawer, and leave without disturbing Lito. Each time the toilet flushes, the tension mounts. We lower coffee and cocoa cups to saucers with painful care. "Tonia!" yells Lilia, and we all frown.

On my way through the living room to open the drapes, I trip over the old man's shoes. It must be a compulsion now. I know they're there in front of the couch in the morning, but I can't seem to steer a course around them. I'm wearing my sneakers. The old man's shoes echo his disdain for my lack of panache. His is a Latin love affair with shoes—soft beautiful leather, the exaggerated style—and he's as faithful to his ritual of spit and polish as his wife ever was to her beads.

It is a ritual that Lilia adores. When Lito finally rises from his bed (Tonia's bed) and finishes his ablutions, he disappears once more into the girls' room and emerges fully dressed—except for the shoes. "I am up, Maria!" He calls as he goes into the living room (his cue for her to serve him breakfast). It is Lilia's cue too,

that he is ready to receive her adoration, and she comes winging in from whatever project Maria had kept her quiet with, and hugs the stocky legs in their neatly creased trousers. (The second week of his stay, we dug up the old ironing board; Maria irons his shirts, his pants, his handkerchiefs, his underwear, but the day I came home and saw her struggling with a sheet, the end trailing down across the carpet despite her most ingenious efforts to prop its fullness over chairs, I hit the ceiling, let the old man sleep on a few wrinkles; it's not going to kill him; they're Perma-press, for God's sake!)

Ah, yes, the shoe ritual. Maria appears with a day-old newspaper and the little cardboard box of shoe polish and brushes. Lito folds the paper, places the first shoe on it, opens the dark glossy polish, and begins to swirl the brush over the leather surface. Each shoe receives a careful covering and then Lito listens to Lilia recite her numbers in Spanish. When she arrives at 30, Lito selects a buffing brush and slowly eases it over the first shoe. Then his strokes pick up a vigorous rhythm as he brings out the shine. After the second shoe, then it's Lilia's turn. Carefully putting her pudgy hand inside the shoe—"no fingerprints!"—she buffs away energetically until Lito says, "Fine, fine."

Fully dressed now, he strolls into the dining room and sits down before his hot cup of bitter coffee. It's Maria's turn to serve it. I'm in the midst of my second morning lecture by now. Then she gathers up the black-smudged paper and returns the polish and brushes to the box and shelf.

It was over the shoe polish that Maria and her father had their only confrontation. Lilia is not a sly child, but she is mischievous and has no sense of her own peril. Tonia, at two, recognized danger, understood about poisons, stopped at the curbs of busy streets, and could handle a paring knife with caution. At four, Lilia's spontaneity is still her worst enemy. She will lean over the edge of the balcony (Maria has put a child-proof lock on the sliding doors), run with a knife in her hand, taste anything she finds growing near the apartment house that has an interesting color or texture. We have put things up high beyond reach and found that nothing is truly out of reach for Lilia.

"Papa, you really must put away the polish when you are done," Maria admonished one morning after Lilia made a polish and jelly sandwich. After a moment of silence the old man rose, flicked off the TV, and announced, "I'm going out."

For them, that was a fight. Maria silently apologized in a dozen different ways. Now she tries to remember the polish before Lilia does.

It doesn't occur to him that he's a menace. Take the pills, for instance. "At least he could put them in a child-proof container," I rage. But Maria will not reprimand him again. We must watch Lilia, that's all. But he tempts her with those damned pills, constantly jiggling them in his pocket, counting them with Lilia, crooning to her about "my little miracle, my magic *pildoras*." Lilia, of course, is fascinated. And laetrile, of course, is poison. Not in the amount that Lito carefully administers to himself each day, but in sufficient concentration—and in a small child? It was in the news a while back. Some kid died from swallowing her father's pills. After all, the stuff is made out of apricot and peach pits, and it's no old wives' tale that you mustn't eat the pits when you finish the fruit. They actually contain small amounts of poison.

We're picking peaches ourselves tomorrow, out at Farrell's Farm, and we'll have to watch Lilia carefully for that reason. Maria and I have planned this outing for a week, anticipating the taste of tree-ripened fruit and the luxury of an afternoon's freedom with equal appetite. We will urge Lito to come with us to pick the peaches, but he won't.

And he doesn't. We're off, just the four of us, with brown-paper supermarket bags to fill. We enjoy the unaccustomed exercise, the fresh air, and the fruit, which will recall this weekend's respite all through the winter as we open the sticky sweet jars of peaches and preserves. (And will he still be with us then?)

We come puffing up the stairs, arms laden, the girls' T-shirts sticky testimony to their surreptitious sampling. They push past us into the apartment. "Look, Lito!" And he lifts his massive head from the couch, where he's lain all afternoon, watching the soaps and the quiz shows.

"Too much," is his comment.

Maria and I exchange quick glances. Resentment rises in my throat as the girls exit on cue and Maria hurries into her private sanctuary, setting the heavy bags on the floor of the kitchen. There are wet splotches showing through the paper sacks, where some of the soft fruit has begun to ooze. I go downstairs for the

rest of the shopping bags and then follow her into the kitchen, where we view the fruits of our labor in quiet despair. Yes, too much. We had an afternoon's hiatus, but the mood has set again, has gelled against the edges of our wall-to-wall prison.

It's Monday afternoon, and I return later than three o'clock, although I know Maria expected me then. I have shut my door at the college, shifting lecture notes to the edge of my desk and sitting crosslegged on top. My neighbor's sweet Balkan Sobranie, a student's timid knock, the stale air of the office suite all begin to diminish. I am relaxing, a slow easing of muscles tensed by weeks of anger. I achieve the inner tranquility, the pure relief of it washing me with waves of euphoria that make it difficult for me to keep the balance—to remain aloof, suspended.

Later I leave the office with such a sense of release. I have been given back myself. So it is that I arrive at the apartment accompanied by both satisfaction and guilt. I have done my healing at Maria's expense.

It is 4:15, and I find Lilia curled up in Lito's arm as they intently watch TV. They are too comfortable to do more than nod an acknowledgement of my greeting. The malevolent buzzing of the old man's pills as he fiddles with them in his pocket follows me into the kitchen, where Maria is grasping a steaming jar of peaches with tongs, straining to lift the jar over to the pad of newspaper she has set out. She carefully ignores me as she transfers the remaining three pints from pot to pad. We are both postponing the moment when our glances will meet.

"Where is Tonia?"

"In our room."

She turns to me. "Alex, she's so desperate. So am I. I want so badly to scream at him," she whispers, as tears streak her face, her makeup smeared already with sweat and syrup. And finally, "Where *were* you?"

This is the third day she's been canning peaches. They've become her hold on sanity, a diversion, a reason to get on with things when she wants to go screaming from all of us, from motherhood, daughterhood, wifehood, and the sea-green wall-to-wall.

We embrace silently, cautiously. A momentary desire awakens in us both, but futility clings to us as we cling to each other.

I resolve to ease the others' burdens, but where can I begin with

Maria's guilt? For ten years she has been trying to justify each of us to the other, but how do you reconcile the New Jersey Jew whose inheritance consists of a wealth of words, and the noble Spanish widower whose love consists of unremitting demands for service and adulation? Forget it. It can't be done.

She exhausts herself in apologizing to each of us for the existence of (and her love for) the other. And we've been together now for 103 days.

"How's he been?" I ask. She shakes her head, passing a hand over her face, sleeplessness and mascara combining to make deep sad eyes. I look into them and abruptly turn to survey the remaining peaches. Startled by what I have seen in Maria, I busy myself with loading pits and peelings into a bag to lug downstairs and outside to the green dumpster. The peaches are endless. "I'll take these down and then see if I can help Tonia." "Okay." She lifts simmering peaches from another pot and drops them into a cold-water bath.

She has begun to hate him. That much is plain, though she'll never admit it to me, much less to herself. She will never ask him to change, to try, to give a little of himself. Before she could bring herself to ask him to leave—or even to tell us what his plans are—before she would risk the slightest glancing blow to his honor, I think she'd kill herself first. It's true, she's desperate.

I throw the bag into the dumpster, the drenched paper splitting wide as it lands, pits and debris slithering across the refuse of our neighbors. How many bags have I dumped since Saturday?

The heavy smell of cooking peach peel assails me once more as I climb the stairs and push open the door. This time straight down the hall to the girls' room. No, I retrace my steps to the first bedroom. She'll be in *our* bed. But Tonia has exhausted her unhappiness and fallen asleep in my sleeping bag on the floor.

She's truly *my* daughter, Tonia. She's always been shy, painfully sensitive, awkward, anxious, yearning. I ache to ease the vulnerability that I feel has been my patrimony to her. I hope that when she finds her peace it will be less tenuous than mine, for lately I see how precarious my hold on it has become when put to the test. I smooth back her hair, brush a gentle kiss across her forehead, and go out, closing the door quietly behind me. I am tempted to remember a meeting with a student or a book that needs buying. Lito tickles Lilia in the armpit, and she sighs, "Oh, *Lito!*" I return to the kitchen.

I take a dining-room chair and set it against the partition wall, facing the cramped kitchen alcove. Catching Maria between liftings, I take her by the shoulders and turn her toward me. I tuck my arm around her, smooth back her hair, so much darker than Tonia's, and move her gently to the chair. "Sit a moment. I'll do some."

I pick up the rhythm where she has left off—boiling, peeling, slicing the peaches off their pits, plopping them into sterilized jars, pouring syrup, screwing down lids. Maria is too nervous to sit. She joins me and soon we are an efficient assembly line, rapidly processing the peaches, enjoying our silent companionship.

The bag of slops is full again, and I start downstairs with it once more. At street level I'm struck by a thought and turn away from the fly-swarming green dumpster, going downstairs once more, down to the basement. I shift the bag to my left hand, fumble in my pocket with my right, find the key and unlock the door to the apartment house laundry room. There is no one there.

I let the door swing closed behind me and move deliberately to one of the large sinks along the wall. Hastily I feel through the sodden mass in the bag, pressing the pulp, feeling for the pits. I collect them in a corner of the sink, rinse them, rinse my hands and dry them on a rag someone has left on the edge of the basin. I wrap the pits in the rag and view my little hoard with satisfaction. But I must hurry. Setting the bundle down in the lint dust behind the dryer, I pick up the bag once more and go back up to street level to empty it.

I'm light-headed after my exertions, suffused with a sort of energy I haven't felt in all those sleepless nights and mummified days. I jog up the steps, walk briskly into the apartment, and chuckle at Lito's scowl as the door's thud makes him miss an answer on the quiz show.

Maria looks up quizzically and I answer her with a quick squeeze and a conspiratorial, "Love you, babe!" before returning to my place in the assembly line. Who would have thought that a murderous intent could lift one's heart so? But I'd better be careful. She may be the victim of her emotions, Maria, but she's one hell of a smart lady.

Everything is going according to plan, and it makes me nervous. I'm suspicious of anything that comes too easily. I must be careful. I've locked my office door, but there's nothing curious

about that. My students are used to my eccentricities, and if I don't answer their knock now, chances are I will later. I open my briefcase and take out the nutcracker and the rag-bound pits that I spirited out of the apartment house this morning.

I crack open pits, methodically collecting shells to one side, cores to the other. The shells go into an old paper lunch bag, which I crumple into my trash can. And there are the seeds, waiting, expectant. I place the heavy institutional glass ashtray at the center of the desk, put three seeds at the center, and lift Tonia's paperweight, setting the snow whirling within it as I place it curved-side down. Soon I am immersed in my work, grinding mortar-and-pestle style, producing as fine a powder as I can manage. With a start I realize that I have been daydreaming, fantasizing myself an alchemist among dark wooden counters and handblown glass retorts. I've been enjoying myself.

He is calling for his after-dinner coffee. Imperiously: "Maria! The coffee?" She is singing to the children. I pour the cup of coffee and bring it to him. This is customary, but he refuses to acknowledge the fact. For him it's a question of respect.

I come around the wall from the kitchen, bearing his brew—dark, black, bitter—how bitter tonight he will never know.

Inch by inch I leave my sleeping bag that night. He is unconscious on the couch. I know I should be repelled, but I am not. It's good to have a job to do. Silently I ease the bottle from his pocket and wash the pills down the kitchen sink (first a cushioning layer of bread, then the pills, then more bread), and it will all disappear when we run the garbage disposal after breakfast tomorrow. I wipe the bottle free of prints, place it in his outstretched hand, then go to the bathroom. I don't flush, providing an alibi for my nocturnal wandering.

Maria and the girls have not been disturbed, though, and soon I too am asleep.

What I realize now, sitting impotently in our reclaimed bedroom, contemplating my losses instead of my navel, is that even now, the old man's won. His absence drives a wider wedge between us than his presence ever did. It's obvious that Maria knows—or at least suspects. Why else this Lady Macbeth impersonation she's been doing since she returned from the funeral in

Puerto Rico? I've neither confirmed nor denied her suspicions about his "suicide."

So here we live, suspended in limbo, serving an indeterminate sentence of first-degree guilt. Tonia, who acknowledges her relief at Lito's death, also judges herself guilty. Only Lilia is unaffected—she who was closest to him. In the midst of our frigid silence and our grief—not for him but for what his going has cost us—she is as joyful as ever.

Maria opens the door. "Have you finished meditating?"

"It's no use. I'm too upset. Let's go to bed."

We silently pad off to the bathroom, one after the other, return, and slip under the covers of the bed we share once more. I'm wearing my J. C. Penney pajamas, trite evidence that I haven't yet reclaimed my former self. And we have not so much as exchanged more than formal cheek kisses since he—

And then it comes to me, how to lay this spirit to rest, how to exorcise this dybbuk. The old man's bargain—how could I have forgotten it? I sit up, throw back the covers, fling the striped pajamas to the floor, and pull Maria to me.

"Tonight we shall make a son!"

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a *NEW* short-short by

WILLIAM BANKIER

Arthur Harcourt, a living legend in his profession, was nominated for the Presidency of his Society, and his best and oldest friend was given the role of devil's advocate . . .

DEVIL'S ADVOCATE

by WILLIAM BANKIER

"Gentlemen," I began, looking around the paneled clubroom at the wise, experienced faces of my peers in the legal profession, "the Church had a good idea when it created the role of devil's advocate. When an ordinary mortal is under consideration for canonization, it makes eminent sense to have someone prepare the strongest possible case against the candidate. This requires those in favor to be ready to dispel every whisper of criticism. And at the end of the day only the supremely worthy may achieve the level of Saint."

I turned now to observe the noble features of Arthur Harcourt who was seated a little apart from the main body of the club members in a chair of oak and dark leather that resembled a throne. My friend appeared relaxed in his immaculate suit of sober gray and his handsome, youthful face was serene. With ankles crossed, one fist supporting his chin, the other hand fallen across the arm of the chair, he might have been sitting for a portrait in some exclusive studio.

"Arthur Harcourt," I continued, "comes before this learned Society today having been nominated for the post of President. And I, as his friend of longest standing, have been delegated by you to argue against his assumption of that position. So be it. I accept willingly an assignment many might have refused because I believe in the concept of *advocatus diaboli,* and I mean to present the strongest possible case against the witness in the chair."

I paused for effect, pouring a glass of water from the carafe on a table near Harcourt's chair. I only sipped it—I was not thirsty. Just as well; the water tasted foul, stale, almost sulphurous. I made a mental note to have the caretaker scolded for not supplying fresh water before such an important meeting.

"The burden of the case against Harcourt," I said, "is that he has contrived, by use of acute intelligence and eloquent speech, to release from our courts a number of villainous citizens who almost certainly belong in prison." I glanced at my notes. "I cite the case of Steven Kogan, recently tried in this state. Accused of first-degree murder and robbery with violence, Mr. Kogan is currently back running his gambling establishment on Lake Street. A newspaper interview with Mr. Kogan produced the statement, and I quote, 'With a lawyer like Harcourt, I couldn't lose. I'm laughing. He made a fool out of that D.A.' How do you respond, Mr. Harcourt, to the implication that you helped a guilty man to go free?"

Harcourt smiled at me and said, "I argued Kogan's case to the best of my ability. The jury came to their decision without interference. To deplore their decision is to criticize our system of justice." The resonant voice fell silent and Harcourt turned his radiant smile from me to the assembly. All 38 counselors smiled.

"Let me go on," I said, "to the case of Terence Fahey. Two witnesses for the prosecution provided evidence of his guilt that was never refuted. Instead, you managed so to malign the character of these individuals that their testimony was in the end disregarded by the jury and the case against Fahey was dismissed. Surely this is professional conduct unworthy of a man who would aspire to the presidency of this Society."

Harcourt leaned forward, his face shining with sincerity. "I would do anything, I repeat, *anything*, to free the individual I have been hired to defend. Let those assigned to prosecute match my determination, if they can."

I went on presenting a powerful case, being absolutely true to my brief, leaving no stone unturned in the effort to present reasons why Arthur Harcourt's candidacy should be rejected. There were moments when I felt I was arguing too well; what if I succeeded and this remarkable individual was rejected? And yet, even as this thought entered my mind, I assured myself it could never happen. There was a force within Arthur Harcourt that seemed irresistibly destined for achievement.

Step by step I presented the particulars of my case. Like building stones they rose in a solid wall of evidence against Harcourt's integrity and humanity, a wall over which a casual observer might have thought no man could ever climb. But there were no casual observers in the room, only lawyers who, like myself, had lived and worked beside Harcourt, had marveled at his brilliance, had felt the mesmerizing influence of his personality.

My final assault was personal and therefore potentially more damaging than anything I had said previously. I spoke with some trepidation now, wondering if perhaps I was going too far. But as devil's advocate, how could I go too far?

"I speak at last," I said, "of an event that may not be known to everyone in this assembly. But it is supported by medical evidence should any of us find the story beyond belief."

Harcourt seemed to read my mind. "You are referring to the death of Margaret Harcourt."

"I am."

"No need for your evidence then. I don't deny my part in the affair."

"You admit that you sat by the bed of an elderly lady, your own mother, and persuaded her by your eloquence to swallow an overdose of barbiturates, thus acting as accessory before the fact of her suicide?"

"Yes, I admit it. But tell the whole story." Harcourt changed positions so that his eyes could sweep the room. "Tell the honorable members that Mrs. Harcourt's body contained the malignancy that would soon have made her life hell on earth."

"And the estate you inherited had nothing to do with your decision to advise her in this woeful action?"

The room glowed with the witness's innocent smile. "I won't lie to you," he said. "The money, the estate, brought me to a position in this community that most men can only achieve after years of effort. Naturally I welcomed such good fortune. But I swear to you—I did *not* persuade my mother to take her own life."

After an evening of general celebration with our new President in the clubrooms, the two of us journeyed home to my apartment by taxi. It was a chilly night in early January, but I shivered less from the influence of the winter air than because of a feeling that perhaps I had overstated my case. Harcourt had shown me no ill feelings after the hearing or during the evening. But surely the

depth of my cross-examination must have left him questioning our friendship.

He was as silent as I was in the back of the taxi, so as we hissed over glistening streets I said to him, "Tired after the ordeal, Mr. President?"

He displayed a small smile. "Partly that. But it's the whole year-end season actually. The incessant peace on earth and goodwill to all men gives me a stomach ache." He yawned and then belched. "I hate Christmas," he said.

Thankfully my study was warm as toast, my servant having prepared a heaping coal fire in the grate. I poured a couple of brandies, gave one to Arthur, and joined him in the twin chairs before the fire. I decided to clear the air.

"You must have thought I was your worst enemy today, not your best friend."

"Not at all," he said. "*Advocatus diaboli.*" And he laughed out loud.

I drowned a pang of dismay in brandy. Then I said, "Sorry to have brought up the matter of your mother, though. That was reaching."

"Couldn't have cared less since my election was a foregone conclusion. Besides, she wasn't my mother anyway."

This disclosure baffled me. "Not your mother? But her name was Harcourt and you were living there."

"That's right. I moved in and assumed the name because she was rich and alone and her domicile provided a nice base for my operations. The deal was that I gave her a few extra years of life in exchange for her saying I was her son. Eventually she completed the contract by doing as I said—taking her barbiturates like a good girl."

I was appalled. "Then you *were* lying about persuading her!"

"Not at all. Check the record. I swore I did not persuade my mother to take her own life. She was not my mother, as God is my witness. And He is, you know, albeit a hostile one."

I felt I was being made the victim of an elaborate practical joke but at the same time I knew that nothing so benign was taking place. The brandy glass fell from my fingers, rolled across the hearth, and smashed against the andiron. Arthur Harcourt was looking at me with amusement.

"Don't take it so hard, my boy. You'll get used to it. You may even like it at times."

"Like what?"

"Being my assistant. You've proved you can attack me on the stand and you've seen how I can respond. Now I'll begin giving you opportunities to defend me, to work in my behalf."

The heat from the fire was intense but despite it I felt overwhelmed by a frigid wave that penetrated me to the depths of my soul. The fire shifted and several embers tumbled onto the hearth.

Arthur Harcourt rose from his chair, knelt, and began picking up the white-hot coals one at a time, holding several in his bare hand while he replaced them on the fire. He smiled across his shoulder at me, his face crimson in the firelight.

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "I haven't burned my fingers for several thousand years."

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

TAKING CARE OF MOTHER

by NANCY E. HAMILTON

Minnie Mae Searle was a quiet young girl
Who cared for her crotchety mother.
And when Mother died the neighbors all tried
To console her, one after another.

They said she'd been good to do all she could
To ease Mother through all her last ills.
Well, that's just my style, thought Min with a smile—
Getting rid of the arsenic-laced pills.

a NEW Mrs. Craggs story by

H. R. F. KEATING

Mrs. Craggs is an aristocrat of charwomen, partly because she is so good at her work, and partly because she once had a cleaning job in the House of Lords. She is also good at something else—using her God-given senses, especially when "there were some capers that went on"...

MRS. CRAGGS IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS

by H. R. F. KEATING

It was a funny thing, Mrs. Craggs used to say about the cleaning job she once had at the House of Lords, but, in spite of it all being so hoity-toity, there was always a lot of what you might call capers. Nothing nasty, mind. Well, not until That Day. But definitely capers.

Things like the Great Writing Paper Row. Between the Bishop of Porchester, that was, and Tryulph, fourteenth Earl Balerno and Gosforth. Well, that was the name that Mr. Holofernes, the attendant whose domain coincided with Mrs. Craggs', always used for him. Every time. Mrs. Craggs called him Lord Bally Earn Oh. And sometimes to his face. Because he was one of the few peers she ever had many dealings with, seeing that her work in the place—carpets hoovered and surrounds polished, general tidying and everything else dusted and rubbed till it shone—was done in the mornings while their noble lordships did their work—revising Bills sent from the House of Commons, starting up a few quiet Bills of their own and general debating at a high moral level—in the afternoons of Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. But Lord Balerno and Gosforth was a particularly sleepy little peer curling up like a rabbit on the red-leather benches of the chamber

during debates and quite often tucking himself away in a corner and being found only next morning by Mrs. Craggs as she went about her work. That was the way she had got to know him.

And an old fusspot he was, she used to tell her friend Mrs. Milhorne who had charge of the next set of committee rooms at that time—and her polish not a patch on mine, Mrs. Craggs used to think, but not say—always on about waste and things not being in their place and people "misusing" this and that. "Misusing" was a favorite word of his. And "misusing" was what he had accused the Bishop of Porchester of in the Great Writing Paper Row.

Well, of course, Mrs. Craggs said to Mrs. Milhorne, that old Lord Spiritual had asked for it. The way he went on.

Yes, Mrs. Milhorne agreed rather doubtfully, "It don't seem right to be so sort of desperate. Well, not for a Bishop."

"Desperate," Mrs. Craggs replied with a sniff. "Pig-headed's what I call it. Downright pig-headed, he is, that old Bish. Why, he'd call black white if he thought it was red, and well you know it."

The Bishop of Porchester, indeed, had been nominated to his see many years before during the full flow of a Labour Government and with the passing of time his opinions had, if anything, become more Left-wing than ever. And it had been a very Left-wing letter to a newspaper written on House of Lords writing paper which had been the cause of the trouble between himself and the fourteenth Earl Balerno and Gosforth, otherwise Old Bally Earn Oh.

Often, as Mrs. Craggs, her day's work done, made her way out through the lofty spaces of St. Stephen's Hall—Mr. Holofernes, who seldom missed a chance of imparting information of an edifying character, could never refer to the hall without pointing out that it had been behind the statue there of the great Edmund Burke, "that hincomparable horator," that the maniac Bellingham had lurked in the year 1812 before striking down Spencer Perceval, "twenty-first Prime Minister"—often Mrs. Craggs used to say to herself that the old House of Lords was at least always good for a bit of a laugh. It was as nice a job that way as she'd ever had, except for the too often looming presence of Mr. Holofernes in his statutory black tail suit with that big gold medallion dangling under his long solemn face and his way of looking down his nose and loosing off "a whole lot of stuff as you'd

rather not be put to the trouble o' remembering."

All the same, Mrs. Milhorne would say when Mrs. Craggs stated her opinion of Mr. Holofernes, "All the same he has give his life to the House. You can't deny that." She would sigh then—a great gusty sigh, from right down in the depths of her soul. "I think I may give my life to something," she would add. "Only, o' course, there's me health."

"Well, this ain't getting no dusting done," Mrs. Craggs would quickly bang in then. She had heard a great deal in her time about Mrs. Milhorne's health.

Yes, she thought as she set to work putting a bit of good old elbow grease on to the tops of the low cupboards that ran along one wall of Committee Room F, it's all very well giving your life to a place, but that don't entitle you to tell everyone time and again that the Lord Chancellor sits on the Woolsack when presiding over the House, "but does not hact in the capacity of chairman, the House conducting its business without a Chair." All standing up, I suppose, Mrs. Craggs liked to mutter then. And as for that big red-leather pouffe, as she called the Woolsack after she had been taken from her regular duties once to work in the chamber itself—well, what if it was "filled with samples of wool from all parts of the hEmpire"? There hadn't been an empire, not what you could call an empire, for years. And a good job too. High and mightying it over all those poor natives.

Nor did "giving your life" to a place entitle you every time Lord Pinnborough, who was a regular old barrel of lard, came waddling and wheezing by to recall at length that once when Lord Norris and Lord Grey were tellers and Lord Norris "being subject to vapors" was not paying attention, Lord Grey had counted a particularly corpulent peer as ten lords and so a Bill had been passed that never should have been. Or, every time the Marquess of Middlehampton came to the House (which was very often) to go on about how that peer—mad as a hatter, he was, Mrs. Craggs knew well—had had the distinction of having another peer "move that the clerk at the Table do read the hOrder of the House relating to asperity of speech against him, an event that hoccurs hardly once in your average lifetime."

Mrs. Craggs never let all that stop her getting on with her work, even though Mr. Holofernes seemed to find plenty of time to stand about loosing off. But then he had a way with the House that was all his own—perhaps because of the life he had given to

it—extending right down to what was served in the Lords Refreshment Rooms. "We have a particularly fine Madeira wine, Mrs. C., the like of which, as I can vouch for, you will not find helsewhere."

Yes, there were some capers that went on. And when it came to tidying up of a morning, there were some funny things she'd found lying about too. Once a live hen, "sitting there quiet as you please, clucking away like she owned the place." That had proved to be a notion of waddling old Lord Pinnington's who had wanted to make a point when someone had "moved for papers on the agricultural question," only fellow peers had luckily dissuaded him from actually taking the fowl into the chamber. And often enough there were small paper bags of Nuttallis Mintoes. Those always had to be returned to Lord Middlehampton as quickly as possible before he exploded into one of his rages once again. And another time there had been a Kalashnikov machine rifle, courtesy of the Bishop of Porchester. And not once but twice there had been little wash-leather bags containing a number of gold sovereigns. And no one had ever claimed either of those.

But the most surprising thing of all that Mrs. Craggs ever found was on one Wednesday morning—the Wednesday she ever afterward thought of as That Day.

She had been delayed by a series of small mishaps and had not managed to get into Committee Room F until about eleven o'clock, when she really should have been already on her way home. So she had scurried round with her preliminary tidying up, but when she had got to the row of low cupboards running all along one wall under a big gloomy picture of one of the Lords Chancellor in voluminous robes and dusty-looking full-bottomed gray wig she had caught a strong whiff of peppermint. Another of his little old bags, she had thought, and had whipped open the sliding door of the cupboard. Only to find Tryulph, fourteenth Earl Balerno and Gosforth. And this time he was not sleeping but very plainly murdered.

What a kerfuffle there had been then. Mrs. Craggs had, quick as you like, slammed the cupboard door across again and had gone to look for somebody to break the news to. Unfortunately who should be almost immediately outside the door of Committee Room F but Mr. Holofernes, black tail suit, dangling gold medallion, long solemn face and all. So Mrs. Craggs had told him. Which turned out to be a fair mistake. Because Mr. Holofernes, having

first alluded briefly to the assassination of Spencer Perceval, "twenty-first Prime Minister," took it into his head that the matter would have to be dealt with by the Serjeant-at-Arms and by no one else.

"Get the police," Mrs. Craggs said. "Phone the Yard and quick about it. This is murder. Someone's been killed."

"A peer of the realm has been done to—" Mr. Holofernes began argumentatively.

"Get the police," said Mrs. Craggs.

And Mr. Holofernes went then suddenly meek as a lamb to the nearest telephone and dialed 230 1212. And he passed on the message to such effect that in less than a quarter of an hour two gentlemen from Scotland Yard were entering Committee Room F.

By that time, too, of course, various other people had arrived, summoned chiefly by Mr. Holofernes, restored again to his customary state of dignity. There was the Serjeant-at-Arms, who was a retired Air Vice-Marshal. There was the Staff Superintendent, who was a retired Naval Lieutenant-Commander. There was the Yeoman Usher of the Black Rod, who was a retired Naval Captain. There was the Gentleman-Usher of the Black Rod, who was a retired Lieutenant-General. And there was—nobody quite knew why—the Examiner of Private Acts, who was a lady barrister of formidable intelligence given to wearing little red hats. And half a dozen other people of much less consequence, including Mrs. Craggs and her friend Mrs. Milhorne.

"Now then," said the first of the Scotland Yard gentlemen, a tall man with a face almost as lugubrious as that of Mr. Holofernes, dressed in a dark blue suit of ferocious respectability. "Now then, where might I find this alleged body? And who might be the person who made the initial discovery?"

And that brought Mrs. Craggs, who had been standing near the door wondering whether she ought to slip quietly out and wait somewhere else, to the fore once again. She made her way over to the fatal cupboard.

"It's here, Superintendent," she said, deciding that that exalted rank, read about often enough in her study of juicy murders in the papers, must be about right. "Here, in this old cupboard, Superintendent."

"Sergeant, if you please," said the man in the dark blue suit. "Detective-Sergeant Browne."

"Well, it's here then, Sergeant Brown," said Mrs. Craggs.

The sergeant crouched down to open the cupboard, turning momentarily to Mrs. Craggs as he did so and giving her a somewhat baleful look.

"Browne with a 'e'," he said creakily, as if he was certain that Mrs. Craggs had repeated his name without that final enriching, if mute, letter.

And she had.

Sergeant Browne took one quick look into the cupboard, saw what Mrs. Craggs had seen earlier, and rose to his feet.

He turned to the other Scotland Yard man, whom Mrs. Craggs now swiftly transformed into the Detective-Superintendent in charge, in spite of his rather undistinguished appearance. He had a snubby button nose and his stripy gray herringbone suit was shiny at the elbows.

"It's murder right enough, Super," he said. "I'll leave the evidence till the team arrives."

Mrs. Craggs did not much like hearing Old Bally Earn Oh called "the evidence." In spite of his infuriating fussiness about such things as the use of House of Lords writing paper, or rather its misuse, she had liked the old boy and had always awakened him as gently as she could on the mornings she had found him curled up in a corner.

"I wonder if he ever comes to in the middle of the night," Mrs. Milhorne had once speculated. "I wouldn't like to wake up and find myself in this creepy old place. Think of what he might of seen."

Ghosts seemed to be in Mrs. Milhorne's mind. But Mrs. Craggs had not been able to resist saying, "Yeh. Mice, I shouldn't wonder. Amount o' food gets left about." And Mrs. Milhorne had given a delicate breathy shriek.

The Detective-Superintendent took Sergeant Browne at his word and at once began establishing who the dead man was, accepting Mrs. Craggs's temporary identification without demur, despite an attempt by Mr. Holofernes to take this important task upon himself.

"Well now, Mrs. Craggs," the Detective-Superintendent finished, "I don't think we need keep you any more just now. But if you'd stay in the building, you'd oblige me. I'll want to see you again shortly. My name's Brown, by the way. Brown. Without an 'e'."

And he gave Mrs. Craggs what looked suspiciously like the merest flick of a wink.

So Mrs. Craggs went and waited outside and saw all the bustle. The men Sergeant Browne had referred to as "the team" arrived. experts every one, carrying bulky boxes and cameras and tripods and a brown canvas stretcher and trying not to look overawed by their unusually august surroundings. And the Press arrived and were met full face by Mr. Holofernes, but stopped in front of him only long enough to hear him "venture to remind you gentlemen of the recent hencounter between Tryulph, fourteenth Earl Balerno and Gosforth, and his Lordship the Bishop of Porchester" before nudging each other crudely in the ribs and sweeping past, eyes intent on the closed door of Committee Room F.

But there they met Sergeant Browne—"with an 'e' if you please, gentlemen, when you come to file your reports"—and found an altogether more formidable obstacle, though they were eventually promised a statement from Detective-Superintendent Brown—"without an 'e' as it happens, gentlemen"—in about an hour's time.

Mrs. Craggs was standing an hour later near the open door of Committee Room G where the Press conference was held, talking to Mrs. Milhorne who had not been asked to stay but thought she should not travel on her own "after the shock." So she chanced to hear most of what the button-nosed Detective-Superintendent said. It was not a great deal, however, mostly about "an investigation in its very early stages" and having "reason to believe the case is one of foul play" and "fullest inquiries" and "many lines yet to be followed up." But it was when after this that she overheard one of the departing reporters, a young man with heavy horn-rim glasses and a safari jacket, say, "Police Baffled, that's what it amounts to, boys," that she decided she had a duty which she had to perform.

So she knocked on the now closed Committee Room door and when it was opened by Sergeant Browne, she said she wanted to see the Detective-Superintendent.

"My good woman," said the sergeant, "Detective-Superintendent Brown is a very busy man."

"I daresay," said Mrs. Craggs. "But I was the one what found the body, you know. And I've got something as I wants to tell him."

"I am aware of your role in the affair," Sergeant Browne replied. "And I have to inform you that in due course we shall require to take your fingerprints. This will be strictly for elimina-

tion purposes, and at the end of the inquiry you will have the right to witness their destruction, if so be you so wish."

"And when's the end of the inquiry going to be?" Mrs. Craggs asked trenchantly.

"That I am unable to say, though I should estimate that, in the nature of things, a period of some weeks should elapse."

"Would you?" said Mrs. Craggs, when she had worked out what all the words meant. "Some weeks, eh? Well, I should estimate that it'll be in the nature o' some minutes."

Sergeant Browne sighed.

"If you have information which you believe may contribute to the successful outcome of our inquiry," he said, and the emphasis he put on "you believe" would have sunk a smallish battleship, "then I suggest you impart the same to me without further delay."

"No," said Mrs. Craggs.

"My good woman, either you have something to tell us, in which case you would do well to tell me immediately, or you have not, in which case I would request you not to take up more of my not unvaluable time."

"Yeh," said Mrs. Craggs. "And now can I see the Super?"

"You may not."

Mrs. Craggs considered for an instant.

"All right," she said, "I'll tell you this much. It's to do with a suspect."

Sergeant Browne looked at her, his face solemn with skepticism.

"I suppose it's the Bishop of Porchester," he said. "Same as your mate Holofernes, or whatever he calls himself, gave us. Very keen to point to the Bishop was Mr. Holofernes. Only as it so happens the Bishop was in church at the material time, in front of a congregation of forty-eight mothers of children about to be confirmed."

"I daresay," Mrs. Craggs replied unperturbed. "And I might add that mate of mine old Holofernes is not. In fact—"

She gave Sergeant Browne a shrewdly assessing look.

"In fact, it was Mr. Holofernes as I wanted to talk to you about," she went on. "Things like a certain taste for House of Lords madeira wine. Things like a certain habit of Old Bally—of the late victim of falling asleep in a corner and maybe waking up in the middle of the night and seeing certain people, whose whole

life was in this place, helping themselves to more than what they ought."

In the lugubrious face in front of her a gleam was slowly entering two mournful brown eyes.

"I thought as how I ought to mention it," Mrs. Craggs continued. "Specially in view of a certain gentleman what has a dangly gold medallion around his neck being recently seen a-getting into his overcoat."

"Stay there, my good woman," said Sergeant Browne, mournful eyes now glowing like two amber traffic lights. "Stay there and don't move."

And away he went, almost breaking into an undignified run. But not quite.

And as soon as his blue-suited back had disappeared round the nearest corner, in went Mrs. Craggs to Committee Room G, without so much as knocking.

Detective-Superintendent Brown did not look altogether pleased to see her.

"Mrs. Craggs, isn't it?" he said, looking up from the massive copy of Debrett's *Peerage, Baronetage, Knightage and Companionage* which he had been going through with an expression of fair dismay on his button-nosed face. "I'm afraid I'm rather busy just now, but if you'd care to wait."

"I think I'd better not," Mrs. Craggs answered. "You see I got something to tell you, an' I've a feeling I might be stopped by that sergeant of yours if I don't give it you straight away."

Superintendent Brown put a ballpoint as a marker among the many pages of Debrett.

"All right," he said, "tell me."

Mrs. Craggs drew in a deep breath by way of gathering her thoughts.

"Well," she said, "it's him really. Sergeant Browne, with an 'e'."

The two sharply curious eyes on either side of the button nose went suddenly hard.

"You're not going to tell me Sergeant Browne murdered his lordship, are you?"

"Good lord, no, sir. I mean, why should he ever? No, it's something else about him. Something silly really. But important. If you know what I mean."

"Go on."

"Well, it's this. When he opened that cupboard next door to see

if I was round the bend or something and found there really was a murdered body in there—well, he was a bit busy at that moment a-telling me that Browne was spelt with an 'e,' and I don't think he noticed something. And o' course by the time all those fellers arrived with their cameras an' all I daresay it'd gorn."

"What had gone, Mrs. Craggs?"

"Why, the smell. The strong, strong smell o' peppermint there was when I first opened the cupboard and then shoved the door back across, what Sergeant Browne later left open. That was what first made me look in there, you know. The peppermint."

"I see. A strong smell of peppermint. And that tells us something, does it?" Detective-Superintendent Brown's undistinguished face was decidedly thoughtful. "Or at least it tells you something, I suspect, Mrs. Craggs."

"Nuttall's Mintoes," said Mrs. Craggs. "That Lord Middlehampton always sucking 'em. Ask anybody. And temper. Terrible. Ask anybody else."

But the person Detective-Superintendent Brown, without an 'e,' asked was the Marquess of Middlehampton himself. And that Lord Temporal said right out, "Of course I made away with the fellow. Blackguard. He'd stolen something very precious from me. Some Mintoes. Nuttall's Mintoes. The fellow was a disgrace to the House. He had to go. He had to go."

So they took the Marquess of Middlehampton and put him in another sort of house, not quite so distinguished but an equally permanent institution. And Mrs. Craggs soon afterward gave in her notice to the Staff Superintendent because somehow that old House of Lords was not such a place for funny capers any more.

"Q"

a *NEW* detective story by

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THE PRIVATE EYE WHO COLLECTED PULPS

by *BILL PRONZINI*

The address Eberhardt had given me on the phone was a corner lot in St. Francis Wood, halfway up the western slope of Mt. Davidson. The house there looked like a baronial Spanish villa—a massive two-story stucco affair with black iron trimming, flanked on two sides by evergreens and eucalyptus. It sat on a notch in the slope 40 feet above street level and it commanded an impressive view of Lake Merced and the Pacific Ocean beyond. Even by St. Francis Wood standards—the area is one of San Francisco's moneyed residential sections—it was some place, probably worth half a million dollars or more.

At four o'clock on an overcast weekday afternoon this kind of neighborhood is usually quiet and semi-deserted; today it was teeming with people and traffic. Cars were parked bumper to bumper on both fronting streets, among them half a dozen police cruisers and unmarked sedans and a television camera truck. Thirty or 40 citizens were grouped along the sidewalks, gawking,

and I saw four uniformed cops standing watch in front of the gate and on the stairs that led up to the house.

I didn't know what to make of all this as I drove past and tried to find a place to park. Eberhardt had not said much on the phone, just that he wanted to see me immediately on a police matter at this address. The way it looked, a crime of no small consequence had taken place here today—but why summon me to the scene? I had no idea who lived in the house; I had no rich clients or any clients at all except for an appliance outfit that had hired me to do a skip-trace on one of its deadbeat customers.

Frowning, I wedged my car between two others a block away and walked back down to the corner. The uniformed cop on the gate gave me a sharp look as I came up to him, but when I told him my name his manner changed and he said, "Oh, right, Lieutenant Eberhardt's expecting you. Go on up."

So I climbed the stairs under a stone arch and past a terraced rock garden to the porch. Another patrolman stationed there took my name and then led me through an archway and inside.

The interior of the house was dark, and quiet except for the muted sound of voices coming from somewhere in the rear. The foyer and the living room and the hallway we went down were each ordinary enough, furnished in a baroque Spanish style; but the large room the cop ushered me into was anything but ordinary for a place like this. It contained an overstuffed leather chair, a reading lamp, an antique trestle desk-and-chair, and no other furniture except for floor-to-ceiling bookshelves that covered every available inch of wall space; there were even library-type stacks along one side. And all the shelves were jammed with paperbacks, some new and some which seemed to date back to the 1940s. As far as I could tell every one of them was genre—mysteries, Westerns, and science fiction.

Standing in the middle of the room were two men—Eberhardt and an inspector I recognized named Jordan. They both turned when I came in. Eberhardt said something to Jordan, who nodded and immediately started out. He gave me a nod on his way past that conveyed uncertainty about whether or not I ought to be there. Which made two of us.

Eberhardt was my age, 51, and he seemed to have been fashioned of an odd contrast of sharp angles and smooth blunt planes: square forehead, sharp nose and chin, thick and blocky upper body, long legs and angular hands. He was chewing on the

stem of a battered black briar and wearing his usual sour look; but it seemed tempered a little today with something that might have been embarrassment. And that was odd, too, because we've been friends for 30 years, ever since we went through the Police Academy together after World War II and then joined the San Francisco police force. In all that time I had never known him to be embarrassed by anything while he was on the job.

"You took your time getting here, hotshot," he said.

"Come on, Eb, it's only been half an hour since you called. You can't drive out here from downtown in much less than that." I glanced around at the bookshelves again. "What's all this?"

"The Paperback Room," he said.

"How's that?"

"You heard me. The Paperback Room. There's also a Hardcover Room, a Radio and Television Room, a Movie Room, a Pulp Room, a Comic Art Room, and two or three others I can't remember."

I just looked at him.

"This place belongs to Thomas Murray," he said. "Name mean anything to you?"

"Not offhand."

"Media's done features on him in the past—the King of the Popular Culture Collectors."

The name clicked then in my memory; I had read an article on Murray in one of the Sunday supplements about a year ago. He was a retired manufacturer of electronic components, worth a couple of million dollars, who spent all his time accumulating popular culture—genre books and magazines, prints of television and theatrical films, old radio shows on tape, comic books and strips, original artwork, Sherlockiana, and other such items. He was reputed to be one of the foremost experts in the country on these subjects, and regularly provided material and copies of material to other collectors, students, and historians for nominal fees.

I said, "Okay, I know who he is. But I—"

"Was," Eberhardt said.

"What?"

"Who he *was*. He's dead—murdered."

"So that's it."

"Yeah, that's it." His mouth turned down at the corners in a sardonic scowl. "He was found here by his niece shortly before one o'clock. In a locked room."

"Locked room?"

"Something the matter with your hearing today?" Eberhardt said irritably. "Yes, a damned locked room. We had to break down the door because it was locked from the inside and we found Murray lying in his own blood on the carpet. Stabbed under the breastbone with a razor-sharp piece of thin steel, like a splinter." He paused, watching me. I kept my expression stoic and attentive. "We also found what looks like a kind of dying message, if you want to call it that."

"What sort of message?"

"You'll see for yourself pretty soon."

"Me? Look, Eb, just why did you get me out here?"

"Because I want your help, damn it. And if you say anything cute about this being a big switch, the cops calling in a private eye for help on a murder case, I won't like it much."

So that was the reason why he seemed a little embarrassed. I said, "I wasn't going to make any wisecracks; you know me better than that. If I can help you I'll do it gladly—but I don't know how."

"You collect pulp magazines yourself, don't you?"

"Sure. But what does that have to do with—"

"The homicide took place in the Pulp Room," he said. "And the dying message involves pulp magazines. Okay?"

I was surprised, and twice as curious now, but I said only, "Okay." Eberhardt is not a man you can prod.

He said, "Before we go in there you'd better know a little of the background. Murray lived here alone except for the niece, Paula Thurman, and a housekeeper named Edith Keeler. His wife died a few years ago and they didn't have any children. Two other people have keys to the house—a cousin, Walter Cox, and Murray's brother David. We managed to round up all four of those people and we've got them in a room at the rear of the house.

"None of them claims to know anything about the murder. The housekeeper was out all day; this is the day she does her shopping. The niece is a would-be artist and she was taking a class at San Francisco State. The cousin was having a long lunch with a girl friend downtown, and the brother was at Tanforan with another horseplayer. In other words three of them have got alibis for the probable time of Murray's death, but none of the alibis is what you could call unshakable.

"And all of them, with the possible exception of the house-

keeper, have strong motives. Murray was worth around three million, and he wasn't exactly generous with his money where his relatives are concerned; he doled out allowances to each of them but he spent most of his ready cash on his popular-culture collection. They're all in his will—they freely admit that—and each of them stands to inherit a potful now that he's dead.

"They also freely admit, all of them, that they could use the inheritance. Paula Thurman is a nice-looking blonde, around twenty-five, and she wants to go to Europe and pursue an art career. David Murray is the same approximate age as his brother, late fifties; if the broken veins in his nose are any indication he's an alcoholic as well as a horseplayer—a literal loser and going downhill fast. Walter Cox is a mousy little guy who wears glasses about six inches thick; he fancies himself an investments expert but doesn't have the cash to make himself rich—he says—in the stock market. Edith Keeler is around sixty, not too bright, and stands to inherit a token five thousand dollars in Murray's will; that's why she's what your pulp cops call 'the least likely suspect.' "

He paused again. "Lot of details there, but I figured you'd better know as much as possible. You with me so far?"

I nodded.

"Okay. Now, Murray was one of these regimented types—did everything the same way day after day. Or at least he did when he wasn't off on buying trips or attending popular-culture conventions. He spent two hours every day in each of his Rooms, starting with the Paperback Room at eight a.m. His time in the Pulp Room was from noon until two p.m. While he was in each of these Rooms he would read or watch films or listen to tapes, and he would also answer correspondence pertaining to whatever that Room contained—pulps, paperbacks, TV and radio shows, and so on. Did all his own secretarial work—and kept all his correspondence segregated by Rooms."

I remembered these eccentricities of Murray's being mentioned in the article I had read about him. It had seemed to me then, judging from his quoted comments, that they were calculated in order to enhance his image as King of the Popular Culture Collectors. But if so, it no longer mattered; all that mattered now was that he was dead.

Eberhardt went on, "Three days ago Murray started acting a little strangely. He seemed worried about something but he

wouldn't discuss it with anybody; he did tell the housekeeper that he was trying to work out 'a problem.' According to both the niece and the housekeeper he refused to see either his cousin or his brother during that time; and he also took to locking himself into each of his Rooms during the day and in his bedroom at night, something he had never done before.

"You can figure that as well as I can: he suspected that somebody wanted him dead, and he didn't know how to cope with it. He was probably trying to buy time until he could figure out a way to deal with the situation."

"Only time ran out on him," I said.

"Yeah. What happened as far as we know it is this: the niece came home at 12:45, went to talk to Murray about getting an advance on her allowance, and didn't get any answer when she knocked on the door to the Pulp Room. She became concerned, she says, went outside and around back, looked in through the window and saw him lying on the floor. She called us right away.

"When we got here and broke down the door, we found Murray lying right where she told us. Like I said before, he'd been stabbed with a splinterlike piece of steel several inches long; the outer two inches had been wrapped with adhesive tape—a kind of handle grip, possibly. The weapon was still in the wound, buried around three inches deep."

"Three inches?" I said. "That's not much penetration for a fatal wound."

"No, but it was enough in Murray's case. He was a scrawny man with a concave chest; there wasn't any fat to help protect his vital organs. The weapon penetrated at an upward angle and the point of it pierced his heart."

I nodded and waited for him to go on.

"We didn't find anything useful when we searched the room," Eberhardt said. "There are two windows but both of them are nailed shut because Murray was afraid somebody would open one of them and the damp air off the ocean would damage the magazines; the windows hadn't been tampered with. The door hadn't been tampered with either. And there aren't any secret panels or fireplaces with big chimneys or stuff like that. Just a dead man alone in a locked room."

"I'm beginning to see what you're up against."

"You've got a lot more to see yet," he said. "Come on."

He led me out into the hallway and down to the rear. I could

still hear the sound of muted voices; otherwise the house was unnaturally still—or maybe my imagination made it seem that way.

"The morgue people have already taken the body," Eberhardt said. "And the lab crew finished up half an hour ago. We'll have the room to ourselves."

We turned a corner into another corridor and I saw a uniformed patrolman standing in front of a door that was a foot or so ajar; he moved aside silently as we approached. The door was a heavy oak job with a large old-fashioned keyhole lock; the wood on the jamb where the bolt slides into a locking plate was splintered as a result of the forced entry. I let Eberhardt push the door inward and then followed him inside.

The room was large, rectangular—and virtually overflowing with plastic-bagged pulp and digest-sized magazines. Brightly colored spines filled four walls of floor-to-ceiling bookshelves and two rows of library stacks. I had over 6000 issues of detective and mystery pulps in my Pacific Heights flat, but the collection in this room made mine seem meager in comparison. There must have been at least 15,000 issues here, of every conceivable type of pulp and digest, arranged by category but in no other particular order: detective, mystery, horror, macabre, adventure, Western, science fiction, air-war, hero, love. Then and later I saw what appeared to be complete runs of *Black Mask* and *Dime Detective* and *Weird Tales* and *The Shadow* and *Western Story;* of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* and *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* and *Manhunt;* and of titles I had never even heard of.

It was an awesome collection, and for a moment it captured all my attention. A collector like me doesn't often see anything this overwhelming; in spite of the circumstances it presented a certain immediate distraction. Or it did until I focused on the wide stain of dried blood on the carpet near the back-wall shelves, and the chalk outline of a body which enclosed it.

An odd queasy feeling came into my stomach; rooms where people have died violently have that effect on me. I looked away from the blood and tried to concentrate on the rest of the room. Like the Paperback Room we had been in previously, it contained nothing more in the way of furniture than an overstuffed chair, a reading lamp, a brass-trimmed rolltop desk set beneath one of the two windows, and a desk chair that had been overturned. Between the chalk outline and the back-wall shelves there was a scattering of magazines which had evidently been pulled or

knocked loose from three of the shelves; others were askew in place, tilted forward or backward, as if someone had stumbled or fallen against them.

And on the opposite side of the chalk outline, in a loosely arranged row, were two pulps and a digest, the digest sandwiched between the larger issues.

Eberhardt said, "Take a look at that row of three magazines over there."

I crossed the room, noticing as I did so that all the scattered and shelved periodicals at the back wall were detective and mystery; the pulps were on the upper shelves and the digests on the lower ones. I stopped to one side of the three laid-out magazines and bent over to peer at them.

The first pulp was a 1930s and 1940s crime monthly called *Clues*. The digest was a short-lived title from the 1960s, *Keyhole Mystery Magazine*. And the second pulp was an issue of one of my particular favorites, *Private Detective*.

"Is this what you meant by a dying message?"

"That's it," he said. "And that's why you're here."

I looked around again at the scattered magazines, the disarrayed shelves, the overturned chair. "How do you figure this part of it, Eb?"

"The same way you're figuring it. Murray was stabbed somewhere on this side of the room. He reeled into that desk chair, knocked it over, then staggered away to those shelves. He must have known he was dying, that he didn't have enough time or strength to get to the phone or to find paper and pencil to write out a message. But he had enough presence of mind to want to point *some* kind of finger at his killer. So while he was falling or after he fell he was able to drag those three magazines off their shelves; and before he died he managed to lay them out the way you see them. The question is, why those three particular magazines?"

"It seems fairly obvious why the copy of *Clues*," I said.

"Sure. But what clues was he trying to leave us with *Keyhole Mystery Magazine* and *Private Detective*? Was he trying to tell us how he was killed or who killed him? Or both? Or something else altogether?"

I sat on my heels, putting my back to the chalk outline and the dried blood, and peered more closely at the magazines. The issue of *Clues* was dated November 1937, featured a Violet McDade

story by Cleve F. Adams, and had three other, unfamiliar authors' names on the cover. The illustration depicted four people shooting each other.

I looked at *Keyhole Mystery Magazine*. It carried a June 1960 date and headlined stories by Norman Daniels and John Collier; there were several other writers' names in a bottom strip, a couple of which I recognized. Its cover drawing showed a frightened girl in the foreground, fleeing a dark menacing figure in the background.

The issue of *Private Detective* was dated March, no year, and below the title were the words "Intimate Revelations of Private Investigators." Yeah, sure. The illustration showed a private eye dragging a half-naked girl into a building. Yeah, sure. Down in the lower right-hand corner in big red letters was the issue's feature story: "Dead Man's Knock" by Roger Torrey.

I thought about it, searching for connections between what I had seen in here and what Eberhardt had told me. Was there anything in any of the illustrations, some sort of parallel situation? No. Did any of the primary suspects have names which matched those of writers listed on any of the three magazine covers? No. Was there any well-known fictional private eye named Murray or Cox or Thurman or Keeler? No.

I decided I was trying too hard, looking for too-specific a connection where none existed. The plain fact was, Murray had been dying when he thought to leave these magazine clues; he would not have had time to hunt through dozens of magazines to find particular issues with particular authors or illustrations on the cover. All he had been able to do was to reach for specific copies close at hand; it was the titles of the magazines that carried whatever message he meant to leave.

So assuming *Clues* meant just that, clues, *Keyhole* and *Private Detective* were the sum total of those clues. I tried putting them together. Well, there was the obvious association: the stereotype of a private investigator is that of a snooper, a keyhole peeper. But I could not see how that would have anything to do with Murray's death. If there had been a private detective involved, Eberhardt would have figured the connection immediately and I wouldn't be here.

Take them separately then. *Keyhole Mystery Magazine*. Keyhole. That big old-fashioned keyhole in the door?

Eberhardt said abruptly, "Well? Got any ideas?" He had been

standing near me, watching me think; but patience had never been his long suit.

I straightened up, explained to him what I had been ruminating about, and watched him nod: he had come to the same conclusions long before I got here. Then I said, "Eb, what about the door keyhole? Could there be some connection there, something to explain the locked-room angle?"

"I already thought of that," he said. "But go ahead, have a look for yourself."

I walked over to the door, and when I got there I saw for the first time that there was a key in the latch on the inside. Eberhardt had said the lab crew had come and gone; I caught hold of the key and tugged at it, but it had been turned in the lock and it was firmly in place.

"Was this key in the latch when you broke the door down?" I asked him.

"It was. What were you thinking? That the killer stood out in the hallway and stabbed Murray through the keyhole?"

"Well, it was an idea."

"Not a very good one. It's too fancy, even if it was possible."

"I guess you're right."

"I don't think we're dealing with a mastermind here," he said. "I've talked to the suspects and there's not one of them with an IQ over a hundred and twenty."

I turned away from the door. "Is it all right if I prowl around in here, look things over for myself?"

"I don't care what you do," he said, "if you end up giving me something useful."

Slowly I wandered over and looked at one of the two windows. It had been nailed shut, all right, and the nails had been painted over some time ago. The window looked out on an overgrown rear yard--eucalyptus trees, undergrowth, and scrub brush. Wisps of fog had begun to blow in off the ocean; the day had turned dark and misty. And my mood was beginning to match it. I had no particular stake in this case and yet because Eberhardt had called me into it I felt a certain commitment. For that reason, and because puzzles of any kind prey on my mind until I know the solution, I was feeling a little frustrated.

I went to the desk beneath the second of the windows, glanced through the cubbyholes: correspondence, writing paper, envelopes, a packet of blank checks. The center drawer contained pens and

pencils, various-sized paper clips and rubber bands, a tube of glue, a booklet of stamps. The three side drawers were full of letter carbons and folders jammed with facts and figures about pulp magazines and pulp writers.

From there I crossed to the overstuffed chair and the reading lamp and peered at each of them in turn. Then I looked at some of the bookshelves and went down the aisles between the library stacks. And finally I came back to the chalk outline and stood staring down again at the issues of *Clues, Keyhole Mystery Magazine,* and *Private Detective.*

Eberhardt said impatiently, "Are you getting anywhere or just stalling?"

"I'm trying to think," I said. "Look, Eb, you told me Murray was stabbed with a splinterlike piece of steel. How thick was it?"

"About the thickness of a pipe cleaner. Most of the 'blade' part had been honed to a fine edge and the point was needle-sharp."

"And the other end was wrapped with adhesive tape?"

"That's right. A grip, maybe."

"Seems an odd sort of weapon, don't you think? I mean, why not just use a knife?"

"People have stabbed other people with weapons a hell of a lot stranger," he said. "You know that."

"Sure. But I'm wondering if the choice of weapon here has anything to do with the locked-room angle."

"If it does I don't see how."

"Could it have been *thrown* into Murray's stomach from a distance, instead of driven there at close range?"

"I suppose it could have been. But from where? Not outside this room, not with that door locked on the inside and the windows nailed down."

Musingly I said, "What if the killer wasn't in this room when Murray died?"

Eberhardt's expression turned even more sour. "I know what you're leading up to with that," he said. "The murderer rigged some kind of fancy crossbow arrangement, operated by a tripwire or by remote control. Well, you can forget it. The lab boys searched every inch of this room. Desk, chairs, bookshelves, reading lamp, ceiling fixtures—everything. There's nothing like that here; you've been over the room, you can tell that for yourself. There's nothing at all out of the ordinary or out of place except those magazines."

Sharpening frustration made me get down on one knee and stare once more at the copies of *Keyhole* and *Private Detective*. They had to mean something, damn it, separately or in conjunction. But what? What?

"Lieutenant?"

The voice belonged to Inspector Jordan; when I looked up he was standing in the doorway, gesturing to Eberhardt. I watched Eb go over to him and the two of them hold a brief, soft-voiced conference. At length Eberhardt turned to look at me again.

"I'll be back in a minute," he said. "I've got to go talk to the family. Keep working on it."

"Sure. What else?"

He and Jordan went away and left me alone. I kept staring at the magazines and I kept coming up empty.

Keyhole Mystery Magazine.

Private Detective.

Nothing.

I stood up and prowled around some more, looking here and there. That went on for a couple of minutes—until all of a sudden I became aware of something Eberhardt and I should have noticed before, should have considered before. Something that was at once obvious and completely unobtrusive, like the purloined letter in the Poe story.

I came to a standstill, frowning, and my mind began to crank out an idea. I did some careful checking then, and the idea took on more weight, and at the end of another couple of minutes I had convinced myself I was right.

I knew how Thomas Murray had been murdered in a locked room.

Once I had that, the rest of it came together in short order. My mind works that way; when I have something solid to build on, a kind of chain reaction takes place. I put together things Eberhardt had told me and things I knew about Murray, and there it was in a nice ironic package: the significance of *Private Detective* and the name of Murray's killer.

When Eberhardt came back into the room I was going over it all for the third time, making sure of my logic. He had the black briar clamped between his teeth again and there were more scowl-wrinkles in his forehead. He said, "My suspects are getting restless; if we don't come up with an answer pretty soon, I'm going to have to let them go on their way. And you too."

"I may have the answer for you right now," I said.

That brought him up short. He gave me a penetrating look, then said finally, "Give."

"All right. What Murray was trying to tell us, as best he could with the magazines close at hand, was how he was stabbed and who his murderer is. I think *Keyhole Mystery Magazine* indicates how and *Private Detective* indicates who. It's hardly conclusive proof in either case but it might be enough for you to pry loose an admission of guilt."

"You just leave that part of it to me. Get on with your explanation."

"Well, let's take the 'how' first," I said. "The locked-room angle. I doubt if the murderer set out to create an impossible crime situation; his method was clever enough, but as you pointed out we're not dealing with a mastermind here. He probably didn't even know that Murray had taken to locking himself inside this room every day. I think he must have been as surprised as everyone else when the murder turned into a locked-room puzzle.

"So it was supposed to be a simple stabbing done by person or persons unknown while Murray was alone in the house. But it wasn't a stabbing at all, in the strict sense of the word; the killer wasn't anywhere near here when Murray died."

"He wasn't, huh?"

"No. That's why the adhesive tape on the murder weapon—misdirection, to make it look like Murray was stabbed with a homemade knife in a close confrontation. I'd say he worked it the way he did for two reasons: one, he didn't have enough courage to kill Murray face to face; and two, he wanted to establish an alibi for himself."

Eberhardt puffed up a great cloud of acrid smoke from his pipe. "So tell me how the hell you put a steel splinter into a man's stomach when you're miles away from the scene."

"You rig up a death trap," I said, "using a keyhole."

"Now look, we went over all that before. The key was inside the keyhole when we broke in, I told you that, and I won't believe the killer used some kind of tricky gimmick that the lab crew overlooked."

"That's not what happened at all. What hung both of us up is a natural inclination to associate the word 'keyhole' with a keyhole in a door. But the fact is, there are *five other keyholes* in this room."

"What?"

"The desk, Eb. The rolltop desk over there."

He swung his head around and looked at the desk beneath the window. It contained five keyholes, all right—one in the rolltop, one in the center drawer, and one each in the three side drawers. Like those on most antique rolltop desks, they were meant to take large old-fashioned keys and therefore had good-sized openings. But they were also half hidden in scrolled brass frames with decorative handle pulls; and no one really notices them anyway, any more than you notice individual cubbyholes or the design of the brass trimming. When you look at a desk you see it as an entity: you see a *desk*.

Eberhardt put his eyes on me again. "Okay," he said, "I see what you mean. But I searched that desk myself and so did the lab boys. There's nothing on it or in it that could be used to stab a man through a keyhole."

"Yes, there is." I led him over to the desk. "Only one of these keyholes could have been used, Eb. It isn't the one in the roll top because the top is pushed all the way up; it isn't any of the ones in the side drawers because of where Murray was stabbed—he would have had to lean over at an awkward angle, on his own initiative, in order to catch that steel splinter in the stomach. It has to be the center drawer then, because when a man sits down at a desk like this, that drawer—and that keyhole—are about on a level with the area under his breastbone."

He didn't argue with the logic of that. Instead he reached out, jerked open the center drawer by its handle pull, and stared inside at the pens and pencils, paper clips, rubber bands, and other writing paraphernalia. Then, after a moment, I saw his eyes change and understanding come into them.

"Rubber band," he said.

"Right." I picked up the largest one; it was about a quarter-inch wide, thick and strong—not unlike the kind kids use to make slingshots. "This one, no doubt."

"Keep talking."

"Take a look at the keyhole frame on the inside of the center drawer. The top doesn't quite fit snug with the wood; there's enough room to slip the edge of this band into the crack. All you'd have to do then is stretch the band out around the steel splinter, ease the point of the weapon through the keyhole, and anchor it against the metal on the inside rim of the hole. It would take

time to get the balance right and close the drawer without releasing the band, but it could be done by someone with patience and a steady hand. And what you'd have then is a death trap—a cocked and powerful slingshot."

Eberhardt nodded slowly.

"When Murray sat down at the desk," I said, "all it took was for him to pull open the drawer with the jerking motion people always use. The point of the weapon slipped free, the rubber band released like a spring, and the splinter shot through and sliced into Murray's stomach. The shock and impact drove him and the chair backward, and he must have stood up convulsively at the same time, knocking over the chair. That's when he staggered into those bookshelves. And meanwhile the rubber band flopped loose from around the keyhole frame, so that everything looked completely ordinary inside the drawer."

"I'll buy it," Eberhardt said. "It's just simple enough and logical enough to be the answer." He gave me a sidewise look. "You're pretty good at this kind of thing, once you get going."

"It's just that the pulp connection got my juices flowing."

"Yeah, the pulp connection. Now what about *Private Detective* and the name of the killer?"

"The clue Murray left us there is a little more roundabout," I said. "But you've got to remember that he was dying and that he only had time to grab those magazines that were handy. He couldn't tell us more directly who he believed was responsible."

"Go on," he said, "I'm listening."

"Murray collected pulp magazines and he obviously also read them. So he knew that private detectives as a group are known by all sorts of names—shamus, op, eye, snooper." I allowed myself a small wry smile. "And one more, just as common."

"Which is?"

"Peeper," I said.

He considered that. "So?"

"Eb, Murray also collected every other kind of popular culture; that's something we've overlooked in this dying message thing. One of those kinds is prints of old television shows. And one of your suspects is a small mousy guy who wears thick glasses; you told me that yourself. I'd be willing to bet that some time ago Murray made a certain obvious comparison between this relative of his and an old TV show character from back in the fifties, and that he referred to the relative by that character's name."

"*What* character?"

"Mr. Peepers," I said. "And you remember who played Mr. Peepers, don't you?"

"Well, I'll be damned," he said. "Wally Cox."

"Sure. Mr. Peepers—the cousin, Walter Cox."

At eight o'clock that night, while I was working on a beer and reading a 1935 issue of *Dime Detective,* Eberhardt rang up my apartment. "Just thought you'd like to know," he said. "We got a full confession out of Walter Cox about an hour ago. I hate to admit it—I don't want you to get a swelled head—but you were right all the way down to the Mr. Peepers angle. I checked with the housekeeper and the niece before I talked to Cox, and they both told me Murray called him by that name all the time."

"What was Cox's motive?" I asked.

"Greed, what else? He had a chance to get in on a big investment deal in South America and Murray wouldn't give him the cash. They argued about it in private for some time, and three days ago Cox threatened to kill him. Murray took the threat seriously, which is why he started locking himself in his Rooms while he tried to figure out what to do about it."

"Where did Cox get the piece of steel?"

"Friend of his has a basement workshop, builds things out of wood and metal. Cox borrowed the workshop on a pretext and used a grinder to hone the weapon. He rigged up the slingshot this morning—let himself into the house with his key while the others were out and Murray was locked in one of the Rooms."

"Well, I'm glad you got it wrapped up and glad I could help."

"You're going to be even gladder when the niece talks to you tomorrow. She says she wants to give you some kind of reward."

"Hell, that's not necessary."

"Don't look a gift horse in the mouth—to coin a phrase. Listen, I owe you something myself. You want to come over tomorrow night for a home-cooked dinner and some beer?"

"As long as it's your wife who does the home cooking," I said.

After we rang off I thought about the reward from Murray's niece. Well, if she wanted to give me money I was hardly in a financial position to turn it down. But if she left it up to me to name my own reward I decided I would not ask for money at all; I would ask for something a little more fitting instead. What I really wanted was Thomas Murray's run of *Private Detective.*

a *NEW* short story by

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Have you ever stood before a hanging judge and had to defend yourself, with your life or career in the balance? No? Then try it now—vicariously and with no danger to your own skin . . . Michael Gilbert is a "pro's pro" in this story about one of the Private Secretaries of the Prime Minister . . .

"Verdict of Three" will appear in an anthology titled VERDICT OF THIRTEEN *edited by Julian Symons, to be published by Faber & Faber in the United Kingdom and by Harper & Row in the United States.*

VERDICT OF THREE

by *MICHAEL GILBERT*

On that Wednesday morning, when the messenger from the Home Office arrived at my flat, I was reading the account splashed across the front page of the *Daily Telegraph* of my Uncle Alfred's suicide. It seemed that he had taken poison, at his house in Chessington Street. His body had been found by his sister.

I can't say that his departure caused me any sorrow. The fact that he was my relation had been a source of embarrassment to me from my school days onward. Alfred Laming was a man who delighted in taking the unpopular side in any public controversy and sometimes compounded his offense by being right. In 1939 he had declared himself a virulent supporter of Stalin and had been interned under Regulation 18B—until the arrival of the Russians in the war on our side had caused him to be released with apologies. After that he had enjoyed innumerable brushes with the authorities. The week before he killed himself, he had penned

an open letter to the Home Secretary accusing him of systematic and malicious persecution. The details he gave sounded convincing, too.

I signed a receipt for the buff-colored envelope and waited until the messenger had taken himself off before I opened it. I had a premonition of what it would contain. It was a three-line communication. It required me to present myself at Number 5 Richmond Terrace at eleven o'clock that morning and it was signed by the Secretary to the Cabinet Office.

It crystallized all my recent suspicions and apprehensions.

You cannot work in the innermost circles of government without sensing when something has gone wrong, particularly when that something may affect you.

I reasoned that it must be connected with the American note, because the American note was the most important piece of work which had ever been entrusted to me. It was only by chance that it had come my way at all.

The Prime Minister of that period had four Private Secretaries. (Nowadays he has six, but these are more spacious times.) We divided the work between us. The senior dealt with patronage and appointments. The next senior, Tom Rainey, with Foreign affairs. The two newest, myself and Bill Anstruther, with Home affairs. In the ordinary way, the drafting of a note from the Prime Minister to the British Ambassador in Washington, a note which was to form the basis of discussions between the Ambassador and the President of the United States, would have been Tom's job, had he not been whipped off to the hospital at the last moment with an inflamed appendix.

So the lot had fallen to me. I had taken the lift down to Registry Filing, had signed for the three green folders which were to form the basis of the note, and had taken them up, in the lift, to my room on the second floor of the Cabinet office building in Whitehall. I was by then no novice in the inner workings of government, but I must confess that those folders had opened my eyes.

They were verbatim accounts, taken down in the well-known handwriting of the Chief, of conversations earlier that year which he had held with the Prime Ministers of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, whose presence in London had been carefully, and successfully, concealed. In them the steps to be taken, in certain circumstances, had been set out with brutal clarity.

When top people talk directly to each other, they do so without any of the euphemisms and half truths which soften their public utterances. (I recalled some of the unpublished and unpublishable comments made by Churchill to Roosevelt at critical moments during the war.) I could well imagine the worldwide effect if a single one of the unvarnished sentences in those folders had been allowed to get into the wrong hands.

If I had needed any further reminder of their importance I had received it when, leaving my office for a quick lunch, I caught a glimpse of Patrick Regan at the end of the corridor. I'm not sure if he saw me, but I knew what his presence there signified. Patrick is a month or two older than me. I first met him when we arrived at our prep school at Broadstairs on the same day. He preceded me to our public school by a single term. During the war I lost touch with him. I was a plodding infantry man. He was in a number of irregular and dashing outfits suited to his Irish temperament. After the war, as I knew, he had joined M.I.5. and I didn't doubt that it was part of his job to patrol the corridors and make sure that no unauthorized eyes saw those three green folders.

Since it was a fine morning in late autumn and since there was plenty of time, I decided to walk from my flat, which is near Lords, to Whitehall. Before I left, I packed a few things into a suitcase. When you went into Number 5 Richmond Terrace it was not always certain that you would come out again. It has an underground exit which leads straight to Cannon Row Police Station.

As I walked down Baker Street and through the maze of little lanes behind Oxford Street, I was being followed—by a memory . . .

The School House fag was a cheerful shrimp of my own age called Edgecumb. Curious that I could remember his name and face when so many, more important, have been rubbed out by the passage of time.

"Ashford wants you in his study," he said. "I shouldn't hang about. He's in a frightful bait about something."

I sped along those stone-paved passages until I reached and knocked on the door of the large study at the end. Even now I sometimes see that door in my dreams.

A hoarse roar told me to come in.

A table had been pulled out from the wall and my three judges sat behind it. It was a hanging court. Ashford, in the middle, was head of the House. Captain of rugger, red in hair and temper. On his right a tall boy, called Major, a cross-country runner and a one of the school racquets pair. The third was something of an unknown quantity, a boy called Collins who wore tortoiseshell glasses and was reputed to have a brain. He might, I felt, be inclined to take a more tolerant view of whatever crime I was supposed to have committed, but I hardly saw him standing up to the other two.

"I've been hearing stories about you," said Ashford. "You seem to think you can get away with anything. You may have been a big bug at your prep school, but in this place you're a worm."

To this evident truth no comment seemed possible and I made none.

"You were reported last week for cheek to head of the prep-room."

The head of the prep-room, a fat boy called Clover, had slipped on a cake of soap in the bathroom and fallen on his fat backside. I had been rash enough to laugh.

Result, six whacks with a gym shoe.

"I ought to have dealt with you myself that time. Then you might have thought twice about—this."

Ashford slapped down on the table in front of me a piece of paper on which was printed, in block capitals, the words: CLOVER IS A FAT ASS.

"But," I said, "I know nothing about that. Me? I never saw it before."

"Then how is it that Blackie saw you at nine o'clock last night putting something up on the house notice board?"

"I should watch where you're going, sir," said the policeman. "If you step off the curb like that. without looking first, you'll be in trouble."

"Sorry, officer," I said, "I was thinking about something else."

"Lucky he had good brakes—"

Collins said, in his dreamy voice, "Blackie didn't actually say that. He said he saw him in front of the notice board."

Blackie was the youth who cleaned our boots.

Ashford glared at Collins and then swung around on me again.

"And anyway, what were you doing out of your dormitory at nine o'clock? You know the house rules."

"Barnes, the head of the dormitory, sent me down to get something for him. It was just before nine o'clock. He said if I hurried I'd be back in time. The clock was striking as I went down the stairs."

Major said reluctantly, "I did have a word with Barnes. He confirmed that bit."

"All right," said Ashford. "Barnes confirms that you went down, and Blackie confirms that you were hanging about in front of the notice board. What were you doing?"

"I did stop for a moment. I wanted to see if I was in the under-fifteen game."

"I think you're a liar. You had it in for Clover and you thought you'd get your own back in this—in this disgusting way."

"Isn't that man Alfred Laming your uncle?" said Major. "The man who wrote that letter to the *Times*. He sounds a bolshy sort of sod."

I admitted that Sir Alfred Laming was my uncle. I had read the letter. too. It was the one in which he said that Baldwin ought to be impeached for neglecting our air defenses—a view which found quite a few supporters six years later.

"All right," said Ashford. This seemed to conclude the case for the prosecution. All that remained was to pass sentence. Major nodded.

Collins had taken off his glasses and was polishing them gently. He said, "By the way, when you looked at the notice board, was this paper on it?"

Imminent danger must have tuned up my mental processes to concert pitch, because I saw all the implications of that question as soon as it was asked. If I said "Yes," then why hadn't I reported it to someone in authority? If I said "No," then since all other junior boys were safe in their dormitories by nine, it left me as the last and most likely culprit.

In desperation I decided to tell the truth.

I said, "I'm sorry, Collins, but I simply can't remember. All I was looking at was the games list."

There was a moment of grim silence. Collins seemed to have lost interest. Ashford said, "You can wait outside."

In the corridor I found Patrick. His Irish blood made him a volatile boy, easily roused to extremes of passion and sentiment. He

grabbed me by the arm and said, "Are they going to beat you?"

I croaked, "I don't know." We were both close to the door and had to talk in whispers.

"If they try to do it, you've got to appeal to old Flathers."

Flathers was Mr. Flatstone, our Housemaster.

"I can't do that," I said, aghast.

"You must. It would be totally unfair. They haven't got an iota of proof it was you."

"Hold it," I said.

I was listening unashamedly at the door. What I was afraid I was going to hear was the scrape of two chairs being put together, back to back. It would be my lot to kneel on one and hang my head down on the other.

Instead, I heard Ashford's voice. He said, "I don't quite see the point of it."

"It was a test question," said Collins. "The easiest thing would have been for him to have said that it *was* there and he saw it."

Major said, and there was unexpected deference in his voice, "I still don't see. How do you know he didn't see it?"

"He can't have," said Collins. "I took it down myself, at five to nine."

"Then why on earth," said Ashford, "didn't you say so before?"

"I was interested to see if he was going to tell a lie," said Collins. He sounded amused. "He jolly nearly did, too. But people usually tell the truth under pressure."

"I think it's going to be all right," I said to Patrick . . .

The Commissionaire at Number 5 greeted me with such a somber look that I felt that he, at all events, had already found me guilty. He escorted me up in the lift and led me along to the room at the end of the corridor. I felt his hand metaphorically on my collar.

He knocked at the door and held it open. There were two men in the room. One was Lord Cherryl, the man who had headed the Inquiry into the Security Services. The other was Mr. Justice Rackham—a most appropriate name, as more than one journalist had pointed out, since he seemed to conduct his cases in a manner reminiscent of the Star Chamber.

Lord Cherryl said, "Please sit down. You must understand that this is an unofficial and preliminary inquiry. We have been asked by the Home Secretary to put some questions to you. No record

will be kept of what is said. Nevertheless, although it is unofficial and off the record, you have the right to be represented by a lawyer of your own choosing, if you wish."

"I think I'd better find out what it is I'm being accused of first," I said. "That is, if I am being accused of something."

"It's your decision," said Lord Cherryl. There was a long moment of silence. I didn't say anything. Lord Cherryl turned to the papers in front of him.

"I'd like to clear up one or two preliminary matters first. When you left school in 1937 you went to Oxford, with an Open Scholarship at Balliol. You were there for two years and left in 1939, without taking a degree, to join the Royal West Kent Regiment." I nodded. "While you were at Oxford you were a member of a group called the Barricade Club—a club which professed extreme left-wing views."

"They didn't only profess them," I said. "A number of our members fought in the Spanish Civil War. On the unpopular side."

"But since you joined the Armed Forces with such commendable promptitude in 1939—at a time when Soviet Russia was our official enemy—it would seem that your feelings had altered."

"One tends to be volatile at the age of twenty."

"Of course. You fought throughout the war as an infantry soldier, attained the rank of Major, were wounded in the North African fighting and were mentioned in dispatches."

I had no quarrel with any of that.

"After the war you were called to the Bar, Gray's Inn, and joined Maurice Pastor's Chambers."

"As a pupil," I said, "I never actually achieved a tenancy."

Mr. Justice Rackham said, "That was the Maurice Pastor who was disbarred for sedition in 1950."

I nearly said, "You know bloody well it was. You were Chairman of the Bar Council at the time and chiefly responsible for getting him chucked out." However, I still had myself in hand and simply said, "Yes."

"You gave up the Bar in 1950 and joined the Home Office under the special arrangements then in force for ex-servicemen. You were given accelerated promotion through the Principal grade and in 1952 were an Assistant Secretary in the Department of Establishment and Organization."

"Officially, I still am," I said. "My next step was a posting, not a promotion."

"I was coming to that," said Lord Cherryl smoothly. "Two years ago you were offered, and accepted, the post of Private Secretary to the Prime Minister."

"Did it ever occur to you to wonder," said Mr. Justice Rackham, in his gravelly voice, "why you were selected for such a position?"

"Frequently," I said. "The only solution which occurred to me was that the P.M. himself had fought as an infantry soldier through the first World War."

This was an unkind side-swipe at Rackham, who was quite young enough to have served in 1939, but had preferred his career at the Bar. I wasn't feeling kind. I thought this dissection of my early life impertinent and wished they would come to the point.

Lord Cherryl did so, with unexpected suddenness. He said, "Your duties would not normally have covered foreign affairs. It was only owing to the chance indisposition of Mr. Rainey, I believe, that you were charged with drafting a note for the P.M. to Sir Neville Stokes in Washington."

Here it came.

"That's correct," I said.

"And in order to draft this note you were given access to three folders of documents of the highest security classification."

"I had them in my room for one complete working day," I said.

"And were they ever out of your sight?"

"Only when I went down to lunch in the canteen. When I locked them in my filing cabinet. I also locked the door of my room."

"Then you will no doubt be surprised," said Mr. Justice Rackham, "when you learn that photocopies of the documents in all three folders were in the possession of your uncle, Sir Alfred Laming, twenty-four hours later."

"But—" I said.

"Just to keep the record straight," said a third voice, "Sir Alfred isn't actually your uncle, is he?"

He had come into the room so quietly, and I had been so intent on what was being said, that he might have been there for some minutes without my noticing him.

I had seen him on one occasion only since I left school, but I recognized him at once. The same tortoiseshell glasses, the same downward-turning mouth. Time had taken away some of his hair and had put a stamp of authority onto his face, but it was the same stooped shoulders and unathletic figure.

"I called him my uncle," I said. "He was really only my mother's cousin."

Lord Cherryl did not seem too happy about this interruption, but was clearly in no position to resent it. Collins pulled up a chair and added himself to the tribunal. He had a folder of papers which he put down as carefully on the table as if they had been new-laid eggs. He said, "Please don't recap for me. I'm fully in the picture."

"Then," said Lord Cherryl, "perhaps you would deal with Mr. Justice Rackham's question."

The interruption had given me time to get back some part of my wits.

"If I remember it correctly," I said, "he asked me if I was surprised to know that copies of these documents had found their way into the hands of my uncle. It would be an understatement. I am not surprised. I am flabbergasted."

"You can offer no explanation?"

"Before I say anything more, I should like to know exactly what happened to my uncle."

Lord Cherryl looked at Collins, who gave a very slight nod. I knew then that Collins was really conducting the interview.

"Home Security have had Sir Alfred under observation for some time. Yesterday morning he made an arrangement, on the telephone, to meet a man in the afternoon in Kensington Gardens."

"What man?"

Lord Cherryl didn't like being interrupted and he didn't like being asked questions, but after another glance at Collins he condescended to deal with this one. He said, "He is—or was, until that moment—the Third Secretary for Economic Planning at the Russian Embassy. As a result of what happened his credentials have been withdrawn."

Collins said, with a very slight smile, "He returned to Moscow by air yesterday evening. I don't imagine we shall see him again. I beg your pardon, Lord Cherryl, I interrupted you."

"As I was saying, Sir Alfred kept this rendezvous. He was in the act of handing over a packet when he was apprehended and taken into custody. He must have been prepared for such a contingency. He swallowed a cyanide capsule when he was in the car on the way to the police station."

"The report in the papers said that he died at home."

"We agreed to this minor variation with his sister. There

seemed no point in distressing the family further by announcing that he was under arrest at the time of his death."

I was conscious, suddenly, of a very cold feeling.

The world, at that time, was balanced between a war which had just finished and a new war which might break out at any moment. Those particular documents would be embarrassing if they were published even now. At that time they could have been deadly. The prompt action of the Security Service had prevented the papers from getting into the wrong hands. But they would argue that Sir Alfred had read them and could probably reproduce them. *Was that why he was dead?* He had never seemed to me to be the sort of man who would commit suicide. He had far too great a sense of his own importance.

I had no illusions about M.I.5. Their motto was: *Salus Populi Suprema Lex.* A single life was unimportant where the safety of the State was in the balance. And if they convinced themselves that I was the only other outsider who had read those papers—

I became aware that Lord Cherryl had been speaking for some moments and the silence suggested that he had asked me a question and was waiting for an answer.

I said, "I'm sorry. Would you mind repeating that?"

"You must agree that the timing is significant. You had the papers under your control all day on Monday. When you had finished with them by six o'clock, you returned them to Registry Filing. Their records show that these papers have not been removed by anyone else since. Yet on the following morning we find copies in the possession of your uncle."

There was nothing to say but "No comment." I guessed this would be thought flippant, and said nothing.

Mr. Justice Rackham now took a hand. He said, in his Star Chamber voice, "Surely you can see the strength of the case against you?"

Again I said nothing.

"Unless you are going to suggest that there is some leakage in Registry Filing."

I knew better than to suggest that. The two middle-aged ladies who controlled our security filing system were of the utmost respectability. One was the daughter of an Admiral and the other was the sister of an Air Vice-Marshal. The only crime one could conceive either of them committing was assaulting someone they found being unkind to an animal.

"And in any event," said Lord Cherryl, "since neither of the officials concerned had, as far as we know, any connection with Sir Alfred Laming, even if, inconceivably, one of them had extracted these papers, they would have had no reason to hand them to him."

"Well?" said Mr. Justice Rackham.

At that point, regrettably, I lost my temper. I said, "It's no good saying 'Well,' as if I was an obstinate juryman. This tribunal may be unofficial, but I imagine it's meant to observe some of the elementary rules of law and procedure. All you're saying is that I *could* have taken these papers and no one else *as far as you knew* could have done so. Therefore I've got to prove that I'm innocent. You ought to know better than that. You've got to prove me guilty."

Lord Cherryl started to say, "Where a strong presumption—" but Collins cut him off with a tiny movement of his hand.

He said, "The case against you isn't quite as watertight as you seem to be assuming. After all, there was a full hour when you were at lunch."

I rounded on him, in turn.

"There's no need to try and lead me into that trap. I know perfectly well that you had one of your watchdogs in the corridor during the whole time I was away."

"You mean—?"

"I mean Patrick Regan. I happen to know him. We were at school together. And I knew he was a member of your outfit."

"Yes," said Collins, with another of his ten percent smiles, "I remember you both, very well indeed."

It was difficult to explain quite how it happened, but from that moment the feeling of the meeting altered. The atmosphere lightened. The few remaining questions which Lord Cherryl put were couched in a much more friendly tone. Mr. Justice Rackham seemed subdued.

When I was shown out even the Commissionaire seemed to have caught the prevailing spirit. He positively smiled at me as he let me out. I walked down Whitehall gulping great lungsful of air and wondering what to do next.

Perhaps I was being subjected to the traditional hard-soft-hard treatment. Was the next thing a hand on my shoulder? Was I being kept under observation?

I suddenly felt that I didn't care.

I had a good lunch at my Club and then went for a walk. If I was being followed, I would give my followers some exercise.

I started from Central London, walked up to Hampstead, made a complete circle of the Heath, and came back down Fitzjohn's Avenue in the dusk. There were bonfires in the gardens and the smell of burning leaves filled the misty autumn air.

I was surprised to see a light on in my flat and had a word with the porter.

"The gentleman arrived half an hour ago. He said you were expecting him and I took the liberty of letting him in. I hope I did right, sir."

"Quite right."

I had guessed it would be Collins before I found him sitting primly on the edge of one of my armchairs.

"Do you know," he said, "there were moments this morning which took me back twenty years."

He sounded entirely friendly.

"Me too," I said with feeling. "Would you mind telling me what it was all in aid of? And would you care for a drink?"

I poured two drinks. Collins watched me in silence. Then he said, "Regan was arrested this afternoon."

I put my own drink down carefully on the table.

"We've had our doubts about him for some time. What we wanted was one clear piece of proof that he was lying. He'd committed himself, beyond the point from which he could retreat, to a statement that he had not been inside the Cabinet Office on that day, or any other day. We still don't know how he got in, without passing the security guard, or how he got out again. It's possible that he used the kitchen entrance and took a chance on not being spotted."

"He got into my room and opened my filing cabinet and photographed the papers? While I was at lunch?"

"I don't suppose the locks gave him much trouble. We teach our people these tricks."

"And didn't realize that I'd seen him?"

"Even if he'd suspected it, he'd have taken a chance on it, I think. You assumed he was there on duty. You wouldn't necessarily have said anything about it. You very nearly didn't, either."

"That's right," I said. "I very nearly didn't."

"I'd concluded that he must have been there and that you might have seen him. I thought that if we went about it the right way

you'd probably blurt it out. You were in such a bad temper by the time you got round to it that it convinced us all."

People usually tell the truth under pressure, said a voice from 20 years ago.

When Collins was putting his coat on in the hall he said, "Incidentally, did it never occur to you that it was Regan who put that notice up on the board? That was why he was so worried about you getting beaten for it. In those days he had a conscience, I suppose."

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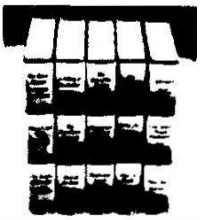

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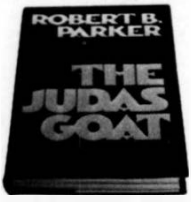

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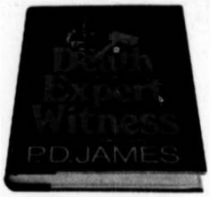

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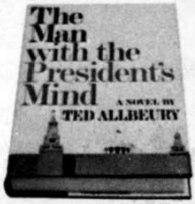

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